

Inclusive Development and the Future of Democracy in Africa: The Role of the AU and RECs



Authors: Ratidzo C. Makombe - Researcher, Institute for Pan African Thought and Conversation University of Johannesburg (UJ), South Africa.

Adeoye O. Akinola - Associate Professor, Department of Politics and International Relations, Faculty of Humanities and an Associate, Institute for Pan-African Thought and Conversation, UJ, South Africa.

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5 Molesey Avenue, Auckland Park 2029, Johannesburg, South Africa.



+27 11 559 7230



<http://ipatc.joburg>

1 Introduction

The contemporary discourse on inclusive development and democracy in Africa has garnered significant attention as the African Union and its regional institutions stand at a crucial juncture in their quest to counter the growing socio-economic disillusionment and rising democratic backsliding, particularly in the Sahel region. Over the past decade, scholars and policymakers involved in Africa's democratisation have had to ask whether democracy is being consolidated on the continent. While numerous countries such as Botswana, Cape Verde, Ghana, Mauritius, and South Africa have made remarkable progress toward establishing robust democratic institutions and norms, significant challenges persist in most countries. These challenges include political instability, corruption, economic disparities and exclusive governance, and unconstitutional changes of governments (UCG), which pose threats to the effectiveness of democratic governance.

Additionally, the consolidation of democracy varies widely across the continent, with some countries experiencing setbacks in their democratic trajectories, reversals due to authoritarian tendencies, inability to entrench democratic culture and build durable institutions, and a lack of civil liberties. This is compounded by declining economic performance, manifesting through growing unemployment, inflation, and fiscal crisis. As such, the efforts to foster inclusive development while ensuring democratic governance remain complex and nuanced, necessitating a deeper understanding of the specific socio-political contexts within each African country. Although the AU and its Regional Economic Communities (RECs) are tasked with addressing these socio-economic and political challenges, their current efforts offer limited grounds for optimism. The future requires collaborative strategies that address these challenges in the attempt to actualise the continent's Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want.

According to the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, data from 21 African countries, home to 47.9 percent of the continent's population, indicate a decline in overall governance quality in 2023 compared to 2014.[1] This decline persists despite the adoption of Agenda 2063 in 2013 and the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM)'s mandate to advance good governance across the continent. While some countries have made progress, 11 countries (Botswana, Burkina Faso, Eswatini, Guinea, Mauritius, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, Sudan, Tunisia, Uganda), constituting 29.3 percent of the African population, have experienced governance deterioration since 2014. The inability of African countries to achieve sustainable socio-political stability and economic development highlights the fragility of African democratic institutions.

Thus, to acquire a critical insight into the role of the AU and RECs in fostering democratic governance and promoting inclusive development, the African Union Studies Unit at the Institute for Pan-African Thought and Conversation (IPATC), University of Johannesburg in South Africa, and TrustAfrica in Dakar, Senegal, hosted the 2nd African Union Studies Annual Symposium, titled "Inclusive Development and the Future of Democracy in Africa: The Role of the AU and RECs", between the 4th and 6th of November 2024, in Johannesburg, South Africa. One hundred and four (104) participants attended physically and about forty (40) participants attended online via Zoom.

[1] Mo Ibrahim Foundation (2024) 2024 IIAG: Key findings, https://assets.iiag.online/2024/IGW/2024-IIAG-key-findings_EN.pdf, p. 8 & 9.

The symposium features three keynote addresses by highly esteemed dignitaries: H.E. Amb. Dr Kaire Mbuende, H.E. Amb. Bankole Adeoye represented by Ambassador William Azumah Awinador-Kanyirige, and Ms Cynthia Chigwenya.[2]



H.E. AMB. DR KAIRE MBUENDE, GAVE THE KEYNOTE ADDRESS ON DAY ONE OF THE SYMPOSIUM.

Source: <https://diplomatmagazine.eu>



AMBASSADOR WILLIAM AZUMAH AWINADOR-KANYIRIGE GAVE THE KEYNOTE ADDRESS ON DAY TWO OF THE SYMPOSIUM.

Source: <https://www.ghanawebbers.com>



MS. CYNTHIA CHIGWENYA GAVE THE KEYNOTE ADDRESS ON DAY THREE OF THE SYMPOSIUM.

Source: IPATC

Apart from the Keynote Sessions, the three-day symposium featured, two plenary sessions, and eighteen high-level panels, focusing on different themes on democratisation and inclusive development. The symposium critically assessed the contributions of the AU and RECs to the advancement of democratic governance across the continent and articulated strategic proposals aimed at augmenting their institutional effectiveness and deepening constructive collaboration among member states.

2 The Political Economy of Africa

Africa's socio-political environment is defined by both promising progress and persistent challenges. Comprising 54 diverse countries, each with its own historical, cultural, and political contexts, the continent presents a complex image of democratic evolution, authoritarianism, insecurity, and social transformation. The continued inability of many African states to achieve sustainable socio-political stability and inclusive economic development reflects the fragility of their democratic institutions. The roles of the AU and RECs are critical in this context. Through various organs, agencies, and initiatives, the AU aims to promote democratic governance, human rights, and socio-economic development. However, the continent remains uneven in progress. While some countries are advancing toward stability, others are trapped in cycles of conflict and political turmoil. A key concern in recent years has been the resurgence of military coups, particularly in West Africa. Between 2020 and 2023, the region experienced three attempted and five successful military coups, resulting in military-controlled transitional governments and withdrawals of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) due to the regional institution's anti-coup posture. These events have raised alarm over the erosion of democratic norms and the potential normalisation of forceful and

[2] H.E. Dr Amb. Kaire Mbuende is the former Namibian Ambassador to the European Union and the United Nations. Bankole Adeoye - Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, African Union Commission (AUC); Ambassador William Azumah Awinador-Kanyirige, and Ms Cynthia Chigwenya is the former African Youth Ambassador for Peace for Southern Africa.

unconstitutional changes in governments.

The failure to consolidate stable democracies in the Sahel region has triggered significant geopolitical shifts. Chief among them is the decline of France's influence in Francophone Africa. Perceptions of neocolonialism and military overreach have fuelled anti-French sentiment, prompting countries like Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, the Central African Republic (CAR), and Chad to expel French troops and shut down its military bases. This diplomatic hostility against France and other Western countries has granted access to non-democratic countries, such as Russia and China. These moves have been widely celebrated, at least on social media and other forums, as a resurgence of Pan-Africanism and a step toward sovereignty.

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Filling the resulting vacuum, Russia has expanded its influence via the Wagner Group (now African Corps)—a private military proxy providing security and diplomatic support to unstable regimes while leveraging anti-Western sentiment. In return for its services, the Wagner Group receives rights to extract valuable resources for profit and strategic economic advantage.[3] Meanwhile, the United States(US) has recalibrated its Africa policy by shifting from military-heavy engagement to trade and economic diplomacy. Initiatives like 'Prosper Africa' aim to strengthen trade and promote democratic development, although US involvement remains inconsistent and often disrupted by domestic political distractions.[4]

Security remains a significant challenge across the continent, impeding democratisation and economic development. Many African countries are plagued by extremist insurgencies linked to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and Al-Qaeda, resulting in large-scale displacement, humanitarian crises, and weakened local governments. Since the outbreak of war in 2023, estimates of fatalities in Sudan have varied widely. Some sources report approximately 61,000 deaths, while others suggest the toll may be as high as 150,000.[5] The UN, however, maintains a significantly lower estimate of around 22,000. A separate report further complicates the picture, indicating that up to 90 percent of deaths in Khartoum remain unreported. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), ongoing clashes between government forces and the M23, including other armed militias in the eastern region, have displaced over 7.3 million people.[6]



PROF SIPHAMANDLA ZONDI - DIRECTOR OF IPATC, UJ, ADDRESSING GUESTS AND PANELISTS ON DAY ONE.

Source: IPATC

[3]Mohamedou, K (2024) The Wagner Group Russia's Foreign Policy and Sub-Saharan Africa, Geneva Paper, March. [chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://dam.gcsp.ch/files/doc/geneva-paper-32-2024](https://dam.gcsp.ch/files/doc/geneva-paper-32-2024).

[4] Chin, J. J., & Bartos, H. (2024). Rethinking US Africa Policy Amid Changing Geopolitical Realities (Spring 2024).

[5]See Yibeltal, Kalkidan & Basillioh Rukanga (2024) Sudan death toll far higher than previously reported – study, BBC News, 14 November, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/crln9lk51dro>.

[6] Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (2025). Democratic Republic of Congo, 14 March, <https://www.globalr2p.org/countries/democratic-republic-of-the-congo/>.

Ethnic tensions, exclusive governance, competition over resources, and foreign interference all contribute to the protracted violent conflict.

Exclusive governance has led to uneven economic development across Africa. Stark disparities between urban and rural areas persist, alongside a lack of inclusive policies that address the needs of youth, women, and other marginalised groups. Africa has the world's youngest population—60 percent under age 25—representing both a tremendous opportunity and a source of pressure. High youth unemployment and underinvestment in education have fueled frustration and civic unrest. Youth-led protests such as Nigeria's #EndSARS, South Africa's #FeesMustFall, Senegal's anti-government demonstrations, and Kenya's Gen-Z Movement are signs of growing political engagement driven by discontent and corruption, inept leadership, police brutality, repressive tax reform, and socio-economic inequality.

Human rights challenges, particularly gender inequality, remain pervasive. While countries like Rwanda have made significant strides, boasting 61.25 percent female representation in parliament as of 2023,[7] Namibia elected its first female president, Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah. Progress across the continent is uneven. Many countries still fall short in ensuring gender parity in education and healthcare, while legal protections for women are a rarity.

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3 Democratic Deficits in Africa

The meeting reiterated the fact that democracy in Africa is at a crossroads. While institutional backsliding and declining legitimacy threaten its foundations, the continent is also witnessing a resurgence of civic activism and unconventional political participation, especially among its youth. The rise of private fighters and mercenaries and weakening regional security and enforcement mechanisms, such as the 'Early Warning System' and the AU's 'Responsibility to Protect (R2P)', are causes for concern. Despite the seeming 'celebration' of military coups in many Sahelian countries, the enduring public support for democratic values on the continent offers a glimmer of hope.

Analysing Africa's Democratic Backsliding and Civic Resilience

A report by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), which has tracked democratic performance in 158 countries since 1975, reveals that 47 percent of countries experienced a decline in key democratic indicators over the past five years.[8] Within this broader trend, a comparative study of democratic progress and regression between 2018 and 2023 shows that 56 percent of African countries are backsliding, while only 33 percent demonstrated democratic advancement.

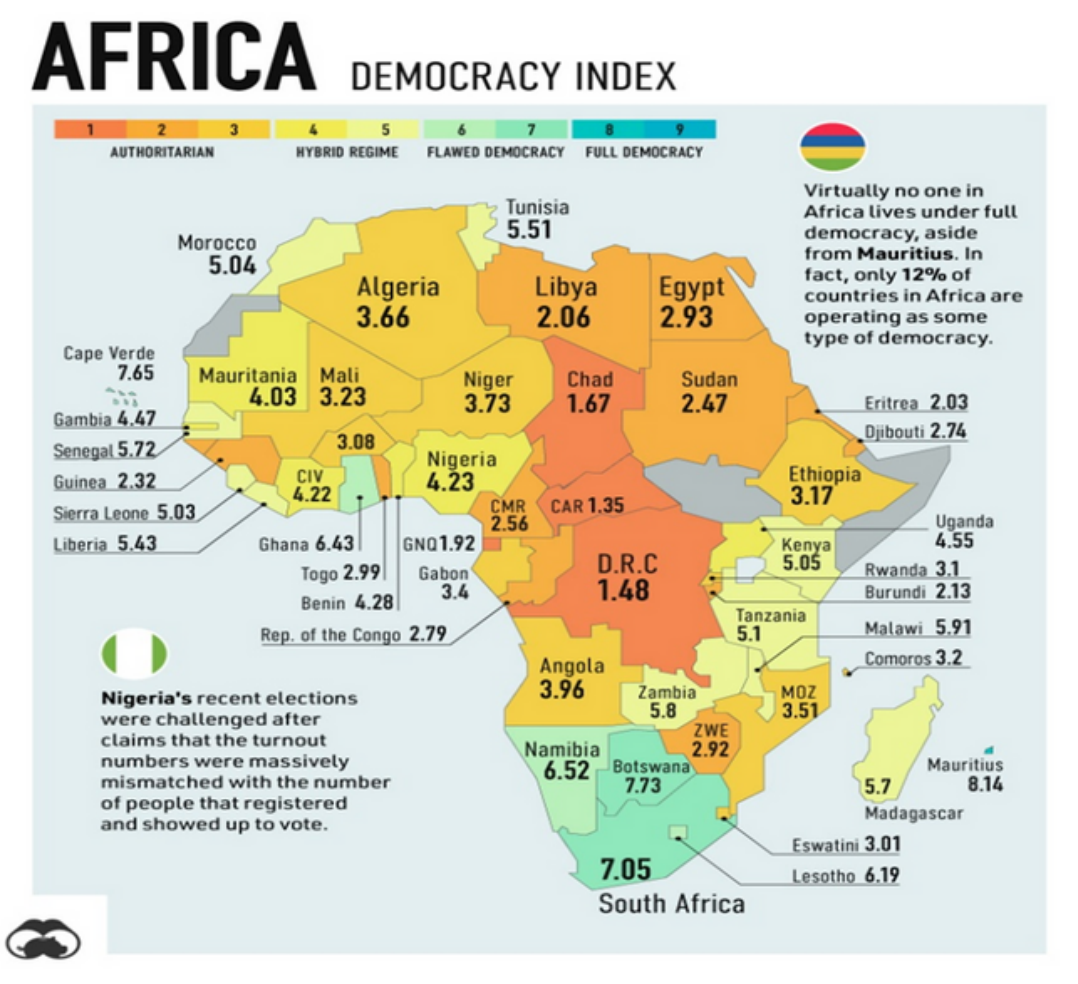
[7] Kumar, K.A. and Sunny, A. (2025). Political Representation and Unspoken Struggles of Rwandan Women, The Diplomatist, 11 March. <https://diplomatist.com/2025/03/11/political-representation-and-unspoken-struggles-of-rwandan-women/>.

Countries such as The Gambia, Burundi, and Zambia, have made significant strides toward democratisation. [9]

As illustrated in Figure 1 below, Mauritius stands out as the only fully democratic country on the continent. In contrast, most African countries are classified as either hybrid or authoritarian regimes, underscoring widespread democratic erosion. This regression has had broader implications, particularly for environmental governance. In many cases, weakened democratic accountability has led governments to prioritise short-term economic interests over long-term environmental sustainability.

“...a comparative study of democratic progress and regression between 2018 and 2023 shows that 56 percent of African countries are backsliding...”

Figure 1: Africa Democratic Index[10]



The data in Table 1 indicates that only 12 percent of African countries claim to practice some form of democracy, reflecting a pessimistic view of the continent’s democratic performance. Over the years, Africa has struggled with the pressing question of whether its citizens and civil society still have faith in democracy. According to data generated by Afrobarometer (2024), across 39 countries, two-thirds of

[8] International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) (2024). The Global State of Democracy 2024, Strengthening the Legitimacy of Elections in a Time of Radical Uncertainty, [chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnbpcajpglclefndmkaj/https://cdn.sanity.io/files/2e5hi812/production-2024/0134f4cc56156db21ee23cf1072ab6d71704cd51.pdf](https://cdn.sanity.io/files/2e5hi812/production-2024/0134f4cc56156db21ee23cf1072ab6d71704cd51.pdf).

[9] IBID.

[10] Oluwole, Victor (2023) Top 10 African nations leading in democracy index rankings, <https://africa.businessinsider.com/local/lifestyle/top-10-african-nations-leading-in-democracy-index-rankings/y0p62pd>.

Africans prefer democracy to any other system of government. Large majorities also reject one-person rule (80 percent), one-party rule (78 percent), and military rule (66 percent). Despite this strong normative support for democracy, satisfaction with how democracy functions has declined sharply in some of the continent's most prominent democracies, such as Botswana, Mauritius, and South Africa, where satisfaction levels have dropped by 35 to 40 percent points in recent years.[11] This erosion of satisfaction can be attributed to the weakening of the social contract between citizens and their governments, increasing dissent and insurgencies. This has resulted in the growing use of private military companies (PMCs) and mercenaries for security functions traditionally performed by state armed forces.

“Despite this strong normative support for democracy, satisfaction with how democracy functions has declined sharply in some of the continent's most prominent democracies...”

The Role of Continental and Regional Institutions

Beyond state-level democratic decline, continental and regional institutions have also shown signs of regression in enforcing democratic norms. According to the AU 2000 Lomé Declaration, “the refusal by an incumbent government to relinquish power to the winning party after free, fair, and regular elections” is considered unconstitutional. However, the AU's has been inconsistent in upholding this principle. During Malawi's 2019 elections, the AU endorsed the victory of then-President Peter Mutharika, a result later overturned by the country's judiciary, which ruled in favour of the opposition. This starkly contrasts with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which has shown greater assertiveness in safeguarding democratic norms.

In 2015, ECOWAS threatened military intervention in The Gambia when President Yahya Jammeh refused to concede after losing the election. Similarly, ECOWAS strongly condemned the military coups in Mali and Burkina Faso and issued an ultimatum to the Nigerien military junta to vacate office or face the military might of the regional body. Although these actions by ECOWAS may align with the institution's democratic norms, they are often viewed as politically selective, raising questions about legitimacy and consistency. Meanwhile, the AU has largely remained passive in addressing such breaches of democratic norms, primarily ceding intervention to the RECs.



DR EBRIMA SALL - EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF TRUST AFRICA, SENEGAL, ADDRESSING GUESTS AND PANELISTS ON DAY ONE.

Source: IPATC

Rethinking Democracy: Local Contexts and Civic Engagement

The effectiveness of democracy in Africa continues to be debated, prompting questions about its adaptability, localisation, and legitimacy. Contrary to the general perspectives, in some contexts, democratic systems have been localised to incorporate traditional governance structures. For instance, Malawi, South Africa, and Zimbabwe integrate traditional authorities into their democratic frameworks. In the case of Lesotho, it

[11] Afrobarometer (2024). Foreword: Afrobarometer and African democracy <https://www.afrobarometer.org/feature/flagship-report/>

combines a constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary system, qualifying as a representative democracy adapted to local traditions.

Despite the tinkering of democracy to respond to local realities by African political elites, concern persists about exclusive governance and declining democratic participation, especially among youth, who comprise a significant portion of the continent's population. Voter turnout data validates this trend: only 27 percent of eligible voters participated in Nigeria's 2023 election, Kenya's turnout declined by 16 percent between 2013 and 2022, and Uganda's 2021 election saw a 57 percent turnout. Yet, this decline in formal electoral participation should not be mistaken for political apathy. This has brought to the fore the discourse around the youth's unconventional political participation. For instance, youth activism across Africa is vibrant and increasingly influential. Youth-led movements like Nigeria's #EndSARS (2020), South Africa's #FeesMustFall (2015–16, 2021), Kenya's #RejectFinanceBill (2024), and Senegal's anti-government protests (2021–2023) all demonstrate that young people remain deeply engaged in shaping politics and framing their political futures.



PROF ADEOYE O. AKINOLA - ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR AT THE DEPARTMENT OF POLITICS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS, IN THE FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AT UJ AND AN ASSOCIATE OF IPATC.

Source: IPATC



FROM THE LEFT: MR DAVID OMOZUAFOH - REGIONAL GOVERNANCE AND RULE OF LAW ADVISOR, UNDP REGIONAL SERVICE CENTRE FOR AFRICA, ETHIOPIA; AND **H.E. DR LUMUMBA STANISLAUS-KAW** - FORMER AMBASSADOR OF SOUTH SUDAN TO THE UNITED NATIONS.

Source: IPATC

4 Inclusive Development

Inclusive development, as envisioned by the AU, goes beyond the quantitative metrics of economic growth to examine the qualitative aspects of who truly benefits from that growth. It aims to promote equity, foster expansive participation, and achieve social justice. This perspective highlights the distribution of economic gains and the importance of active participation by all segments of society, particularly those historically marginalised and contemporarily excluded, such as the youth and women. This requires a concerted effort to identify and dismantle systemic barriers (economic, social, or institutional) that prevent individuals and communities from accessing vital opportunities.

AfCFTA and Intra-African Trade as Catalysts for Development

Africa holds great promise, endowed with natural resources, fertile land, a youthful and vibrant population, and a lively cultural heritage. These remarkable strengths provide a solid foundation for growth and development; however, Africa faces significant challenges that require collective strategies. Despite its resource-wealth, many countries continue to depend heavily on exporting raw materials, making them vulnerable to shifts in the global economy.

To tackle these economic challenges and ensure inclusive growth, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) was established in March 2018 as a pivotal component of Agenda 2063. This ambitious initiative aims to unite 54 African markets into one dynamic trade bloc, representing an impressive 1.7 billion people and a combined Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of \$3.4 trillion.[12] The AfCFTA aims to eliminate 90 percent of tariffs, enhance intra-African trade and create employment, reduce non-tariff barriers, and facilitate the seamless movement of goods, services, and investments throughout the continent. As discussed by participants, realising the full potential of the AfCFTA faces some formidable hurdles, primarily from structural challenges that fall into supply-side and demand-side constraints. On the supply side, inadequate infrastructure poses a significant barrier.



HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE SYMPOSIUM.

Source: IPATC



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Source: IPATC

In some African regions, underdeveloped road networks, limited railway connections, insufficient port facilities, and unreliable energy systems hinder the efficient movement of goods and people. These infrastructure deficits not only raise business costs but also diminish the competitiveness of African products both within the continent and in global markets. Furthermore, landlocked countries like Chad and Niger struggle with inadequate transport corridors that limit their access to coastal ports, increasing the time and cost of trade. In Nigeria, despite being one of Africa's largest economies, persistent electricity shortages, often less than 4,000 MW for over 200 million people, undermine industrial productivity and discourage investment in manufacturing.[13]

[12] World Economic Forum (2025). Accelerating the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area agreement through public-private collaboration, <https://initiatives.weforum.org/forum-friends-of-the-african-continental-free-trade-area/home>.

[13] ISS (2024) African Futures: Nigeria, <https://futures.issafrica.org/geographic/countries/nigeria/>.

Similarly, Kenya's port of Mombasa, one of the busiest in East Africa, faces chronic congestion and inefficiencies that delay the clearance and movement of goods to inland destinations such as Uganda and Rwanda. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), poor road conditions and limited rail infrastructure significantly obstruct the movement of minerals and agricultural produce from the interior to international markets. These examples illustrate the urgent need for coordinated infrastructure investment across the continent to support AfCFTA's implementation. Without reliable infrastructures like roads, power, ports, and railways, African businesses will continue to face logistical challenges that limit their ability to trade competitively and efficiently under the agreement.

Moreover, low consumer purchasing power is a significant obstacle on the demand side. The prevalence of poverty, unemployment, and income disparity limits many Africans' ability to buy goods and services beyond their most basic needs, shrinking the market for intra-African trade. Restricted market access for rural populations and marginalised groups hinders broader participation in trade networks. Financial exclusion compounds the situation, with a significant portion of Africa's population unable to access the formal banking system. This restricts their ability to obtain credit, use mobile payments, and engage with the financial tools vital for thriving in an integrated economy. These challenges are evident in the notably low levels of intra-African trade, approximately 15 percent compared to 54 percent in the North American Free Trade Area, 70 percent within the European Union (EU) and 60 percent in Asia.[14] This data highlights the pressing need to address these systemic barriers to fulfil the AfCFTA's vision of transforming Africa into a self-sustaining, economically integrated powerhouse



PROF KHABELE MATLOSA - FORMER DIRECTOR, POLITICAL AFFAIRS OF AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION, ADDIS ABABA.

Source: IPATC



PROF FIONA TREGENNA - SOUTH AFRICAN RESEARCH CHAIR INITIATIVE (SARCHI), INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT, UJ.

Source: IPATC



PROF EDDY MALOKA - FORMER CEO, AFRICAN PEER REVIEW MECHANISM.

Source: IPATC



MR SY MAMABOLO - CHIEF ELECTORAL OFFICER OF THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION (IEC) OF SOUTH AFRICA.

Source: IPATC

Climate Change and Financing in Africa

As Africa continues to pursue socio-economic transformation, it is crucial to effectively balance its commitment to global climate action with its urgent development imperatives. This lies at the heart of Africa's climate diplomacy and development planning because of its enormous mineral resources and their exploration. For example, Nigeria and Angola, two of Africa's largest oil producers, rely heavily on hydrocarbon revenues to fund national budgets, social programs, and infrastructure projects. Resource revenues are vital for poverty alleviation and economic diversification. Similarly, Mozambique has recently

[14] African Development Bank Group (2025). The High 5 Integrate Africa, <https://www.afdb.org/en/the-high-5/integrate-africa>.

discovered vast reserves of natural gas, which the government hopes will transform its economy by generating revenue for public services and climate adaptation measures. In the DRC, vast cobalt and copper deposits are central to global green technologies, yet the country also depends on these minerals to fund basic development priorities.

There have been calls for Africa to forgo its natural resources for climate goals, which is both unjust and impractical, given the continent's minimal contribution (less than 4 percent) to global greenhouse gas emissions. These resources are essential tools for financing climate resilience, generating employment, and building adaptive capacity. The challenge, therefore, is not whether Africa should develop its natural resources, but how to do so in a way that is sustainable, equitable, and aligned with long-term climate goals.



FROM THE LEFT: PROF DAVID MOORE - UJ - UJ, AND MS. MPULE KGETSI - AFRICAN YOUTH AMBASSADOR FOR PEACE, SOUTHERN AFRICA, BOTSWANA.

Source: IPATC



HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE SYMPOSIUM.

Source: IPATC

Historically, Africa has contributed the least to global carbon emissions, as stated above. Yet, it bears a disproportionate share of the impacts: desertification in the Sahel, rising sea levels in West Africa, cyclones in Southern Africa, and prolonged droughts in the Horn of Africa. Meanwhile, developed countries account for over 78 percent of historic greenhouse gas emissions, having industrialised at great environmental cost, often through the exploitation of both natural and human resources from the Global South.[15] Africa requires US\$250 billion annually (2020–2030) to meet its Paris Agreement Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), yet current climate finance inflows average just US\$30 billion, which is only 12 percent of the needed amount.[16] African actors are justifiably frustrated by the failure of wealthy countries to fulfil their longstanding climate finance commitments, notably the pledge to mobilise \$100 billion annually for developing countries.[17] This shortfall and inadequate transfer of green technology and knowledge undermine Africa's ability to pursue low-carbon development pathways aligned with Agenda 2063 and the Paris Agreement.

Migration, Remittances and Investment

Remittances are a lifeline for many African economies, providing essential financial support to households and communities. From 1980 to 2000, it ranked as the second-largest source of external financial flows, positioned just behind Official Development Assistance (ODA) and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). However,

[15] United Nations Environment Programme (2019), Emissions Gap Report 2019. Nairobi: UNEP, <http://www.unenvironment.org/emissionsgap>.

[16] It's available online at <https://afripoli.org/projects/climate-finance/climate-finance-in-africa-needs-challenges-and-opportunities-to-deliver-the-financial-resources-et-al>

[17] Good Governance Africa (2025). The Paris Agreement is a Delusion. 28 February, <https://gga.org/the-paris-agreement-is-a-delusion/>.

since 2010, remittances have surged ahead, becoming the continent's leading source of external funding. The African diaspora has expanded significantly, with estimates showing it doubled from 1990 to 2020, now exceeding 40 million people. While their efforts are undermined in Western media and narratives, their importance to Africa's survival cannot be undermined.

Each year, the volume of international migrant remittances received by African nations has seen remarkable growth. This upward trajectory culminated in a record-breaking \$100 billion in 2024.[18] Remittances has become as a stable and dependable financial resource, often exhibiting greater consistency than other external financial sources. This reliability is particularly notable during economic turmoil, such as the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. While many financial sectors faced severe challenges, remittances experienced only a slight decline of 3.4 percent, contrasting sharply with the nearly 20 percent drop in FDI.[19]



DAY ONE OF THE 2ND AFRICAN UNION STUDIES ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM, TITLED "INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT AND THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA: THE ROLE OF THE AU AND RECS".

Source: IPATC

The significance of remittances is evident in countries such as Egypt, where it reached over \$30 billion in 2022, forming a crucial pillar of the country's foreign exchange reserves and helping to buffer the economy against balance-of-payments shocks. In Senegal, remittances account for more than 10 percent of GDP, which is pivotal in household consumption and education financing. Likewise, in Lesotho and The Gambia, remittances make up a substantial share of national income, often exceeding 20 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), making them indispensable for macroeconomic stability. For many African households and economies, these funds offer financial assistance and a sense of security during uncertain times. As such, remittances are far more than mere transactions; they are vital support systems that bolster resilience, sustain livelihoods, and promote economic stability across the continent. While remittances offer significant economic opportunities, the AU and its member states must transform them from sources of household consumption into powerful drivers of national, regional, and continental development.

[18] Global Forums on Remittances, Investment and Development (2024). Remittances from the African diaspora grew in 2023, set to exceed US\$ 100 billion in 2024. 31 January, <https://gfrid.org/remittances-from-african-diaspora-grew-in-2023-set-to-exceed-us100-billion-in-2024/>.

[19] Cassimon, D., & Mavrotas, G. (2021). Development finance in the post-COVID-19 era: implications, challenges and opportunities. *Africa growth Agenda*, 18(1), 4-9.

5 Policy Recommendations

The following key policy recommendations emerged from the meeting in November 2024:

1. There must be renewed commitments from all stakeholders, particularly the AU, its agencies, and RECs, to make democracy a collective African citizens' project for inclusive development. The democratic reversals, particularly in the Sahel region, dented the immeasurable AU and RECs' pro-democracy postures and undermined their commitments to norms and protocols.
2. The capacities of the AU structures, organs and institutions are extremely weak; thus, continental and regional institutions need to be strengthened or reformed to deliver their mandates effectively. The current configuration of these bodies impedes concerted efforts to realise the Africa We Want.
3. Most AU programmes, interventions, and activities remain invisible to the average African citizen, highlighting a disconnect between the AU and its people. This calls for renewed commitment to a citizen-centred, rather than elite-centred, approach.
4. There is an urgent need for social mobilisation and awareness around overcoming the challenge of balancing state sovereignty through national security interests versus the responsibilities of the AU and RECs to safeguard constitutionalism, democratisation, effective governance, and peace and security.
5. The role of non-state actors – civil society, academia, interfaith organisations, think tanks, women, youth organisations, traditional authority, and the private sectors – have been relegated to oblivion. Integrating these institutions into national, regional, and continental frameworks is essential to advancing the Pan-African agenda and accelerating the implementation of the AU Agenda 2063's seven aspirations.
6. There must be intentional efforts and commitments to intensify research for the generation and transfer of local knowledge to influence continental and regional policies and decision-making agendas. These institutions should resuscitate the African knowledge system in governance, politics, economies, and peace and security. Reviving Ubuntu governance and peace architectures, along with their regional variants across Africa, appears to be a practical and viable option.
7. The youth and women should be intentionally and strategically repositioned to actively participate in democratisation and economic productivity, and take a leading position within the national, regional and continental peace and security frameworks. It becomes too hypocritical for a continent with a majority youth population to 'reserve' the youth for the future – the future is now. Thus, the youth should be given meaningful platforms to contribute to democratic governance, development, and security efforts.
8. Despite ongoing complaints about the limited capacity of regional and continental institutions and resource constraints, there remain several instances of overlapping roles between the AU and its RECs. It is essential to streamline these functions and redirect redundant resources toward enhancing the effectiveness of these institutions.

9. The AU must commit to transforming itself from an intergovernmental body into a truly multilateral institution with binding and enforcement power; without this shift, it will continue to fall short of its aspirations.

10. The AU and RECs' anti-coup stance is insufficient to prevent democratic setbacks in the Sahel and beyond. These institutions should be more focused on addressing misgovernance, corruption, and unconstitutional tenure extensions by civilian leaders.



AMB. JERRY MATJILA - FORMER SOUTH AFRICAN AMBASSADOR FOR THE EU AND UN.

Source: IPATC



SIMONE MBODÉ DIOUF - AFRICAN UNION YOUTH AMBASSADOR, PEACE FOR WEST AFRICA, DAKAR, SENEGAL.

Source: <https://x.com/SimoneDiouf/photo>



DR. OLUWASEUN TELLA - HEAD, FUTURE OF DIPLOMACY, INSTITUTE FOR THE FUTURE OF KNOWLEDGE (IFK), UJ.

Source: IPATC



DR JONATHAN P SANDY - HEAD, PEACE AND SECURITY CLUSTER, AFRICAN UNION'S ECOSOCC.

Source: <https://leadership.ng/sandy-jpj-facilitates-adoption-of-maputo/>



PROF ANTONIA SIMBINE - DIRECTOR-GENERAL, NIGERIAN INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RESEARCH, NIGERIA.

Source: <https://niser.gov.ng/v2/office-of-the-director-general/>



PROF FRITZ NGANJE - HEAD OF DEPARTMENT, POLITICS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS, UJ.

Source: IPATC



MR STEVEN GRUZD - HEAD, AFRICAN GOVERNANCE AND DIPLOMACY PROGRAMME AND THE RUSSIA-AFRICA PROJECT, THE SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS (SAIIA).

Source: IPATC



DR ODILILE AYODELE - SENIOR RESEARCH SPECIALIST, HUMAN SCIENCES RESEARCH COUNCIL (HSRC), SOUTH AFRICA.

Source: IPATC



DR ISSAKA SOUARÉ - FORMER ASSOCIATE SENIOR RESEARCHER WORKING WITH SIPRI'S SAHEL AND WEST AFRICA PROGRAMME.

Source: IPATC

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The Institute for Pan-African Thought and Conversation (IPATC) Policy Briefs are a series of reports from the Institute's research-based and policy-oriented seminars on relevant themes intended for policy practitioners and decision-makers in foreign policy, Pan-African issues, security, governance, aid and development. They aim to inform public debate and generate input into the sphere of policymaking. The perspectives expressed are outcomes from strategic engagements and those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Institute and the University of Johannesburg.



About the Authors:

Ms. Ratidzo C. Makombe is a Researcher at the Institute for Pan-African Thought and Conversation (IPATC) at the University of Johannesburg(UJ). Her main areas of research are Human Security, including election violence, grassroots conflict, poverty reduction and sustainable development in Africa.

Prof. Adeoye O. Akinola is an Associate Professor at the Department of Politics and International Relations, in the Faculty of Humanities and an Associate of IPATC, UJ. His main areas of research are globalization, African political economy, Africa Union Studies, migration, resource governance, conflict and peace studies.



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IPATC was established at the University of Johannesburg (UJ) in 2016 as one of nine flagship centres of excellence to conduct research. It provides a forum for scholars, practitioners, and civil society actors across Africa and its Diaspora to dialogue and contribute to the rigorous production and dissemination of Pan-African knowledge and culture. The Institute seeks to promote original and innovative Pan-African ideas and critical dialogue in pursuit of global excellence in research and teaching and to contribute actively to building an international profile for UJ on Pan-African issues.