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WALKING THROUGH A TIGHTROPE: THE CHALLENGE OF ECONOMIC GROWTH AND POVERTY IN AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

Economic growth and poverty reduction now take the centre stage in most global policy discourse. This is coming at a time that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are fast gaining global relevance. Africa has witnessed the highest but non-inclusive level of growth in the last decade because the continent still grapples with high unemployment rate especially among the youths. This paper therefore examines some drivers of and constraints to growth and poverty reduction in Africa. The paper focused on Africa by using secondary data sourced from different such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Transparency International (TI), Institute of Economics and Peace (IEP) and National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) reports and Annual Abstract of Statistics. Analytical methods employed were mainly descriptive statistics and comparative statistics. Findings showed that economic growth recorded in the continent is a 'jobless' one advancing inequality and poverty. More so, 75 percent of countries with low human development are in Africa with the continent's consistent economic growth imparting insignificantly on the livelihoods of the people. In fact, 27 out of 54 African countries were reported to have GDP of less than $USD 2000 per capita. GDP growth in sub-Saharan Africa was estimated at 4.9 percent in 2013 and this increased to 5.3 percent in 2014 and further estimated to rise to 5.5 percent in 2015. The fight against inequality, poverty and unemployment is tantamount to aiming a moving target. Youth unemployment remains a component of Africa's growth owing to persistent low productivity and underemployment in the informal sector. The resultant implication of this is manifested through persistent inequality, poverty, armed conflict and unchecked migration of young people to industrialised nations in search of the non-existing livelihood opportunities. This paper therefore recommends increased and monitored investments in critical infrastructural facilities. There is a need for multilevel and multinational partnership in the fight against corruption and social conflict to attract foreign direct investment. Investment in social security programmes will also assist the poor and vulnerable people in the continent.

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INTRODUCTION

Africa is the second most populous and second largest continent in the world. The continent is endowed with human and natural resources (AFDB *et al.,* 2015). Africa has a population of 1.033billion people with youths constituting majority of the population (World Population Review, 2014). The average annual growth of real output increased from 1.8 percent in the 1980-1989 periods to 2.6 percent in 1990-2000 and 5.3 percent inthe period 2000-2010 (UNCTAD, 2014). The problem of income inequality is a great constraint underlying inclusive growth in sub-Saharan Africa (AFDB *et al*., 2015). The task of achieving economic growth remains the central component of most development agenda. According to Ogunlela (2012), the health of an economy can be ascertained from the answers to these three questions which are; What is the state of poverty? What is the unemployment situation? What is happening to inequality? When there is a sustained decrease in all of these, development results. However, if one or two of this central problems increase, the economy is not developing even if per capita income increase in multiples.

Economic growth is the expansion in the production and marketing of good and services in an economy owing to technological advancements within a year. Economic growth sustained over time is referred to as economic development. A change is departure from the obtainable to the desirable. The literature is unanimous on the economic growth in Africa. However, inquiry into the nature of economic growth shows that growth in Africa co-move with poverty, youth unemployment and inequality (Blanke *et al.,* 2013). In fact, the high inequality undermines growth elasticity of poverty estimated at -0.7 compared to -2.0 in the rest of the developing world excluding China thereby reducing the prospects of broad-based growth (WEF, 2013).

REALITIES OF THE AFRICAN ECONOMY

The performance of Africa in the realisation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) has not been particularly encouraging (UNDP, 2014, AFDB *et al*., 2015). However, there are significant improvements in the area of universal primary education access, combating Human Immune Deficiency Virus and Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDs), Tuberculosis and other diseases. The problem of extreme hunger, poverty, unemployment and inequality remained pervasive in the last decade (UNCTAD, 2014).

The tale of economic growth in Africa is a mix of good and bad outcomes. This is attributable to the differences in economic outcomes across countries (AFDB *et al*., 2015). The constraints to broad-based economic growth have been traced to corruption, debt relief and donor aids, insecurity and other negative externalities in Africa. The youth population is growing faster than the available opportunities. For instance, in Nigeria and Uganda an estimated half of the population is under the age of 15. Meanwhile, 69 percent (33 out of 48) Least Developed Countries (LDCs) of the world and 75 percent of the countries with low human development are in Africa (Sippel *et al*., 2011; AFDB *et al*., 2015). Again, the region has the highest birth rates in the world. In fact, it is estimated that the number of people in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) may double by the end of 2050 and quadruple by the end of 2100 (Sippel *et al.,* 2011). The demographic dividend in Africa has not been harnessed in terms of the dominance of youths. This is because majority of the youths are unemployed consequently compromising the security status of the continent.

Africa manages to experience the highest economic growth globally despite the challenges. In fact, GDP growth in sub-Saharan Africa was estimated at 4.9 percent in 2013, increased to 5.3 percent in 2014 and projected to rise by 5.5 percent in 2015 (AP, 2013; AFDB *et al*., 2015). Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) has skyrocketed by 7 folds in one decade. The service sector, agriculture, building industry and manufacturing industry remain the highest employer of African labour force. The service sector is the most important driver of Africa's growth with about 47 percent GDP contribution as against 37 percent for industry and 16 percent for agriculture between 2000 and 2011 (UNCTAD, 2014). Economic growth is materialising in countries like Ghana, Mozambique, Namibia and South Africa. Conversely, Somalia, Liberia and Eritrea has not experienced economic breakthrough over time. This implies differences in the economic outcomes across African countries.

The African business environment is still unfavorable compared to other continents despite sustained economic growth. Transport costs still rank among the highest in the world (AFDB *et al*., 2013). The share of manufacturing in total value added fell from 13 percent in 1990 to 12 percent in 2000 and 10 percent in 2011 which depicts deindustrialization (UNCTAD, 2014).

African economic growth though consistent over the years have imparted insignificantly on the livelihoods of the people. In terms of stage of development, 27 out of 54 African countries have GDP less than $USD 2000 per capita. They include Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal etc. This shows about half of the African economies are at the lowest stage of development (WEF, 2013). The medium stage of development ($USD 3000 to $USD 9000 GDP per capita) level consists of Cape Verde, Mauritius, Morocco, South Africa and Swaziland.

However, there is no African country in the high/third stage of development where GDP per capita is greater than $USD 17, 000. Africa accounts for 14 out of 20 lowest-ranked economies in terms of Global Competitiveness Index. African ranks lowest in Global Competitiveness Index. The undesirable properties of the African economy will be further deepened by increased urbanization as 41 percent of African population lives in cities (Deloitte, 2014). This is projected to increase by 1 percent every two years. This will increase pressure on the inadequate infrastructure in African cities if unchecked (WEF, 2013).

Youth unemployment remains a component of Africa's growth owing to persistent low productivity and underemployment in the informal sector. Africa has the highest youth (15-24years) population of 200 million and it is projected to increase by 200 percent by 2045 (ACET, 2014). Again, about 59 percent of the youths (20-24 years) are projected to have had secondary education in 2030 compared with current 42 percent (Blanke *et al*., 2013; ACET, 2014). Meanwhile, the private sector meant to employ the youth face harsh economic conditions. Private companies now downsize rather than employ. Thus, government employs a sizeable number of the youths. However, there is a limit to what the government can employ. The government employs about 40 percent In South Africa, Nigeria and Tanzania (Blanke *et al*., 2013). There are about 1.5 million young people in Egypt while private organisations can only employ 600,000 people. Similarly, South Africa has about 3 million young people not in employment, education or training and 600,000 unemployed youths meant to fill 800,000 vacancies (Blanke *et al.*, 2013).

Recent studies indicate a minimum of 7 percent annual growth rate and investment rate of 25 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on infrastructure is needed to reduce poverty significantly in Africa (Foster, 2008; WEF, 2013). Africa currently invests 18 percent (which is below the 25 percent benchmark) and the continent has not achieved 7 percent growth rate (WEF, 2013). Therefore, the reason poverty reduction remains a shifting target is not far-fetched. Currently, $USD 45 billion is being invested on infrastructure in Africa as against the $USD 93 billion required. This implies there is a deficit of $USD 50 billion annually if Africa must achieve her lofty developmental goals (UNCTAD, 2014).

Again, recent estimates attest to the fact that Africa has the highest income poverty headcount in the world. In fact about 50.9 percent of the people are poor using the income poverty headcount approach and about 36 percent are near income poverty. Again, 59.6 percent of the people in sub-Saharan Africa are multidimensionally poor (see Table 1). This implies Africa has a lot of work to do in combating poverty.

TABLE 1: INCOME AND MULTIDIMENSIONAL POVERTY BY REGION

Region	Number of Countries in the Sample	Income Poverty Head Count	Near Income Poverty	Number of Countries in the Sample	Multidimensional Poverty Headcount	Intensity of Deprivation	Near Multidimensional Poverty
Arab States	10	6.5	36.4	9	15.5	48.4	8.7
East Asia Pacific	11	12.7	25.1	10	6.4	44.7	16.2
Europe and Central Asia	15	1.4	6.0	15	1.8	37.3	4.5
Latin America and the Caribbean	20	5.7	7.0	14	6.7	42.8	9.5
South Asia	8	30.6	44.4	7	53.4	50.8	17.9
Sub-Saharan Africa	40	50.9	27.8	36	59.6	55.0	16.2

Source: (UNDP, 2014)

CONSTRAINTS TO GROWTH IN AFRICAN COUNTRIES

There are many constraints to growth in the continent of Africa and the list is endless ranging from man-induced constraints to natural constraints. Few of the notable ones are discussed below.

Infrastructure Deficit

Infrastructure deficit is an underlying constraint to broad-based economic growth in Africa (Foster and Pushak, 2011; World Bank, 2013). This is because infrastructure deficit renders businesses particularly unattractive and it depresses firm productivity by around 40 percent (Escribano *et al.*, 2008; Foster, 2008). The continent's largest infrastructure deficit occurs in the private sector (World Bank, 2013). The generation capacity and electricity consumption or security of supply is inadequate. In fact, 48 countries of sub-Saharan Africa (with a total population of 800 million) have the same level of power generation with Spain (with a population of 45 million people) (Foster, 2008; Mbekeni, 2013). The annual power consumption in Africa is estimated at 124kilowatt hours per capita and it is declining. This is 10 percent of consumption elsewhere in the developing world. The power consumption is just enough to power 100 watt light bulb per person for 3 hours a day (Foster, 2008). The persistent power outages account for 5 percent loss in sales of African firms and 20 percent for informal sector firms unable to run on alternative power generating sets (Foster, 2008). More than 30 African countries experience power outages and frequent interruptions to service. This can be linked to climate change impacts materializing through droughts as most African countries rely on hydroelectric power. Africa loses about 12.5 percent production time to power outages. The continental road freight cost (4 times) more than other continents; power costs 14 US cents per kw/hr as against 5-10 US cents (Mbekeni, 2013).

Africa is progressing in terms of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) compared to other parts of the world. However, Africa remains the world's most under-penetrated region with subscriber growth at nearly 12 percent (GSMA, 2015). Sub-Saharan Africa has the lowest mobile internet subscriber penetration of 20 percent which falls below the 33 percent global average. This implies Africa has a lot of work to do in building a techno-driven economic growth while promoting financial inclusion in the process (Oluwatayo, 2014; GSMA, 2015). The roads and weak rail network in Africa leave more to be desired.

Africa has abundant water resources but majority of the people do not have access to potable water. This constitutes a paradox of lack in the midst of plenty. This is because of the absence of water storage and irrigation technology. The continent experiences high level of hydrological variability with fluctuations in precipitation across areas, across sectors and over time (Grey and Sadoff, 2008). This variability is expected to be exacerbated due to climate change in the nearest future.

The high cost attached to the inadequate infrastructure constrains access in Africa. In fact, power tariffs, water tariffs, road freight tariffs, international telephony and internet dial-up service are higher in Africa compared to other developing regions (Foster, 2008). For instance, power tariffs range from 0.02 to 0.45 $USD/Kwh in sub-Saharan Africa compared to 0.05-0.1 $USD/Kwh in other developing regions. The water tariffs range between 0.86 and 6.56 US$/m^3 in the region compared to 0.03-0.6 US$/m^3 in other developing countries (Foster, 2008). This indicates infrastructure deficit has been further compounded by high prices pushing access beyond the reach of the poor. Meanwhile, sub-Saharan Africa is the world's poorest region with the highest headcount rate of 48 percent (World Bank, 2015).

The Challenge of Corruption

Corruption is a phenomenon difficult to define and measure (Idachaba, 2014). Apart from the fact that there are dissenting views on the definition of corruption, the act is done secretly and off-book. The World Bank defines corruption as the abuse of public power for private interest (Ajodo-Adebanjoko and Okorie, 2014). Corruption is a societal-ill with political, economic, social and environmental implications (Idachaba, 2014). The Asian Development Bank defines corruption as the behavior on the part of the officials in the public and private sectors in which they improperly and unlawfully enrich themselves and/ or those close to them or induce others to do so by misusing the position in which they are placed (OECD, 2008). Whichever way corruption is defined, it is a contagious problem in Africa (Ajodo-Adebanjoko and Okorie, 2014). Corruption has been an integral part of human activities from time immemorial (Oye, 2013). In 2014, 175 countries were captured in the 2014 Corruption Perception Index (CPI). The average score for sub-Saharan Africa is the lowest at 33 and lesser than the global average of 43. The highest is Botswana with 63 and the lowest is Somalia with a score of 8. In fact, 92 percent of African countries scored below 50 out 100 in the CPI (TI, 2015). The bottom position in the CPI (as shown in Table 2) is occupied by Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Libya, Eritrea, Guinea Bissau, Angola, Burundi, and Zimbabwe. There is no African country in the first 40 positions in the Corruption Perception Index. This implies corruption is pervasive and more concentrated in Africa.

TABLE 2: TOP 10 CORRUPT AFRICAN COUNTRIES

Number	**Country**	**Score**	**Position**
1	Somalia	8/100	174/175
2	Sudan	11/100	173/175
3	South Sudan	15/100	171/175
4	Libya	18/100	166/175
5	Eritrea	18/100	166/175
6	Guinea Bissau	19/100	161/175
7	Angola	19/100	161/175
8	Burundi	20/100	159/175
9	Zimbabwe	21/100	156/175
10	Democratic Rep. of Congo	22/100	154/175

Source: Transparency International (2015).

The African Union estimates that corruption costs in Africa are above $US 148 billion dollars annually (Uneke, 2010). The corruption of leaders in Africa has resulted in unquantifiable welfare losses (Idachaba, 2014). The people are left unaided in the fight against poverty, unemployment and climate change-induced problems (floods, droughts, malaria etc.). Corruption increases the cost of doing business, makes expected returns to capital uncertain and reduces the attractiveness of African economy (Baliamoune-Lutz and Ndikumana, 2007; Oye, 2013). Corruption influences the quantity of productive public investment such that public resources are mobilized inefficiently and most times towards unproductive activities.

Insecurity and Economic Growth in Africa

Insecurity is a global phenomenon with African dimensions. Insecurity undermines economic development in Africa. This is especially so, for countries with youth dominance in their population. The huge army of unemployed youths provides efficient and effective labour force for violent uprisings, armed robbery, electoral violence, kidnapping and other activities disrupting law and order. It is very worrisome that Nigeria ranks first globally for its kidnapping risks accounting for 25 percent of the world incidents (Burns and Wilcox, 2013). Similarly, Libya clinched the fourth position among countries where kidnapping took place in 2014 (NYA, 2015). In fact, between January and December 2014, Nigeria accounted for 15 percent of reported kidnap cases globally. Libya and Sudan accounted for 6 percent and 3 percent respectively in the same period (NYA, 2015).

Apart from the fact that the poor security situation has led to unquantifiable welfare losses, businesses cannot grow sustainably hence the exclusive economic growth. The emerging dimension to insecurity in Africa is terrorism premised on religious and economic demands. Terrorism is a serious threat to global peace and development with varying severity among countries. Meanwhile, terrorism has been conceptualised by IEP (2015) as any event that satisfies at least two of the three conditions for terrorism. The first is, the violent act meant for the achievement of political, economic, religious or social objectives. The second is the violent act including evidence of an intention to coerce, intimidate or convey some other messages to a larger audience (audiences) other than the immediate victims. The third condition is met when the violent act was outside the precepts of international humanitarian law.

Globally, 82 percent of the fatalities resulting from terrorist attacks in 2013, occurred in five countries-Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nigeria and Syria (IEP, 2015). The bulk of the recorded deaths from terrorism in 2013 resulted from the activities of four terrorist groups-ISIL, Bokoharam, the Taliban and al-Qa'ida and its affiliates (NYA, 2015; IEP, 2015). Currently, 7 out of 13 countries reported by IEP (2015) as being at risk of increased terrorist activity are in Africa. The countries are Angola, Burundi, Central African Republic, Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Mali and Uganda (NYA, 2015; IEP, 2015). Nigeria recorded the fourth highest number of deaths (10.2 percent) from terrorism. As shown in Table 3, 11 out of 30 countries occupying the top 30 positions in the 2014 Global Terrorism Index (GTI) are in Africa (IEP, 2015). This implies Africa is currently plagued by terrorism hence the need for concerted efforts to stem the tide.

TABLE 3: TOP AFRICAN COUNTRIES ON THE GLOBAL TERRORISM INDEX

Serial Number	Country	Global Rank	Score
1	Nigeria	4th	8.58
2	Somalia	7th	7.41
3	Kenya	12th	6.58
4	Egypt	13th	6.5
5	Libya	15th	6.25
6	Democratic Rep of Congo	18th	5.9
7	Sudan	19th	5.77

8	South Sudan	20th	5.6
9	Algeria	21st	5.52
10	Mali	22nd	5.29
11	Central African Republic	26th	5.19

Source: IEP (2015)

Ohiwerei (2014) reported activities of terrorist groups have resulted in high drop-out rates of children from schools. He cited the example of about 7000 students forced out of school with 14 schools closed down in Borno State, Nigeria. Soyinka (2014) reported terrorism in Nigeria and by extension Africa is a product of unabated impunity, injustice and corruption. It therefore follows that the destruction of livelihoods and infrastructure based on religious, economic and social agitations will continue to make poverty sustainable.

Dependence on Primary Products

Despite the huge endowments in terms of mineral resources, Africa benefits least from trade. The African economy is import-dependent as it produces primary products and exports raw materials to developed countries. Africa then imports the finished goods with balance of trade tilting towards the industrialised world (Lee, 2012). Africa's exports are mainly primary products consisting of primary agricultural commodities, natural resources and minerals that are extremely vulnerable to fluctuating prices and environmental tariffs (Mutenyo, 2011). For instance, 94 percent in Angola are in crude oil, in Burundi, 72 percent of exports are in coffee, in Equatorial Guinea, 99 percent of exports are in oil and gas, 55 percent of exports in Malawi are in Tobacco, in Nigeria, 82 percent of exports are in crude petroleum, in Sierra Leone, 90 percent of exports are in diamonds and in Zambia 70 percent of exports are in copper (Mutenyo, 2011). Agriculture is the mainstay of most economies in Africa in terms of employment. This is because agriculture employs about 60 percent of the active labour force in Africa (AGRA, 2014) .In terms of trade, African farmers are victims of dumping. The competition from highly subsidized agriculture in advanced countries inhibits agricultural growth and trade potentials in Africa (Oluwatayo and Ojo, 2016). Agriculture being a very important sector in Africa remains underdeveloped due to climate change impacts, low level of technology, conflicting government policies and poor market linkages among many others. The continent is plagued by unstable food prices (World Bank, 2013) and soaring cost of food imports.

CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Africa is a land of untapped potentials in terms of human and material resource endowments. Despite the rich mineral deposit in the continent, it is very appalling to know that the inhabitants of a number of countries in Africa still grapple with the problem of hunger, poverty and either underemployment or unemployment. The continent is blessed but unfortunately the continent has the highest number of youths in the world with both positive and negative dimensions. If engaged the youths can provide the needed productive labour force thereby putting the economy on a sound footing considering the fact the youths are the energy needed to drive the much clamored indistrialisation.

Conversely, unemployed youths are efficient and readily available tool in the promotion of violence and insecurity. The current wave of armed conflict and insurgency in many of the states in Africa alluded to this problem. Africa has witnessed consistent economic growth in the last decade. However, the poverty situation and inequality have not improved. African growth is constrained by insecurity, corruption, infrastructure deficit and heavy reliance on primary products. The implication of the aforementioned challenge is that the growth in the continent is non-inclusive, advancing polarisation and rising inequality among different segments of the society.

Policy Recommendations

The constraints to broad-based growth in Africa have been X-rayed and discussed in this paper and based on the foregoing, the following recommendations are made:

(1) Government and private sector should increase and monitor investments in critical infrastructure (road, power, water etc) so as to attract the much needed foreign direct investment (FDI) into the continent.
(2) There is the need for multilevel and multinational partnerships/collaborations in the fight against corruption and terrorism in Africa. The developed world should collaborate and not recolonize Africa in the struggle.
(3) There is also the need to design sustainable social security programmes for the chronic poor by African government and humanitarian agencies.

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