



**Concept Note and**

**Call for Papers**

**AFRICAN ECONOMIC CONFERENCE 2015**

**ADDRESSING POVERTY AND INEQUALITY IN THE POST 2015  
DEVELOPMENT AGENDA**

**Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo**

**2-4 November, 2015**

## 1. Introduction

1.1 The theme for the 2015 African Economic Conference (AEC) is **Addressing Poverty and Inequality in the Post 2015 Development Agenda**. As outlined in the African Union's (AU) Agenda 2063 and the Africa's Common Position on Post 2015 documents, the vision is for "*an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the global arena.*" Key among Africa's aspirations is to achieve prosperity that is based on inclusive growth, and development that is *people driven* and that also *unleashes the potential of women and youth*. Given this stated goal of the Common Position and the central aim of Agenda 2063 to eradicate poverty in all its ramifications in one generation and to build shared prosperity through social and economic transformation; the theme of this conference is very timely.

1.2 The AEC will bring together policy-makers, researchers and development practitioners from Africa and from around the world to make a strategic contribution to the implementation of Africa's vision and the identification of concrete actions necessary for poverty and inequality reduction in the context of the post-2015 development agenda. The Conference will provide an opportunity to assess the impact of current growth strategies on poverty, inequality and human development in Africa. In addition, the conference will discuss successes, lessons learned and identify remaining gaps, challenges and emerging issues on the topic. It will encompass in-depth presentations of policy-oriented research by both established academics and emerging researchers from the continent who will debate and recommend policy options on how to reduce poverty and inequality for Africa's equitable, inclusive and environmentally sustainable development.

## 2. Achieving human development and the MDGs in Africa

2.1. Comparable to other regions of the world, African countries have made significant strides in all the dimensions of human development, including in education, health and income indicators. The 2014 UNDP Human Development Index (HDI) shows that 17 out of 52 African countries have achieved high and medium levels of human development. HDI values for countries in Central, East, Southern and West Africa increased by 26% from 1990 to 2013, making it the third fastest growing region after East Asia (36%) and South Asia (34%). In comparison, HDI levels in the Arab States and Latin America for the same period were 19% and 18% higher, respectively. Improvements in human development in Africa can be attributed to rapid economic growth based on increased resource flows from natural resource extraction, growth in agriculture and services, human capital development and improved governance.

2.2. However, recent MDG Progress Reports on Africa (e.g. African MDG Report 2014) show that the region is on track to meet only two out of the eight MDGs—the goals related to universal primary education and gender parity at primary level of education. In contrast, insufficient progress has been made with respect to the poverty and hunger goals. The limited inclusiveness of economic growth and low growth and inequality elasticity of poverty are key factors in explaining the slow progress on these particular goals. The environment and health goals are the least likely to be met even though some appreciable

progress has been recorded in recent times. Moreover, progress achieved to date is vulnerable to reversals due to countries' weak capacity to respond to various shocks that is compounded by inadequate and poorly funded social protection systems.

### **3. Addressing Poverty and Inequality in Africa**

3.1. Africa's GDP growth has been high and has remained robust since the mid-2000, with growth rates averaging 5% and well above the global average of 3% per annum (African Economic Outlook, 2014). Improved macroeconomic management, robust domestic demand, steady remittance flows, favourable commodity prices and increased export volumes have been supportive of the continent's growth, such that midway through 2014, Africa was riding a high wave of growth whilst the rest of the world was still in recession. The high average continental growth rate nonetheless masks significant variation across sub-regions and various country typologies i.e. resource rich countries, land-locked countries, fragile states, as well as across low income countries (LICs) and middle income countries (MICs). While agriculture and services have been the main engines of growth, oil and mining activity in resource rich countries has weakened as a result of the fall in commodity prices, especially crude oil. Manufacturing production increased in a few countries but often declined or remained too small to boost growth. The service sector, including traditional services such as transport, trade, real estate and public and financial services, and new services, such as information and telecommunication technologies (ITC), are boosting growth in many countries. It is important to note that structural economic transformation in Africa has bypassed the manufacturing sector. Factors of production moved away from agriculture to services instead of into the manufacturing sector—value added in manufacturing fell from 14 percent to 10 percent of GDP between 2000 and 2008.

3.2 The past decade of relatively high growth has bred a new and optimistic narrative on Africa and its economic prospects. However, the continent continues to face many challenges. For instance, there is broad consensus among Africa's leaders and development practitioners that structural transformation and progress in terms of equitable and sustainable development has been *limited* in Africa, despite the volume of wealth created from recent growth. The growth process has neither been inclusive nor equitable. It has also not been transformational enough to respond to challenges ushered by external and internal economic shocks, high unemployment rates, rapid urbanization and changing demographic patterns largely characterized by a youth bulge. Most importantly, countries have not succeeded in *substantially* reducing poverty and inequality across the continent so that in spite of the appreciable growth over the past decade, the fall in poverty (percentage of people below \$1.25 a day) from 56.5 percent in 1990 to 48.5 percent in 2010 [2014 African MDG Report] was relatively small. The inescapable conclusion is that African growth has not been people-centered.

3.3 Africa's socio-economic progress faces significant reversals due to weakening governance and institutional frameworks, lingering conflicts and growing radicalization, high unemployment rates—particularly for the youth and women; and environmental

degradation and climate change. In addition, there is growing concern that the high levels of income inequality throughout Africa are holding back progress. Africa has the second highest unequal distribution of income and consumption within countries after Latin America and the Caribbean. But there is evidence that the Gini index fell from 0.458 to 0.439 between 1990-99 and 2000-09 – one of the most appreciable declines across developing groups (African MDG Report 2014). In addition, a large proportion of Africa's population is living in countries where inequality is rising (UNDP forthcoming).

#### **4. A post 2015 Agenda for Africa**

4.1. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) currently under negotiation respond to Africa's challenges and take on global issues that require a global partnership for sustainable development. The overarching objective of the SDGs is to eradicate poverty by 2030. These goals include a focus on the achievement of sustained and inclusive economic growth, full and productive employment as well as decent work for all. The agenda beyond the MDGs now focuses on a shared future with shared responsibilities and one universal and transformative agenda for sustainable human development. In this regard, African institutions and countries have a key role to play in meeting the unfinished agenda of the MDGs and accelerating equitable and sustainable development in Africa. Sustaining the momentum achieved by governments, civil society and private sector actors during national and regional consultations on the post-2015 development agenda, is vital to producing clear goals and developing implementation and monitoring frameworks that respond to new challenges including climate change and social protection.

4.2 The draft SDGs advocate for renewed action on poverty eradication at the global level and include transformational elements as outlined in the report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (UN, 2013). The five proposed transformational "shifts" include: (i) leave no one behind; (ii) put sustainable development at the core; (iii) transform economies for jobs and inclusive growth; (iv) build peace and effective, open and accountable institutions for all; and (v) forge a new global partnership.

4.3. African countries now have the opportunity to review policy options and implementation frameworks that would accelerate the economic and social transformation of the continent towards a more sustainable growth path that results in reduced inequalities and the eradication of poverty. As such, the AEC 2015 will contribute to the policy dialogue and advocacy on inclusive growth by presenting the latest empirical evidence on poverty and inequalities in Africa and provide critical thinking on how policy makers, development partners, the private sector, CSOs and academia should support the planning and implementation of the post-2015 agenda.

#### **5. Overview and Objectives of the AEC Series**

5.1 Since its inception in 2006, the AEC series has fostered dialogue and the exchange of knowledge on a variety of issues and challenges that Africa is facing (see box 1).

### **Box 1: Past Themes of the African Economic Conference**

- AEC 2006 — Accelerating Africa's Development Five Years into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.
- AEC 2007 — Opportunities and Challenges of Development for Africa in the Global Arena
- AEC 2008 — Globalization, Institutions and Economic Development of Africa
- AEC 2009 — Fostering Development in an Era of Financial and Economic Crises
- AEC 2010 — Setting the Agenda for Africa's Economic Recovery and Long Term Growth
- AEC 2011 — Green Economy and Structural Transformation in Africa
- AEC 2012 — Fostering Inclusive and Sustainable Development in Africa in an Age of Global Economic Uncertainty
- AEC 2013 — Regional Integration in Africa
- AEC 2014 — Knowledge and Innovation for Africa's Transformation

- 5.2 The specific objectives of the African Economic Conference series are to:
- promote knowledge management as an important driver of policy dialogue, good policy planning and implementation;
  - foster dialogue that promotes the exchange of ideas and innovative thinking among researchers, development practitioners and African policymakers;
  - encourage and enhance research on economic and policy issues related to the development of African economies;
  - provide an opportunity for young African researchers, Africans in the Diaspora, regional and sub-regional organizations to disseminate their research findings as well as share information with African policymakers on the work they do in the region.

## **6. African Economic Conference 2015**

6.1 The African Economic Conference 2015 will take place in **Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo from November 2 to 4, 2015**. This 10<sup>th</sup> edition of the AEC will coincide with the unveiling of the new Sustainable Development Goals that are due to replace the Millennium Development Goals from January 2016.

6.2 As in previous years, the Conference will provide a unique opportunity for researchers, policymakers and development practitioners from Africa, and elsewhere, to debate Africa's development and the policies required to eradicate poverty and reduce inequalities in the context of the Post 2015 Agenda. In particular, with a focus on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the conference will establish the means to realize Africa's ambitious agenda on inclusive growth as well as poverty and inequality reduction within social groups, countries and regions on the continent. The AEC 2015 will explore Africa's desired policy, institutional and investments frameworks for reducing poverty and inequalities including critical regional dimensions.

6.3 The Conference will comprise a number of plenary sessions led by experts on African development as well as break-out sessions that will feature presentations and

discussions by prominent academics, policy makers, private sector actors, opinion leaders, young African researchers and representatives from development organisations. The break-out sessions will allow for more in-depth and technical analyses of salient issues arising from the thematic focus of the Conference— Addressing Poverty and Inequalities in the Post 2015 Agenda.

6.4 The key discussion topics suggested below will enable a broad range of discussions on the current state of and prospects for Africa’s transformation and inclusive growth and will generate valuable insights for improved policy making.

- The nexus between poverty, inequality and growth in Africa (theory and evidence)
- Poverty and inequality features and determinants in Africa
- Economic, social and environmental impacts of poverty and inequality in Africa
- Inclusive growth and structural transformation as strategies for poverty reduction in Africa
- Avoiding ‘spatial poverty trap’ and promoting horizontal, vertical and spatial inclusion in Africa
- Policy options for addressing poverty and inequality in Africa
- Strategies for poverty and inequality Goals in the post-2015 development agenda (especially the proposed Goals 1 and 10).

6.5 Papers accepted for presentation will comprise original work not previously published. Young African female and male researchers are especially encouraged to submit their articles. One of the objectives of the AEC series is to provide young African researchers with the opportunity not only to share their work with a broader audience, but also to expand their networks. As is the tradition, a distinguished panel will assess the papers presented and award a prize to the author whose paper has been deemed as the best Conference paper. The winner will be announced at the closing ceremony.

## 7. Time Frame for Submission of Papers

- 7.1 Authors must follow the instructions on the AEC 2015 website ([www.undp.org/aec](http://www.undp.org/aec)) to submit completed papers.
- 7.2 Participants and experts submitting papers for the Conference must adhere to the key deadline dates as stated in table 1:

**Table 1: Annotated Time Frame**

Annotation	Deadline Date
Deadline for paper submission	31 July 2015
Notification of final acceptance	18 September 2015
Submission of revised manuscripts	2 October 2015
Closing of flight bookings	15 October 2015
Conference Dates	2-4 November 2015

7.3 Papers will be blind-reviewed by the co-organising institutions. The objective is to have the highest quality papers presented at the Conference.

## **8. Expected Outputs**

8.1 The outputs of the Conference are expected to include:

- A Conference Report: a summary of key findings as well as key policy recommendations distilled from conference papers and keynote speeches;
- Conference Proceedings: a special issue of the *African Development Review* containing the most innovative articles of policy and operational relevance, as well as a proceedings book that publishes selected papers. This double publication finds a useful application in policy-making for political leaders and in defining strategic priorities for development practitioners.

## **9. Sponsorship**

9.1 While submitting their abstracts, authors will be requested to indicate whether they require support to cover expenses (travel, accommodation and daily subsistence allowance) associated with their participation at the Conference. Only one author per paper accepted for presentation will be eligible to sponsorship. Support is reserved for presenters and young researchers from Africa.