Regional Integration in Africa: Progress of Agenda 2063

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Abstract

Regional integration in Africa is a multifaceted process involving economic, political, and social dimensions. The AU, established in 2002, has emerged as a key actor in fostering cooperation among African nations. The development of Agenda 2063 by the African Union serves as a strategic framework aimed at fostering socio-economic development and regional integration throughout the continent, addressing the diverse challenges confronting African countries. However, with the conclusion of the initial phase of Agenda 2063 in 2023, it is evident that many African countries are struggling to achieve the set goals. The attainment of these objectives appears to be beyond the reach of most African countries, with projections indicating that they may only materialize well beyond the target year of 2063. This paper critically examines the progress made by the AU in implementing regional policies during the first decade and assesses the challenges encountered in promoting cohesive regional governance to realize the objectives outlined in Agenda 2063 in Southern Africa.

Keywords Regional integration, Agenda 2063, Regional policy, African Union

JEL R0, R58, R50

Introduction

Regional integration in Africa represents a multifaceted process aimed at fostering collaboration and coherence in economic, political, and social policies among African nations. This endeavor has historical roots, with post-colonial leaders recognizing the imperative of unity in addressing common challenges and promoting collective development. The evolution from the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to the African Union (AU) in 2002 marked a critical juncture in the continent's commitment to regional integration (Oloruntoba, 2014).

The journey toward regional integration in Africa commenced with the establishment of the OAU in 1963, reflecting a collective aspiration for unity and sovereignty. Over time, the focus shifted from political liberation to economic and social development (Murithi, 2011). The transformation into the AU signaled an intensified commitment to regional collaboration, laying the foundation for comprehensive integration initiatives. The AU serves as an important actor in shaping regional policies, employing various mechanisms to articulate and implement its vision (Tella, 2018). Central to this is the development of comprehensive policy frameworks such as Agenda 2063, providing a long-term vision for the continent. The AU Commission functions as the executive arm, overseeing policy execution, while specialized agencies and bodies contribute to sector-specific policy initiatives (AU, 2024).

In the realm of peace and security, the AU's Peace and Security Council (PSC) plays a crucial role. Through conflict prevention, management, and resolution mechanisms, the AU endeavors to create an environment conducive to regional integration (Murithi, 2011). The AU's commitment extends to economic integration, exemplified by initiatives like the African Continental Free Trade

Area (AfCFTA). AfCFTA seeks to establish a unified market, fostering intra-Africa trade, industrialization, and economic growth (AU, 2020). One of the key objectives of regional integration in Africa is to promote economic growth and development through enhanced trade and investment opportunities. The AU's efforts in this regard include the establishment of regional economic communities (RECs), such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC), which serve as platforms for promoting economic cooperation and integration within specific geographic regions (African Union Commission, 2019).

Asare-Nuamah (2019) states that despite the AU's overarching vision and initiatives, regional integration in Africa encounters several challenges. An implementation gap persists, with variations in national capacities, political will, and resource constraints hindering the effective execution of continental policies. Security concerns, including persistent conflicts in some regions, pose significant obstacles to the AU's objectives (Ademola, 2022).

Decades later, economic disparities among African nations present another challenge, with differing developmental levels, trade imbalances, and diverse economic structures complicating efforts to establish a seamless economic community. The proliferation of RECs has led to overlapping mandates and competing interests, hindering effective coordination and coherence in regional integration efforts (Magoke & Oke, 2023). Governance issues and concerns about sovereignty also cast a shadow, as inconsistent commitment among member states and reluctance to cede authority hinder the establishment of supranational structures (Mlambo, Thusi & Ndlovu, 2022).

The AU's role in regional policy formation is significant, reflecting Africa's commitment to achieving unity, peace, and sustainable development. However, challenges persist, requiring continuous efforts to overcome barriers to integration. This paper outlines the Agenda 2063 as the main regional policy tool, focusing on the first 10-year implementation plan progress and the challenges that exist for the success of regional integration implementation in Africa particularly in Southern Africa. This paper concludes with recommendations and strategies to improve existing measures so that policies translate into tangible benefits for African countries.

Theoretical Framework

The diverse array of Regional Integration Theories provides insights into the process of regional integration as viewed through different theoretical frameworks. These theories serve a crucial role in comprehending the historical evolution and present condition of integration clusters, while also facilitating predictions regarding their future trajectory. Originally conceived to elucidate integration dynamics in Europe, prominent theories such as Neofunctionalism and Intergovernmentalism have been instrumental in this regard. Nonetheless, the emergence of the New Regional Approach (NRA) signifies a contemporary theoretical development aimed at explaining regional integration in a changing global landscape (Hettne & Söderbaum, 1998).

The New Regional Approach (NRA) for Africa represents a shift in thinking regarding regional integration and cooperation on the African continent. It emphasizes the importance of regionalism and collaboration among African nations to address common challenges and achieve shared goals. The NRA departs from earlier approaches that focused primarily on state-centric models of governance and sovereignty and instead promotes a more inclusive and participatory approach to regional cooperation (Hettne & Söderbaum, 1998).

The NRA recognizes that many of the challenges facing African nations, such as poverty, conflict, and underdevelopment, are inherently regional in nature and cannot be effectively addressed

by individual countries acting alone. Therefore, it advocates for the creation of regional institutions and mechanisms that enable African nations to work together to tackle these challenges collectively. In terms of governance, the NRA emphasizes the importance of good governance principles, such as transparency, accountability, and the rule of law, both at the national and regional levels. By promoting these principles, the NRA seeks to enhance the effectiveness and legitimacy of regional institutions and ensure that they serve the interests of all member states and their citizens (Magoke & Oke, 2023).The NRA also has implications for sovereignty, as it requires African nations to cede some degree of sovereignty to regional institutions in order to participate in regional cooperation initiatives. However, proponents argue that this loss of sovereignty is offset by the benefits of increased regional integration, such as enhanced economic cooperation, improved security, and greater political influence on the global stage (Magoke & Oke, 2023).

In summary, the New Regional Approach for Africa represents a paradigm shift towards greater regional cooperation and integration on the continent. By promoting good governance, sovereignty, and regionalism, the NRA seeks to empower African countries to address common challenges and achieve sustainable development and prosperity.

Methodology

The methodology that was followed for this article was qualitative in nature. The study involved desk-top research. First, the AU was selected as a target region based on a pre-determined criteria. The first 10-year implementation plan of Agenda 2063 started in 2014 and lapsed in 2023. Next, a general search was conducted using various search engines to review literature to identify Agenda 2063 goals and aspirations and to identify progress. Then, an analysis of the legislations and policies was conducted for region and Southern Africa was selected and certain aspirations and goals to identify strengths and weaknesses/shortcomings. The objective of performing this analysis is an effort towards aiding discussions on how to further aid the AU to identify sectors that will help them reach some of the 2063 goals. This is mainly because most African countries won't meet the goals set for 2023, with many only materialising well beyond 2063 because the lack of political will and poor governance hinder progress in the region. Using this approach granted us the opportunity to make suitable recommendations to improve the implementation of some Agenda 2063 goals.

Regional policy framework: Agenda 2063

The AU's regional policy, particularly encapsulated in Agenda 2063, embodies a strategic vision for Africa's socio-economic development and regional integration. At its core, Agenda 2063 aims to achieve a prosperous, peaceful, and united Africa, driven by its citizens and representing a dynamic force in the global arena. The objectives of Agenda 2063 are multifaceted, encompassing economic transformation, social inclusion, environmental sustainability, and good governance. By fostering economic diversification, industrialization, and infrastructure development, Agenda 2063 seeks to unlock Africa's vast potential and create opportunities for sustainable growth and development.

To realize its objectives, the AU employs a range of mechanisms and strategies outlined in Agenda 2063. These include the promotion of intra-African trade and investment through initiatives like the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which aims to create a single market for goods and services across the continent. Additionally, Agenda 2063 emphasizes the importance of enhancing regional infrastructure, connectivity, and digitalization to facilitate trade, mobility, and economic integration. Moreover, Agenda 2063 emphasizes the need for good governance, peace,

and security to create an enabling environment for sustainable development and regional cooperation (AU, 2024).

The impact of Agenda 2063 on regional integration in Africa has been substantial, albeit with both achievements and challenges. On the positive side, Agenda 2063 has provided a common framework and vision for African countries to work towards, fostering a sense of unity and purpose (Ademola, 2022). The establishment of the AfCFTA represents a significant milestone in regional economic integration, with the potential to stimulate trade, investment, and economic growth across the continent. Moreover, Agenda 2063 has spurred initiatives in areas such as infrastructure development, education, and healthcare, contributing to improvements in living standards and social inclusion (Mlambo et al. 2022).

However, challenges remain in the implementation of Agenda 2063 and its impact on regional integration. These include capacity constraints, resource mobilization, and governance deficits, which hinder the effective implementation of regional policies and programs (DeGhetto et al., 2016). Moreover, geopolitical tensions, conflicts, and security threats continue to pose significant obstacles to regional cooperation and integration efforts (Gwala, 2015). Addressing these challenges requires sustained political commitment, institutional strengthening, and greater coordination among African countries and regional organizations.

Results and Discussion

The slogan "The Africa we want" captures the essence of Agenda 2063, representing a collective vision for fostering inclusive growth and sustainable development across the continent. This vision aspires to position Africa as a fully developed and well-integrated region on par with other global counterparts (Soumahoro, Kinkoh, Aikins, & Louw-Vaudran, 2023). It aims to capitalize on and expedite previous implementation efforts and existing continental initiatives aimed at fostering growth and sustainability. Agenda 2063 has seven overarching aspirations, 20 specific goals, and a multitude of associated priorities (AU, 2023).

According to the AUDA-NEPAD, the continent's overall score in meeting its Agenda 2063 aspirations was 51% in 2021 (Fig. 1). Notably, Aspiration 1 exhibited significant deficiency, registering at 37%, with one of its goals, "Capable institutions and transformed leadership in place at all levels," notably lagging at 32%. Remarkable progress toward achieving the outlined Agenda 2063 goals by 2021 has been observed in countries such as Rwanda, Senegal, and Ethiopia (Fig. 2). Conversely, countries like Sudan, Benin, and Mauritania have demonstrated the least progress. Even economically robust nations like South Africa appear to be falling short in meeting Agenda 2063 goals, ranking notably low with a score of 22%. Fig 3 shows the selected region and how Southern Africa is doing overall, and which aspirations need to be focused on.
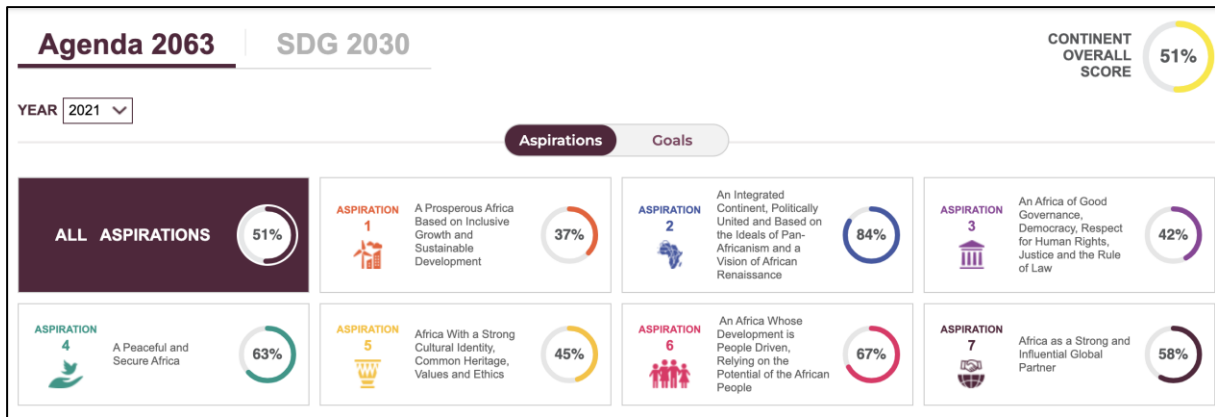
Figure 1. Overall score for all Aspirations for Agenda 2063 in 2021
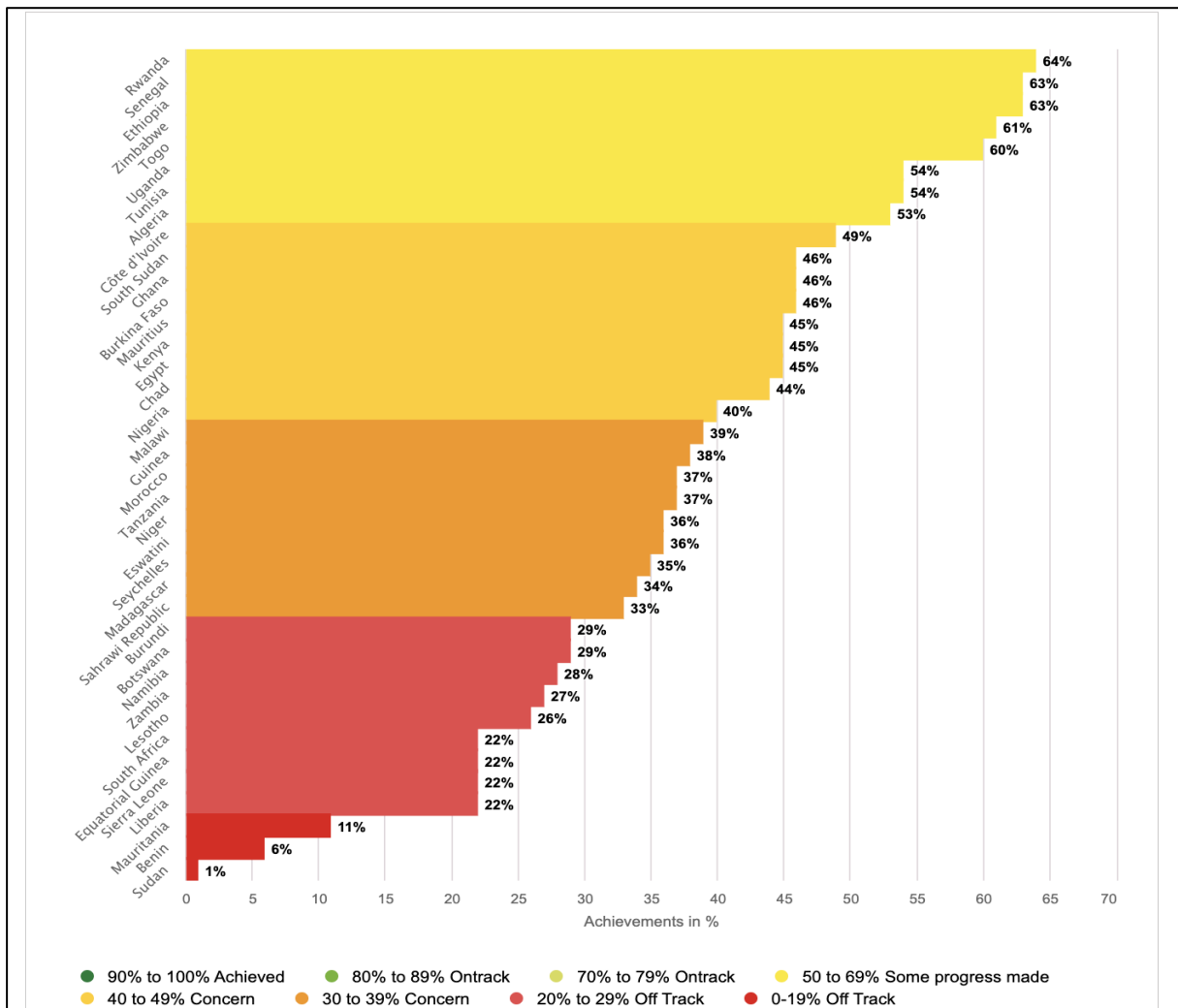*Source: AUDA-NEPAD, 2024*

Figure 2. Member states scores for all Aspirations in Africa
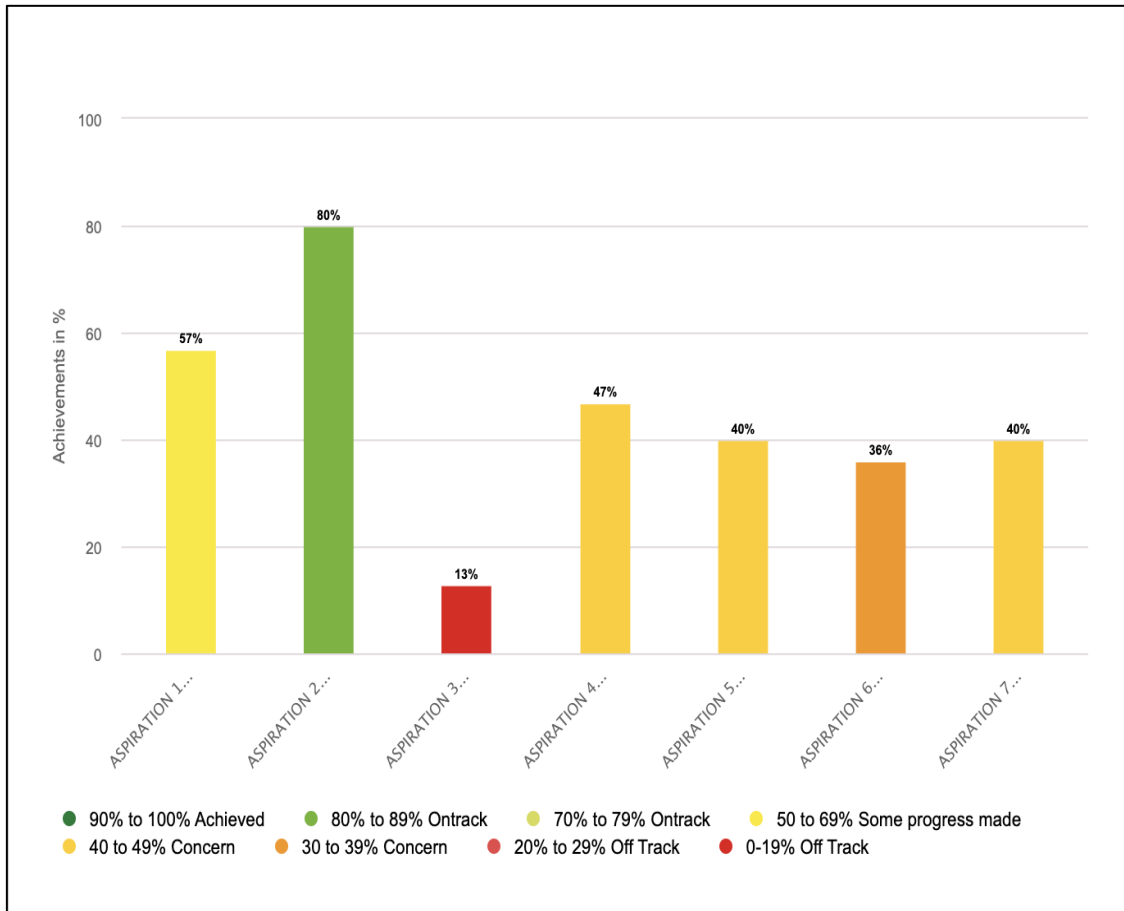*Source: based on AUDA-NEPAD 2024*

Figure 3. Southern Africa regional overall Aspiration score
Source: based on AUDA-NEPAD 2024

In Southern Africa, the score stands at 57%, notably higher than the continental score of 37% (Fig. 4) for Aspiration 1. Goal 1, focusing on "A High Standard of Living, Quality of Life and Well Being for All," presents the poorest performance, reflecting the prevalent high poverty levels across Africa. Similarly, Goal 4, "Transformed Economies and Job Creation," is underperforming, correlating with poverty alleviation efforts. Within Southern Africa, countries such as Lesotho demonstrate significant underperformance, achieving only 4% of the target for Goal 1 and below 25% for Goals 2, 4, 5, and 7. Conversely, Goal 3, centered on "Healthy and Well-Nourished Citizens," garners the highest achievement across most countries, with Zimbabwe leading in progress at 76% (AUDA-NEPAD, 2024).
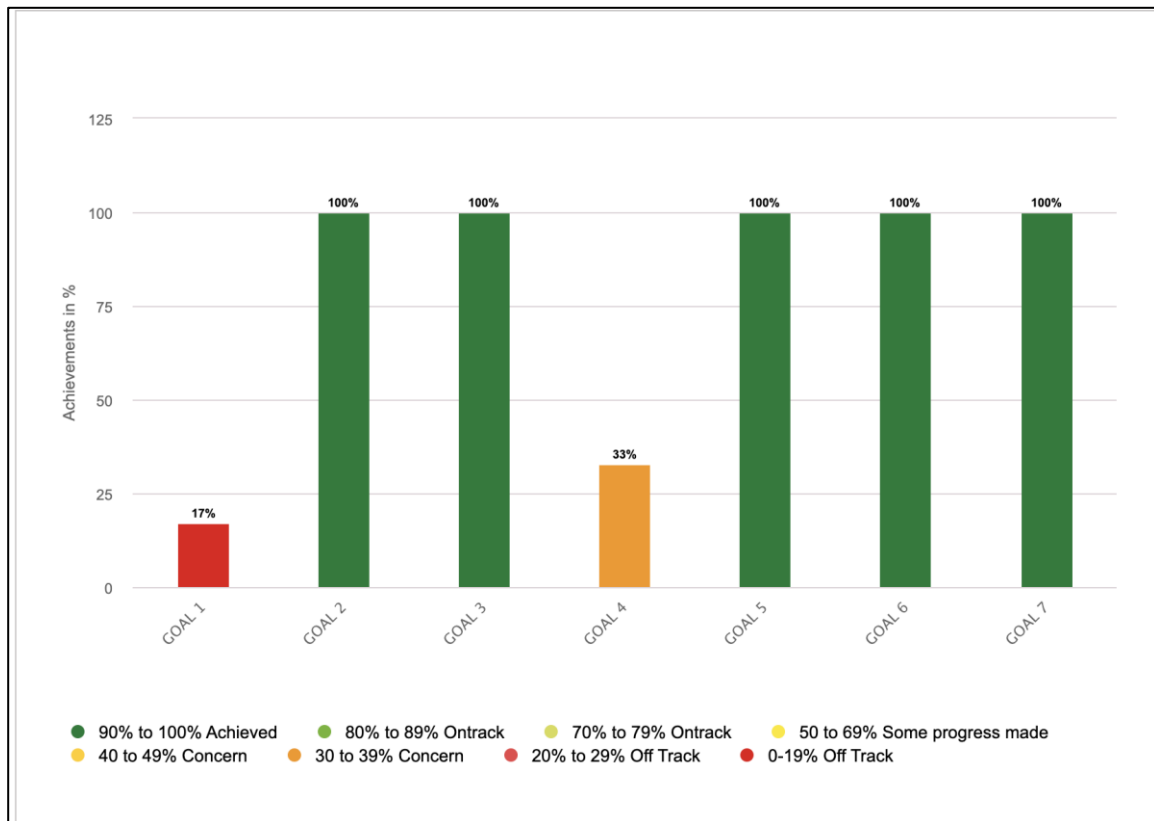
Figure 4. Aspiration 1: Southern Africa performance by goals
Source: based on AUDA-NEPAD 2024

In Southern Africa, the score stands at 87% for Aspiration 2, slightly higher than the continent-wide score of 84% (Fig. 5). West Africa leads the region with a score of 91%, while East Africa scores 63%, North Africa 41%, and Central Africa lags behind at 17%. The most challenging goal to progress in appears to be Goal 9, focused on "Key Continental Financial and Monetary Institutions established and functional." This underscores the significance of implementing the AfCFTA in 2018, aimed at establishing functional financial and monetary institutions across the continent (AUDA-NEPAD, 2024). Such initiatives aim to reduce shallow financial infrastructures, thereby enhancing economic freedom for citizens. Countries like Nigeria and Ghana have made notable strides in establishing these institutions to meet the 2063 target.
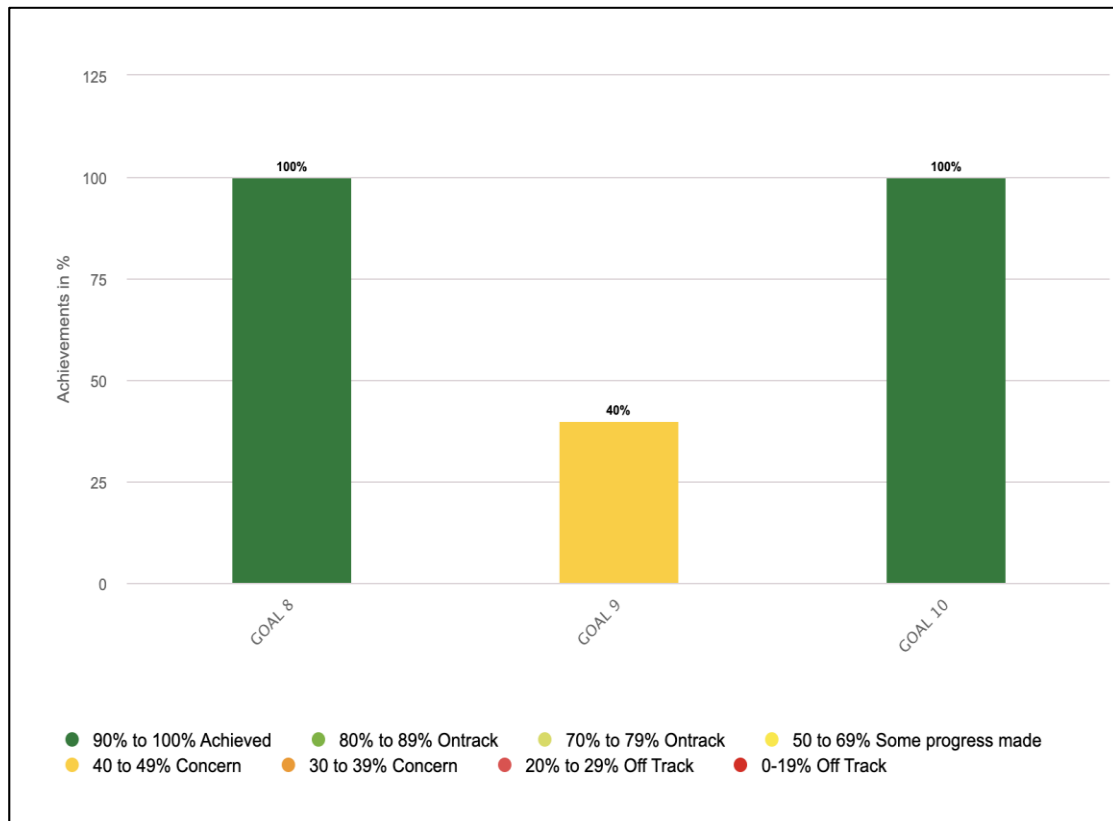
Figure 5. Aspiration 2 for Southern Africa performance by goals
Source: based on AUDA-NEPAD 2024

The Southern African region achieved a score of 13% for Aspiration 3, while the continent's overall score stood at 42%. Within this aspiration, the region made 26% progress in "Democratic values, practices, universal principles of human rights, justice, and the rule of law entrenched." Notably, the entire continent performed poorly in this regard, with West Africa (19%) and North Africa (21%) scoring lower than Southern Africa (AUDA-NEPAD, 2024). Issues such as corruption, lack of transparency, and weak governance structures undermine democratic institutions and diminish public trust in government across these regions. In countries like Congo, ongoing conflict and historical and contemporary foreign interventions further disrupt democratic processes, either by supporting authoritarian regimes or destabilizing democratic governments, thereby impeding progress toward upholding democratic values, practices, and universal principles of human rights, justice, and the rule of law. Regarding Aspiration 4, the Southern African region achieved an overall score of 47%, compared to the continent's score of 63%. However, the region made no progress in Goal 13, "Peace, Security, and Stability are preserved," indicating that it may not reach the 2063 target at the current pace. Surprisingly, all other regions achieved 100% progress in this aspect within the same timeframe (Fig. 6). North Africa (17%) performed worse than Southern Africa in this goal. Additionally, West Africa made no progress in Goal 14, "A Stable and Peaceful Africa" (AUDA-NEPAD, 2024).
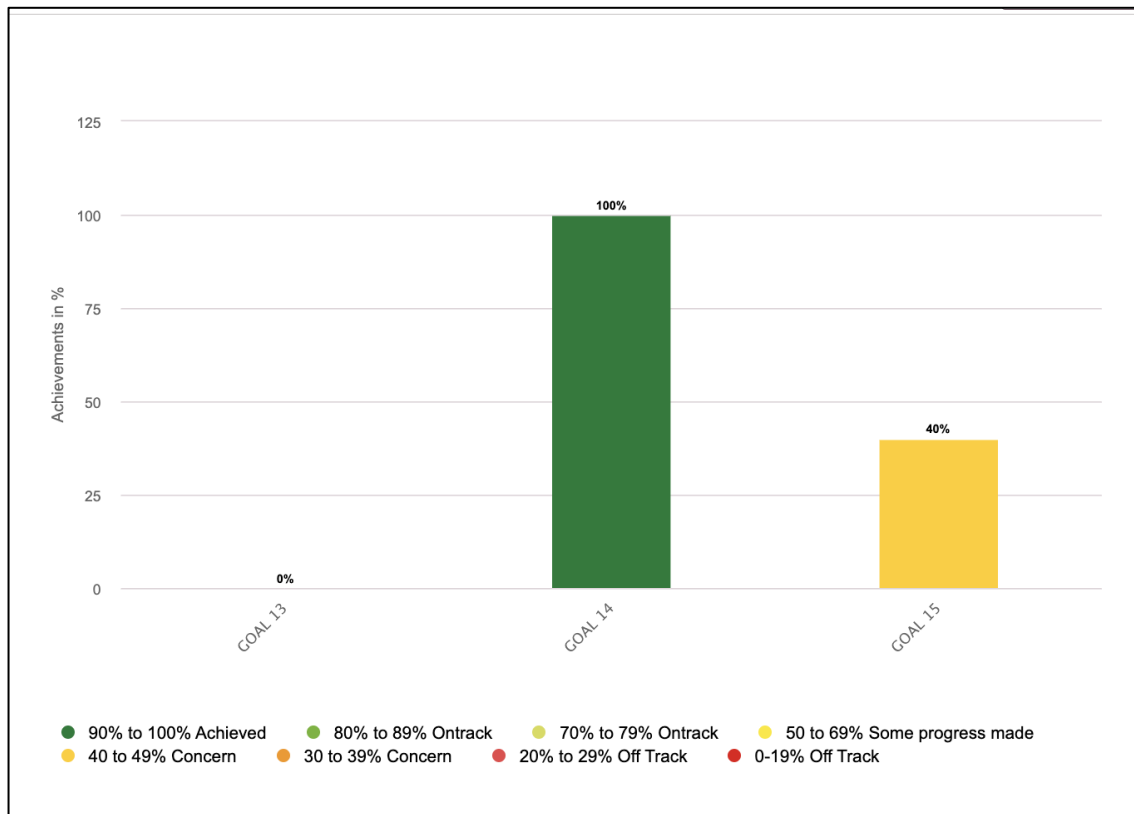
Figure 6. Aspiration 4: Southern Africa performance by goals
Source: based on AUDA-NEPAD 2024

With the exception of Central Africa, all other regions have shown gradual progress towards Aspiration 5, aiming to achieve Goal 16, "African Cultural Renaissance is pre-eminent." Southern Africa ranked third with an overall score of 40%, while the continent scored 45%. West Africa recorded the lowest score after North Africa, with a score of 24%. Notable progress was observed in countries like Zimbabwe, achieving 85% progress, while countries like South Africa and Namibia showed no progress. (AUDA-NEPAD, 2024). In Aspiration 6, Southern Africa attained a score of 36%, compared to the continent's overall score of 67%. Progress was noted only in Goal 17, reaching 54%, focusing on "Full Gender Equality in All Spheres of Life." However, within this goal, women empowerment targets showed minimal progress, standing at only 7%. Goal 18, centered on "Engaged and Empowered Youth and Children," showed no progress during the assessed period. In the final Aspiration 7, Southern Africa achieved a score of 40%, while the continent scored 58%. Progress toward Goal 19, emphasizing Africa's role in global affairs and peaceful co-existence, reached 31% (Fig 7). However, Goal 20, focusing on "Africa takes full responsibility for financing her development," saw only 43% progress. Central Africa scored 35% for this goal, East Africa 40%, North Africa 58%, and West Africa 69%. Nigeria emerged as the only country making significant strides in financing its own development (AUDA-NEPAD, 2024).
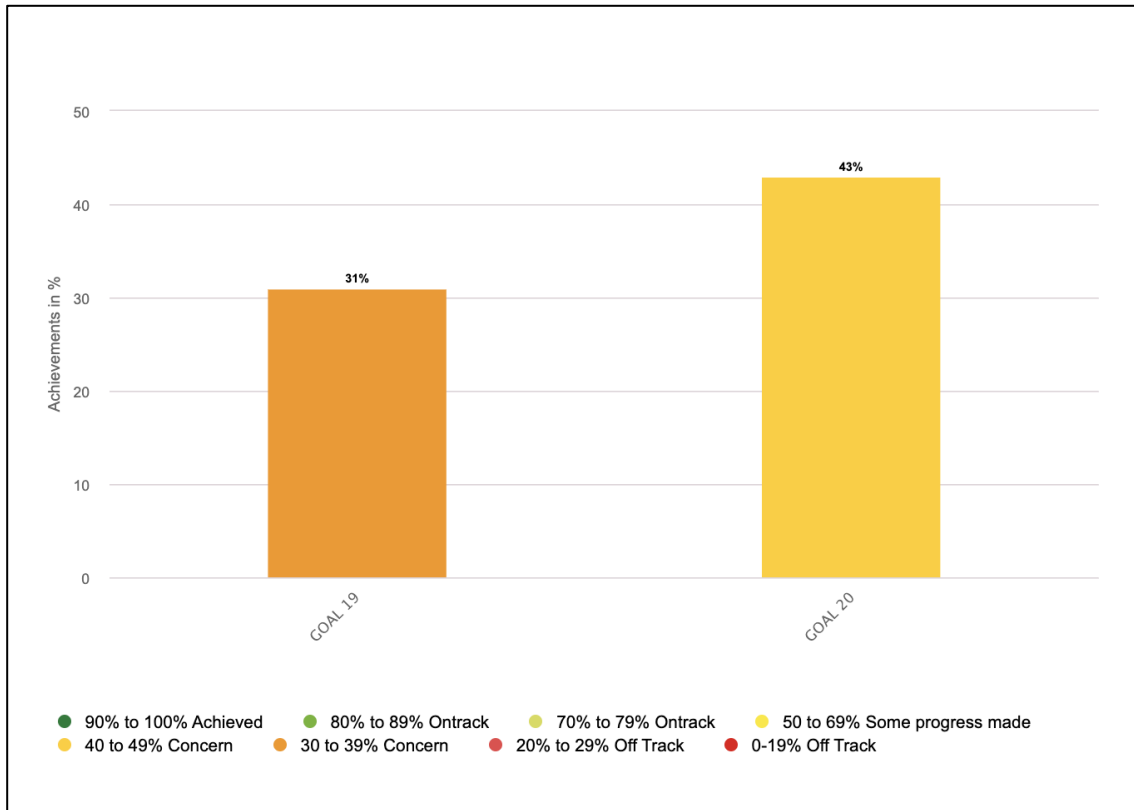
Figure 7. Aspiration 4. Southern Africa performance by goals
Source: based on AUDA-NEPAD 2024

Discussion: Challenges to Agenda 2063

Insufficient progress in Africa's development can primarily be attributed to a combination of factors, notably the absence of political commitment and governance deficiencies across the continent (DeGhetto et al, 2016). The inability of governments to effectively implement their development strategies continues to impede the materialization of Agenda 2063. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic and escalating climate challenges have compounded economic challenges. In the Southern African region, the region grapples with high levels of poverty, inequality, and unemployment, which pose significant barriers to achieving these development goals (Ibrahim, 2022; Sule, 2019).

Moreover, the Southern African region lacks the necessary financial, human, and infrastructural resources required to implement projects and programs aimed at achieving Agenda 2063 goals (Ademola, 2022). The data indicates a lack of progress in achieving Goals 12 and 13, which focus on establishing capable institutions and ensuring peace, security, and stability, critical for Agenda 2063 implementation. Consequently, member nations display limited prioritization, engagement, and enthusiasm for Agenda 2063, often lacking institutional frameworks comparable to those for the SDGs, hindering the integration of overarching visions into national strategies (Mlambo, 2022).

This study highlights the progress made by the AU and its member states towards the key objectives of Agenda 2063, albeit at a gradual pace and predominantly in select countries. However, the Southern African region, the focus of this research, appears poised to miss the targets set for 2023. Projections suggest that significant progress may extend well beyond 2063. The failure to meet these milestones should raise concerns among the AU, its member states, and their development partners.

Conclusions and recommendations The fact that 38 out of 55 countries were involved in the AU's Development Agency-New Partnership for Africa's Development progress reports on the first 10-year plan shows that there is no accountability. In the medium term (2024 to 2033), establishing mechanisms for regular policy review and alignment at the national level to ensure that member states are actively working towards Agenda 2063 goals for the second phase and implementing penalties for those that do not comply. This could be annual policy review meetings where member states report on their progress, identify challenges, and strategize on overcoming obstacles.

Recognizing the limited progress in women's empowerment targets, Southern African governments should implement targeted policies and programs to advance gender equality. This may involve increasing access to education and economic opportunities for women, as well as implementing measures to combat gender-based violence. However, in the long term (2024 to 2043), to address the challenges in financing development, Southern African governments should prioritize efforts to enhance domestic resource mobilization and reduce dependency on external funding. This may involve implementing fiscal reforms, promoting private sector investment, and improving governance and transparency in financial management. Furthermore, Southern African governments should prioritize the effective implementation of the AfCFTA to establish functional financial and monetary institutions across the region. This could include harmonizing trade policies, reducing trade barriers, and promoting intra-regional trade to enhance economic integration and foster sustainable economic growth. By prioritizing these actions, Southern African governments can accelerate progress towards establishing functional financial and monetary institutions, ultimately contributing to the achievement of Aspiration 2 of Agenda 2063, and fostering sustainable economic development and prosperity in the region.

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