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Abstract

The article analyzes South Africa's role in the African Union's Agenda 2063. It examines South Africa's position as a leading regional power post-apartheid. The study contends that Pretoria has developed a strategy towards its region. The argument is supported by a descriptive analysis of the implementation of Auda-Nepad and South Africa's efforts to broaden the thematic scope of the AU. The results show that South Africa's strategy as a leading regional power in Africa has been achieved through Pretoria's role as a paymaster in both the AU and Auda-Nepad, alongside the development of its own Agenda 2063 projects.

Keywords: South Africa; Regional Power; African Union; Agenda 2063; Auda-Nepad.

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Introduction

As the successor to the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the African Union (AU) currently has 55 members. The AU's Constitutive Act delegates to the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) the function of economically integrating the African sub-regions and facilitating broad continental integration. The Act also gives the African Union Development Agency-NEPAD (AUDA-NEPAD), formerly known as the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), the goal of stimulating private sector cooperation and economic integration. However, the creation of the African Union and the establishment of AUDA-NEPAD were both strongly influenced by South Africa.

This article analyzes South Africa's role as leading regional power in Africa by conducting an analysis in the field of

regional powers and region building literature. In that sense, we argue that South Africa has developed a regional power strategy towards its region – i.e., Southern Africa and the African continent –, by engaging in two regional power leadership strategies: a cooperative leadership and a distributive/structural leadership. To further support that claim, the paper presents an empirical contribution on South Africa's role to develop the African Union and create the AUDA-NEPAD, expanding the AU's thematic scope through Agenda 2063. The latter initiative aims to incorporate the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) raised during the United Nations Summit on Sustainable Development in September 2015. Additionally, a preliminary assessment of South African initiatives under AUDA-NEPAD and the progress made toward achieving the goals of Agenda 2063 across the African continent will also be presented.

In addition to the descriptive analysis based on specialized literature, this article conducts a documentary analysis of the annual reports of the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO). These reports have been published since the AU's creation in 2002. The article also references documents and reports found on the websites of the African Union and AUDA-NEPAD.

Further study of the South African case is crucial for Political Science and International Relations, as it offers a distinctive viewpoint on the examination of the international agency of African nations, primarily in the study of the concept of regional powers. During the Apartheid regime, South Africa was considered a pariah state in the International System and by other African countries. However, the country's external agency helped reshape its regional and continental relations. This new international prominence became a vital tool in overcoming Apartheid's isolation.

This article is structured into six sections besides the introduction and conclusion. The first section presents a conceptualization of South Africa's strategy as a Regional Power, creating a debate with the regional power and the region building literature. The second section provides a summary of the post-apartheid South African government's foreign policy orientation. The third section discusses South Africa's role in reformulating the African Union (AU) and implementing NEPAD. The fourth section provides data on the process of expanding the AU's thematic scope, within the context of the Jacob Zuma administration. The fifth section presents the seven aspirations of the African Union's Agenda 2063, the twenty derived objectives, and the preliminary results achieved, with a comparative overview of the African continent's performance based on the African Union Commission (AUC) and the AUDA-NEPAD reports, published in 2020 and 2022. Finally, the sixth section provides details on South African projects under AUDA-NEPAD, as they represent progress towards the goals defined by Agenda 2063.

From Pariah to a Leading Regional Power? Conceptualizing South Africa's strategy towards the African Continent

Given that the core objective of this article is to analyze the role of a southern regional power in its region, it is appropriate to highlight some of the important contributions from the regional power literature. Doing so will enable the reader to have a more comprehensive understanding of the African Leading Regional Power concept, and contribute to the elaboration of a conceptual framework for South Africa's strategy to become an African leading regional power in the post-apartheid era.

It should be noted that there is no consensus in the literature on the concept of regional power, as well as no generally accepted method for the identification of such powers. Nolte highlights that classifying a state as a Regional Power is complex and is not solely based on power resources, whether "hard," "soft," or a combination of these elements (known as "smart power"), but it also depends on perceptions of global and regional power hierarchies. Furthermore, he also highlights the importance of defining the role of political elites in determining the country's position within these hierarchies (Nolte 2010).

Detlef Nolte and Daniel Flesmes also argue that the status of a Regional Power is a social category that depends on recognition and the power hierarchy established by other states. However, being part of this social category requires suitable material resources (Flesmes and Nolte 2010).

In other words, the concept of a Regional Power encompasses a wide range of variables, including power resources, global and regional perceptions, recognition by other states, and domestic dynamics. Over the past decades, there have been several contributions to the definition and identification of these variables (Osterud 1992; Schirm, 2005; Flesmes and Lemke 2010), but for the purposes of this article, we adopt the definitions and variables presented by Nolte, as he provides a set of attributes that align with the idea of an African Leading Regional Power.

Nolte (2010) argues that a regional power should: (i) maintain significant economic, political, and cultural connections with its region; (ii) exert a marked influence on the geopolitical definition and the political-ideological construction in its region; (iii) exercise this influence through regional governance structures; (iv) articulate a common regional identity or project; (v) contribute to collective goods in its region or play a significant role in providing such goods; (vi) define the regional security agenda; (vii) have its leadership status recognized or, at the very least, respected by other states inside and outside the region, especially by other Regional Powers; and (viii) participate in interregional and global forums and institutions, representing not only its own interests, but also regional interests. In summary, according to Nolte, Regional Powers are influential and powerful states in their regions, with a special responsibility in regional security and order maintenance (Nolte 2010).

Another key aspect of the discussion surrounding regional powers is analyzing their adopted international strategies. These strategies may vary depending on the availability of ideational or material power resources, and regional powers must also ensure that their global and regional strategies are aligned. However, simultaneously pursuing both regional and global leadership may result in tensions, as the distinct approaches required at each level can clash (Prys 2012). Acting at the regional level can, however, strengthen the global position of the regional power, as argued by Andrew Hurrell. In order to elevate its global status, a Regional Power may opt to boost its influence within the region. This can be effectively achieved by forming a coalition to support the region, promoting regional success, or representing the region and its interests in international forums (Hurrell 2010).

Destradi (2010) notes that understanding the strategies of regional powers and their influence on the regional order requires an actor-centered approach. Nolte's comprehensive approach for scrutinizing the behavior and strategies of regional powers conceptualizes them as "leading regional powers" (Destradi 2010). Furthermore, besides power resources, influence in the area, and recognition, predominant regional powers possess the capability to persuade both internal and external states and actors to acknowledge their leadership (Nolte 2010).

Carvalho and Gonçalves (2016) propose three types of leadership that a regional power can undertake: cooperative/consensual, normative and intellectual, and structural/distributive. Cooperative leadership involves the ability to create consensus and cooperate in regional institutions or crisis resolution. Normative and intellectual leadership entails the ability to project ideas and values that support the regional project. Finally, structural and distributive leadership involves acting as a "paymaster" by providing public goods such as regional stability, infrastructure, and economic cooperation costs.

That approach also explains the regional power's engagement and leading position within its region. The Regional Powers literature has so far privileged specific roles as signs of involvement, like paymastering or creating regional organizations (Flemes and Lemke 2010).

Developed by Mattli (1999), the concept of paymaster refers to the leading member state within a regional group that alleviates distributive tensions and promotes integration. It not only acts as a center for coordinating regional regulations and policies, but also bears the institutional, financial, political, and other expenses related to the establishment of the regional initiative. According to the author, having an undisputed leader among the group of countries that are seeking closer ties is a key supply condition for successful integration within a regional scheme.

However, as argued by Vigevani and Cepaluni (2011) typical southern regional powers, such as Brazil and South Africa, tend to underperform such roles, due to their own economic vulnerabilities and autonomy-preservation strategies.

In this article, our empirical data and document analysis indicate that South Africa's strategy towards the status of an African regional power was based mainly on cooperative leadership and

structural and distributive leadership, mainly from 1999 to 2008, during Mbeki's term. The former is evident through its leadership in reshaping the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and its role in the establishment and institutionalization of the African Union (AU). The latter focuses on the paymaster role played by South Africa, not only in creating physical structures for the new African regional organizations, but also in making significant investments to promote regional stability, mainly focusing in South-South Cooperation, peacekeeping operations and regional crisis management.

In South Africa's specific context, developing a domestic strategy to achieve regional leadership status was crucial. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the regional leadership strategy South Africa has developed, it is essential to address the domestic changes that have taken place since the establishment of the New South Africa in 1994. Those changes impacted South Africa's foreign policy orientations towards its region, and paved the way for it to become an African regional leader. This domestic factor goes beyond the typical material capabilities approach commonly found in the literature. It highlights the relationship between South Africa's foreign policy restructuring and its interactions with the African continent.

South African Foreign Policy Orientations in the Post-Apartheid Period (1994-2018)

Following the transition to democracy in the early 1990s, South Africa, led by Nelson Mandela between 1994 and 1998, significantly increased its external activity. By adopting a more transparent and active regional foreign policy, it emerged as a crucial diplomatic leader on the African continent.

However, its foreign policy encountered significant challenges in adapting to a democratic environment. This included the need to rebuild trust with neighboring states and to overcome the interventionist legacy of apartheid. These challenges could only be overcome through the development of foreign and defense policy initiatives that prioritized the promotion of regional cooperation and South Africa's engagement in regional and multilateral organizations.

As a result, the country became actively involved in major African initiatives such as the African Union, the successor to the Organization of African Unity, and the transition process from the Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference (SADCC) to the Southern African Development Community (SADC) between 1991 and 1992. Additionally, South Africa became closer to the non-aligned movement (NAM/G77) and engaged with human rights advocacy movements.

This section presents the main guidelines of South Africa's foreign policy towards its region during the three democratic governments in the post-apartheid era. The table below provides a summary of how each government oriented its foreign policy (Table 1).

Table 1. Foreign Policy Guidelines towards the Region in the Post-Apartheid Period (1994-2018)

Political Leadership	Foreign Policy Guidelines	Political Party
Nelson Mandela (1994-1999)	Promotion of Human Rights and Democracy; Non-violent resolution of inter-state conflicts	African National Congress (ANC)
Thabo Mbeki (1999-2008)	African Renaissance, Pan-Africanism, and greater African agency on the world stage	African National Congress (ANC)
Jacob Zuma (2009-2018)	The “African Agenda”, Economic Diplomacy and political concertation in intra- and extra-regional initiatives	African National Congress (ANC)

Source: authors' elaboration, based on Masters (2017) and Hamill (2018).

During Nelson Mandela's presidency, foreign relations played a vital role in the New South Africa project. Mandela's opposition to any racial differentiation among South African citizens was reflected in the metaphor of the “Rainbow Country.” The country's foreign policy was guided by the construction of a new national identity, focused on overcoming the past without seeking revenge or retaliation against white people by black people (Braga 2014).

The post-apartheid foreign policy was developed based on the following pillars described by Mandela in *Foreign Affairs*: a) centrality of human rights in international relations; b) worldwide promotion of democracy; c) appreciation of justice and respect for international law as a guide for international relations; d) pursuit of peace through internationally agreed and non-violent mechanisms; e) centrality of Africa; f) prioritization of actions on behalf of the interests of the African continent; g) regional and international cooperation as enablers of economic development (Mandela 1993).

One of the first initiatives of the Mandela administration was to remove South Africa from international isolation and approach old allies. Additionally, the country sought admission and/or readmission to international organizations and regional organizations such as the Commonwealth, the United Nations (UN), NAM/G77, the Organization of African Unity (OAU), and entry into the SADC (Otávio 2018).

Mandela's government faced a central challenge in consolidating a new Africanist foreign policy. On the one hand, the country sought to strengthen a regional policy based on the defense of human rights, democracy, and the integration of the continent into global value chains. On the other, it had to ensure a regional leadership position, in a period marked by several security crises on the continent, without this more assertive action reigniting fears of sub-imperialist policy (Brites and Padilha 2017).

The main alternative to this impasse was to legitimize its regional actions through the Southern African Development Community (SADC). In the face of security crises that erupted

in Southern Africa during this period, the country ensured that the measures adopted were made viable through this regional organization.

During Mandela's government, South Africa was involved in two crises in the African continent. The first was the crisis in Zaire (later the Democratic Republic of Congo). With the outbreak of the conflict and the involvement of other states such as Uganda and Rwanda, South Africa took a divergent stance from Angola, Zimbabwe, and Namibia, which sent military units to Congo in 1998. South Africa was against this intervention and only later, through the SADC, validated the military actions of neighboring countries. Pretoria's concern was that a generalization of the conflict could occur, leading to a larger conflict in the African continent (Rizzi and Schutz 2014).

The second crisis that deserves attention took place in Lesotho from September 1998 to May 1999. After an electoral crisis in the country, and by the request from Lesotho's Prime Minister to the SADC for an intervention, South Africa and Botswana were selected to act in the operation, which became known as Operation Boleas. However, there was a rush in the military actions of South African armed forces, which, in a disjointed way with the Botswana army, entered the territory prematurely and had a controversial role¹.

Thabo Mbeki's government (1999-2008) maintained the foreign policy principles established during Mandela's presidency (Geldenhuys 2008). However, Mbeki's strategy was different, with an international vision committed to the 'African Renaissance'. This new rhetorical approach marks a heterogeneous combination of a return to African roots, reinforcement of regional cooperation, and adherence to Western values (Nathan 2005).

Mbeki's foreign policy emphasized South Africa's role in the broader international context, prioritizing engagement with international organizations such as the United Nations and its specialized agencies, as well as other international movements (such as the G77, the African Union, the World Economic Forum, and G-8 meetings). During his mandate, South Africa played a central role in transforming the intergovernmental structure of the continent, namely the transition from the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to the African Union (AU) (Geldenhuys 2008).

The Mbeki government reinforced South-South Cooperation, focusing on Pan-Africanism to promote partnerships with southern states through multilateralism (Pere 2002). Moreover, South Africa's participation in peacekeeping operations in Africa increased significantly compared to the post-Mandela period (Schoeman 2007).

During his tenure, Zuma's administration sought to integrate South Africa into the global community by linking foreign policy to his government's development plan. This strategy aimed to support sustainable economic growth and internal development, with a focus on addressing the triple challenges of unemployment, poverty, and inequality through international mechanisms such as NEPAD, regional integration, and infrastructure projects like the North-South Corridor and Rail Corridor (Masters, 2017).

¹ Blake, R. Interview with the author. Niterói, October 18, 2020.

The regional dimension of domestic problems justified the emphasis given to multilateral actions and prioritizing relations with Southern Africa in South Africa's foreign policy.

Zuma's presidential diplomacy became even more engaged from 2010 onwards, with 25 official state visits and 49 diplomatic visits. He participated in business summits accompanied by large business delegations, and played a significant role in securing South Africa's inclusion in the BRIC group, comprising Brazil, Russia, India, and China, after traveling to the capitals of these countries seeking their support. He also hosted the IBSA Forum summit in 2011, which further cemented his role as a leader in the international community (Van Onselen 2012).

South Africa's role in reshaping the African Union (AU) and implementing NEPAD

In 2002, the African Union (AU) was established during a meeting in Durban, South Africa, with the support of South Africa and Libya. According to Jongur (2014), this new organization was more ambitious than its predecessor, the Organization of African Unity (OAU), and aimed at leading integration in Africa, sub-regionalism, peace and security, human rights, Africa's participation in the global economy, democratic governance, and the development of scientific and technological structures.

Mathews (2005) argues that the main objectives of the AU were to achieve greater unity and solidarity between African countries and people, defend the sovereignty and independence of its member states, promote political and socio-economic integration, encourage international cooperation, promote peace and stability, democratic principles, good governance, and human rights.

South Africa played a significant role in the early years of the AU, having chaired the presidency of the organization and assisted in the appointment of commissioners, the operationalization of AU bodies such as the Pan-African Parliament and the Peace and Security Council, and the creation of Technical Committees. Additionally, South Africa played a crucial role in implementing the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) within the AU.

The importance of South Africa's involvement in the establishment of the AU is highlighted by Jongur (2014), who noted that it was instrumental in defining the organization's objectives and creating conditions for increased cooperation among African countries (Department of International Relations and Cooperation 2003).

South Africa hosted the inauguration of the second session of the Pan-African Parliament in 2004 and established the AU's Peace and Security Council, which provided a unique African structure for conflict prevention, management, and resolution, as well as for peacebuilding and peacekeeping. South Africa was elected for a three-year term on this Council, and it also increased its financial support for the implementation of NEPAD projects proposed by African countries and other development partners (Department of International Relations and Cooperation

2005). President Mbeki played a crucial role in South Africa's diplomatic engagement in the AU's establishment and NEPAD's formulation.

According to Diallo (2006), NEPAD had a remarkable distinguishing feature, the idea of "enhanced partnership". Behind this seemingly innocuous expression lies a new definition of "cooperation" between donors and recipients, similar to the current South-South Cooperation standards. The suggestion was that African states should define the development objectives themselves, and agree with donors on a set of development outcomes to be financed through normal budget lines, with joint monitoring by both parties. This would eliminate complex conditions, reinforce African ownership, and facilitate the evaluation of development initiatives.

Institutionally, NEPAD also progressed since its launch. It gained a Secretariat (based in South Africa), a Steering Committee, an Implementation Committee, composed of 15 Heads of State, and five task groups (each headed by an African country) to identify and implement projects in the five areas: peace and security; economic governance; infrastructure; financial and banking standards; agriculture and access to markets (Döpcke 2002).

The pivotal role played by Thabo Mbeki in the establishment of NEPAD and the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) cannot be overstated. Mbeki was instrumental in designing the APRM, which aimed to improve governance at the local, national, and continental levels without relying on punitive measures (African Peer Review Mechanism 2023).

According to Landsberg (2019), the APRM adopted several principles to promote African autonomy and self-determination, such as strengthening regional and continental integration, attracting foreign investment, and fostering a new partnership between Africans and the international community.

Furthermore, Mbeki's political and diplomatic efforts were instrumental in making South Africa the host of both NEPAD and APRM secretariats. As emphasized by Landsberg (2019), Mbeki was committed to investing in whatever was necessary to ensure the functioning of these institutions. In summary, Mbeki's contributions to the creation and development of NEPAD and APRM played a critical role in promoting good governance, regional integration, and African self-determination.

The African Union on Jacob Zuma's African Agenda

Under Jacob Zuma's presidency, South Africa prioritized active participation in the activities of the African Union as a key strategy to strengthen the African Agenda. In that sense, throughout this section, we provide a brief description of the main activities played by South Africa's diplomacy in the AU from 2010 to 2018.

In the early period from 2010 to 2011, South Africa participated in harmonizing the RECs, transforming the AU Commission, developing the "Shared Values of the AU" document, and building various structures of the Union. Additionally, South Africa supported cooperation

with key international partners during the Africa-EU Summit, the Africa-France Summit, the Africa-Arab Summit, and the Africa-South America ministerial meeting, while also assuming the chair of the NEPAD infrastructure committee (Department of International Relations and Cooperation 2011).

South Africa was elected in 2011 to the African Union Peace and Security Council (AUPSC), and played an important role in promoting peace on the continent (Department of International Relations and Cooperation 2012). In 2012, it hosted a high-level summit meeting where the UN Security Council Resolution 2033 was unanimously adopted, and Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma was elected as the first woman and first candidate from the Southern African region for the key position of Chairperson of the African Union Commission (AUC). South Africa also hosted the Global African Diaspora Summit in 2012, achieving the main objective of creating a sustainable partnership between African states and the African diaspora movement through a Joint Action Plan (Department of International Relations and Cooperation 2012).

In 2013, South Africa made an important contribution to the development of an “African Common Position on the Post-2015 Development Agenda”, and to the decision on the development of the AU Agenda 2063 as a plan that will chart Africa’s development trajectory for 50 years. It was also elected to the AUPSC for the 2014-2016 period (Department of International Relations and Cooperation 2014). During its tenure on the AUPSC, South Africa used its council membership to highlight poverty and unemployment as drivers of violence and terrorism. As a result, there was major engagement among affected members of the AU on issues of terrorism on the continent (Department of International Relations and Cooperation 2017).

In June 2015, South Africa hosted the 25th African Union Summit under the theme “Year of Women’s Empowerment and Development towards Africa’s Agenda 2063.” As a result, gender resolutions and several commitments were approved. The main resolutions were the approval of the “Ten-Year Implementation Plan for Agenda 2063” document and its financing mechanism. Both aimed at building a collective vision for Africa’s deepened integration and development (Department of International Relations and Cooperation 2016).

During the 28th Ordinary Session of the AU Executive Council in 2016, South Africa was reelected for another two-year term as a member of the AUPSC, continuing its initiatives in peace-building, post-conflict reconstruction, as well as humanitarian and disaster management actions of the African Union (Department of International Relations and Cooperation 2016).

In 2017, the African Union granted the Pan-African Women’s Organization (PAWO) special agency status, marking a historic decision. To acknowledge this achievement and revitalize PAWO as a platform for building a progressive women’s movement in Africa, South Africa organized an intergenerational dialogue titled “Building a Strong Women’s Movement in Africa” during the 55th anniversary of Pan-African Women’s Day on July 31, 2017, emphasizing its commitment to promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment within the continent (Department of International Relations and Cooperation 2018).

At the 31st Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union in Nouakchott, Mauritania, in June 2018, the decision was made to transform the “NEPAD Planning and Coordination Agency” into AUDA-NEPAD (Department of International Relations and Cooperation 2018).

The mandate of AUDA-NEPAD involves several key responsibilities, such as coordinating, facilitating, and promoting cooperation with Africa’s strategic partners and stakeholders to effectively mobilize resources. They also provide technical and implementation support to regional economic communities and member states in executing priority projects and programs, while serving as the technical interface for all of Africa’s development stakeholders and partners (African Union Development Agency 2021a).

The transition from NEPAD to the African Union Development Agency was a major diplomatic milestone for South Africa, as it bolstered the AU’s cooperation framework and enhanced its capabilities (Costa 2022).

The African Union’s Agenda 2063 and the preliminary results of its aspirations and goals

The OAU’s transformation into the AU resulted in a shift from its traditional objectives of fighting against colonialism and racial segregation regimes to multisectoral agendas with new aspirations, objectives, and priority areas.

In January 2015, the AU adopted Agenda 2063, during the XXIV AU Summit, building on the commitments made in the Solemn Declaration of the 50th Anniversary of the OAU/AU in May 2013. Agenda 2063 outlines Africa’s desired trajectory for the next fifty years and includes seven aspirations:

1. A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development
2. An integrated continent, politically united based on the ideals of Pan-Africanism and the vision of Africa’s Renaissance
3. An Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice, and the rule of law
4. A peaceful and secure Africa
5. An Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, values, and ethics
6. An Africa, whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women, and youth, and caring for children
7. Africa as a strong, united, resilient, and influential global player and partner (African Union 2015).

Agenda 2063 is a strategic plan for inclusive and sustainable development aimed at realizing the pan-African vision of an integrated, prosperous, and peaceful continent led by its citizens, representing a dynamic force in the international arena (Assis et al. 2022).

The seven aspirations mentioned are broken down into twenty goals, each with prioritized areas of action closely linked to the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

These goals include i) Improving the quality of life and well-being of citizens by generating employment and income, providing social security, basic services, affordable housing, and overcoming poverty; ii) Providing quality education based on science, technology, and innovation; iii) Improving health and nutrition; iv) Achieving economic transformation through diversification, industrialization, and value addition; v) Focusing on modern agriculture and productivity; vi) Developing a blue economy, emphasizing marine resources, transportation, and port operations; vii) Developing a resilient and environmentally sustainable economy through resource management, biodiversity conservation, water security, and climate resilience; viii) Fostering African unity through the establishment of a federation or confederation. ix) Establishing fully functioning continental monetary and financial institutions; x) Developing state-of-the-art infrastructure, with a focus on communication and connectivity; xi) Upholding democratic values and practices, universal principles of human rights, justice, and the rule of law; xii) Empowering capable institutions and transformative leadership, prioritizing local governance and participatory development. xiii) Preserving peace, security, and stability; xiv) Establishing a stable and peaceful Africa with institutionalized peace and security mechanisms; xv) Ensuring the full functioning of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA); xvi) Revitalizing African culture; xvii) Promoting gender equality by empowering women and combating violence; xviii) Engaging and empowering youth while protecting children's rights; xix) Elevating Africa as a significant partner in global issues; xx) Holding Africa responsible for financing its development, focusing on African capital markets, fiscal structures, and development assistance (African Union, 2015).

In that sense, Agenda 2063 is a comprehensive roadmap for sustainable and inclusive development in Africa, aligning with global efforts to achieve sustainable development goals. To track progress towards the goals and aspirations of Agenda 2063, the African Union Commission (AUC) and AUDA-NEPAD were assigned to coordinate and prepare biennial performance reports at a continental level.

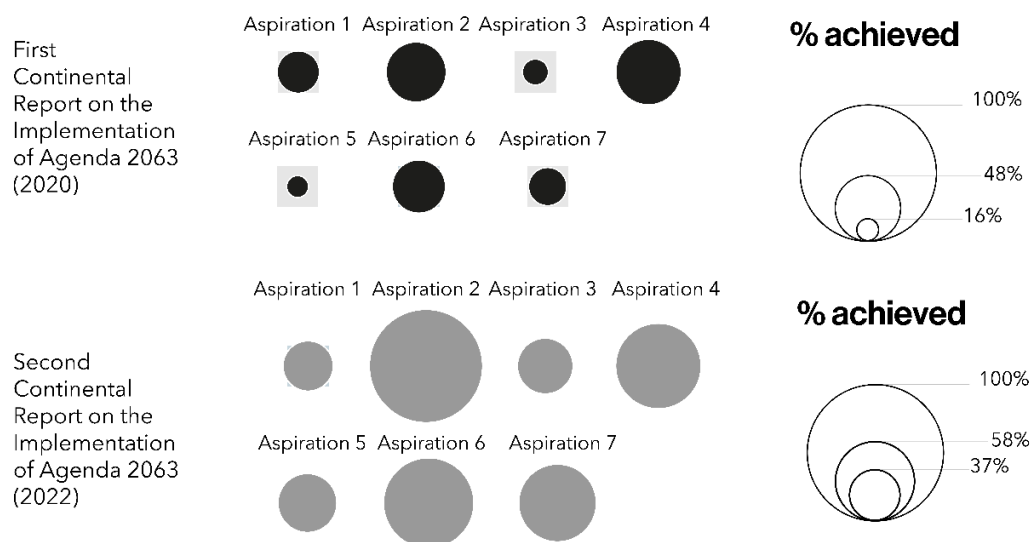
The first Continental Report on the Implementation of Agenda 2063 was launched during the 33rd AU Summit in February 2020, presenting data related to the 2019 implementation targets. The 2nd Continental Report on the Implementation of Agenda 2063 was published in 2022, showing data against the 2021 targets. While the reports are a relevant initiative to monitor the institutionalization of Agenda 2063, they have limitations, as they only cover 32 African countries in the first report, and 38 in the second.

Regarding the continental goals until 2022, the first report shows an aggregate score of 33% among the seven aspirations, with the highest being peace and security, with 48% progress, and the lowest being cultural identity, with 16%. The second report shows a general performance of 51% against the 2021 targets of Agenda 2063. An overview of the continent's performance by all Agenda 2063 aspirations is presented below:

Image 1. Continent Performance by All Aspirations

CONTINENT PERFORMANCE BY ALL ASPIRATIONS

% of the Agenda 2063 aspirations achieved by the African continent in 2020 & 2022



Source: authors' elaboration, based on African Union Commission (2020; 2022).

In regards to the aspirations, the first report demonstrates that none of the seven have achieved implementation greater than the expected goal. While only three have results exceeding 32.5% of the target (An integrated, politically united continent based on Pan-Africanism and the African Renaissance ideals with 44%, A peaceful and secure Africa with 48%, and An Africa whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of its people, especially women, and youth, and caring for its children with 39%), the other four aspirations presented lower performance (African Union Commission 2020).

On the contrary, the second report shows some improvements. The four previous worst scores now exceed 37% of the target (A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development, from 29% to 37%; An Africa with good governance, democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law, from 16% to 42%; Africa with strong cultural identity, common heritage, value, and beliefs, from 12% to 45% and Africa as a strong and influential global partner, from 26% to 58%). Meanwhile, the three best previous scores, now all exceed 63% (A peaceful and secure Africa, from 48% to 63%; An Africa whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of its people, especially women, and youth, and caring for its children from 38% to 67%) (African Union Commission 2022).

The following image summarizes the results achieved so far, divided among the twenty objectives derived from the seven Agenda 2063 aspirations:

Image 2. Continent Performance on Goals

CONTINENT PERFORMANCE ON GOALS

African Continent score by Agenda 2063 goals against 2019 and 2021 targets

	1st Report (2020)	2nd Report (2022)		1st Report (2020)	2nd Report (2022)
A High Standard of Living, Quality of Life and Well Being for All	59%	31%	Democratic values, practices, universal principles of human rights, justice and the rule of law entrenched	33%	42%
Well Educated Citizens and Skills revolution underpinned by Science, Technology and Innovation	26%	44%	Capable institutions and transformed leadership in place at all levels	4%	32%
Healthy and Well-Nourished Citizens	44%	77%	Peace, Security and Stability are preserved	28%	72%
Transformed Economies and Job Creation	18%	17%	A Stable and Peaceful Africa	40%	57%
Modern Agriculture for increased productivity	8%	59%	A Fully Functional and Operational African Peace and Security Architecture	73%	60%
Blue/ ocean economy for accelerated econ. growth	21%	39%	African Cultural Renaissance is pre-eminent	16%	45%
Environmentally sustainable climate resilient economies and communities	29%	64%	Full Gender Equality in All Spheres of Life	39%	81%
United Africa (Federal or Confederate)	11%	98%	Engaged and Empowered Youth and Children	40%	33%
Key Continental Financial and Monetary Institutions established and functional	93%	No data	Africa as a major partner in global affairs and peaceful co-existence	50%	64%
World Class Infrastructure criss-crosses Africa	30%	70%	Africa takes full responsibility for financing her development	20%	55%

Source: authors' elaboration, based on African Union Commission (2020; 2022).

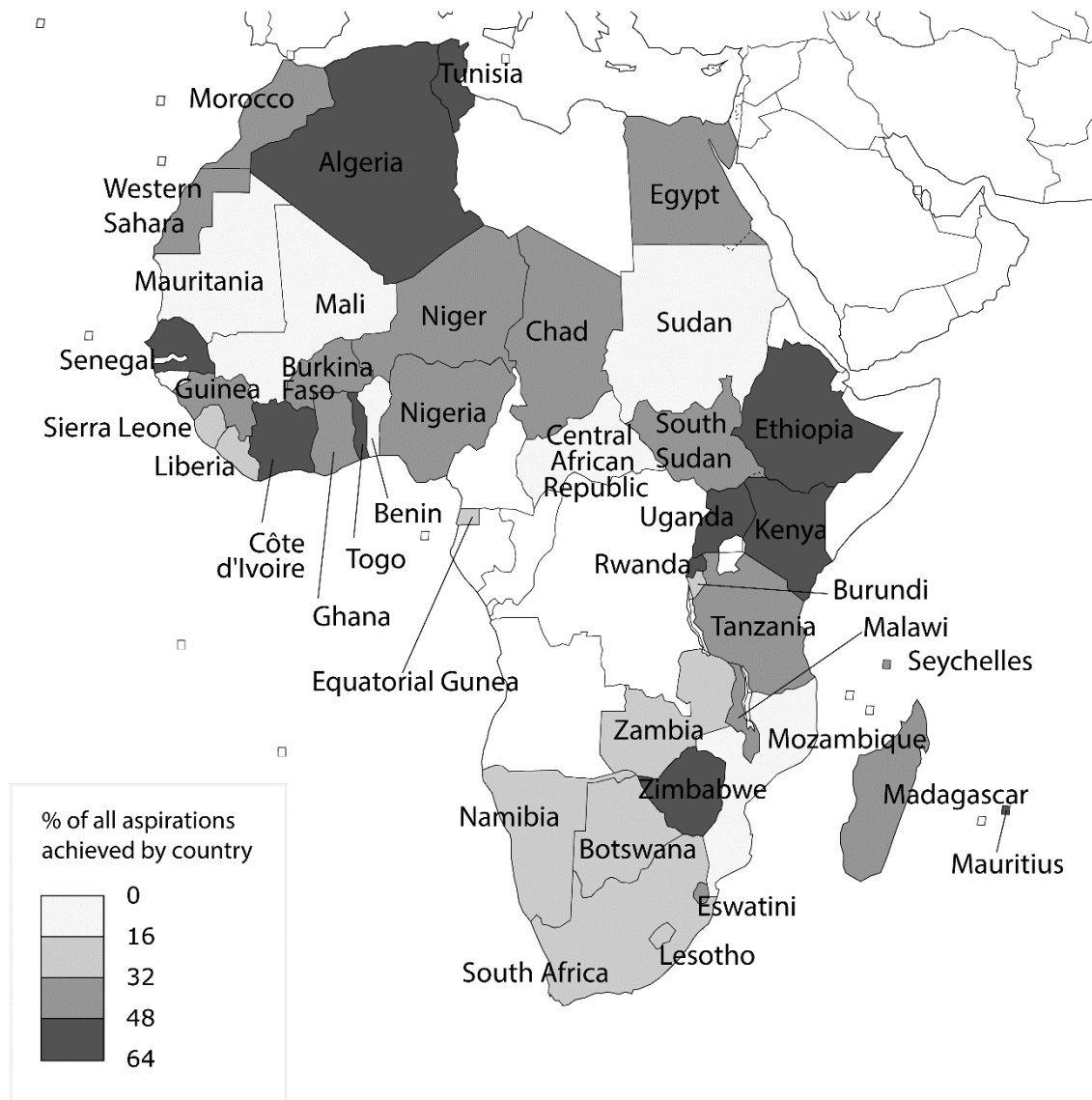
According to Oliveira and Otavio (2022), one of the main innovative elements of the AU's Agenda 2063 concerns the defined goals for achieving the Agenda's aspirations. According to the authors, the goals are established in percentage terms, and their achievement is always measured concerning the data reported and endorsed by the countries in the reference year of the ten-year plan. Thus, absolute goals that must be equally achieved by all continental actors are not established, but rather goals that reflect the expectation that all actors will operate proportional changes relative to the point where they were when Agenda 2063 was implemented. Therefore, the expectation is that change on the continent should be generated from the transformation of each African country, demonstrating recognition and respect for the existence of specificities and differences among continental actors (Oliveira and Otavio 2022).

Therefore Agenda 2063's aspirations are all significant for the development of a greater international role and symbolic power of African countries (Tella, 2018). In that sense, it is worth observing each African country's performance towards the African Agenda 2063 aspirations against 2021 targets:

Image 3. Agenda 2063 Implementation

AGENDA 2063 IMPLEMENTATION

% of all Agenda 2063 aspirations achieved by African countries against 2021 target



Source: authors' elaboration, based on African Union Commission (2022)

The African Union Commission (2022) report identifies several areas where progress has been made in Africa. For instance, there has been an increase in the percentage of the population with access to electricity and the Internet. Additionally, there has been an increase in the proportion of women with access to sexual and reproductive health services. The report also indicates that more eligible people with HIV now have access to anti-retroviral treatment. There has also been an increase in the level of African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) domestication, and there is a greater commitment to the Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM) among AU

member states. The proportion of women holding seats in national parliaments, regional, and local bodies has increased. Finally, there has been a decrease in the proportion of women and girls subjected to sexual and physical violence, as well as genital mutilation.

Despite these advances, progress has been slow in several areas. For example, real GDP per capita and annual GDP growth rates have been slow to increase. Unemployment rates have not decreased significantly, and neo-natal mortality rates and malaria incidence remain high. There has also been little reduction in corruption levels, and tourism and manufacturing are not contributing significantly to GDP. The percentage of agricultural land placed under sustainable land management practices has not increased significantly. Implementation of the Trans-African Highway Missing links and the African High-Speed Rail Network has also been slow (African Union Commission 2022).

A deeper analysis of individual countries' performances is crucial to demonstrate the progress required to meet the targets established in the AU's Agenda 2063. However, it is important to note that this research will solely concentrate on South Africa's performance. The following section will present the country's projects and outcomes, with a focus on initiatives developed within the framework of AUDA-NEPAD.

South African projects within the AUDA-NEPAD framework

Auda-Nepad reports that various organizations in South Africa have received financial aid, including TCSA (Teen Challenge South Africa), SAMRC (South African Medical Research Council), SAWID (South African Women in Dialogue), WDF (Women Development Foundation), and LeadAfrika (Afrika Leadership Development Institute) (Auda-Nepad 2022b).

Between 2007 and 2022, South Africa has been involved in roughly 14 projects (see Table 2), either directly or indirectly. These initiatives contribute to the implementation of the Agenda 2063 aspirations and objectives, not only in South Africa, but also in other African countries.

Table 2. South African Projects under NEPAD - AU - 2007 to 2022

Thematic Area	Projects
Food and Nutrition Security	Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF)
	Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC)
Health and Medications	African Medicines Regulatory Harmonisation (AMRH)
	African Union Smart Safety Surveillance (AU-3S) Programme
Agriculture	Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP)
	Rural Futures: Skill Audit on youth employment creation in South Africa
Education	African Institute for Mathematical Science (AIMS) – Next Einstein Initiative

Continue

Continuation

	<p>I. Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA) – with 11 infrastructure projects derived from it:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. TAH programme ii. Single African Sky phase iii. ICT Enabling Environment iv. ICT Terrestrial for Connectivity v. Internet Exchange Point (IXP) programme vi. North-South Power Transmission Corridor vii. Central African Interconnection viii. North-South Multimodal Corridor ix. Southern Africa Hub Port and Rail x. Lesotho HWP Phase II – water transfer <p>II. Presidential Infrastructure Champion Initiative (PICI) – With two derived projects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) North-South Corridor Road/Rail Project b) Unblocking Political Bottlenecks for ICT Broadband and optic fiber Projects Linking Neighbouring States
Infrastructure	
Technology & Innovation	African Science Technology and Innovation Indicators (ASTII)
Capacity Development	Common African Position (CAP) - Strengthening the negotiating capacities of African countries in the Post-2015 Development Agenda through Africa's development priorities, reflected in the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
Climate Changes	Climate Change Fund African Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative (AFR100)
Aquaculture	Policy Framework & Reform Strategy for Fisheries & Aquaculture in Africa

Source: authors' elaboration, based on African Union Development Agency (2023).

In this section, we discuss two critical areas of focus for South Africa: Food Security and Nutrition, as well as Healthcare and Pharmaceuticals.

The latest report from AUDA-NEPAD highlights South Africa's significant contributions to two projects aimed at improving food security and nutrition: the "Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF)" and "Programme for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC)" initiatives.

These projects focus on raising awareness among government officials about the HGSF model, which advocates for locally sourced school meals through a continent-wide sharing of experiences and mapping exercise. The report also documents best practices for integrating orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) into the HGSF programs in South Africa. Moreover, the project estimated the cost of hunger in South Africa to be USD 985 million, which can inform the development of nutrition-oriented policy frameworks and programs aimed at eradicating child undernutrition (African Union Development Agency 2023).

South Africa has made significant contributions to several initiatives in the field of health and medicine. The African Medicines Regulatory Harmonisation (AMRH) project was launched

in 2016 and endorsed by African Heads of State and Government at the AU Summit in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

South Africa was among the first countries to contribute to institutions known as “RCORES”. These institutions have specific academic and technical expertise in regulatory science and training capabilities to produce a regulatory workforce in Africa, through the collaboration of the Potchefstroom campus of North-West University (African Union Development Agency 2023).

In May 2022, South Africa launched the Center of Excellence in Science, Technology, and Innovation (CoE-STI) in partnership with the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR)² and Stellenbosch University, both South African institutions.

CoE-STI is one of the five centers of excellence established by the African Union (AU) to leverage science-supported knowledge and innovations to support the accelerated implementation of Agenda 2063. The other centers of excellence focus on rural resources and food systems, climate resilience, human capital, institutional development, and supply chain and logistics (African Union Development Agency 2021b).

The “African Union Development Agency Centre of Excellence in Science, Technology, and Innovation” (Auda-Nepad CoE-STI) aims to leverage the continent’s research and science capacities and connect this to policy and implementation efforts to respond to continental development priorities. It has identified over 40 national innovations from long-term programs at Stellenbosch University and CSIR, which cover a wide range of solutions in areas such as health, renewable energy, agriculture, water, and sanitation to support countries in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic (Akinbo 2022).

The Auda-Nepad CoE-STI also provides a continental platform for support and resource mobilization for scaling up, dissemination, and localization of proven innovations from research organizations and partners. The center connects Africa-oriented knowledge and research centers with other knowledge and research ecosystems across the continent. Additionally, it acts as a platform for innovators to access alternative options on how to reach their customers when launching new solutions (African Union Development Agency 2021b).

Conclusion

Twenty-two years have passed since the establishment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and nine years since the update and expansion of the goals with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In Africa, we have witnessed a unique example of multilateral mobilization towards a common agenda for member countries of the African Union. The Agenda 2063 not only aligns with the general objectives defined by the SDGs to reduce poverty,

² CSIR is an entity of the South African Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation, and is one of the leading scientific and technological research, development and implementation organizations in Africa. Constituted by an Act of Parliament in 1945 as a scientific council, CSIR conducts targeted and multidisciplinary research and technological innovation, as well as industrial and scientific development to improve the quality of life for all South Africans (Council for Scientific and Industrial Research 2022).

protect the environment and climate, and ensure that people everywhere can enjoy peace and prosperity, but it is also part of a process that encompasses two movements: Pan-Africanism and the African Renaissance.

According to Oliveira and Otavio (2022), Agenda 2063 emphasizes a strategy of mutual responsibility, particularly the intensification of regional integration, in the pursuit of African solutions to the continent's challenges. While Pan-Africanism emphasizes contestation as a means of acting in the international arena, the African Renaissance emphasizes the adoption of an agenda that highlights mutual responsibility.

Furthermore, as argued by Tella (2018), engagement with Agenda 2063 is an important asset for reinforcing the relevance of African countries in their regional and multilateral engagement.

This study also revealed how post-apartheid governments in South Africa have not only effectively engaged with the agendas of Pan-Africanism, but also played a critical role as a leading regional power in Africa by establishing new African institutions, such as the African Union, and extending the thematic scope that contributed to the unification of Agenda 2063.

South Africa's engagement with Auda-Nepad projects and initiatives demonstrates its commitment to the African Continent and reinforces its leading regime-building approach, mainly within the African Union and Agenda 2063. This commitment is twofold, aiming to achieve international prominence and reinforce the success of an initiative in which South Africa played a significant role in its conception. Moreover, this engagement is part of a broader strategic plan that emphasizes the strengthening of the AU institutional structures. Through its assertive posture in defending these organizations, South Africa aims to enhance their effectiveness and ensure their continued relevance in the continent.

Overall, it is apparent that Pretoria developed a successful strategy to pursue the role of a leading regional power in Africa by fulfilling the three types of leadership presented by Carvalho and Gonçalves (2016).

Cooperative/consensual leadership was achieved through consensus building, collaborating at the institutional level of the African Union, especially during South Africa's first tenure as Chair of the AU, and through its investments to promote regional stability.

One could argue that South Africa also aimed for intellectual leadership in Africa through its African Renaissance rhetoric and the Ubuntu Diplomacy. The latter was namely developed at the "White Paper on South African Foreign Policy" during Jacob Zuma's term (2009-2018). According to Emelianenko (2022), the document endorsed the promotion of a multipolar, just and equitable global order and emphasized the pursuit of development and prosperity in Africa as one of its central themes. South Africa stood out as the first African nation to base its foreign policy on a cornerstone of African identity: Ubuntu. This infusion of Ubuntu gave the foreign policy document an African character and provided a partial normative and intellectual leadership.

Finally, concerning structural and distributive leadership, South Africa partially functioned as the "paymaster" in the African continent. By fostering the Ubuntu Diplomacy, the African Renaissance and engaging closely with the institutionalization process of both the African Union

and the AUDA-NEPAD, South Africa tied itself to the new African regional institutions. For example, Pretoria built the AU Pan-African Parliament and hosted the Auda-Nepad headquarters in Midrand, South Africa with its own resources. Additionally, South Africa provided other public services, including infrastructure projects and economic cooperation costs, through its African Renaissance and International Co-operation Fund (ARF)³.

Nonetheless, during Mbeki's government, South Africa tied itself in a greater sense to its paymaster role in Africa. The period between 1999 to 2008, was the peak of South Africa investments in international cooperation, while also bearing the new regional and continental African organizations infrastructures and engaging in most of the UN- and AU- led peacekeeping operations and region crisis management on the continent. From Zuma's government onwards, even though South Africa kept close ties to its leading regional power – mainly the normative and intellectual leadership, with the Ubuntu Diplomacy – it lost most of its regional paymaster grip due to the political and economic crisis that led to Jacob Zuma's downfall. It kept more attached to its closer region organizations in Southern Africa, such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Southern African Customs Union (SACU).

The crisis faced by the African National Congress also slowed the pace of Pretoria's progress towards the implementation of Agenda 2063, as the data collected highlighted.

To address this issue and accelerate the implementation of Agenda 2063 in South Africa, the African Union Commission and Auda-Nepad have recommended further support in specific areas. These include reducing youth unemployment rates, reducing the prevalence of undernourishment and underweight among under-five children, reducing neonatal and under-five mortality rates, and boosting manufacturing and tourism. By focusing on these areas, South Africa can make progress toward achieving the aspirations and goals of Agenda 2063.

On the positive side, South Africa has made good progress towards increasing internet access, reducing the proportion of the urban population living in slums, increasing the overall number of women with access to sexual and reproductive health services, increasing access to anti-retroviral treatment, and increasing the amount of terrestrial and inland water areas preserved.

To ensure that all countries in Africa can achieve the aspirations and goals of Agenda 2063, the African Union Commission and Auda-Nepad must offer wider assistance to those nations that may be struggling to report due to limited resources or accountability.

With its recent economic recovery and based on its past experience, Pretoria also holds a major opportunity to provide support, technical assistance, capacity building, and acting as a hub for investments and funding – as it did during Mbeki's term – to help these countries make progress toward achieving the Agenda 2063 goals. It is essential that all African countries are given equal opportunities to succeed and that no one is left behind in this critical effort.

³ The ARF was one of the first initiatives to reinforce the African Renaissance discourse. With the establishment of Act No 51 of 2000, which created The African Renaissance and International Co-operation Fund, South Africa aimed to strengthen international cooperation with and on the African continent, as well as to reinforce the rhetoric of the Republic of South Africa's commitment to Africa (South African Government 2021).

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