

Introduction to the special issue on Africa's futures

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The story of Africa's future continues to be an unfolding one. As Gatune (2010) points out the story is more like a rollercoaster following short term economic results. When growth is good, the story's future is rosy but when the growth topples, which tends to happen so often especially when commodity cycles dip, the prospects tend to be seen as poor. Not enough attention is given to capture the deeper drivers of Africa and really capture where Africa is heading without being distracted by the many stories of despair that Africa seems to spawn. These stories of desperation tend to loom large and largely shape the story of Africa's future, perhaps a testimony of the power of the old colonial narrative of the dark continent. The recent good performance of African economies has seen a flurry of good stories. Even the Economist magazine which in 2001 had declared Africa “a hopeless continent” changed its forecast and in 2011 declared Africa “a rising continent” in 2011, a complete reversal (Adewumi, 2011).

For sure Africa remains a place beset by many challenges of underdevelopment. The majority of the world's poor now live in Africa. Malnutrition and resulting stunting of growth is killing the intellectual potential of many children, crippling their future prospects even before they start the race into knowledge based economies of the future where brain power will be the key asset. Challenges are being compounded by new trends in particular climate change. To get an understanding of the trends driving Africa the first article, produced by the Institute of Security Studies (ISS), looks at Africa trends to 2035. The trends provide some hope but also a cause for concern. Though Africa continues to rise economy wise the number of poor people continues to grow. In 2035 there could be as many as 170 million more extremely poor Africans than in 2016. Tepid economic growth is not keeping up with fast demographic growth. So the challenge of providing employment for a fast growing youth population is perhaps the most daunting challenge facing Africa. The youth bulge is a double edged sword, with right investments especially in skills and unlocking economic opportunities through investment in infrastructure, transformation of economies through increased value addition and greater integration of economies to improve markets among other policies. Failure to adequately address this can have disastrous consequences. North Africa is still grappling with the turmoil of an unfinished revolution, the Arab Spring, a revolt of the millennials due to lack of economic opportunities among other reasons as discussed in the article by Nisreen and Gatune.

The future of Africa will depend very much on how it will be able to transform its economies to create the needed opportunities for its youths. This will in turn very much depend on the ability to transform agriculture and use this as the engine for powering overall economic transformation. This is a topic of a recent report by the African Centre for Economic Transformation (ACET, 2017). This is also the theme of the article by Bumni Ajillore that looks at the future of Agricultural Research and Innovation (ARI) system in Africa. He makes that strong case that the future of agriculture depends on the ability of ARI systems to bring the needed innovations to upgrade agriculture to various stakeholders. The article points to six key drivers of the future of the ARI system which were then used to build scenarios for the future agricultural research and innovation in Africa. The most desirable scenario points out that the key will be getting the needed political will to commit budgets and also building a critical mass of futurist within the ARI system.

Governance has been the perennial challenge of Africa. Probably the most basic and intractable challenge. Though there is still a democracy deficit, trends show improvements and indeed point that Africa is relatively more democratic than could be expected given its generally low levels of GDP per capita. However some recent gains in democracy have been reversed as countries have revised constitutions to create life presidencies. Neo-patrimonial systems even in the democracies remain dominant where democratic elections are really vehicles for capture of power by ethnic coalitions and state bureaucracies, then are used to keep others at bay. This then brings to question what should be the future of governance. This is a topic that is discussed in the article by Otto Kroesen who rightly questions what modernization should mean for Africa. Should it follow the western model or should Africa find a way to reorganize the traditional systems based on clan loyalties and patrimonial system so that they can be “modernized”. He argues that the modern universalist state seen in Europe is the result of significant bloodshed through several revolutions, the most famous being the French Revolution, and two world wars. And even after all this we are witnessing a return to ethnic based systems, a testimony that the universalist state misses something, the connectedness that comes with traditional systems. They argue that the universalist state may not be the way forward for Africa and call for a new kind of “ethnic” coalition based in entrepreneurship akin to trade guilds that were key to giving birth to modern societies in medieval Europe. They argue if this spirit of belongingness, identity and self-affirmation is located in the economic sphere (and not in the sphere of politics!) by cooperative networks and entrepreneurial “tribes” an equilibrium may be found between the heritage of the past and the challenges of the future. The issue of governance and the future of Africa is also the subject of the article by Ricardo-Raymond Schung that looks at the future of human trafficking in Sub Saharan Africa (SSA). It places the driver of human trafficking as perceptions that are largely shaped as much by economic and social conditions as by the underlying narrative (e.g. “I am because I want to be like them”). Leadership plays a key role in creating conditions shaping the future. African leadership has failed to create the right conditions and a narrative and are accused of selling “used futures”—one that may have succeeded elsewhere e.g. Europe but does not fit into the local context of Sub-Saharan Africa. For example, the pan-African vision is a leader-induced, shared vision on paper, but it is not the shared vision of the people. He proposes that a narrative based on Ubuntu philosophy of inclusiveness which supports the bottom-up, community-driven change that truly puts people first. Essentially the worldview moves from people being connected based on political and economic ideologies that may result in a used future – to one where communities and solidarity become the glue of society based on cultural values and the acceptance of one another. Embracing Ubuntu is thus seen as the key to a better future that provides opportunities for all.

One might accuse this issue of falling in the same folly as many that consider Africa as one monolith, failing to appreciate the huge diversity across the continent. This is partly true. There is not enough space to capture the whole diversity and Africa was largely the unit of analysis in this issue. Though Africa is heterogeneous one can also argue that there are many things that tie Africa as one and indeed one can argue that the fortunes of African countries are intertwined. So until the challenges of Congo are resolved, the great lakes region will continue to be in turmoil. Fortunes of East Africa are very much tied to Kenya’s performance. Indeed the common ties play a much bigger role in shaping the futures of Africa than the heterogeneity we see. All the same studies at a country or regional level can give insights into the future and provide insights in upcoming challenges that are yet to manifest at a more aggregated level, the so called weak signals. For instance the article by Roux and Viljoen that looks at the problem of aging in South Africa is a good example. Though Africa’s focus is the youth bulge, we could miss a new challenge that is looming, that is that of aging. People are living longer and by 2035 and going ahead there will be a significant cohort of people over age 65 and South Africa will be one of the first countries to have to deal with the challenge. Using the CLA approach, the article shows that clearly countries are ill equipped to

cope with old stereotypes about old people (as rigid and unable and unwilling to learn) and their role (as passive receiver of help) are very strong. They point to the need of changing the narrative about older people and equipping them properly and thus unleash a generation of “Silver Surfers” which can actually add to the dynamism of Africa. The article on the future of North Africa also points to prospects of a region that is traditionally seen as not part of Africa but more tied to the Middle East. While North Africa and Middle East share a common Arab heritage the region also shares strong historical connections with the Rest of Africa. Both parts have shaped each others trajectory stretching back to ancient Egypt and the Middle age's Trans-Sahara trade. Therefore a reading of the Future of North Africa is very pertinent to understanding the future of the rest of Africa. Indeed the Arab Spring points to good lessons as SSA grapples with the challenge of a growing youth bulge. More importantly the common challenge of food security is pointing to new areas of building new bridges for collaboration as North Africa can transfer expertise in irrigation in return for access to abundant land in SSA. North Africa's institutional innovations in addressing issue of urbanization also provides useful lessons and new areas of collaboration in shaping better futures.

As pointed out the Africa trends tend to show significant rises and drops, very promising trends can be followed by significant reversals. This is a reflection of Africa's exposure to shocks and also a testimony of its inability to cope with shocks. Traditional shocks of political upheavals, commodity prices crashes are now being compounded by climate change induced shocks that are making droughts incidences more frequent and more severe. The future of Africa will very much depend on how well it copes with shocks. A better future requires that resilience to shocks be at the centre of long term planning especially in achieving SDGs. This is the thrust of the article by Raymond Tutu and Janice Busingye. They point however this is not the case. Though many development plans make reference to resilience the concept is not well captured in the plans. They call for rethinking of the concept of development and centralize resilience thinking in making development plans.

The world is that the cusp of a new revolution, The 4th Industrial Revolution (4IR), revolution that promises to have more impact than other revolutions. For Africa as X. N. Iraki argues this presents an opportunity to leapfrog development for this will require use of intelligence and anyone can think! This is a provocative thought, however 4IR will require more than skills but also infrastructure (internet and electricity), good governance to attract investment and vibrant innovation systems as pointed in a recent report by ACET for the Africa Development Bank (ACET, 2018). All the same it does represent an opportunity for Africa to fashion a very different future. However not all is rosy about 4IR, as the article by Van vurren points, the new technologies will come with challenges and also compound old challenges. They show that Africa is not free from information warfare that will be conducted in cyberspace and indeed terrorism is already a challenge. The potential of cyberspace is real especially if societies remain fragmented as the new media provides new ways or organizing and coordinating. There is potential for states to use information warfare on citizens eroding many rights. Information technologies by creating new sources of power are reshaping the trajectory of political development away from political and democratic models of the West. The potential challenge of these new platforms calls for further strengthening collaboration and common understanding.

In the last article Clifford Campbell explores the link between African and her diaspora in shaping Africa's future. It points that the current post-colonial Africa with a pan-Africanist agenda is largely a product of the America's diaspora imagination whose ideas of pan-Africa shaped much of the thought of the founding fathers. The potential for a diaspora playing a significant role is huge and indeed the Africa Union has recognized the diaspora as a bona fide constituency. While the old diaspora that left Africa during slavery remains a force in shaping thought, it is the new diaspora that has more recently might make a bigger mark going forward. These tend toward highly educated individuals and indeed some of the most highly educated groups in the West. This group is already a

significant contributor to development through remittances but the huge potential is brain circulation through returning experts and more crucially through use of 4th industrial technology tools that will facilitate flow of knowledge and ideas.

In conclusion while this issue may not have delved into the full range of drivers of Africa futures and thus paint the full range of potential future of Africa, it does provide interesting snapshots that point to various futures. It also makes use of many futures tools thus pointing to the many ways that the futures of Africa can be explored. We thus hope that the issue will stimulate researchers and practitioners to develop more articles and further deepen our understanding of Africa and more crucially point to levers for steering Africa to better futures.

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