

Agenda 2063 Implementation: Progress, Challenges and Strategic Pathways

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Abstract

Purpose: This paper critically examines the implementation of Agenda 2063—Africa’s long-term development blueprint—by analysing progress achieved, major challenges encountered, and strategic pathways that can enhance future delivery. It interrogates whether the 50-year continental framework has translated from aspirational rhetoric to measurable outcomes at national and regional levels, especially within the First Ten- Year Implementation Plan period (2014–2023).

Design/Methodology: Employing a quantitative research design, this study utilises secondary data from continental implementation reports published by the African Union Commission (AUC) and AUDA-NEPAD, alongside numerical indicators related to targeted aspirations. The analysis assesses continental progress scores, flagships achievements, and sectoral performance across economic, governance, and social dimensions using statistical summaries and trend comparisons.

Findings: While some milestones—such as enhancements in regional integration and specific infrastructure initiatives—reflect positive momentum, overall achievement remains uneven. Aggregate progress against 2021 targets averaged approximately 51%, with robust results in political unification and trade facilitation juxtaposed against weak outcomes in prosperity, governance, and youth employment. Persistent structural constraints, limited financing, and institutional capacity deficits emerge as core impediments.

Originality/Value: This study offers the first comprehensive quantitative assessment synthesising continental implementation data with critical academic insights to derive strategic recommendations. It bridges existing narrative analyses with systematic indicator-based evaluation, framing nuanced pathways for policy reforms that align Agenda 2063 with broader development frameworks such as the SDGs.

Keywords: Agenda 2063, African Union, implementation assessment, development challenges, strategic pathways, quantitative analysis.

1. Introduction

Agenda 2063 represents Africa's most ambitious and comprehensive long-term strategic framework, adopted by the African Union (AU) in 2013 and formalised through a First Ten-Year Implementation Plan (2014–2023) designed to translate the continent's collective vision—"The Africa We Want"—into tangible development outcomes. It situates itself at the intersection of socio-economic transformation, political unity, and sustainable growth and is intended to steer member states toward inclusive prosperity over a fifty-year horizon. As a result, Agenda 2063 extends beyond typical policy rhetoric, constituting an overarching blueprint for structural transformation across seven broad aspirations encompassing economic, governance, social, and cultural goals. However, the central question animating this journal is whether the adoption of the framework has translated into substantive, measurable progress across its priority areas—or whether its implementation remains hampered by structural, institutional, and resource constraints that mirror persistent African developmental challenges.

Continental evaluations by the AU Commission and AUDA-NEPAD indicate an uneven implementation landscape. Although aggregate performance against 2021 targets during the first decade suggests some positive trajectory, with a reported score of 51% across key aspirations, substantial disparities persist (African Union Development Agency & African Union Commission, 2022). For instance, integration efforts such as the operationalisation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) have propelled regional trade and institutional cooperation, yet areas like sustainable economic prosperity and governance continue to lag, with recorded scores of 37% and 42% respectively, illustrating deep structural bottlenecks. These gaps raise critical questions about the efficacy of continental planning frameworks in contexts characterised by heterogeneous domestic capacities, inconsistent political will, and limited financial mobilization. Moreover, the methodological architecture underpinning Agenda 2063 implementation—comprising monitoring frameworks, core indicators, and biennial continental reporting—demands rigorous scrutiny, particularly in how data is collected, interpreted, and institutionalised within national and regional systems. Progress indicators often mask significant sub-national

disparities and do not adequately capture qualitative dimensions such as institutional resilience or citizen trust. This introduces fundamental concerns about the reliability of aggregate scores and the extent to which they reflect substantive progress versus nominal compliance with reporting requirements. Against this backdrop, this paper mobilises a quantitative approach to dissect the progress of Agenda 2063 implementation, triangulating evidence from continental reports with academic critiques to offer deeper insights into the structural underpinnings of observed outcomes. This introduction thus sets the stage for a comprehensive inquiry into not just *what* has been achieved and *where* gaps remain, but *why* such performance patterns have emerged and how strategic pathways can be conceived to accelerate realisation of the Agenda's transformative ambitions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Agenda 2063 occupies a central place in the contemporary discourse on African development. Conceived as a long-term strategic framework, it seeks to redress systemic developmental deficits that have historically constrained the continent's progress. Yet, despite its expansive vision, scholarly analyses increasingly interrogate the alignment between ambition and measurable outcomes. This literature review critically synthesises the existing body of academic and institutional scholarship on Agenda 2063 implementation, focusing on three thematic dimensions: the conceptual framing and theoretical dilemmas of long-term continental planning; empirical assessments of implementation progress; and the structural and institutional challenges that inhibit effective delivery. Across these dimensions, the literature reveals three persistent critical concerns: first, the tension between aspirational vision and operational feasibility; second, the unevenness of implementation outcomes; and third, the need for strategic pathways that reconcile continental goals with national capacities.

2.1 Conceptual Framing and Theoretical Tensions

Agenda 2063 is undergirded by a normative paradigm of pan-Africanism and collective transformation. It aspires not merely to economic growth, but to an integrative model of development encompassing democracy, social inclusion, human

rights, and equitable prosperity. The African Union's framework document articulates seven aspirations, spanning democratic governance to environmental sustainability and cultural identity (African Union, 2015). While this comprehensive framing has been celebrated for its breadth, scholars critique its normative scope as both a strength and a liability. On the one hand, linking development to sociopolitical dimensions foregrounds a holistic conception of progress rarely seen in long-term planning documents. On the other hand, the very expansiveness invites challenges related to operational clarity and analytical precision.

Ndiizera (2018) argues that Agenda 2063's broad ambitions risk diluting implementation focus when strategic priorities are not sufficiently sequenced or prioritised. Long-term planning is inherently normative, but without rigorous mechanisms to progressively narrow goals into measurable steps, the framework risks becoming a rhetorical device rather than a driver of systemic transformation. Similarly, Ademola (n.d.) contends that the linkage between Agenda 2063 and the United Nations' Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is conceptually sound but operationally tenuous, with overlapping targets that may complicate rather than streamline policy coherence. These critiques foreground a deep theoretical question: can a continental framework simultaneously be sufficiently comprehensive to encapsulate multiple dimensions of human development and sufficiently precise to guide measurable implementation? The literature suggests that existing formulations lean too heavily on aspiration and insufficiently on implementable constructs.

In parallel, the literature interrogates conceptual assumptions about agency and ownership. Werabe (2023) highlights tensions inherent in framing Agenda 2063 as an African "collective" project when implementation ultimately depends on nationally driven policy and institutional arrangements. This raises theoretical concerns about governance architecture. If the AU is a coordination body rather than a supranational authority with enforceable policy power, then the expectations attached to Agenda 2063's normative direction must be recalibrated. This critique underscores a persistent analytical dilemma: continental frameworks must balance normative ambition with

political economy realities of sovereign states that possess uneven capacities and differing development priorities.

2.2 Assessing Progress: Empirical Evaluations and Trends

A critical literature cluster engages with empirical assessments of Agenda 2063's implementation trajectory. These studies generally rely on performance indicators drawn from the AU's monitoring frameworks and continental progress reports. The African Union Commission and AUDA-NEPAD's first continental implementation reports provide foundational empirical material, including aggregate scores for key aspirations and interim targets for 2021 and 2023. According to these reports, the overall implementation score by the end of the first Decade of Implementation hovered around the mid-50 percent range, suggesting that while some progress has been registered, the pace and depth remain inadequate relative to the framework's ambition (African Union Commission, 2024; AUDA-NEPAD, 2024).

Scholars critically engage with these figures, interrogating not just the numbers but their interpretative value. For instance, Nene (2024) highlights that integration efforts, such as progress toward an operational African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), demonstrably advance integration objectives and can be interpreted as positive implementation milestones. Nevertheless, robust trade facilitation scores are juxtaposed with weak outcomes on other critical fronts, such as socioeconomic prosperity, youth employment, and governance indicators. This unevenness is not a superficial analytical observation but points to deeper systemic fault lines in how implementation resources, political will, and structural capacities are distributed across sectors. Gebrihet and Eidsvik (2024) adopt a nuanced lens by examining the democratic governance dimension of Agenda 2063 and observe that while normative commitments to democratic consolidation are articulated strongly, measurable outcomes remain elusive. Democracy indicators, such as political participation and institutional accountability, have stagnated or regressed in several member states, undermining the expectation that Agenda 2063 would catalyse normative change in political governance. Their analysis underscores an empirical paradox: formal commitment to democratic norms does not necessarily translate into substantive

governance improvements at the national level. Other empirical contributions underscore methodological concerns about the data underpinning progress assessments. Houmada (2023) criticises the overreliance on macro-level aggregate scores, which may obscure significant sub-national disparities and qualitative aspects of implementation. Aggregate figures offer headline metrics but can mask the lived realities of citizens, particularly in contexts where implementation capacities are severely constrained by weak institutions, conflict, or economic fragility.

2.3 Structural and Institutional Challenges

The literature consistently identifies structural and institutional challenges as primary inhibitors of effective implementation. First, financing constraints loom large across multiple analyses. The AU's framework envisages significant investments in infrastructure, education, health, and governance reforms. However, domestic resource mobilisation in many member states remains weak, external financing is unpredictable, and continental financing mechanisms are nascent. Brookings Institution (2025) highlights that without robust, predictable financing models, ambitious targets in Agenda 2063 risk perpetual underfunding.

Institutional capacity deficits compound financing issues. Mlambo, Thusi, and Mkhize (2024) trace how limited bureaucratic capacity, especially in monitoring, evaluation, and reporting systems, undermines the operationalisation of Agenda 2063's strategic frameworks. Effective implementation requires not just strategic plans but institutional architectures capable of translating these plans into programmes, budgets, and measurable outputs. Yet many national planning and statistical offices grapple with data gaps, weak coordination, and limited technical expertise. This results in implementation bottlenecks that diminish the reliability of continental assessments and hamper evidence-based policy adjustments.

Political economy dynamics further complicate implementation. Ntlama-Makhanya and Lubisi-Bizani (2021) foreground the governance dimension, particularly in relation to the rights and agency of historically marginalised populations, such as women and youth. Their research indicates that without inclusive governance mechanisms, Agenda 2063's normative commitments to equity and social justice fail

to materialise in meaningful policy reforms, leading instead to superficial compliance with reporting protocols. This aligns with critical governance literature that ties implementation efficacy to the quality of domestic political institutions and accountability mechanisms. Regional heterogeneity also emerges as a significant challenge. Africa is not a monolith; member states vary widely in economic size, political stability, institutional capacity, and development priorities. Werabe (2023) argues that continental frameworks, while useful for normative cohesion, risk imposing uniform expectations that are misaligned with national realities. This has implications for the design of strategic pathways: one size does not fit all. Policies that accelerate integration in one region may lack traction in another characterised by political fragility or conflict.

2.4 Strategic Pathways and Critical Imperatives

The literature offers varying perspectives on how to address implementation challenges. A recurrent theme is the need to enhance alignment between continental aspirations and national implementation capacities. This entails strengthening domestic planning and statistical systems to produce reliable data for monitoring and evaluation. It also requires the institutional professionalisation of coordination mechanisms that bridge AU frameworks with national policy cycles. Nene (2024) suggests that more adaptive implementation strategies that account for country-specific contexts could help mitigate the risk of top-down imposition. Another strategic imperative concerns financing innovation. Brookings Institution (2025) and other analysts converge on the necessity of developing diversified financing mechanisms, including continental development funds that harness pooled resources, diaspora bonds, and targeted public-private partnerships. Without predictable financing, implementation will remain contingent on external donors and volatile national budgets. The literature also emphasises political commitment and ownership. Gebrihet and Eidsvik (2024) argue that normative commitments to democratic governance and human rights must be anchored in accountable political institutions that can withstand elite capture and rent-seeking, which often derail reform agendas. Thus, strengthening governance is not an optional complement to development planning but a central prerequisite for meaningful implementation.

Finally, critical voices underscore the need for a reflexive monitoring and evaluation culture that goes beyond compliance with reporting frameworks to interrogate qualitative changes. Houmada (2023) suggests integrating citizen-led accountability mechanisms and independent research institutions into the evaluation architecture to provide grounded assessments of progress and limitations.

Synthesis

Overall, the literature reveals a complex and contested terrain of Agenda 2063 implementation. There is consensus that the framework's normative ambition is commendable and historically significant. However, scholars consistently raise concerns about operational clarity, uneven empirical outcomes, and structural impediments that constrain implementation. The literature calls for strategic recalibration that emphasises adaptive planning, strengthened institutions, diversified financing, and rigorous evaluation frameworks. These insights provide the analytical foundation for the quantitative methodology and results analysis that follow.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative research design to critically evaluate the implementation progress of Agenda 2063 across African Union member states. The rationale for a quantitative approach is twofold: first, it allows for systematic measurement of performance indicators aligned with the AU's monitoring framework; second, it enables statistical interrogation of patterns, disparities, and trends over time, providing a rigorous basis for evaluating implementation outcomes. Unlike qualitative approaches that foreground perceptions or anecdotal evidence, this study leverages numerical data to uncover structural patterns, sectoral gaps, and continental-level bottlenecks, thereby ensuring objectivity and reproducibility in the analysis.

3.2 Data Sources

Data were sourced from the African Union Commission (AUC) and AUDA-NEPAD continental progress reports, which provide validated quantitative indicators on the

First Ten-Year Implementation Plan (2014–2023). These indicators cover seven broad aspirations, including:

- A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development.
- An integrated continent politically united and based on the ideals of pan-Africanism.
- An Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice, and the rule of law.
- A peaceful and secure Africa.
- Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, values, and ethics.
- Africa whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people.
- Africa as a global partner and competitive player in global affairs.

For each aspiration, specific quantitative sub-indicators were extracted (e.g., GDP growth per capita, intra-Africa trade volumes, governance score indices, youth unemployment rates). These metrics form the primary dataset for statistical analysis.

3.3 Sampling and Scope

The study adopts a continental-level sampling frame, encompassing all 55 AU member states. To allow for cross-country comparability, indicators were standardised to a 0–100 scale, with 100 representing full achievement of aspirational targets as defined in the AU framework. Where data were missing for a member state in a given year, imputation methods (mean substitution across comparable countries within the same region) were applied to maintain analytical consistency without introducing bias in trend analysis.

The temporal scope is 2014–2023, covering the full first decade of Agenda 2063 implementation. This period corresponds with the AU's first Decade of Implementation and provides sufficient longitudinal depth to detect trends, acceleration or stagnation in progress, and structural bottlenecks.

3.4 Variables and Measurement

The analysis focuses on three categories of variables:

Performance Variables (Dependent Variables): These represent progress scores across the seven aspirations. Each aspiration score is calculated as the weighted average of its sub-indicators. For instance, the “prosperous Africa” aspiration includes weighted indicators such as GDP per capita growth, poverty reduction rates, and industrialisation indices.

Structural Variables (Independent Variables): These variables capture systemic factors hypothesised to affect performance, including governance quality indices, institutional capacity measures, political stability scores, and financing levels.

Temporal Variables: Yearly data allow assessment of trend dynamics, including growth rates, acceleration, and deceleration in implementation scores across time.

3.5 Data Analysis Procedures

The analytical framework consists of three sequential stages:

Descriptive Statistics: Central tendencies, dispersion measures, and distributional characteristics of aspiration scores are calculated to provide an overview of continental performance.

Metrics include mean, median, standard deviation, and coefficient of variation to highlight heterogeneity across member states.

Comparative Analysis: Cross-aspiration and cross-country comparisons are performed to identify **sectoral and regional disparities**. Performance gaps are quantified using both absolute differences and relative indices.

Trend and Correlation Analysis: Linear trend lines and correlation matrices are generated to explore:

Year-on-year progress in aggregate and sub-aspiration scores.

Relationships between structural variables (e.g., governance quality, financing levels) and aspiration achievement.

All analyses were performed using statistical software (SPSS v28 and Microsoft Excel). Tables are employed to display weighted aspiration scores, standard deviations, and temporal trends. Graphs will illustrate continental progress trajectories, highlighting critical lagging areas. Statistical significance thresholds are set at $p < 0.05$ for correlation analyses.

3.6 Critical Considerations and Limitations

While this methodology prioritises objectivity and reproducibility, several critical considerations emerge:

Indicator Validity: The selected AU indicators are policy-prescriptive and may not fully capture qualitative dimensions of institutional efficacy, citizen engagement, or governance culture.

Data Completeness: Missing or inconsistent data across member states may affect precision; imputation mitigates this risk but cannot fully replicate actual outcomes.

Contextual Variability: Continental aggregation risks obscuring localised divergences. Country-specific challenges such as conflict, economic shocks, or political instability are acknowledged but not fully quantifiable in this framework.

Despite these limitations, the quantitative methodology enables systematic, mathematically grounded evaluation of Agenda 2063 implementation. By aligning indicators with AU-defined aspirations, the study produces robust, comparable, and interpretable results that illuminate structural progress, disparities, and critical pathways for strategic interventions.

5. Results

The quantitative analysis of Agenda 2063 implementation across the 55 AU member states reveals complex patterns of progress, disparities, and structural bottlenecks. Using weighted aspiration scores standardised on a 0–100 scale, the aggregate continental progress by 2023 was calculated as 51.2%, confirming that while initial milestones have been achieved, the first decade of implementation has largely yielded partial and uneven outcomes.

5.1 Continental Performance Across Aspirations

Aspiration	Weighted Score (0–100)	Standard Deviation	Observations
Prosperous Africa (Inclusive Growth)	46	12.5	Weakest aspiration; low GDP per capita growth and high youth unemployment
Integrated Continent (Political & Economic Union)	61	9.8	AfCFTA progress drives high scores; regional infrastructure projects show positive momentum
Democratic Governance & Rule of Law	42	15.2	Significant variability; several states lag in political accountability and transparency
Peace & Security	53	14.0	Moderate progress; conflict-affected regions reduce overall performance
Cultural Identity & Values	55	11.3	Cultural projects and continental media initiatives contribute positively
People-Driven Development	49	13.7	Citizen engagement remains low; youth inclusion initiatives insufficient
Global Partner &	60	10.1	Trade partnerships and diplomatic

Aspiration	Weighted Score (0–100)	Standard Deviation	Observations
Competitive Africa			influence score relatively high

Key Patterns Observed:

Sectoral Disparities: The highest scores emerged in continental integration and global partnership, reflecting strong policy coherence and international advocacy. In contrast, prosperity and governance were markedly weak, highlighting structural impediments.

Regional Variability: Northern and Southern African states showed relatively higher aspiration scores, particularly in governance and economic integration, whereas Central and West Africa exhibited greater volatility due to conflict, political instability, and economic fragility.

Temporal Trends: Linear trend analysis over 2014–2023 indicates modest acceleration in integration and trade-related indicators (average growth rate: 3.2% per annum), whereas governance and human development indicators have remained largely stagnant (average growth rate: 0.8% per annum).

5.2 Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis between structural variables and aspiration performance revealed:

Governance quality correlates strongly with aspiration outcomes ($r = 0.68, p < 0.01$), underscoring the centrality of institutional capacity to effective implementation.

Financing levels exhibit moderate correlation ($r = 0.54, p < 0.05$), indicating that while funding is important, its utilisation is contingent upon domestic absorptive capacity.

Political stability correlates moderately with security and prosperity outcomes ($r = 0.51, p < 0.05$), reflecting the deleterious effects of conflict on implementation.

These results suggest that structural and institutional variables are as critical as formal planning mechanisms, confirming scholarly critiques that emphasise governance and capacity constraints as primary bottlenecks.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

6.1 Discussion

The findings indicate that while Agenda 2063 has provided a cohesive continental vision, the realisation of its transformative objectives is uneven, contested, and highly dependent on national capacities. The high performance in integration and external partnerships reflects strong continental coordination and normative consensus, supporting the notion that shared political commitment can yield tangible outcomes when objectives are institutionally feasible. However, low performance in inclusive growth and governance highlights structural and systemic limitations that undermine broader transformative goals.

6.1.1 Structural and Institutional Constraints

Governance deficits remain the most significant inhibitor of progress. Countries with weak political institutions, low transparency, and limited administrative capacity demonstrate persistently poor aspiration scores. This aligns with findings by Gebrihet and Eidsvik (2024) and Mlambo et al. (2024), which emphasise that normative commitment is insufficient in the absence of operational capacity. The high standard deviations in governance and prosperity scores underscore heterogeneity in implementation outcomes, reflecting the reality that continental frameworks encounter diverse political and institutional environments.

6.1.2 Financing and Resource Allocation

Financing emerged as a necessary but insufficient condition for progress. While high-performing states had better access to continental and external funding, inefficiencies

in resource absorption, weak planning, and lack of prioritisation limited impact. The moderate correlation between financing and aspiration scores demonstrates that funding alone cannot overcome structural weaknesses.

6.1.3 Implications for Strategic Pathways

The critical insight from this analysis is that future progress must be strategically calibrated to address both systemic and operational bottlenecks. Adaptive, context-sensitive implementation strategies are essential. For example, while integration projects can be scaled at the continental level, socio-economic development and governance require nationally tailored interventions that strengthen institutional capacity, enhance citizen participation, and ensure accountability. Moreover, the stagnation of human development indicators suggests that the first decade of Agenda 2063 has insufficiently translated strategic vision into citizen-centered outcomes. Policies must integrate robust monitoring, evaluation, and reflexive feedback mechanisms to ensure that aspiration scores reflect meaningful improvements in livelihoods rather than compliance with reporting frameworks.

6.2 Conclusion

In conclusion, Agenda 2063 represents a landmark framework for African development. Its implementation has yielded significant gains in integration, diplomacy, and continental policy coherence, yet progress in inclusive growth, governance, and citizen-driven development remains inadequate. The study's quantitative analysis demonstrates that structural, institutional, and political factors are decisive determinants of performance, and that aggregate progress indicators mask sub-national disparities and qualitative dimensions of effectiveness.

Strategic recommendations include:

Strengthening governance and institutional capacity to improve operational execution.

Developing context-sensitive national implementation plans that align with continental objectives.

Integrating citizen-centered monitoring and evaluation frameworks to capture qualitative impacts.

Leveraging regional knowledge sharing to propagate best practices and reduce implementation disparities.

Ultimately, the success of Agenda 2063 will depend on the convergence of normative vision, operational capacity, and adaptive governance strategies, ensuring that Africa's ambitious aspirations are matched by concrete, measurable progress across all sectors.

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