

THE QUEST FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT:

Agenda 2030, The New Urban Agenda and their Applicability and Relevance

In the World's Poorest Regions

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Introduction

In 2000, the eight Millennium Goals or MDGs were agreed upon by all Governments members of the UN as the first plan of action to address key global challenges by 2015, ranging from the reduction of poverty to improving primary education as well as environmental sustainability, which also include targets on slum upgrading, water and sanitation. It should be noted here that for the UN, sustainability has never just been about protecting the natural environment, sustainability is therefore not just about climate change, alternative energy and reduction of carbon emissions, but is often simplified in such a manner by many.

Within the context of the implementation of the MDGs, the UN started moving towards establishing a long-term partnership for sustainable development with the private sector through the creation of the UN Global Compact, whose members are large corporates and national chambers of commerce and business and associations of industry, primarily from the developed economies. At about the same time, the World Economic Forum, the primary place of encounter of the world's political and business elite also began to expand its agenda include discussion topics related to the MDGs, including environmental sustainability and poverty reduction.

During the same period, and in parallel, the United Nations as a whole, although there were variations over the full range of its various composite entities, began engaging with greater frequency and intensity with civil society and other stake holders, such as the private sector, in areas of mutual interest and began to give priority in its work to more vulnerable segments of the world's population, such as women and youth. This not only reflected the shifting priorities of its major financial contributors and donors, but was also seen as essential to overcome deep societal inequalities and lack of economic opportunities as part of a sustainable development strategy, all held together by an overall conceptual umbrella with two main strategic thrusts: poverty reduction and human rights.

The vision that informed and drove this strategic approach as described above was that of a United Nations system, joined by a progressive and environmentally-responsible private sector on the one hand, and by an equally socially and environmentally-responsible civil society on the other, propelling a common effort to generate sustainable development and economic growth at the global, national and local levels.

Moving to the Next Level: Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals

Then in September 2015, after a year of intense negotiations between Governments, an agreement was reached, under the auspices of the United Nations, on a global Agenda 2030, containing seventeen sustainable development goals or SDGs with 169 targets and 230 indicators of success.

This was followed by the Paris Agreement - as part of the process of negotiations on a United Nations convention on climate change - to reduce the carbon emissions globally and to take measures to limit the global temperature increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius. If implemented this would

amount to a beginning of an energy revolution globally away from carbon-based fuels to clean energy from wind, solar, geothermal, etc.

The SDGs focus on the following areas of action: eliminating extreme poverty and reducing poverty in general; ending hunger; quality education for all; gender equality; sustainable management of water and sanitation for all; access to modern, renewable, clean and affordable energy; sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all; resilient infrastructure; reducing inequality; sustainable cities and communities; climate action; life on water and sustainable use of oceans; life on land and the sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems; peace and justice and peaceful societies; and revitalizing global partnerships for sustainable development. Unlike the MDGs, the SDGs have qualitative, not precise quantitative targets, which may be an indication of their transformative ambitions, but will also make it more difficult to measure success over a period of time. It may also be an indication of the political compromises that had to be made to achieve global consensus for them.

Will Agenda 2030 and the SDGs succeed? Having been subscribed to by all the world's governments, will they filter down to international and private financial institutions and funds, the corporate sector, supported and advocated for by the media and civil society at large to form a critical and unstoppable mass of support? Will governments and the private sector just pick and choose amongst them, focusing on those that fit in best with their overall policy and business strategies? Only time will tell. Certainly the ambition seems to be there to succeed. For it is also true that the issues which make up the SDGs are critical to future world economic growth and general prosperity, and to ensure that that growth is sustainable and continuous and brings stability, in all of its forms, to the international system and to countries and societies domestically. And to reduce the endemic instability and unpredictability of the current global economic system, its short cycles of continuous ups and downs and regional highs and lows, which make long term planning by both companies and households near impossible, although they do provide short term opportunities for capital funds and speculators.

It is also worth noting that the aim of some of the major proponents of Agenda 2030 is that all the actions taken at whatever level to implement the SDGs should be undertaken in such a way as to reduce global warming, the carbon print and greenhouse emissions and limit the pace of climate change in line with the Paris Agreement. This however could ultimately lead to a distortion in the implementation of the sustainable development goals, and to a priority given to renewable and other clean fuels such as geothermal, as the first priority in the absence of a hierarchy of priority in the SDGs : i.e. what comes first and what comes second etc. and the fact that renewable and clean energy are the link between the Paris Agreement and the SDGs.

In other words, a sentiment may emerge, if it has not already emerged, that breakthroughs and wide applications in clean and renewables and the technologies associated with them are the essential prerequisite to address the other substantive SDGs. It goes without saying that such a sequencing is also in the interest of large global technology and energy players. One should also

point here that in various surveys on the SDGs, various groupings of respondents have given highest priority to those SDGs related to climate and the lowest to those related to poverty reduction, i.e. reducing the actual circumstances of life of the poor and other low-income groups, increasing the impression that in the contemporary world profits and business opportunities come first, people second.

For what is most noteworthy, and related to the above observation, is that Agenda 2030, in its last goal, on implementation, proposes a global public – private partnership to achieve the other, substantive, Sustainable Development Goals. One suspects that hidden implicitly in the pages of Agenda 2030 is an attempt to create some new global form of “ethical” capitalism. It is also worth noting that SDG 17 on Revitalizing Global Partnerships for Sustainable Development, gives priority to partnership with the private sector, with civil society mentioned under other stakeholders in one of the targets of that key Sustainable Development Goal. The SDGs and Agenda 2030 therefore continue, indeed aim to strengthen, partnerships for sustainable development begun during the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals. They are viewed as critical for successful implementation.

Should the SDGs be embraced by the private sector, for example, there are certainly many opportunities here which go beyond energy, and include financial services, infrastructure, transportation as well as the ICT sector, modernizing agriculture, expanding manufacturing, among many that could be mentioned here, all critical sectors for generating long-term sustainable economic growth globally and for lifting emerging markets and to drive their growth for the medium and long term, markets which are by and large seen as the future driving force of the global economy; and that global economy will have over the coming decades a decidedly more urban character, the implications of which should have been highlighted in a more profound kind of way in Agenda 2030, especially with regard to the poorest regions of the world.

Sustainable Urbanization in Agenda 2030

With urbanization continuing at a quick pace in the developing and middle income countries in particular, with urbanization levels globally set to reach 70 per cent of the population in the near future, having only breached 50 per cent less than two decades ago, it is surprising that urbanization and its consequences for sustainable development had not been given greater prominences in the analyses of global trends which informed the drafting of the SDGs and in Agenda 2030. In many ways, it is in human settlements that “the battle for sustainable development will have to be fought and won.”

Only one SDG, Goal 11 “Make Cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable” also referred to in shorthand as the SDG on sustainable cities and communities, directly focuses on cities and sustainable urbanization, listing ten targets, three of which can be said to be supportive measures to implement the other seven.

The first of the ten targets is affordable housing and slum upgrading, a carryover of the target on slum upgrading of the MDGs. This is followed by targets on affordable and sustainable transport and transport systems; on enhancing participation by civil society in urban planning and management; on safeguarding the world's cultural and natural heritage and on universal access to green and public spaces; on reducing the number of deaths and economic losses from natural disasters and on reducing the adverse environmental impact of cities, with special attention air quality and waste management. The last three targets are: strengthening urban-rural linkages through national and regional development planning (one of whose main indicators for success is the drafting of national urban policies); the adoption of city disaster risk reduction strategies; and supporting least developed countries, especially in building sustainable and resilient buildings using local materials.

While all these targets are laudable, they certainly do not exhaust the scale of priorities that should be addressed in light of the central role of cities and other human settlements in ensuring sustainable economic growth and employment as well as environmental sustainability and judicious use of natural resources. At best Goal 11 is a good start to be built on by others.

Habitat III and the New Urban Agenda

That was to be the role assigned to the Third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, Habitat III for short, held in October 2016, about a year after the adoption of the SDGs by the UN General Assembly. Indeed Habitat III viewed itself as contributing through its global action, the New Urban Agenda, to the implementation of Agenda 2030 and to the fleshing out and provision of more detail to, in particular, of Goal 11 as well as other related SDGs. It also to be noted here that Agenda 2030 and its SDGs continues to be the overall framework for action of the international community to achieve environmentally sustainable development and economic growth. All other global plans of action drafted and approved under the umbrella of the United Nations are to support the successful implementation of the goals of Agenda 2030 in coordination and cooperation within their specific areas of substantive responsibility, including the New Urban Agenda. All other global plans are therefore subordinate to Agenda 2030.

The New Urban Agenda was drafted as a continuous text in the format of a declaration by national governments, which has its limitations. It makes it difficult to describe pressing substantive issues followed by detailed recommended action. The New Urban Agenda or NUA is a political statement of intent, not a detailed technical programme of action. It does not follow the goal/target/indicator format of the SDGs of Agenda 2030.

Rather, in the New Urban Agenda the international community declares its commitment to a broad range of actions to achieve sustainable urbanization, clustered under the umbrella of three focus areas: sustainable urban development for social inclusion and ending poverty; sustainable and

inclusive urban prosperity and opportunities for all; and, environmentally sustainable and resilient urban development.

Goals under the various focus areas range from ending poverty, affordable housing for all, access to basic services, inclusive governance, economic growth and full employment, integrated planning with public participation, renewable energy development and use, support to the informal economy, elimination of unsustainable consumption and production patterns in human settlements, reduction of vulnerability to climate change of human settlements; promotion of smart cities using the latest digital technologies, building of quality infrastructure and promotion of spatial planning. And many, many more. In fact, more than three-quarters of the over 160 paragraphs of the NUA contain multiple” goals” and” targets” in each, probably exceeding those of Agenda 2030 (17 and 169 respectively), but not going into any detail with regard to any, given that the New Urban Agenda is more of political statement or declaration of intent.

It may therefore have been better to have prioritized some of the issues and actions or have a hierarchy amongst them with regard to urgency in implementation or build the NUA around a limited number of core challenges common to most of the world’s regions. While it is admirable to list all the pressing issues which surround sustainable urbanization and sustainable cities and commit to actions to address all of them, promising to do everything carries with it the risk of not finishing and accomplishing anything. Also it is one to draft an urban agenda to supplement, broaden and support SDG 11 on Sustainable Cities, it is another to overwhelm it as if attempting to replace it.

Given the breadth of issues and goals articulated in the NUA, the tools for effective implementation listed in the Agenda are surprisingly brief. They revolve around building urban governance structures and effective planning and management of urban spatial development. The means for implementation, as they referred to in the Agenda emphasize technology, especially new digital technologies and partnerships with other stakeholders, especially with the private sector, as in Agenda 2030. Finance is, as with regard to the SDGs, not given the attention that it should be in the NUA (neither is land and its cost). There is also is detailed costing of these two global plans of action, as there usually never is for plans of this type. Much hope is placed on the ability of the private – financial and non-financial, domestic and international – to provide the resources and capital, to invest and lend.

On the other hand , developing and middle income countries, and even developed economies, have limitations on their capacity to borrow or raise taxes and certainly not enough domestic capital to finance the implementation of all the goals and targets of sustainable urbanization contained in Agenda 2030 and the New Urban Agenda. Priorities have therefore to be set, sequencing stages and phases of implementation and customization to meet particular should be the norm. Global plans of action always are in need of adjustment in light of specific challenges of a region or a particular countries or sets of countries, their level of economic, social and institutional development and their present economic and related policy priorities – and nowhere are those

specific challenges greater than in Africa as is the potential for economic growth and the rewards for doing so sustainably. It will be a test for the efficacy of Agenda 2030 SDGs and of the NUA in a supportive role. It also illustrates the need the diversity in approach and flexibility in application.

Africa and Agenda 2030: The Challenge of Creating Growth and Opportunities during a Period of Rapid Change and Urban Transformation

Of all the emerging regions, Africa, especially sub-Saharan Africa, is the region that has the longest path to go to develop, where doing so sustainably, with an eye towards Agenda 2030, as well as the New Urban Agenda, will be the greatest challenge.

But that it does so is in the interest of the entire global economy, and that it does so in a sustainable manner. There is huge room on the continent for potential market expansion, for growth in consumption. At the same time, given that the level of development is still low, it provides an opportunity to grow the economies and develop societies in line with the sustainability principles of the SDGs and the NUA, especially when it comes to the latest sustainable technologies. It provides an opportunity to skip historical stages of technology applications. The whole continent, in effect has the potential to be a laboratory for innovation, with those innovations then distributed globally.

But it also presents the greatest challenges when it comes to the expansion of economic opportunities and new forms of employment, especially for the youth, of both genders. It is the continent where the issue of youth employment may be the most challenging, the potential for the negative impact of climate change on future economic growth most severe and where the private sector may face the most daunting tasks, even if the interest to invest and grow Africa is there.

Africa Rising: The Point of Departure

At the present time, Africa, is the poorest continent, with about 43 percent of the population living in extreme poverty and the continent contributes only about 4 per cent to global GDP. Sixty per cent of the population is engaged in agriculture, mostly subsistence and smallholder, with agriculture contributing about 12.5 percent to GDP. Outside of South Africa, manufacturing is not a significant contributor to the economy with perhaps the exception of Kenya. But it is also among the world's fastest growing regions, growing between 4 to 5 per cent annually in the ten years prior to 2014, with many countries clocking growth rates of between 5 and 6 per percent, with Ethiopia lately growing at rates of above 10 per cent. Those average rates slowed by about 1 per cent in 2015, however, due in most parts to a decline in commodity prices, including oil. If these growth rates continue, especially if there is a commodity price rebound and the Covid pandemic is addressed successfully, over the course of this decade, most of the African countries will attain "middle-income developing economy" status, the same as most countries in Latin America at the present time. No wonder there is much talk in the press, in the media, in business circles today about "Africa Rising."

In light of all the aforesaid, the question may be asked as to what extent Agenda 2030 and its Sustainable Development Goals and their various targets are the right sustainable development recipe for Africa. At the same time success for Agenda 2030 in Africa will be critical for the successful implementation of the Agenda world-wide. When the Agenda 2030 blueprint is overlain over the development trends and challenges of Africa it is clear that there is a less than a perfect fit given the priorities of Governments on the continent and the immediate challenges that they face. The SDGs appear to more focus on social and environmental issues than on core economic ones, more focused on preservation than on providing guidance for the speedy transformation that Africa is undergoing, focused as it is on rapid wealth and income creation and on maximal natural resource exploitation given continuing rapid population growth and persistent high levels of poverty.

Seen from this perspective, the SDGs seem more suitable for developed and more mature developing economies than to those which are just at the threshold stage and experiencing the first symptoms of “economic take-off” and are in transit from a subsistence rural economy to one that is modern and urban-based. Such scrambles to economic development are by their very nature not conducive to the deliberate strategic approach which implementation of Agenda 2030 (or for that matter the New Urban Agenda) requires, accompanied by a strict regulatory framework that is consistently enforced. In fact they may very well erode the environmental and sustainability tenets that underpin Agenda 2030 and exacerbate climate change, something to which Africa in particular is most vulnerable to.

It also still needs to be seen whether the private sector operating in Africa, whether foreign or domestic, is the kind of prime partner for the implementation of Agenda 2030 and the New Urban Agenda as envisioned by its drafters: progressive and environmentally and socially responsible. It may exist here and there in embryo, but it is far from certain that it will emerge as hegemonic so as to lead the economic growth of Africa along a sustainable path consistent with the SDGs and sustainable urbanization. The same may be said of the continent’s Governments.

Civil society organizations and other relevant stakeholders may be able to step into the breach here, but given their relative weakness in most of Africa, this requires a forceful effort to strengthen them, something which is not contemplated in Agenda 2030, although the role of other stakeholders is acknowledged. There may have been political reasons for this: Democracy is not fully consolidated in Africa, far from it in fact in many countries. Promotion of civil society and other non-governmental organizations, such as those focusing on youth and women, operating independently outside of state control may be seen as potential challengers of the political status quo in many places. On the other hand such kind of activism may be exactly what will be required to make an African path to sustainable development succeed and to help address the specific sustainable development challenges, including those not adequately addressed in Agenda 2030, a gap which the NUA attempts to fill.

CHALLENGES TO THE FUTURE SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICA

Given the already perceivable slowdown in the commodities super-cycle, which may be temporary or it may be not, given all the global economic uncertainties at the moment caused by the COVID pandemic, which also is demonstrating Africa's vulnerability to external shock, there is a need to build resilience in these economies in order to maintain progress and achieve the structural transformation and modernization towards mature, diversified middle-income economies across the continent so as best exploit growth opportunities and ensure their sustainability. In 2015, continent wide economic growth clocked in at 3.2 per cent according to the World Bank in its economic update on May 2016. By 2020 those growth rates had either stagnated or grown negative, with a few exceptions due to the economic impact globally of the pandemic. But the future prospects nevertheless remain positive. But to take full advantage of them requires that African states and policy makers manage a number of challenges in a successful manner. Among these challenges are:

Managing Urbanization

Currently, sub-Saharan Africa's urban population growth are twice that of population growth overall, which is unusually high, averaging around 4 per cent per annum, in part the result the result of improving health care and incomes. The population of Africa has doubled over the past twenty-five years to an estimated 1.25 billion at the present time. Rural - urban migration continues, but the increases are also due to natural urban population growth. Two decades ago, 20 per cent of Africa's population, on average, was urban. Today that percentage is closing in on 40 percent, especially in some of the most populous countries, such as Nigeria. In ten years or so Africa is expected to be the home of at least 23 megacities of more than 10 million inhabitants. Large metropolitan areas with good infrastructure can be magnets for investment because of their ability to absorb a large amount of capital if they are well-managed and well-served and planned. This is not the case in many, if not most African cities, organized chaos is the general rule, in great part due to the rapidity of urban growth, much of it spontaneous and a lack of sufficient human and financial resources at the local level. Congestion is undermining productivity, frequent interruptions in power supplies and other services frustrate businesses and ordinary residents alike, soaring urban land prices driven by a construction boom are discouraging investment, especially in new greenfield projects. Affordable housing, whether for rent or sale, and the lack of it, is fast becoming a policy issue, driven by growing public discontent. Efforts are being made to halt all the trend above, but they require more external financial and technical support, and a general re-think of urban policies, if they exist at all. They also point at the general lack of well-thought out policies and strategies in all areas of public policy in general in Africa.

As already alluded to, for these reasons it is surprising that there is not more attention paid to rapid urbanization, and its implications, in Agenda 2030, not only for Africa but for most of Asia. There is of course SDG 11 on Making Cities and Human Settlements inclusive, safe resilient and sustainable, but this wording does not really speak to all of the urgent problems which have to be addressed in managing urbanization in Africa. There is nothing in the SDG that speaks to the economic development of cities, land issues, urban finance, urban youth unemployment or for that matter urban planning and management as such. Transport is addressed, management and planning only within the context of participation in such processes. Having and implementing strategic urban policies at a time of rapid urbanization is by and large ignored. Access to housing and slum upgrading is a target of the SDG, but it is doubtful that it will receive much priority if an initial survey of global stakeholders in Agenda 2030 is anything to go by: Of a maximum priority score of 8, Housing scored 1.7. The top three scores in that survey done by the Stakeholder Forum in May 2017 went to Climate Change (Goal 13), Sustainable Clean Energy (Goal 7) and to Ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns (Goal 12, which scored 7.1, 6.4 and 6.3, respectively. SDG 11 on Cities scored 2.6 overall. The highest score amongst its targets was for 11.6: reducing the adverse environmental impact of cities, including by paying special attention to air quality and municipal and other waste management. It scored 5.3. It is interesting to note that waste management and transport are the only urban services specifically listed under SDG11, although water and sanitation targets are mentioned elsewhere in the Agenda, although not with specific reference to cities.

It is therefore becoming increasingly clear that Africa in particular may need to look outside the framework of the SDGs to address most of its pressing needs to manage rapid urbanization. This will quite a challenge as Agenda 2030 seeks to become the global framework for sustainable development which will set the priorities for development finance, both public and private. The New Urban Agenda may be of some help here to modify the directions laid out by Agenda 2030, but it will be limited by the overriding goal of the United Nations for consistency with Agenda 2030 and with the priority for its implementation given to it by the UN. But there no doubt that the New Urban Agenda as a guide to sustainable urbanization, providing it is given more focus and structure and detailed technical content is a better tool for Africa and speaks to its actual priorities than SDG 11 of Agenda 2030.

Continuity in Growth of Investment in Infrastructure

Between 1990 and 2005 it is estimated that infrastructure investment contributed to about half of Africa's economic growth and this trend continues although at a somewhat lower rate as the growth bonus of infrastructure investment takes hold with increased capital investment in businesses and other economic activities. Investment in infrastructure will need to continue over the coming decades to maintain and accelerate growth and reduce levels of poverty. The returns on such infrastructure investments are significant, with an average of 30 to 40 per cent returns for telecommunications (ICT) investments, over 40 per cent for electricity generation and 80 per cent for roads.

The capital for sustained investment in infrastructure will continue to have to come from abroad, although a number of countries have in the past years raised capital for such investments on the international bond market, as well as raising capital from domestic markets through bond issues, some carrying very attractive interest rates which have lured foreign investors including prominent Western investment banks. More rigorous revenue collection, including through income and value-added taxation is another option to raise capital from domestic sources, but still, given the cost of infrastructure and income levels in Africa, those options are at the present time still limited. The cost of building infrastructure in Africa is essentially at global levels, at the same incomes and wages are not, so this raises the issue of the pricing of services generated by that infrastructure so that they are affordable to the broader population, an issue that many governments in Africa have not yet really begun to contemplate as they do not have the resources to subsidize them for lower income groups, and this will be quite a challenge in the years ahead, as rising costs of services will put pressure on wages and raise all kinds of inflationary challenges and reduce competitiveness. It is also interesting to note here, returning again to Agenda 2030, that infrastructure does not have the prominence it deserves in Agenda 2030, being part of only one goal, SDG 9 on building resilient infrastructure, promoting resilient and sustainable industrialization fostering innovation, with only one target exclusively dedicated to it. The goal overall received only a score of 2.1 in the Stakeholder Forum survey mentioned, this particular had an even lower one: 1.7. The New Urban Agenda does include commitments on what is referred to as the building of quality infrastructure, although it is not given the prominence it deserves given the NUA's predilection for planning and management. Nor is much thought given to the cost of infrastructure and the pricing for its use and the financing of its construction and to cost recovery in general.

This is despite the fact that infrastructure development, resilient or otherwise, is a top priority in places like Africa, it can generate employment, although with limited sustainability, and it can foster skills development, both matters of great priority to Africa's young populations and to its policymakers.

Addressing the Youth Bulge

About 70 to 80 per cent of Africa's population is under the age of 35, about 50 per cent under the age of 21, and population growth is continuing at relatively high rates, so this trend will continue for some time to come. Although figures may vary depending on what formula and methodology is used, there is no doubt that Africa has quite a challenge on its hand here. As many as 50 per cent or more are unemployed, that is without employment in the formal sector, the rest try to eke out some sort living in that amorphous "informal sector", which is most often just another world for a daily struggle for survival, or they depend on daily handouts from friends or family. Kenya, just to cite one example, only generates about 100 000 new formal jobs in the public and private sector a year. That is in a country of 42 million where there are 700 000 new school leavers from secondary schools and higher institutions of learning seeking employment every year and this trend will continue over the coming decades. The other 600 000 are assumed to have found employment in the "informal sector." No wonder that the BBC in a world-wide survey of youth in major cities

around the world, found that the highest percentage of youth willing to emigrate to developed economies, if they had the opportunity, was found in Nairobi: 80 per cent. European policymakers in particular should take note, the migration crisis of the last two years will continue unless unparalleled political, financial and technical support is mobilized in a sustained manner to assist Africa's development.

Given this age structure of the African population, it is time to start thinking if growth rates of 5 to 6 percent a year are enough to face this challenge of employment. That is also why African governments are pushing the idea of youth entrepreneurship and self-employment more and more now. For even growth rates in excess of 10 per cent may not suffice, and even that rate of growth may not be achievable nor sustainable as it requires a level of government efficiency and a level of investment and capital absorption ability which may not be feasible unless there is a singular push by capital world-wide to focus on Africa and to ignore opportunities elsewhere. Intra-regional and international migration may be the only solution, especially if wage levels are to rise. One must remember here that China's phenomenal growth over the past two decades, a shining example Africa wishes to follow, was not the result of just nurturing a domestic private sector, but also the consequence of an effective and efficient state, massive public sector investment in infrastructure and a rigorous one-child per family policy, as well as public sector control over land allocation.

When it comes to sustainable development or economic growth under whatever conceptual umbrella, private sector investment is a necessary, but never the sufficient factor for success alone, and it also holds true for youth employment, it must be investment that serves as a catalyst for accelerated youth employment, for both young women and men, and on a sustained basis over the coming decades. This will be a primary challenge facing all African governments for the foreseeable future, something they will other regions of the world, and for this reason it should have been the prominence it deserves in Agenda 2030. Made more acute by the fact that the agricultural sector, unless it is made more productive and labour absorbing, will continue to shed excess population through migration to urban centres, which should be reflected in the New Urban Agenda given the weight and prominence that it deserves. Possibly at the time of the drafting and negotiating of the New Urban Agenda, as well as Agenda 2030, awareness of the specific of youth unemployment was not what it has become today, and this provides further arguments for adjusting strategies for the implementation of both Agendas. The pace of change in the world is fast and global agendas for action is they remain static will become irrelevant either completely or in parts.

Modernizing Agriculture

The agricultural sector in Africa employs 60 per cent of the population, much of it small-holder and subsistence farming. At the same time it is estimated that demand for food in Africa will increase by threefold, as it will world-wide and that by 2050.

This requires a transformation and modernization of agriculture in Africa, and in sub-Saharan Africa in particular, supported by new technologies, techniques, new crops and seed varieties as part of extension and advisory services (and capacity building programmes) and mechanization where feasible and possible. It will also require the establishment more than before of resilient networks of cooperation among small-holders and the extension of credit lines, as well as substantial capital investment in irrigation, storage and refrigeration facilities etc. if productivity is to increase dramatically over the coming three decades, as it has too. Doing so sustainably will be a tremendous challenge without causing irreversible environmental damage. Ultimately governments in Africa will also have to address the issue of constant land partition through successive inheritance processes over generations, leaving at the end plots of land which are too small to sustain basic food needs of the families that occupy them, let alone produce any type of surplus for sale to feed growing urban populations.

This is especially worrying as many African governments are actively trying to break up traditional community ownership patterns in favour of private land ownership in order to fuel the land market, creating the spectrum on one the hand of a trend, over time, of more rather than less family micro-farms, and on the other of the emergence of large corporate farming created from bundling land purchased from families who have benefitted from the “privatization” of community land, but are too poor to work it and are tempted by financial offers to escape from their poverty.

This is not pure speculation, it is already happening, especially in the Rift Valley of eastern and central Africa, which is being touted as a future “bread basket of the world”, similar to the American Mid-West, Argentina, and in decades past, the Ukraine. And it will do little to raise rural poverty and income levels, this can only be achieved ultimately by creating value-added to foodstuffs and other agricultural commodities through elaboration in-country which in turn can provide more employment, create economically vibrant rural centres and slow rural to urban migration to already congested major cities and towns. And this migration primarily consists of unemployed and under-employed rural youth unable even to reek out the most minimal existence on the family homestead, if such a homestead even exists anymore. Another option for that migration, as some flows may persist in any event given the overpopulated rural areas, is to direct them smaller, more familiar, towns in geographic proximity, instead to far-away major urban centres which are in any case already straining. But this requires an integrated strategy which turns stagnant rural towns and trading centres into dynamic service centres for a modernized and more productive rural economy and as locales for the elaboration of raw agricultural produce.

Such a integrated strategy is only hinted at in target 11.a of SDG 11 of Agenda 2030, which calls for supporting positive economic, social and environmental links between urban and rural areas (by strengthening national and regional development planning). This type integrated strategy is also missing from the New Urban Agenda, although there is much mentioned of balanced territorial development and planning and rural-urban linkages. What is required however, and this be a future adjustment in these agendas are integrated strategies that link agricultural productivity , food security and value added elaboration of raw agricultural outputs with the growth and

development of neighbouring secondary cities and rural centres so as to create a symbiotic relationship them of services and employment. This would a valuable addition to the two Agendas and would make more relevant to the development needs of least developed, developing and middle income economies. At present there seems to an explicit bias, even in the New Urban Agenda, in favour of measures for metropolitan areas and large cities, possibly because it is there that environmental and sustainability challenges are perceived to be greatest.

There is also Sustainable Development Goal 2, on ending hunger, achieving food security, improving nutrition and promoting sustainable agriculture. Emphasis is given in that Goal's targets to access to food and nutrition by the world's poorest, to genetic diversity in food stuffs and agricultural practices that limit damage to eco-systems and reign in climate change. There is one target on doubling agricultural productivity and the incomes of small-scale producers, including through access to land, inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment though, but only time will tell whether it will receive the same kind of priority as the other targets under this goal in the form of support from developed countries in terms of financial and technical support at the level required. The Stakeholder Forum Survey referred to throughout this segment of the paper assessed interest in this target in the countries of Europe, who form the bulk of potential assistance providers to Africa, at 0.00 overall, but this would have to verified by further surveys and enquiries. If this lack of interest is confirmed it would be disastrous for Africa and other developing countries as raising productivity and income of small farmers is essential to poverty reduction and sustainable development in Africa and elsewhere.

One last matter that should be mentioned here and given prominence in the implementation of Agenda 2030 is that it has been estimated recently that one-third of existing agricultural production in Africa is threatened by climate change over the next twenty years through periodic droughts, flooding, soil erosion and environmental degradation in general. Africa may be world's lowest carbon emitter, but may suffer the most from climate change unless that process is slowed significantly, putting the future economic growth of the continent under a dark cloud, so to speak. And this has to be taken into account when projecting an "Agricultural Revolution" for Africa, it will only become a reality if the rest of the world does its part to stem climate change as part of a comprehensive sustainable development strategy world-wide. African states can also do their part, particularly in the field of renewable energy and through re-forestation and halting the wholesale destruction of the continent's forest cover which is also crucial to the maintaining the stability of the world's climate and air quality. Africa is losing millions of hectares of forests each year to indiscriminate logging.

Expanding Manufacturing

Another strategy to increase income and employment will have to be to expand the manufacturing sector, about 13 per cent of the economy of Africa as a whole, a share which is stagnant in many parts of the continent and actually declining in others, unable to compete with cheap imports as

most local manufacturing is centred on mass household consumption goods and other basic goods which can be easily substituted with imports, especially if there is significant price and quality difference. The solution then seems to be a combination of direct foreign investment and equity participation in the manufacturing sector to expand it and to introduce new production technologies and product diversification especially in countries where there is a large potential domestic market or in countries which are part of a sub-regional common market, combined with privileged access, especially for new domestic industries to the global market, especially to North America and Europe, through such mechanisms as ACOA in the case of the US and the EPAs and General System of Preferences (GSP) in the case of the European Union, although they also come with reciprocity clauses and strict manufacturing, quality and environmental standards. Such a strategy for manufacturing growth, where it is being attempted, is being met with some resistance by established local manufacturers who find themselves squeezed between importers on the one hand and on the other by foreign companies seeking to establish themselves directly but which may eventually squeeze local businesses out of lucrative national and African regional markets altogether. Resolving this conundrum will be quite a challenge to African policymakers, especially in those countries which are open societies and where governments are subject to domestic political pressures. It would indeed be a welcome addition if global plans of action would speak to such conundrums and offer solutions. It would give them a touch of realism which would be welcomed.

Related to the issues described above, when it comes to expanding and increasing the efficiency and productivity of the manufacturing sector, one of challenges that by necessity has to be met is the formalization of that part of the “informal” sector that engages in small scale manufacturing. Its products may be cheap and affordable, but they are often of dubious quality, the manufacturing processes often damaging to the environment and to health. Turning this sector into a small-scale modern manufacturers of quality products through the extension of technology and affordable credit and capacity building without sacrificing affordability while meeting environmental, health and product content standards, among other hurdles will be quite a challenge. However, allowing the unfettered expansion of the informal sector as a dumping ground for surplus labour and surplus school leavers is not the way forward for sustainable economic growth. Its formalization would also boost public revenues as at the moment the sector pays little in taxes, nor is part of any formal regulatory framework, especially with regard to labour standards and minimum wage regulations. The New Urban Agenda in particular addresses the issue of supporting the “informal economy”, but provides few details as to how to go about it in depth, which as mentioned before is a shortcoming found throughout that document due to its format and structure. It should actually become a priority in the implementation of the New Urban Agenda given the prominence of the informal economy in Africa and in all developing regions and many middle income countries and it would a valuable contribution to the implementation of Agenda 2030 as a whole.

Skills Development and Capacity-Building

Also related to the growth of the manufacturing sector is the crucial issue of skills development in general. Even the most advanced economy in Africa, South Africa, as pointed out in a recent Government report, has admitted that it is facing a “skills” gap in the entire range of technical qualifications required for a modern economy. This skills gap and lack of skilled qualified labour is mirrored throughout the continent and requires a concerted government response assisted by ODA and international organizations to systematically raise the skills levels of the general population and the youth in particular. Technical training has been the neglected part of Africa’s education system. Half of Africa’s youth may be graduating from secondary schools, university education is expanding mainly due to spread of private tertiary education, but this will not be enough to build a sustainable modern economy. Moreover, Africa is already producing too many lawyers, marketing graduates and accountants and not enough quality engineers in any case, what it needs are technicians in all categories, skilled semi-professionals, qualified machinists etc., even mechanics and electricians for that matter, qualified craftsmen and women, ICT specialists and operators, among many skills categories one could mention here. The advantage of starting now on this path is that it would allow for the introduction of the most-up-date techniques, proficiency in the latest technologies and tools and would allow Africa to catch up at the high end of the learning curve.

Industrialization and manufacturing and skills development are indeed mentioned in the SDGs, but again, as in case of youth unemployment, not to degree or prominence required to address the specific African situation and similar situations elsewhere, as targets or elements of targets, as under SDGs 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and 10 (Reducing Inequality), for example. Skills development should also become a priority in the implementation of the New Urban Agenda as part of a broader focus on capacity building. In fact, in retrospect, capacity-building for sustainable urban growth and development should have a highlighted key area of the NUA.

Effective Governance and Corruption

Sustainable development and economic growth in Africa requires an efficient and transparent state apparatus and public sector, strong institutions and good governance and management practices at all levels as well as a functioning and predictable legal system and a regulatory framework that is conducive to sustaining high levels of foreign direct investment, and capital movements into Africa of any type, over the short to long-term. Existing land policies will also have to be reviewed. And this must be coupled with robust fiscal and monetary policies. Great strides are already being made in this direction, but there is still a long way to go in most countries. This may be the greatest challenge facing Africa into the future because even though assistance will no doubt be made available, as is already the case, but ultimately success will require local political will. It cannot be imposed from the outside. At the present time up to 30 per cent of collected revenue and state and local budgets are lost due to mismanagement, misappropriation and outright theft. Setting this right will be a herculean task, but here ICT can be very helpful to make the process of government

spending and revenue collection more transparent and discourage fraud and corruption, as shown in a number of African states. But ultimately what will win the day is persistent political commitment at the highest level for change. A transnational corporate sector committed to CSR principles inherent in the UN Global Compact and modern business practices in general can also be a force for positive change on the ground in Africa, and this should be encouraged.

Given the United Nations' extensive work in Africa, it is surprising that the issue of corruption only comes up once in Agenda 2030, under SDG 16, Building Inclusive Societies, as target 16.5, reducing corruption and bribery in all its forms. Means to do so are specified in that target either, and it only calls for reduction, not elimination. Institution-building, so critical to the success of sustainable development, and sustainable urbanization, in Africa is not referred to at all in Agenda 2030, one would have at least expected a goal on good governance in such an Agenda but it is not there, which is surprising to say the least, the issue certainly has not been resolved in the last few years, neither in developing nor in many developed countries. And all this in an Agenda that seeks to be manual for policy for the entire global community, all the Member States of the United Nations, for the rest of this decade and a guide for priority areas of investment in sustainable development by the private sector firms and public and private financial institutions world-wide. Here again the New Urban Agenda may fill this gap at least partially with its emphasis building good urban governance as a main tool to implement the New Urban Agenda.

Final Observation

What this review of the state of sustainable development in Africa shows is that only when global plans of action are overlain over the actual situation and local priorities in different regions and countries of the world and the directions they are taking in economic growth and societal change, the transformation that is already under way, and their impact, environmental or otherwise, can the actual fit and match of global plans of actions such as Agenda 2030 and its SDGs and the New Urban Agenda be assessed and adjusted accordingly. For as shown with this example from Africa, it may reveal gaps and omissions in those plans and actions, goals or targets which need to be more emphasized, sometimes at the expense of others. What it reveals is that Agenda 2030 and the New Urban Agenda are good foundation documents which must be built upon through a continuous review exercise which should be a core part of their implementation so as to adjust theory to practice, to balance the ideal and practical, this may be the only way to make these Agendas relevant and, ultimately successful.

It may very well be then, that as a prerequisite for their successful implementation the SDGs and the New Urban Agenda will have to be translated into region-specific plans of action to give them greater relevance with each region assigning their own priorities as derived from both Agendas as well as others that may have been omitted. Individual countries may also want to follow suit. This may undermine the impact as envisioned by the drafters of these two documents and lead to uneven

application, but then perfection is not necessarily the definition of success. Implementation is, and that implementation will have a greater degree of success if it is in self-interest of regions and countries to do so, another argument for region and country-specific plans. Implementation of Global Plans of Action, as in politics, is the art of possible. A similar approach was already used to reach the Paris Accords on Climate Change. When the choice is between pragmatism and failure, pragmatism always wins the day.

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