

By the Africa Center for Strategic Studies

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The African Union's ambitious vision of citizen-focused development, infrastructural and institutional innovation, and sustained peace and security provides a template to harmonize intra- and interregional strategies.



The Gautrain, Africa's first high-speed rail line, in Pretoria, South Africa.

In line with Africa's enormous potential as a youthful population, emerging market, and hub for technological and cultural innovation, the African Union (AU) set out a vision and strategy of what the continent could become when marking the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). Agenda 2063 envisages a continent with a vibrant economy, the eradication of poverty, greater interregional integration, the entrenchment of the rule of law and democratic governance, and peace and security. This vision is accompanied by a strengthened cultural identity through an "African renaissance" based on Pan-African deals of equality, genuine popular participation, and solidarity in upholding these principles.

To assess the continent's progress in realizing this ambitious agenda, the Africa Center for Strategic Studies spoke with Ambassador Frederic Gateretse-Ngoga, Senior Advisor on International Partnerships, the AU Border Program, and Regional Security Mechanisms in the Office of the Commissioner for Political Affairs and Peace and Security at the AU Commission. In this capacity, he is a lead coordinator for the AU's implementation of Agenda 2063.

WHY DOES AFRICA NEED AN AGENDA 2063?

Every regional community requires a long-term plan, a clear vision of the future it aspires to, and the means to measure progress toward that vision. Launched in 2015, Agenda 2063 embodies Africa's collective ambition of where we see ourselves in the middle of the 21st century. The objective is to move towards an integrated, prosperous, democratic, and secure Africa—an Africa that is well governed, responsive to its citizens and diaspora, and able to assume its rightful place in the world.

Agenda 2063 is not simply an overarching vision. It is broken down into 10-year implementation plans that emphasize practical delivery in key sectors such as transportation, education, peace and security, and alignment with national priorities.

Agenda 2063 represents a continuation and consolidation of earlier frameworks: the Lagos Plan of Action (1980–2000) and the 2002 Strategic Vision for Africa, which laid the foundations for the Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation in Africa.



Delegates attend an Agenda 2063 conference during the African Union Summit, February 16, 2025.

WHAT ARE THE PRIMARY GOALS OF AGENDA 2063?

Agenda 2063 is anchored in the aspiration to craft “The Africa We Want,” a peaceful, prosperous, integrated, people-driven, and globally influential continent. This vision is articulated through seven aspirations:

1. A prosperous Africa rooted in inclusive growth and sustainable development
2. An integrated continent, politically united under Pan-African ideals
3. A continent characterized by good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice, and the rule of law
4. An Africa at peace with itself
5. A continent with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, and shared values
6. A people-driven development agenda that harnesses the potential of women and youth
7. An Africa that is a strong, united, and influential player on the global stage

Among the flagship projects designed to bring these aspirations to life are the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), the Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM), the African Passport and free-movement policy, the Grand Inga hydropower project in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and digital and scientific platforms required to propel Africa into a knowledge-based economy.

MAJOR INFRASTRUCTURAL PROJECTS

Creating infrastructure that facilitates intra- and interregional trade, commerce, and transportation is a central element of Agenda 2063. Projects underway or envisaged include:

- 18,000 kilometers of cross-country highway infrastructure have been financed by the African Development Bank out of a planned 56,000-kilometer system.
- Expanding cross-border rail links, such as the:
 - TAZARA Railway, connecting Tanzania and Zambia
 - Addis Ababa–Djibouti Railway, connecting Ethiopia and Djibouti
 - Beira–Bulawayo Railway, connecting Zimbabwe and Mozambique
 - Sena Railway, connecting Mozambique and Zambia
 - Daka–Niger Railway, connecting Senegal and Niger
- 12,000 kilometers of track comprising the AU’s Integrated High-Speed Rail Network have been constructed. The network will link North Africa to Southern Africa, with each region implementing a Regional Railway Master Plan fitting into the larger integrated plan. An additional 50,000 kilometers of track is envisioned by 2043.

WHAT INDICATORS OF PROGRESS CAN WE POINT TO SINCE AGENDA 2063'S INCEPTION, AND WHAT ARE SOME CHALLENGES?

Significant strides have been made in translating vision into practice. The AfCFTA became operational in 2021, creating the largest free trade area in the world by membership. If fully implemented, it could boost intra-African trade by more than 50 percent and fundamentally reshape industrialization and regional value chains. Pilot transactions under the AfCFTA have already taken place, demonstrating that political will is materializing into economic reality. Ratifications continue to expand, and the permanent secretariat in Accra, Ghana, is operational.

The first Ten-Year Implementation Plan (2014–2023) recorded that Africa had achieved just over half of its targeted milestones—a commendable achievement reflecting both progress and the challenges of implementation. Infrastructure connectivity has advanced with new transport networks, broader electrification, and significant information and communications technology (ICT) improvements. Energy integration has gained momentum through initiatives such as the African Single Electricity Market (AfSEM) and the Continental Power Systems Masterplan.

Visa reforms and free-movement policies have also advanced. Rwanda and Ghana, for instance, liberalized visa regimes to facilitate easier entry for Africans, with Ghana's 2025 visa-free announcement marking a historic milestone. These reforms reduce barriers for traders, entrepreneurs, and ordinary citizens, bringing the idea of continental integration into everyday life.

Progress on Select Agenda 2063 Flagship Projects

Flagship Project	Progress
African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)	54 African states have signed on, but structural reforms are needed to increase regional economic integration and intra-African trade.
Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM)	Progress is ongoing for full liberalization and harmonization.
Integrated High-Speed Rail Network	Progress has been made on internal rail networks. Continent-wide cross-border connectivity is progressing.
Grand Inga Hydropower Project	Technical and environmental impact assessments are ongoing.
Pan-African e-Network	Good progress in digital transformation and cybersecurity has been made.
African Passport/Free Movement	Several states have signed and implemented free-movement protocols. Still, critical mass is low, and ratification remains insufficient.
Silencing the Guns	Progress in democratization, constitutionalism, and political governance have experienced serious setbacks.
African Commodities Strategy	Some countries are reorienting their economies for greater value addition, but progress remains uneven. The formation of an association of critical mineral-producing countries is expected to accelerate these efforts.
Pan-African Virtual and e-University (PAVEU)	Advancing but incomplete. Growing buy-in from political leadership and private sector.

Source: AU and African Union Development Agency (AUDA /NEPAD)
More Progress ■■■■ Less Progress

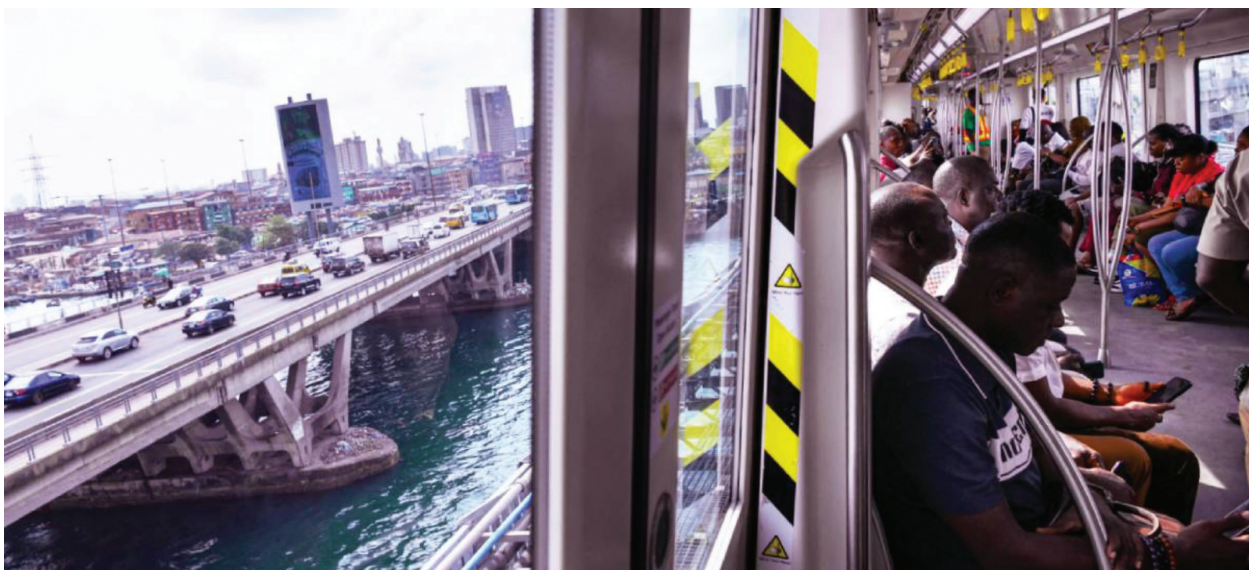
Another area of progress is monitoring and accountability. The AU now conducts biennial reviews and publishes dashboards to track results. These mechanisms enhance transparency and allow citizens and leaders alike to assess progress, hold institutions accountable, and contribute ideas. Importantly, the Ten-Year Plans are aligned with the priorities of Regional Economic Communities (REC), ensuring coherence between continental goals and regional action. Legal instruments such as the AfCFTA agreement and protocols on free movement and migration provide binding frameworks for states to translate continental aspirations into domestic laws.

Nonetheless, challenges remain substantial. Financing gaps persist as flagship projects require large upfront investments, yet many countries still rely heavily on external financing. Implementation is uneven, with some countries integrating Agenda 2063 into their national development plans while others lag due to weak institutional or technical capacity. Security challenges in regions like the Sahel, the Horn of Africa, and parts of Central Africa continue to undermine progress.

Data gaps also pose problems, making it difficult to measure outcomes accurately. Sustained progress requires greater domestic financing, stronger institutional capacity at both the AU and REC levels, and consistent domestication of commitments into national policies and budgets.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE AGENDA'S KEY MILESTONES AND DELIVERABLES FROM NOW THROUGH TO 2063 AS YOU SEE THEM?

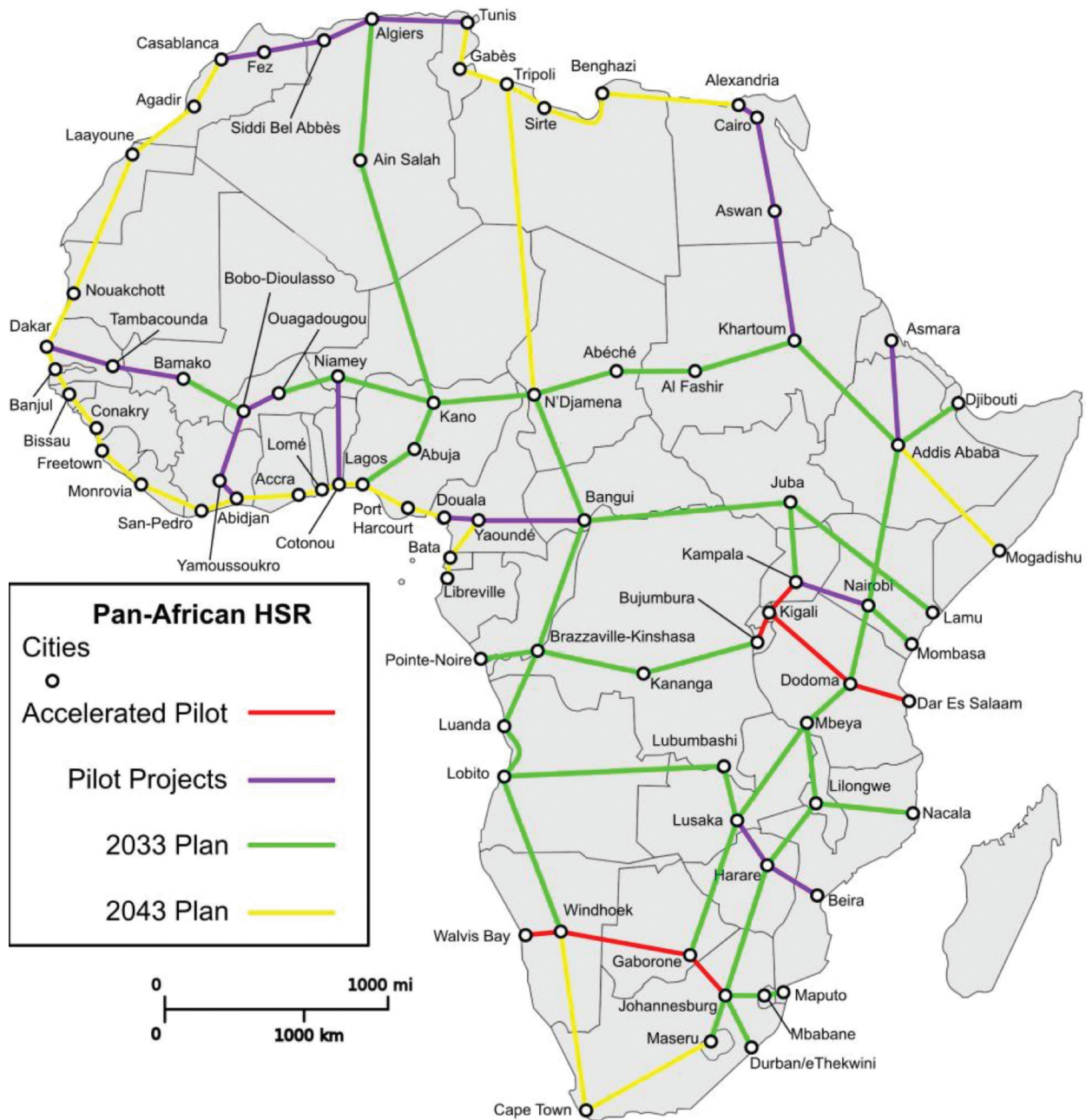
We are currently in the “Decade of Acceleration” (2024–2033), during which flagship projects such as the AfCFTA, the African Passport and Free Movement regime, the SAATM, and the AfSEM are prioritized. By 2033, operational segments of the Integrated High-Speed Rail Network should be functioning, energy access will have expanded, intra-African trade volumes should rise significantly, and visa-free travel will ideally be widespread.



Passengers on the Lagos Rail Mass Transit (LRMT) in Lagos, Nigeria. (Photo: AFP/Han Xu)

In the 2030s and 2040s, attention will shift toward deepening economic transformation through industrialization, manufacturing, and value addition, reducing reliance on raw commodity exports. Social progress should include universal access to healthcare, nutrition, education, and greater gender equality. Environmental sustainability will also be central, with expanded adoption of renewable energy and greater climate resilience.

By the mid-21st century, major flagship projects such as the Grand Inga Dam and Pan-African financial institutions should be fully operational.



The high-speed rail network planned under Agenda 2063. (Image: Abs616)

By 2063, Africans should enjoy universal access to basic services, supported by strong governance and capable institutions. At this point, Africa should stand as a key player in global trade, innovation, and cultural influence.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE STRUCTURAL CHANGES THAT HAVE BEEN MADE AT THE NATIONAL AND REGIONAL LEVEL TO ADVANCE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE AGENDA?

To advance Agenda 2063, the AU and member states have pursued blended financing, strengthened partnerships, and implemented institutional reforms. Blended finance—combining public resources, concessional finance, and private investment—has become an important tool. The African Development Bank has taken the lead alongside bilateral partners and private investors. Public-private partnerships are increasingly used for infrastructure projects ranging from energy corridors to digital networks.

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Domestic resource mobilization has also advanced through tax reforms, improved financial management, and instruments such as diaspora bonds. Countries like Ethiopia, Ghana, Mauritius, and Rwanda have shown how diaspora engagement and targeted reforms can attract investment.

Human capital development remains a cornerstone. Agenda 2063 prioritizes youth, women, and science and technology. Initiatives such as the Pan-African Virtual and e-University, scholarship programs, and STEM-focused education reforms aim to build the workforce Africa needs for industrialization and the digital economy. These investments ensure that Africa's young population drives innovation rather than seeking opportunities abroad.

HOW WOULD YOU ASSESS THE LEVEL OF POPULAR OWNERSHIP AND AWARENESS OF AGENDA 2063 AMONG AFRICAN CITIZEN STAKEHOLDERS?

Ownership and awareness are critical to the success of Agenda 2063. At the continental level, leaders, AU organs, and regional bodies are invested. The private sector and civil society are increasingly engaged, and flagship projects like AfCFTA and visa liberalization have resonated with the public. Traders in West Africa, for example, already benefit from reduced barriers, while entrepreneurs in East Africa are accessing wider markets.

Yet, at the grassroots level, awareness remains uneven. Many rural communities or marginalized groups do not yet see how Agenda 2063 directly affects their daily lives. The vision becomes tangible only when translated into practical improvements such as jobs, roads, or simplified travel. Effective communication—through local languages, community dialogues, and visible benefits—is essential.

Agenda 2063 will only succeed if it becomes a people's project rather than an AU initiative.

Civil society organizations and youth networks are vital in bridging this gap. In some countries, they play an active role in shaping national implementation, while in others, their involvement remains limited. Agenda 2063 will only succeed if it becomes a people's project rather than an AU initiative.

The African diaspora must also be fully engaged. Recognized as Africa's "sixth region," the diaspora includes peoples of African descent in the Americas, Europe, and beyond. These communities are empowered to participate in AU institutions and decision-making. The challenge now is to fully integrate diasporic voices into the shaping and ownership of Agenda 2063.

WHAT LIES OVER THE HORIZON IN TERMS OF NEXT STEPS?

Looking ahead, the path forward must combine immediate, visible wins with longer term structural reforms. In the next 1 to 5 years, priorities include deepening AfCFTA implementation by addressing rules of origin, digital trade, and nontariff barriers so that ordinary Africans feel the benefits. Accelerating visible integration wins is also critical—through visa-free corridors, operationalization of SAATM, and infrastructure projects such as regional highways and energy interconnectors. Financing must be scaled up through continental infrastructure funds, diaspora bonds, and innovative risk-sharing mechanisms.

Over the medium- to long-term (5–20 years), the focus must shift toward strengthening continental institutions, particularly Pan-African financial and monetary structures, while institutionalizing peace and conflict prevention to safeguard development gains. Sustained investment in people will be vital, with STEM education, vocational training, and digital innovation at the heart of industrialization and value addition.

We also need to do more on the peace and security front. Out of 55 AU member states, we have 20 to 30 active conflicts—some large, others low-intensity insurgencies or localized clashes. We must invest more in nation building and state building relevant to Africa's needs. The state structures we inherited from the colonial governments are inherently antidemocratic and conflict prone. We must change them.

Agenda 2063 represents not only a roadmap but also a call to action.

Secondly, we must strengthen our conflict resolution mechanisms, particularly the AU Peace and Security Architecture. Third, we ought to develop mechanisms to hold member states accountable when they violate the AU Constitutive Act and its provisions on good governance and constitutionalism. We must also return to the values of active and robust diplomacy. Statements of concern are simply not enough when established norms and provisions are violated.

Ultimately, Agenda 2063 represents not only a roadmap but also a call to action. It requires visionary leadership, institutional resilience, and above all, the active ownership of African citizens and the diaspora. If these conditions are met, by 2063 Africa will not only have achieved its aspirations but also assumed its rightful place as a prosperous, democratic, and globally influential continent.