

THE PANDEMIC OF 2019 AND AFRICAN UNION AGENDA 2063: A CRITICAL EVALUATION

UZOMA OLUCHUKWU OKOYE
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
NWAFOR ORIZU COLLEGE OF EDUCATION, NSUGBE
e-mail: okoyezomaoluchukwu@yahoo.com.
Phone No: 08063471929

Abstract

This work examined the impact of COVID-19 on the socio-economic sectors of African states economy as regard to the Agenda 2063 of the African Union (AU). It states the aspirations, goals and priorities of the agenda 2063. It adopted neo-liberalism theory and used qualitative means of data collection. It used descriptive analysis method to analyze the data based on the existing information. It was found out that the COVID-19 exposed the ill parts of African states economy. It showed that African states are still backwards to the sustainable development it is looking up to. The work recommended among others that the governments of African states should through the agenda 2063 upgrade different sectors of their economy, which includes health, education, technology, etc so as to achieve sustainable development on or before the year 2063.

Keywords: Africa, Pandemic, Development, African Union and Industrialization

Introduction

The pandemic, corona virus disease known as "COVID-19" was first seen and reported in Wuhan, China. The disease is said to be a respiratory disease that affects one's breathing which equally can lead to death. It is a dreaded virus that made the entire world to shut down when the virus escalated and spread in virtually the entire world including the African states. The preventive measures were too strict that it led to the lockdown of economies which include: businesses, schools and other services. African states locked down their economic activities and borders were equally closed so as to avoid the movement of people from other countries, international and local flights were suspended, curfews were imposed, mass gatherings such as churches, mosques, sporting events and other social activities were prohibited, use of public transport and other movements were cancelled (IDEA, 2020).

However, the total and temporal lockdown led to serious setbacks in the economies of African states. It led to dormancy, lack of productivity and trade within and outside the continent. It retarded the growth and development strategies and put everything to a half. There were excess economic losses. According to the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), the top ten petroleum exporting countries lost about USD 65 billion in their revenue (UNCTAD, 2020). Hence, the pandemic served as a means of assessing the

different sectors of African Economy. It exposed the dwindling nature and underdeveloped aspects of all sectors of African economy and their leadership and equally made Africans to see their loopholes and where to amend. The African Union had set a developmental agenda called "Agenda 2063 in 2013 to enhance sustainable development in the entire African states. With the outburst of the COVID-19, the African union has seen vital areas of concern to start from. Hence, this work looks at the impact of the pandemic on the achievement of Agenda 2063.

The Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want

The Agenda 2063 is the outcome of the summit of African Union Commission in conjunction with the New Economic Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) Secretariat and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa held in Addis Ababa in the year 2013. The summit and the agenda intend to consider the process of African development in the next 50 years (African Union, 2014). The agenda was finally adopted on January 2015 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; the Headquarters of African Union (African Union, 2020). The agenda have seven aspirations and goals with priorities. It was geared towards the mandate of developing a uniformed strategic framework for inclusive growth and sustainable development and a global strategy to optimize the use of Africa's resources for the benefit of all Africans (Alden, 2017). The seven aspirations, goals and priorities according to African Union (2014) are as follows:

The Seven Aspirations of Agenda 2063

1. A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development.
2. An integrated continent politically united and based on the ideals of pan-Africanism and the vision of Africa's Renaissance.
3. An Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law.
4. A peaceful and secure Africa.
5. An Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, values and ethics.
6. An Africa where development is people-driven, unleashing the potential of its women and youth.
7. Africa as a strong, united and influential global player and partner.

The Goals of Agenda 2063

1. Eradicate poverty in a generation of 2025

2. Catalyse and education and skills revolution and actively promote science, technology, research and innovation.
3. Transform, grow and industrialize our economies through beneficiation and value-addition of natural resources.
4. Consolidate the modernization of African agriculture and agro-business.
5. Address climate change and preserve the environment.
6. Connect Africa through world-class infrastructure.
7. Fast-track the establishment of a continental free trade area.
8. Support young people as drivers of Africa's renaissance.
9. Silence the guns by 2020.
10. Achieve gender parity by 2020 in public and private institutions.
11. Introduce an African passport.
12. Consolidate a democratic and people-centred Africa.
13. Enhance Africa's united voice in global negotiations.
14. Strengthen domestic resource mobilization.

The Priorities of Agenda 2063

1. The people's ownership and mobilization.
2. African resources to finance its development.
3. Accountable leadership and responsible institutions.
4. Capable and democratic development states and institutions.
5. Changed attitudes and mindsets.
6. A pan African perspective.
7. Ownership of the African narrative and brand.
8. African approach to development and transformation.

This agenda reflected a common position of all Africans which include the least developed countries and the middle income states of African continent. The agenda had it that global partnerships would be very vital for Africa to achieve its developmental ambitions. Again that African's domestic resources will be fully mobilized in servicing its major projects so as to enhance sustainable development. The agenda is equally divided into ten-year incremental plans with five successive ten-year (Seung-Jin, 2016; Alden, 2017).

The Covid-19 and the Sectors of African States Economy

The spread of COVID-19 actually exposed the weak public institutions and the level of governance of most African leaders. This is seen using the variables of health, education, poverty, technology for industrialization, revenue, informal workforce, conflict, insurgency etc.

Health Sector

In the Health Sector, the hospitals and clinics were unable to manage and handle the challenges of COVID-19. There were lack of isolation centres that have the equipment and capacity of taking care of the positive patients. There was poor equipment in the hospitals for treatment like the ventilator. Most of the African states lacked ventilators in their hospitals. There were unavailability of testing kits and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), inadequate training of healthcare workers, lack of adequate facilities for the treatment of COVID-19 infected patients, etc (UNESCO, 2020). There were lack of hospital beds and hundreds of millions Africans lack access to healthcare and clean water for frequent hand washing which is a means of preventing the spread of COVID-19 virus (Howard, 2020).

Educational Sector

The educational sector was adversely affected through closure of all levels of schools ranging from the higher institutions to the primary and nursery schools. All learning centres were equally closed. The students and pupils were left at the mercy of their parents that some of them are illiterates and could not render any academic help to their children. However, many Western and Eastern parts of the world resorted to online learning using the information technology (computer and websites) in learning. African states were unable to join this viable option. This actually have social adverse effects on the youths especially the female sex. This is evident from Tanzania, Nigeria, etc. Limited access to education during the lockdown really exposed the need to enhance internet connectivity in rural areas so as to facilitate the online form of teaching and learning (IDEA, 2020).

Poverty

There were food shortages and increase in hunger and poverty in most African states. For instance, Nigeria citizens suffered shortage of food and even the government palliatives could not get to the most of the poor masses. This led to deaths out of starvation and

increase in crime like stealing of food produce. This exposed the abandoning of the agricultural sectors of most African states. Most African states are unable to produce what will be enough for them rather in most cases depend on importation of good from other continents. Such countries include Mauritania, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Gambia, Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, among others.

Technological Status

The technological status of African states was examined. This is evident in cases where production of ventilators, PPES and finding the vaccine for the cure of COVID-19 became a big task and problem for African scientists. African states wholly depend on the decisions of World Health Organization (W.H.O) to the extent of waiting for the WHO to approve and sale the vaccine to African states. The approved COVID-19 vaccine is not made in Africa rather Africans without choice are made to buy the AstraZeneca vaccine produced by Pfizer as the approved vaccine. This simply shows that Africans cannot use their domestic resources to solve African problems except it comes from outside the continent.

Low Production Capacity

Lack of African brand of manufactured food products was equally seen. Nearly, two thirds of African countries are net importers of basic food. There was severe pressure on food security; there were higher food prices. Drop in importation of food and basic consumer goods due to lock down increased inflation and affected businesses and consumers. Pharmaceuticals and protective equipment were imported largely from Europe and China. The rise in global demand for these products really increases their prices and led to reduction of their availability in Africa. About 90% of pharmaceuticals in Africa are imported from other continents. For instance, EU – 51.5%, India – 19.3%, Switzerland – 7.7%, China – 5.2%, United States – 4.3% and United Kingdom – 3.3% (ECA, 2020). However, despite medical aid from China and other traditional donors, diagnostic equipment, personal protective equipment and other medical equipment were short in supply (Simpson, 2020).

Revenue

The decline in crude oil prices had and still has serious consequences on the capacity of oil producing African countries. Oil prices dropped to about 50% in the first quarter of 2020. It adversely affected Nigeria and Angola whose export revenues have about 90% dependence on crude oil with about 70% of their national budget. It led to the devaluation of their currencies. Other most affected countries include Cameroon, Chad, Republic of Congo and Ghana (OECD, 2020; World Bank, 2020).

Informal Workforces

The informal workforces were more vulnerable because of poor working conditions. The government of most African states do not account their informal workers as beneficiaries to social protection measures. About 86% of total employment in Africa is informal while in West African Countries we have about 91%. The informal workers include; traders, retailers, manual workers, mechanics, etc. The poor working conditions of these groups of people pushed them into not keeping to the safety protocols of the virus which includes social distancing and self isolation (ILO, 2017). Hence, this is a big slap on the governments of African states to include their informal workers in the social protection benefits to enable boosting their poor living conditions.

Conflicts

The existence of armed conflicts, banditry and insurgency had led to the creation of the Internally Displaced Person's camp in some African countries. These conflicts lingered till the era of corona virus. The continuous existence of these conflicts has contradicted with one point of the agenda 2063 which is to silence the guns in 2020. Those people in the IDP camps or refugee camps do not follow COVID-19 protocols and are prone to hunger and diseases (Africa Centre for Strategic Studies, 2020).

The above points are vital areas of concern to Agenda 2063 which were exposed by the pandemic. These areas need to be tackled immediately so as to achieve the dreamed Africa.

The Way Forward

1. African governments should through the Agenda 2063 struggle to upgrade their medical sectors with viable equipment and put an end to medical trips to other continents; rather such funds should be utilized to put more modern medical facilities and put the health care system to have international standard.
2. African governments should prioritize including their informal workers as beneficiaries in the social protection services.
3. There is need to increase local manufacturing of drugs and pharmaceutical equipment. This will enable funding and production of drugs without external help in case of any outbreak of diseases or virus in future.
4. There should be decrease in importation of food from other continents. Africa's agricultural sectors should be boosted to produce in excess. Through supporting farmers financially and providing security to them. The excess commodities will enhance the exportation of food to other continents and diversifying African economy to shift from raw material based (Mono economy) to

have industrialized economy. Again, rural integration and development should be adopted and implemented through this agenda. By constructing roads and other social amenities, building industries and attracting foreign investors to invest in the rural areas thereby entering into production processes using Africa's natural resources in Africa and not taking the raw materials to their home country for production and shifting down finished goods to Africa. If production and manufacturing will take place in Africa, there will be increase in industrialization and technology transfer will become very effective. This will shift a lot of concentration from urban areas to rural areas.

5. There should be digitalization of African economies. This will enable active industrialization, boost in communication sector, check-mating climate change, ease online transactions, e-commerce, easy banking, etc.
6. Peaceful means of conflict resolution that suits Africans such as dialogue and proper orientation that we are one should be adopted in resolving conflicts. Also, arms smuggling should be minimized so as to achieve silencing guns in the subsequent years.
7. The educational system should be well equipped to include teaching and learning of science and technology from the basic education. This will enhance the implementation of practical and not just theory. It will lead to creation and invention of equipment that will be useful in different sectors of African economies.

Methodology

This study adopted qualitative research design and descriptive method analysis. Data were collected using secondary sources such as journals, books, international organization reports, internet materials, etc.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of analysis hinges on neo-liberalism. It stated that the global cooperation should be based on mutual interdependence and achieving the common interests of all the countries. It argues that all countries under international cooperation should join hands together to solve a common problem that affects all or some of the countries in relations (Schneider, 2003).

African Union is an international organization that joins the entire African states. It has common objectives and interest on the development of all African States. The members include all the sovereign governments in Africa. Based on the neo-liberal theory, it is believed that AU is set out to achieve the common interest of the entire Africa and also solve their common problem that is peculiar to them. Therefore, it is expected that all governments of African States should put hands together to solve the common problems of Africa

which were exposed by the outbreak of the COVID-19 through tactfully and strategically implementing the goals of the Agenda – 2063 proposed by the African Union. This will enhance achieving sustainable development of Africa by the year 2063.

Results/Conclusion

The COVID-19 has served as an eye opener to the political elites and Africans in general that the continent is still backwards and cannot presently boast of an independent economy. It is clear that despite the adoption of the Agenda 2063 since 2015, six years after, virtually nothing has been achieved and African economy is still dwindling. Hence, it is believed that if the African political elites will build strong institutions in Africa devoid of corrupt practices that the Agenda 2063 and sustainable development will be achieved. All manner of dependency syndrome on the other continents will be reduced to the barest minimum. It is therefore vital that the Governments of African states through the African Union should rise up to their expectations to develop Africa.

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