

Capacity still the missing link in development

Over the past couple of years we have seen ambitious long-term development aspirations, be it through Agenda 2063 or the recently launched Sustainable Development Goals, also known as Agenda 2030. The African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) held its third development forum to explain how these will remain a distant dream unless we quickly deal with the issue of capacity across the continent.



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THE THIRD PAN-AFRICAN CAPACITY Development Forum closed last month with an urgent call to deal with the lack of capacity throughout the continent, especially if countries want to achieve their development targets. "Capacity deficiencies remain a binding constraint to Africa's economic and social transformation," said Professor Emmanuel Nnadozie, executive secretary of the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF).

The event came at a time when the continent faces many challenges based on core areas of weakness that have not been addressed sufficiently, despite a period of high growth in many economies and steady continental growth over more than a decade.

In its analysis of skills shortfalls in critical areas in Africa, the ACBF found that the continent currently has a gap of 4.3 million engineers. In order to implement the flagship projects of the first 10-year implementation programme of Agenda 2063, the continent needs 1.6 million agricultural scientists and researchers and 2.8 million water and sanitation engineers.

There are many other gaps. The output at tertiary education level is not meeting the needs, with more than 80% of students enrolling in social sciences and humanities rather than in science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

Many countries continue to face human and institutional deficits, which prevent them from achieving their full development potential. There is much talk of transformative growth but weak human capacity and weak institutional capacity mean that capacity remains a massive constraint.

The ACBF sees itself as the fourth development institution in the continent, alongside the AU, the ECA and the AfDB, and as a critical component to help create the capacity to implement the strategies devised at the highest levels.

Dr Anthony Mothae Maruping, commissioner for economic affairs at the African Union, highlighted how the AU had been working with the ACBF in assessing the capacity requirements for implementing Agenda 2063.

"Through Agenda 2063, Africa has a clear and articulate roadmap for change. We are counting on ACBF to make this Agenda a reality. The focus should be on building capacity that builds further capacity to make it sustainable," Maruping said.

During the forum, Nnadozie explained that the ACBF was the institution that had a clear comparative advantage to make this a reality and that their new strategy for 2017-2021 has taken into account the needs



Opposite: Prof. Emmanuel Nnadozie, executive secretary of the ACBF. Left: The AU's Dr Anthony Mothae Maruping, working with ACBF to assess capacity requirements. Below: Ivorian President Alassane Ouattara; Côte d'Ivoire will be hosting an ACBF donor conference at the end of this month.

Pledging Conference aims to raise \$250m

The African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) is planning to organise a two-day event in Abidjan at the end of June in which it will officially launch its five-year strategy for the years 2017-2021, and where it will hold a donor pledging session to fund its needs.

It will aim to guarantee some \$250m in funding to finance this plan over the five years. Since its establishment 25 years ago, the Foundation has invested up to \$700m towards capacity building in 45 African countries.

The objective of the conference is to raise most of the required funds, which would enable ACBF to efficiently carry out its mission over the next five years, while attracting new membership from African countries that are not yet members, as well as other countries and international institutions.

The Foundation has until now mainly been funded by non-African and multilateral partners, the World Bank being a major supporter, although funding from African members has been constantly increasing over the last two strategic plans.

This year the donor conference will be hosted by the government of Côte d'Ivoire and also the African Development Bank. It will take place on 30th June and 1st of July and Togolese President Faure Gnassingbé is also expected to be in attendance.



of Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals. "The ACBF has a clear advantage, be it our experience, our understanding of realities on the ground and of course our expertise in how to build capacity.

"We have aligned our interventions to national and continental priorities and developed programmes to deal with the most urgent capacity gaps. Not only developing the skills, but retaining, harmonising and utilising those skills."

The focus for the five-year period will be on several core areas. These include a greater focus on developing critical technical skills, strengthening political institutions that are vital to African transformation, paying special attention to soft skills, supporting countries to achieve tangible development results and ensuring linkages with the private sector and civil society in capacity building.

The role and commitment of development partners in realising the African agenda was put under the spotlight and relationships with civil society, including the media, and the private sector were examined. Although these groups are regarded as being important partners in Africa's development, the relationships have not been properly exploited through the creation of strong and complementary partnerships.

Many relationships between the public and private sector are too often characterised by mistrust, some speakers said, which undermines a unified approach towards realising national objectives.

The ACBF will be holding a pledging conference in Abidjan at the end of June, hosted by the government of Côte d'Ivoire, where the ACBF will officially be launching its next five-year plan. Last year, 2015, was a record year in terms of African government contributions.

Africa, added Nnadozie, still faces the task of addressing some major challenges and capacity remains the missing link in solving these challenges. It is only once all these skills have been developed that Africans can truly be in the driving seat. ■