



PARLIAMENT
OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT

**Aligning with the African
Union's Agenda 2063 and
Promoting the
Development of the
African Continent**

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1. INTRODUCTION

On the 25th of May 1963, leaders of 30 of the 32 independent African states signed a founding charter of the then Organisation of African Unity in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. To mark this day, the African Union (AU) celebrates what is now referred to as “Africa Day” on an annual basis. The Parliament of the Republic of South Africa recognises the importance of ensuring that future generations have a profound understanding of the African continent and its development since the early conceptions of the African Union.

Parliaments can act as a focal point driving a national developmental vision. They can also strengthen dialogue and public participation, driving national policy processes and at the same time provide oversight over implementation. Some of the challenges facing developing countries are of an international nature and require a multilateral resolution hence the importance of the African Union (AU), Pan-African Parliament (PAP) and the New Economic Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) for African countries. Parliaments should play a key role in the democratisation of the international governance system. In addressing the challenges of countries, especially developing countries, governments are increasingly forced to find international solutions to national developmental problems.

The P20 Youth Parliament seeks to provide youth of the Republic of South Africa with a platform through which issues of concern to them can be discussed and given appropriate focus, this paper will describe Youth Development from the perspective of Agenda 2063 and South African policy.

2. KEY ISSUES AND POLICY PERSPECTIVES

2.1 The African Agenda

According to the White Paper on South Africa’s Foreign Policy: The Diplomacy of Ubuntu, the African continent is the centre of South Africa’s foreign policy. The African Agenda serves as a point of departure in South Africa’s engagement with the international community. The African Agenda is premised on the belief that South Africa cannot prosper in isolation from the rest of the continent. South Africa could only flourish if it relates with the continent on principles of equity, mutual benefit and peaceful co-operation.¹

The African Agenda is further based on the understanding of the African Union that socio-economic development cannot take place without peace and stability, as these constitute the necessary conditions for sustainable socio-economic development and a stable political environment. In line with the above, the concept of “African Renaissance” calls for South Africa to engage its partners in Africa and the developing world with a purpose to confront the marginalization of Africa, and to ensure that Africa remains in its rightful place among the countries of the world.²

The country’s ability to interact properly with the current international environment is dependent on an open and critical reflection of key international factors that affect South Africa’s foreign policy. Inspired by the need for a peaceful and just world, South African national interests in the conduct of foreign policy recognises that states are interdependent and promotes cooperation over competition and collaboration over confrontation. South Africa’s interests are inseparable from those of Africa, and it is through the African continent

¹ Parliament of the Republic of South Africa International Relations Strategy (4th Parliament).

² Ibid.

that South African interests could be realised. This requires a long-term commitment to the successful strengthening of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and AU structures.³

Over the last few decades, nations have come to realise that the challenges of economic growth, inequality, security, peacekeeping, disease control, human rights violations, and pollution, among others, are too vast and complex for any nation or region to effectively manage on its own. Because of the truly global nature of these issues, the actions or inaction of every country affect the well-being of all countries and no country is able to address these issues alone.

2.2 Regional Integration

South Africa's commitment to promoting the objectives of the Continent centres on the need to bring about democracy, peace, development and mutually beneficial relations among the countries of Africa. South Africa's objectives for the Continent include the resolution of conflict and the building of a culture in which socio-economic development can thrive.⁴ In addition, South Africa views the SADC as the foundation for its regional, continental and international engagements. South Africa's engagement with Africa rests on the following pillars:

- Participation in regional and continental integration, including the strengthening of the African Union and its structures that seek to promote integration and development of the SADC.
- Implementation of the New Partnership for Africa's Development as the Continent's socio-economic development programme. Strengthening bilateral political and socio-economic relations by way of effective structures for dialogue and cooperation with all countries on the Continent.⁵

Political and economic integration remains one of the motivating forces of South Africa's foreign policy in relation to the consolidation of the African Agenda. This advances continental and regional integration through the harmonisation and rationalisation of the Regional Economic Communities. The country's foreign policy, through the African Agenda, seeks to ensure that the African Diaspora plays a prominent role in the process of the African Renaissance through convening of Diaspora Summits.⁶

Regional integration has a long and complex history. Regional integration has been extensively promoted as an efficient means of fostering closer economic co-operation and enhancing the prospects of participating states' for faster economic development and better living conditions. The reality of regional integration has, however, proved to be a sobering experience for all concerned. The process has been dogged by a wide variety of problems. The absence of well-formulated, cohesive policies, and appropriate institutional and legal frameworks have emerged as some of the more glaring shortcomings.

³ Parliament of the Republic of South Africa International Relations Strategy (4th Parliament).

⁴ International Relations and Cooperation (2010)

⁵ International Relations and Cooperation Strategic Plan (2009-2012)

⁶ Genge (2007)

2.3 Agenda 2063

In the 50th Anniversary Solemn Declaration of the Heads of State and Government of the African Union assembled to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of the OAU/AU⁷. Africa's political leadership while acknowledging past successes and challenges, rededicated itself to the continent's development and pledged their commitment to make progress in eight key areas:

- African Identity and Renaissance,
- The struggle against colonialism and the right to self-determination of people still under colonial rule,
- Integration Agenda,
- Agenda for Social and Economic Development,
- Agenda for Peace and Security,
- Democratic Governance,
- Determining Africa's Destiny, and
- Africa's place in the world⁸

They further pledged to integrate these ideals and goals in a Continental Agenda 2063, through a people-driven process for the realization of the vision of the AU for an integrated, people-centred, prosperous Africa, at peace with itself. The objective of the Agenda is to develop Africa's growth trajectory for the next 50 years benefitting from lessons learnt over the last 50 years. The Agenda has been developed within the context of the Union's 50th Anniversary celebrations and will be people-centred while embracing and continuing with the ideals of Pan Africanism.

Agenda 2063 is critical to the achievement of the political objective of an African Renaissance. It is underpinned by the AU Vision, as provided for in its Strategic Plan Agenda 2063, to build an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, an Africa driven and managed by its own citizen and representing a dynamic force in the international arena".⁹

3. KEY STATISTICS

Africa is the world's second largest and second-most-populous continent. With a population of 1.1 billion people as of 2013, Africa accounts for about 15% of the world's human population. In addition, Africa's population is the youngest among all the continents; 50% of Africans are 19 years old or younger.

South Africa's youth, defined as individuals aged 15–34 years, form a crucial demographic and make up nearly one-third of the population. They represent a dynamic generation navigating a rapidly evolving society influenced by the labour market, poverty, crime and

⁷ 21st Ordinary session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union, at Addis Ababa, 26 May 2013

⁸ African Union, (2014)

⁹ Ibid

access to quality education. According to the 2024 Mid-year Population Estimates, approximately 21 million young people account for 33,1% of the country's population. Between 2014 and 2024, the youth population grew by 2,3%, while the overall population increased by 13,9%. Despite overall population growth in all provinces, the youth population declined in Eastern Cape and Free State, signalling out migration trends and economic challenges¹⁰.

Between 2014 and 2024, the percentage of young people who found jobs dropped by 2,8 percentage points from 30,5% in 2014 to 27,7% in 2024. Among adults, this rate fell by 3,3 percentage points from 57,6% in 2014 to 54,3% in 2024. Youth unemployment, climbed from 36,8% in 2014 to 45,5% in 2024.¹¹

Over the past decade, education trends have shown gradual improvements in both school and higher education attendance. Despite these gains, some areas saw declines. Enrolment in technical and vocational education and training (TVET) colleges dropped. Among population groups, Indian/Asian and white youth had the highest participation rates in higher education at 45,7% and 31,1%, respectively, a disparity that underscores the ongoing challenge of improving educational outcomes for all demographic groups. Across all nine provinces, most youth reported having less than a matric qualification, while only a smaller number had completed matric. Over the past decade, South Africa's youth have faced persistent economic and social challenges, particularly in employment, education and safety. While there have been improvements in access to formal housing and higher education, high unemployment, economic inactivity, and safety concerns continue to shape the realities of young people across the country.¹²

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Agenda 2063 - Aspiration 6: An Africa where Development is People-Driven, Unleashing the Potential of its Women and Youth

Agenda 2063 seeks to place people at the core of Africa's future. It states that "Africa shall be an inclusive continent where no child, woman or man will be left behind or excluded, on the basis of gender, political affiliation, religion, ethnic affiliation, locality, age or other factors". It expands on this further by stating that by 2063, Africa must be "People-centred and caring, puts children first, women are empowered and play their rightful role in all spheres of life, has full gender equality in all spheres of life, and has an engaged and empowered youth".¹³

Reflecting further on the role of youth, Aspiration 6 notes that "by 2063, African children and youth shall be empowered with full implementation of the African Charter on the Rights of the Child". Furthermore, "Youth unemployment will be eliminated, and Africa's youth guaranteed full access to education, training, skills and technology, to health services, jobs and economic opportunities, recreational and cultural activities, as well as to financial means to allow them to realize their full potential". Finally, "Young African men and women will be the path breakers of the African knowledge society and will contribute significantly to innovation and entrepreneurship. The creativity, energy and

¹⁰ StatsSA, (2024).

¹¹ Ibid

¹² StatsSA, (2024).

¹³ African Union: Agenda 2063

innovation of African youth will be the driving force behind the continent's political, social, cultural and economic transformation".¹⁴

A South African perspective on Youth Development

In a speech given on the occasion of the 60th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in Cameroon, the former Deputy Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces, Hon. J. R. Tau, spoke on the importance of Youth Development.

The Deputy Chairperson noted as follows¹⁵:

- The African Youth Charter acknowledges that the “youth are partners, assets and a prerequisite for sustainable development”. Experience shows that a capable and democratic state is needed in order to realise the aspirations of young people, many whom feel excluded from the economy. At the centre of this philosophy should be a bias towards supporting the marginalised in our society.
- The South African conception of youth development is influenced by the historical conditions that have shaped the country and its democratic goals. It is premised on the principles of social and economic justice, empowerment, participation and active citizenship. Since the advent of our democracy, significant progress has been registered on developing programmes, policy frameworks and established institutions aimed at adopting a developmental approach to youth empowerment. This enables, young people to become agents of their advancement, and not mere recipients of government services. Notable initiatives include:
 - National Youth Policy
 - National Youth Commission
 - Umsobomvu Youth Fund
 - South African Youth Council
 - National Youth Development Agency
 - Youth Employment Accord
- At a global level, South Africa has committed to the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and embraced them into a national set of ten priorities. A developmental agenda of this magnitude is a national effort and demands a global and coordinated effort. This is the reason that South Africa understood this global agenda as the single most important agenda for resolving its development challenges.
- In addressing the scourge of poverty, MDG 1, South Africa has committed to speeding up growth and transforming the economy to create decent work and sustainable livelihoods. There has been sustained growth in South Africa in the years prior to the global economic crisis of 2008. Further, South Africa is committed to a path that builds economic and social infrastructure, not only to reverse the 2008 economic crisis and the recent COVID pandemic setbacks, but progress towards decent work which will benefit mostly young people. South Africa recognises that there is a massive backlog of skills, and whilst the country

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Tau, (2014).

has achieved the MDG 2 of universal primary education, there remain concerns that the quality of education holds back the route to development. In this regard South Africa intends to strengthen its skills and human resource base.

5. CONCLUSION

Parliament of the Republic of South Africa has over the past 30 years, passed legislation which sought to progressively transform the material conditions of young people for the better. Some of the key pieces of legislation passed since 1994 include:

- The National Youth Commission Act (Act 19 of 1996)
- The National Education Policy Act (Act 27 of 1996)
- The White paper for Social Welfare (1997)
- The Higher Education Act (Act 101 of 1997)

Over the years, Parliament has endeavoured to create a platform of engagement amongst the youth of South Africa, through its public participation mechanisms such as the Sectoral Youth Parliament. The objective for enabling this platform to function is:

- To strengthen the capacity of key youth development institutions, and ensure integration and coordination in the delivery of youth services.
- To strengthening the capacity of young people to enable them to take charge of their own wellbeing through building their assets, and ultimately realising their potential to the fullest.
- To foster a sense of national cohesion, while acknowledging the existence of diverse circumstances and needs, by providing opportunities to address these.

In order to ensure a prosperous future for the African continent, it is important that the role of the youth is given attention, particularly given that Africa has the youngest population across all continents. Parliament must continue to enhance its public participation processes and ensure that such issues are given the attention they warrant to secure a future as envisioned in Agenda 2063.

Parliamentarians are uniquely placed to contribute to the African Development Agenda for a multitude of reasons, but beyond their legislative functions it must not be forgotten that Parliamentarians represent constituents who are important stakeholders in securing the prosperity of the African continent. The Parliament of South Africa has recognised this valuable step and acted proactively to ensure that necessary steps are taken to strengthen the role of Parliament in these processes.

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