Global and Regional Calls to address inequality

The global impetus to tackle poverty and deprivation in all societies both developed and developing that was launched in 2000 within the framework of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), provided a strong motivation to intensify ongoing national development efforts. While a number of development goals were met at national level, the situation of many groups and regions within countries worsened in both absolute and relative terms, with respect to the income and non-income dimensions. Concomitantly, African economies and societies have clearly been transforming, but the transformation processes have been varied and yielded mixed results and growing inequalities.

The current moment presents a number of critical opportunities for leveraging the concerted efforts to date. In the context of fashioning the global development architecture, the post-2015 consultations and conferences about the next set of goals and targets are well under way. The lack of attention to economic and social inequalities in the MDG-related interventions has been highlighted in many of these global and regional consultations. There have also been calls to incorporate a focus on inequality in various fora, principally in the Public Dialogue and Leadership Meeting on Addressing Inequalities in the Post-2015 Development Agenda as well as in the context of developing the African common position for post-2015. Having recently celebrated 50 years of its unity, with member states, the Africa Union is in the process of forging

---

1 The thematic and national consultations sought to secure broad-based inputs and options for the report of the High-Level Panel and will be useful for member states to consider in the deliberations on the development framework post-2015. The 27-member United Nations High-Level Panel (HLP), established in July 2012 provided leadership in framing the post-2015 development agenda and worked closely with the Rio+20 process to include the goals of economic and social development and environmental sustainability.

2 The meetings, which were held 18-19 February 2013 in Copenhagen, Denmark, were co-hosted by the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), UN Women and the Governments of Denmark and Ghana.
Agenda 2063 to inform the next 50 years of Africa’s development, which presents a significant opportunity to tackle inequalities in Africa.³

Why focus on Inequalities in the context of Structural Transformation in Africa?

“Equitable societies promote social capital, social cohesion and stability, trust and tolerance and thereby innovation, economic growth and sustainable development.”⁴ Yet, in spite of successive development efforts, inequalities of various dimensions persist at high levels, are growing or not declining fast enough in many countries in Africa. They harm society, undermine the efforts to transform national economies, manage the environment and improve the quality of lives of Africa’s people. Inequalities have also contributed to threatening national cohesion and creating insecurity, and are a significant factor in the violent civil conflicts and protests in Africa over the years.

Country and global experience to date indicates that inequalities do not self-correct. Instead, they perpetuate, reproduce over generations and can cumulate and combine to recreate systematic disadvantages for certain groups and individuals—rural dwellers, poor urban dwellers, people in certain occupations, people living in certain regions and ecological zones, as well as for groups such as women, youth, children, persons with disability, those from certain ethnicities, the old and infirm, etc.—that tend to suffer from different types of discrimination and vulnerabilities. Therefore, efforts aimed at addressing extreme poverty, promoting socio-economic development and safeguarding the interests of future generations have squarely to address inequalities.

Inequalities may well be a global challenge, but the stark differences between the economies of African nations and much of the world call for Africa-wide action: first, to confront its unique characteristics and challenges; and second, to join the global alliance for change in the context of the Post 2015 consultations.⁵

Development in the African context has witnessed sharp growth accelerations as well as reversals with structural transformation taking place in fits and starts. With three decades of economic liberalization, with Africa having some of the open economies in the world, almost half of the economies in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) still derive significant export earnings from a limited set of natural resources—mainly minerals, and oil

---

³ The adoption of Agenda 2063 is expected at the 23rd Ordinary Session of the Assembly in June/July 2014.

⁴ As noted in the chairpersons’ summary statement at Copenhagen.

and gas. Of the 20 so-called resource-rich countries, half are fiscally dependent on budget revenue derived principally from natural resources with limited degrees of value added activities. Further, in spite of Africa having some the highest rates of labour force participation in the world, there is a preponderance of casual and precarious jobs that offer few prospects for skills development, upward mobility or quality of life. Africa has consequently a rising share of world poverty, with sharp disparities in access to basic services such as health, education and water, and deficits in other social indicators such as a high prevalence of undernourishment, and high proportions of children found to be stunted. Africa is home to more than half of the world’s out-of-school children and has the highest rate of children leaving school early, usually due, to income and gender inequities. Continued failure to address both social and economic inequities will further constrain Africa’s potential to transform its development trajectory, diminishing the productive capacities of those who suffer from them, and depriving their societies of their needed contributions.

As African governments set out on the path of deliberate and managed structural transformation which is high on its development agenda, it’s important that they adopt thoughtful ways to address inequalities. The collective experiences of countries around the world and within Africa should provide the necessary direction for re-thinking Africa’s structural transformation agenda. The lessons of Africa’s development trajectory suggest that although structural transformation may be a necessary condition for removing gross disparities in the society, it is not a sufficient condition. To change the current trend of widening inequalities, Africa must chart a different course for its development - a course that would be a departure from the old way of managing its development and resources and that ushers in real economic and social transformation.

**Purpose and Objectives of the Africa-wide Conference on Inequalities**

In the context of processes relating to both the African Union (AU) development agenda and the global development post-2015, there is a need to create a constructive space where key African constituencies, that are concerned with different domains of the inequality question and/or are engaged in conceptualizing and shaping possible trajectories for African transformation.

The Conference responds to the call by the AU Chairperson for everyone from every sector of society to have a say in defining “the African agenda

---

6 Economic Commission for Africa, 2012 *Africa Progress Report*
for 2063,” and is therefore aimed at forging linkages between the ongoing African developmental debates and the discussions of a post-MDGs development framework, and a platform for key constituents of Africa’s societies to share their visions and aspirations and explore possible paths to social and policy change that draw on social and economic policies to ensure structural transformation with equity. Specifically, the Conference aims:

- To contribute to placing firmly the inequality/equity issues at the core of the African national and regional policy discourse (e.g. the Africa 2063 agenda), promoting a shared understanding of the nature, scope and drivers of interlocking social and economic inequalities and their determinants.
- To create a space for informed dialogue on which policy options at national and regional levels could tackle these issues, including focus on economic and social inequalities as well as the impact of global inequalities.
- To explore the range of partnerships with the rest of the world the post-MDG and post-Rio+20 follow-up frameworks as well as the ongoing intergovernmental negotiations on climate, trade, etc.), that could advance the pursuit of these policy priorities.

Expected Outputs and Outcomes

The Conference will lead to a statement on “The Africa We Want” as input to the global deliberations on “the World We Want”.

The main expected outcome would be to engender and sustain policy change within three pillars (political will, knowledge and a vibrant constituency), towards:

1. Stronger political leverage to actively promote an African agenda for tackling inequalities and fostering transformation in various spheres: economic, social, political, environmental and spatial;
2. An enhanced understanding of the structural character and economic and social drivers of African inequalities and the different domains in which inequalities operate, the affected social groups as well as the impact of the current growth trajectories;
3. The recognition, and shared knowledge, of appropriate and effective social, macro-economic and sectoral policy in addressing inequalities as well as growth and transformation strategies;

---

7 Opening remarks by Mrs. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma at the Consultative Conference on Women under the theme: “Pan-Africanism, Renaissance and Agenda 2063.”

4. A strategic reflection on identification of research and advocacy requirements for promoting structural transformation and tackling inequalities; and what would be required to move the agenda forward.

It is also expected to catalyze a new coalition of African individuals and institutions that can keep the policy and advocacy focus on a vibrant agenda for equitable African transformation going forward.

Conference Venue and Dates

The Conference will take place at the Accra international Conference Centre, 28-30 April 2014.

Organizers of the Conference

The Conference is convened by the Government of Ghana, and jointly organized by the National Development Planning Commission (NDPC), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, and the Ministry of Finance. It is organized in partnership with several organizations: at the national level, the Institute for Statistical, Social and Economic Research (ISSER), University of Ghana, and the Third World Network-Africa; and at the international level the Government of Denmark and UNICEF; the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), the UN Millennium Campaign (UNMC); the Society for International Development (SID), and CODESRIA; and regional organizations such as the African Union Commission (AUC) and the African Development Bank (AfDB).

Structure and Organization of the Conference

The three day meeting will be organized in plenary and group discussions. The morning of Day 1 will commence with high-level panel which will set the tone for the conference, providing opportunity for reflections on the current conjuncture and opportunities to tackle inequalities as well as historical overview of efforts and successes of African governments in tackling inequalities and structural transformation. The high level panel will be constituted by dignitaries of the levels of president, prime minister; heads of intergovernmental organizations and cabinet ministers. There will also be high-level plenaries on the afternoon of the first day; the morning and afternoon of the second day; and the closing session of the third day. There will be space for more focused and in-depth discussions in parallel sessions on various themes of inequality and structural

---

8 Who partnered the Government of Ghana to conduct the inequality study and co-chair the Public Dialogue and Leadership Meeting on Addressing Inequalities in the Post-2015 Development Agenda, were held 18-19 February 2013 in Copenhagen, Denmark.
transformation on the second and third days. The main Conference is organized in three Dialogue sessions each comprising plenary and parallel sessions, drawing on well researched thematic issue-oriented and agenda-setting reports and Country-specific and Cross-country Comparative Studies. The dialogues are prefaced by remarks by a renowned scholar or policy maker that will help to frame the content and focus of the discussions for the particular session. The conclusions of these sessions will feed into the main conclusions of the Conference and the final Communiqué.

**Participation**

There are two categories of participants, those who are self-sponsored and those sponsored under the Conference budget. The organizers will send out invitations to identified target audiences.

**Target Audience**

About 200 participants comprising both high level policy, and senior level programming officials and practitioners, and resources persons, including presenters, are expected to attend the Conference. They are drawn from:

(i) *The country level* – Government, private, civil society, as well as think-tanks, and academic/research institutions

(ii) *The Africa level* – Regional organizations both intergovernmental and non-governmental, and

(iii) *The international level* – the United Nations, bilateral, regional and other intergovernmental organizations, including experts from other developing, as well as developed regions.

Representation will cover a wide range of disciplines and specializations with representatives from development planning and macro-economic policy agencies, relevant sector ministries and agencies, trade unions, the central banks, social policy institutions; academics, researchers and policy advocacy groups in civil society, as well as the social development/protection networks.

**Interested Participants**

Interested individuals or institutions should send inquiries to: Interested individuals and institutions should send inquiries to:

conferencecoordinator@ndpc.gov.gh

There is limited space for the Conference. Consideration will be given to early self-sponsored applicants with recognized contribution to the field in research, policy formulation or development efforts/support.

You can follow the pre-conference preparatory process at http://africainequalities.org/conference/ as well as on Twitter https://twitter.com/AInequalities.