

Repositioning African Union Agenda 2063: An Exploration of the Nexus between People Centered Development and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (With Specific Reference to AU Aspiration 6)

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Abstract

Agenda 2063 of the African union (AU) – the Africa we want” has been implemented for over five years now, however, there is a concern that if implementation is not done ‘intentionally’, by 2063, it would not have achieved the desired impact. Therefore, this paper attempts to present a clear approach as well as strategies that could contribute to the successful implementation of “Aspiration 6” (A6) in particular, one of the seven identified AU aspirations. This discourse is engaged in from the theoretical approach of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) which focuses on positive outcomes. Firstly, the paper explores Aspiration 6 on people centered development. With majority of Africa’s population made up of women, youth and children, this paper argues that these identified segments of the population should be put at the center of all developmental pursuits. The analysis undertaken, examined identified United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) specifically 4 & 17, as enablers for the realization of A6. Secondly, this paper identifies points of convergence between these developmental goals and pre-existing indigenous knowledge systems (IKS). In doing so, it is posited that, from an African perspective, IKS presents an opportunity for the effective realization of the “Africa we want”. Lastly, strategies to deliberately support IKS through re-orienting research capacity and capabilities are presented. The paper concludes by making key recommendations.

Key Words: People-centered development, Indigenous knowledge systems (IKS), Africa Union(AU) Agenda 2063, AU Aspiration 6 (A6), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)



Introduction and Background

African Union (AU) Agenda 2063 provides a strategic framework for the advancement of key aspirations that usher in the Africa that Africans have desired for many years. This 2063 strategic framework comes 50 years after the formation of the former pan-African organization, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) later renamed Africa Union (AU). AU Agenda 2063 is rooted in Pan Africanism and African Renaissance. It provides a “robust framework for addressing past injustices and the realization of the 21st Century as the African Century” (AU, 2015). To this end, seven key aspirations were identified and developed as levers for the attainment of the “Africa we want”. These are:

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

As lofty as these aspirations may be, if they are not meaningful to the lives of millions of Africans across the continent, then its intentions will have failed. This paper recognizes that and explores key opportunities for the implementation of AU Agenda 2063, especially Aspiration 6 (A6) which envisions an Africa, whose development is people driven, relying on the potentials of African people, especially its women and youth, and caring for children. An attempt is made to examine the implications of A6 within a broader United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) framework to demonstrate alignment or lack thereof. Furthermore, an identified opportunity in the form of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) is introduced as a vehicle for broad participation and improved A6 implementation across the continent. According to Odora-Hoppers (2005) IKS refers to “a total of knowledge and practices whether explicit or implicit, used in the management of socio-economic, ecological and spiritual facet of life stored in the collective memory and communicated orally among the members of the community and to generations (through songs, stories, myths etc.)”. Additionally, the role of research and requisite capacity and capabilities are explored. Thus, the key questions posed in this paper are:

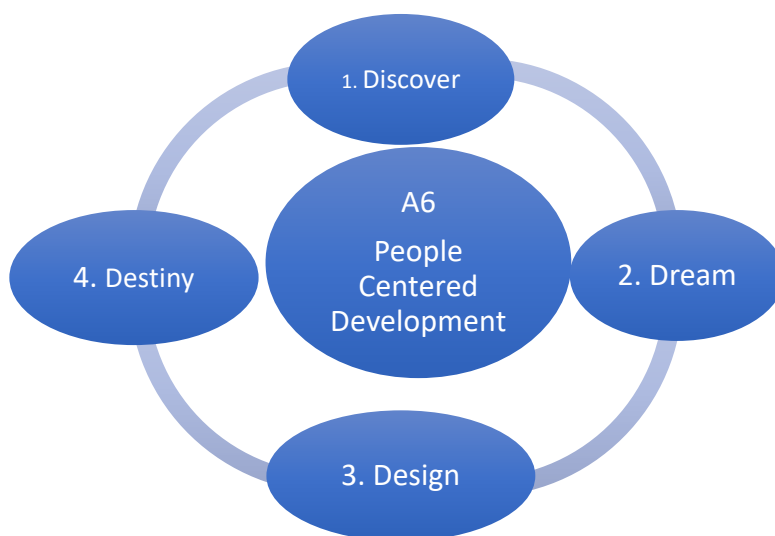


- What does this aspiration “Africa we want” mean (specifically Aspiration 6) within the context of selected SDG goals 4 & 17?
- Does Indigenous Knowledge System present an opportunity for people driven development and the attainment of A6?
- How can people driven development be hinged on solid research capacity and capability in pursuit of the attainment of Aspiration 6?

Theoretical Underpinning

This paper relies on Appreciative Inquiry (AI) as the theoretical base for exploring and attaining a desired strategic vision. AI basically has to do with ‘emphasizing or appreciating that which works in an environment, leveraging that positive outcome in an integrated manner as a vehicle for vision attainment’. Thus, AI as a theoretical framework provides an appropriate fit for the realisation of the AU aspirations especially Aspiration 6 on people centered development. As conceptualized in this paper, a model of AI is depicted in the diagram below.

Figure 1 – Appreciative Inquiry for a people centered development



The above framing is critical as we engage with our current realities to identify what works and needs to be amplified and maximised for the Africa we want. According to this model, there are four key dimensions of Appreciative Inquiry namely;

- Discovery – identifying the best of what is.
- Dream - envisioning what could be
- Design - exploring what would be ideal



- Destiny - determining how success can be sustained.

AI is a 'strength based' approach that up-scales positive elements in the quest to redesign a system, in other to bring about change and transformation. AI as a powerful and positive vehicle mobilizes and inspires people to revolutionise organizations, cities, nations and possibly continents in which people live and work.

Through collaborative AI, people discover their own, and the community's values and strengths, and in the process, unleash the energy and imagination necessary to innovate and translate the strategic vision of the future into reality. David Cooperrider (1986) is the main proponent of AI, which he developed in 1985. He argues that AI taps into people's hopes and dreams for the future and invites them to engage in building the kind of community they envision.

An Exploration of the Interface Between Appreciative Inquiry (AI) and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS)

Within the context of AI, the *discovery* element allows for an understanding of the African context and enables the teasing out of what 'gems' can be leveraged for the future, in this instance, for the "Africa we want". Thus, we relook the continent critically and thoroughly with fresh lenses to identify what those key elements could be. To this end, IKS is identified as a positive core tool and a lever for achieving the "Africa we want". The next element following the discovery of the 'gems' is the *dream*. This dream allows us to visualise the attainment of the aspirations contained in the AU Agenda 2063. In pursuit of the African dream, a key pillar is to explore what the Africa we want, will look like, if anchored by IKS. It must be made clear, that is not necessarily bringing back all Indigenous Knowledge (IK), but appreciating and adapting those that can add value in various sectors. For instance, the entertainment & music sector in the continent seems to have discovered and based her growth potential on this. That phenomenal growth in the sector has largely been anchored on the use of indigenous sounds and languages. Thus, 'decolonizing' the African entertainment industry by embracing IKS, has gained traction in the last two decades. African Music and African genres are at the top of their game, with other well-known international artists from the rest of the world, literally seeking collaboration with African artists, in other to take advantage of the authenticity and the appeal that is inherent in African music.

This trend has ensured consistent growth of the industry, thus Carm's (2018) assertion that re-centering IKS and decolonization holds promise for sustainability of various sectors. This massive growth in the entertainment and music industry has positive economic spinoffs and as such, that industry is now worth billions in US dollars, creates numerous employment opportunities and has potential to grow even more, thereby becoming a key



revenue generator. According to a Price WaterHouse Coopers' (PWC) 2019 report, Nigeria for instance, will be the world's fastest growing entertainment and music market with the industry revenues expected to increase from \$4.46 billion in 2018 to \$10 billion by the end of 2023. In the dream phase, we imagine an Africa, where her languages, truths, practices, arts, medicines, culture, movies, books etc. anchored by truly African and indigenous systems, go way beyond entertainment and music into various sectors, thus setting African products apart as authentic and unique. Again, this authenticity is hinged on IKS. Mohamed Bhai (2013) notes that "there is a rich body of indigenous knowledge embodied in Africa's cultural and ecological diversities and that African peoples have drawn on this for hundreds of years to solve specific developmental and environmental problems".

With clarity of the opportunity of the possibility of the use of IKS as a positive vehicle that anchors many development activities in various sectors, the third element is to **design** that which could be. In this regard, this paper, suggests that, what could be, and its design should consider the integrated nature of the SDGs and AU aspirations. Specifically, in the design of the road map for Aspiration 6, it is important to design and appropriately locate the building blocks that would support the "Africa we want" vision. In this regard, two SDGs, namely 4 (*inclusive and quality education*) and SDG 17 (*on partnerships*) would be important elements at the design stage for Aspiration 6 on people centered development. It is important to note that in the deepening of the implementation of the SDGs 4 and 17, the IKS approach remains key and should be pursued. For instance, with SDG 4 on inclusive and quality education, the decolonization and Africanisation of education is critical, while for the SDG 17 on strengthening partnerships, the long established African collaborative values (such as *Ubuntu philosophy – I am because we are*) of engagements, needs to be deployed. The last element of AI is delivering on **destiny** and this could be achieved through sustained efforts of a destiny that incorporates IKS and actualizes the people centered nature of Aspirations 6. A destiny where majority of Africans (particularly, women, youth and children) have the appropriate capabilities enabled by a system that engenders productive work, where problems are solved by employing appropriate and relevant African solutions for African challenges. This will enable the realization of our destiny but also ensure its sustainability.

An Analysis of AU 2063 Aspiration 6: A People Centered Development

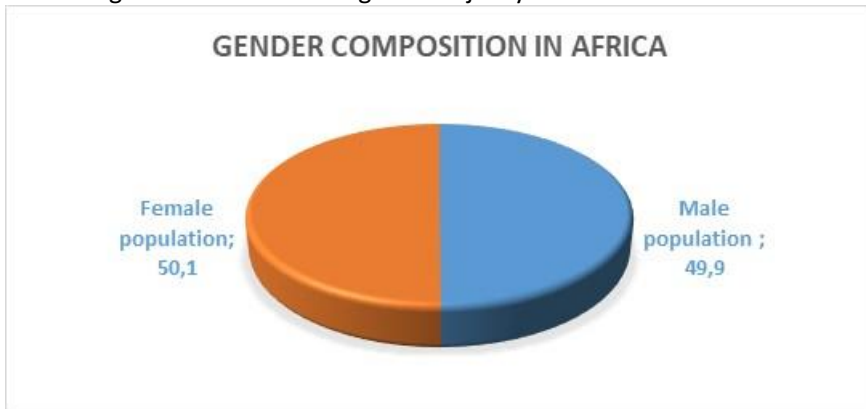
The seven aspirations focusing on various critical aspects for the development of Africa, collectively support the vision of "Africa we want". In this section, this paper will focus on "Aspiration 6 - An Africa whose development is people driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women, youth and caring for children" (AU, 2015). In analyzing and making sense of Aspiration 6 it will be deconstructed under 3 key phrases, that is, three strands of the Aspiration will be analyzed as follows;



An Africa whose development is people driven

This phrase recognizes Africa's peoples as the most important 'resource', to drive Africa's development. There can be no development without Africans and their contribution to the vision. As such, we cannot talk about a people, without exploring "who" they are and where they are located. Identifying the various segments of the population and what is unique about them validates and affirms them, that they are seen, they matter and can contribute to the continent. The charts below identify the gender make-up of the African continent as well as their location, in terms of rural and urban settlements.

Figure 2 – Chart showing that majority of Africans are women



Source: World Bank, 2019

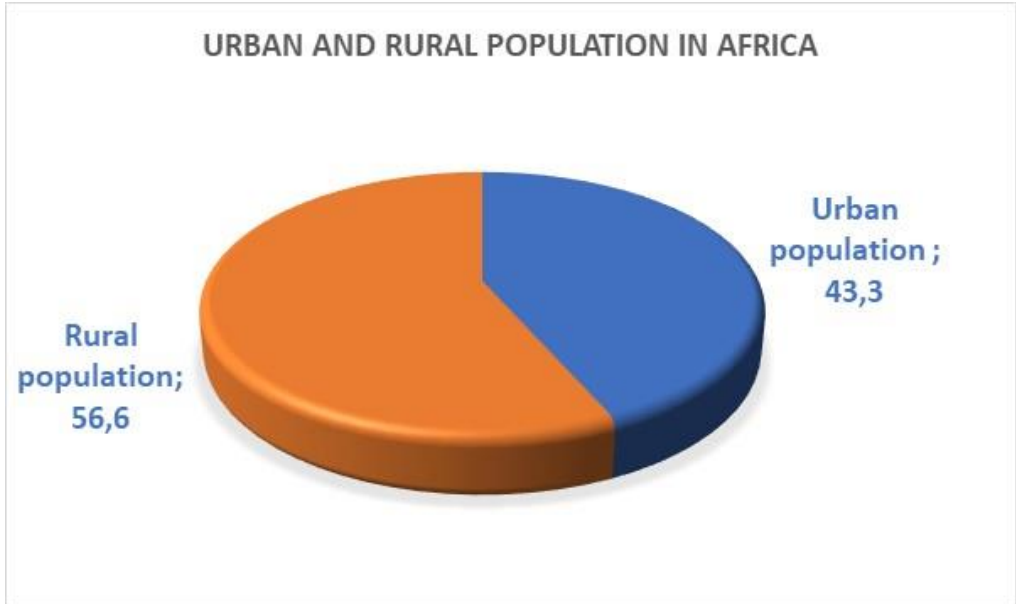
The above chart shows how the African population is constituted in terms of gender, with majority of Africans being women. This suggests that it is impractical that we can attain the vision of the "Africa we want", without maximizing her potentials to the fullest by fully engaging all possible contributors to development. More specifically, the contribution that women, who constitute the majority can make must be considered. It is important to note that this argument is also valid in relation to the youth and children as Africa has a very young population and they equally should be included in developmental initiatives. . Thus, in the quest for people driven development, women, youth and children need to be recognized as vital resources for the attainment of that vision and their exclusion, immediately invalidates the quest to maximize Africa's human resources in her development.

Relies on the potential of African people

The second part of Aspiration 6 recognizes the potential that can be exploited in the pursuit of development. An integral part of that potential is the culture underpinned by tried and tested practices, knowledge developed and owned by Africans, accessible across the continent and that potential could be harnessed by documenting IKS and exploring it

scientifically to identify and adopt best practices that could support the development agenda.

Figure 3: Chart showing that majority of Africans live in rural settings where IKS is readily accessible



IKS has been and remains valuable especially in rural setting. It is utilized to solve many developmental and community challenges. With majority of Africans in rural settings as shown in the chart above, IKS presents opportunity to mobilize this rural majority. Most rural dwelling folks have relied on IKS for many generations. Their developmental activities have sometimes been underpinned by IK influenced practices. Attempts should now be made to bring this knowledge to the consciousness and, possibly, lived experiences of urban populations as well. It is argued that this ‘mainstreaming’ would bode well for the quality of the outcomes of developmental initiatives in society in general.

However, the viability of IKS applicability in urban centers although possible, will require innovation and adaptation of practices. For instance, within the governance arena, in certain communities, accountability is a key value and people are held to account accordingly, for example, through peers (known as age groups, or grades, in some communities) who will administer appropriate sanctions when a group member or a peer has transgressed. The sanctions deployed are administered in a graduated manner depending on the gravity of the transgression and could range from a private reprimand, a public reprimand, fine, suspension for a specified period to even being banned from



holding leadership positions. Such principles could be employed in urban centers within appropriate sectors for example community policing settings. Beyond the community development sector, it could find relevance in public institutions and agencies, requiring public servants of the same grade or level to hold each other accountable (through a peer monitoring mechanism) thereby informing policies and governance practices.

IKS could be pursued and adapted in a way that bridges development agenda in various sectors (e.g. agriculture, pharmaceuticals, medicines, beauty and cosmetics, tourism, storytelling, the creative sector, fashion, governance processes) on the one hand and the people, on the other hand. This would bring about a people centered development that relies on the potential of African people and their knowledge. This integration of IKS in developmental activities suggests the following:

- The pursuit of an identifiable opportunity in IKS actualizes the “potential”
- The opportunity of IKS is not alien as it is integral in current lived experiences of majority of Africans
- IKS is deeply rooted in society, is a recognition of their culture and has sustainable practices that are tried and tested.
- An affirmation that IKS is valid and holds truths that can contribute to the advancement of humanity
- IKS is accessible largely in the rural centers where the majority of Africans reside, thus positioning IKS as a key lever immediately provides an opportunity to galvanize the majority who have previously been marginalized in development quests, while adapting it appropriately in cosmopolitan areas.

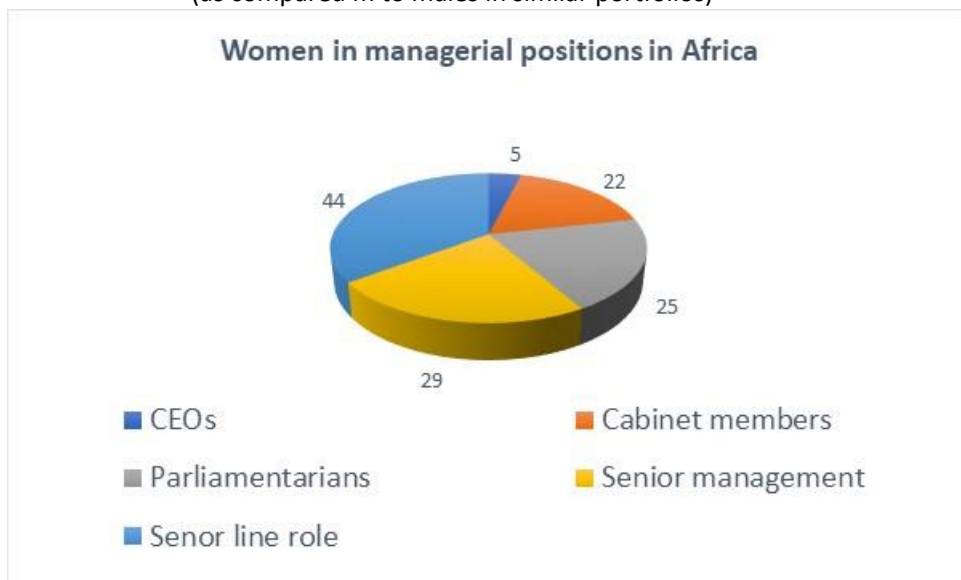
Targets especially its women, youth and caring for children

If the “Africa we want” is to be realized, “all forms of systemic inequalities, exploitation, marginalization and discrimination of young people will be eliminated and their issues mainstreamed in development agendas” (AU, 2015). Aspiration 6 advances a people centered development and the bulk of Africa’s human resources are to be utilized for Africa’s development. According to World Population Review (2020) her children and youth, make up over 61% of the population. The population of children aged 0-14 years in Africa increased from 214 million in 1980 to 486 million in 2015. However, it is estimated that the absolute number of children aged 0-14 years will increase to 585 million in 2025 (United Nations, Economic Commission for Africa, March 2016). According to the AU (2015) this young population “will be the path breakers of the African Knowledge society and will contribute significantly to innovation and entrepreneurship. This creativity, energy and innovation by Africa’s youth shall be the driving force behind the continent’s political, social, cultural and economic transformation... Thus, African children shall be empowered through the full implementation of the African Charter on the Rights of the Child”.



Regarding women, there is a need to ensure their full participation by challenging patriarchy or any practices that limit their full involvement. The realization that people centered development needs to place women squarely at the center of developmental quests, have been spelt out with progress made in countries like Rwanda and South Africa, however much more needs to be done across the board, to actualize the fullest potential that women can contribute to Africa’s development. The figure below shows that women’s participation when compared to their male counterparts in various roles is less than desirable with many shut out of the system.

Figure 4 – Chart showing limited participation of women in various management roles (as compared m to males in similar portfolios)



Source: McKinsey and Company’s annual Women Matter report (August 2016) and International Labour Organization (ILO) (2015).

While some progress has been made, a lot more needs to be done to ensure, at a minimum, gender parity of 50% across roles, since women make up majority of the continent’s population. People centered development will mean that women are given access and support to fully develop their talents in enterprises and other aspects of state endeavors. Practical steps for the actualization of Aspiration 6 demands that that girl children need to be given equal access and educated just like boy children. This also calls for closer scrutiny of other matters that affect women such as:

- Access to Inheritance and property rights



- Elimination of Gender based violence
- Access to productive rights
- Access to reproductive rights

Attention to the above matters will assist the vision attainment. “Africa of 2063 will have full gender parity, with women occupying 50% of elected public offices at all levels and half of managerial positions in the public and private sectors. The economic and political glass ceiling that restricted women’s progress will be shattered” (AU, 2015).

Critical capacity and capability enablers for people centered development

In the pursuit of AU Aspiration 6, firstly, the issue of human resource development and capacity building must be emphasized. To this end, two critical enablers have been identified, namely quality and inclusive education and collaborative partnerships. Both enablers are directly linked to Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 4 and 17.

The first enabler deals with the issue of capacity development through Inclusive and equitable quality education. If the potential of African human resources is to be fully maximized, the outcome for the education sector must focus on children, youth, and women in particular. Furthermore, a mix of education strategies whether formal or informal systems must be outcome oriented and culturally relevant. In other words, education in the African continent should be re-oriented, fit for purpose and decolonised. According to Hlalele (2019) “IKS appreciates and draw from local content and forms of knowing” and has the potential to dislodge dominant western epistemologies thereby embracing indigenous communities and their knowledge. Thus, a decolonized educational system underpinned by the SDG4 implementation should be Africanized as it affirms our African identity in science, arts, philosophy etc. But beyond that, it pursues valid knowledge and innovation that is practical, appropriate, contextually relevant, thereby empowering society in the quest for the attainment of development goals.

The resultant impact of a decolonized and re-oriented educational system will lead to the development of requisite capacities for the attainment of development goals, as beneficiaries of the system tackle the challenges that are faced in the continent. To enable the development of appropriate capacity for people centered development, African educational systems should have the following characteristics;

- Be original and adapt appropriate knowledge (Not copy and paste).
- Be culturally relevant and fit for purpose
- Be inclusive (accessible especially to youth, women and rural populations)
- Have a contextual fit, analytical in approach and problem solving focused
- Actively seeks, uses available and accessible IK for innovation
- Embraces translation of IKS innovations for socio-economic benefits in society



- Promotes education anchored by critical research skills across all levels of schooling
- Challenges current research culture (as distant, nice to do) and pursues research with practical societal value.

The second enabler deals with system capabilities supported by collaborative networks in the system, and this links to SDG 17, which is concerned with strengthening partnership. For the attainment of the African vision, a ‘whole of society approach’ is required but more specifically for Aspiration 6 (a people centered development) to be actualized. Thus, developmental agenda cannot be left to governments alone to drive it, as it is too critical to be let to a few in political and administrative functionaries. It must be a whole of society initiative, with the aid of strong networks and strengthened partnerships. This will improve capabilities in the system that support the strategic goals. For instance, the African peer review mechanism (APRM), is an important strategic goal for the AU but to what extent are the country reports generated with inputs across whole of society through a bottom up approach? Are the voices of majority of the citizens in a country heard regarding various goals? Clearly, strengthening capabilities in the system developed through partnerships and networks would support the UN’s sustainable development goals and all the AU aspirations including Aspiration 6.

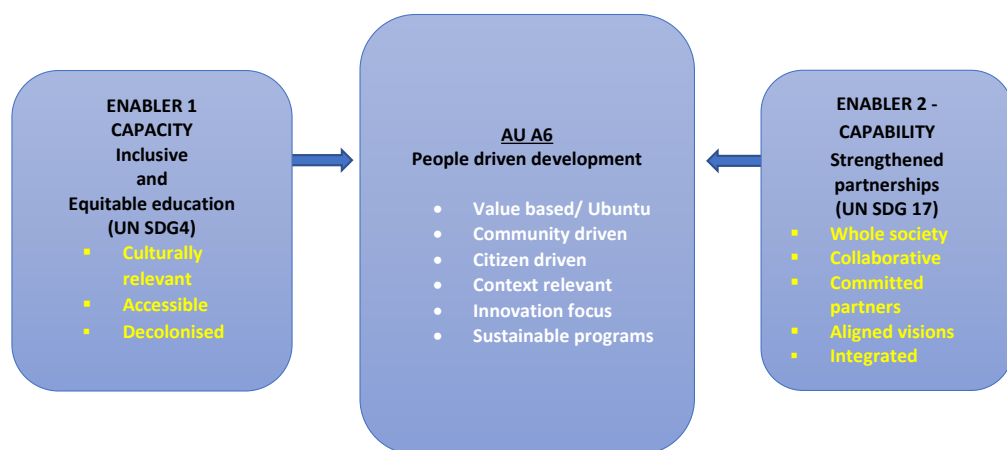
This whole society approach is aimed at building capabilities through strengthening partnerships and would require the following:

- Identifying committed partners and actors across society (urban and rural)
- Setting collaborative rather than competitive agenda
- Interfacing with various systems and plans for maximum gain, for example SDG, Agenda 2063 & NDP
- Developing enabling infrastructure, systems, and processes to support partnerships (e.g., including research networking capabilities, developing cross-cutting research agenda)
- Developing a problem solving, knowledge sharing, innovation focused approach

The appropriate implementation of the SDGs 4 (inclusive and quality education) & 17 (strengthen partnerships) will support the AU Aspiration 6 of a people centered development.



Figure 5: Critical capacity and capability enablers for people centered development



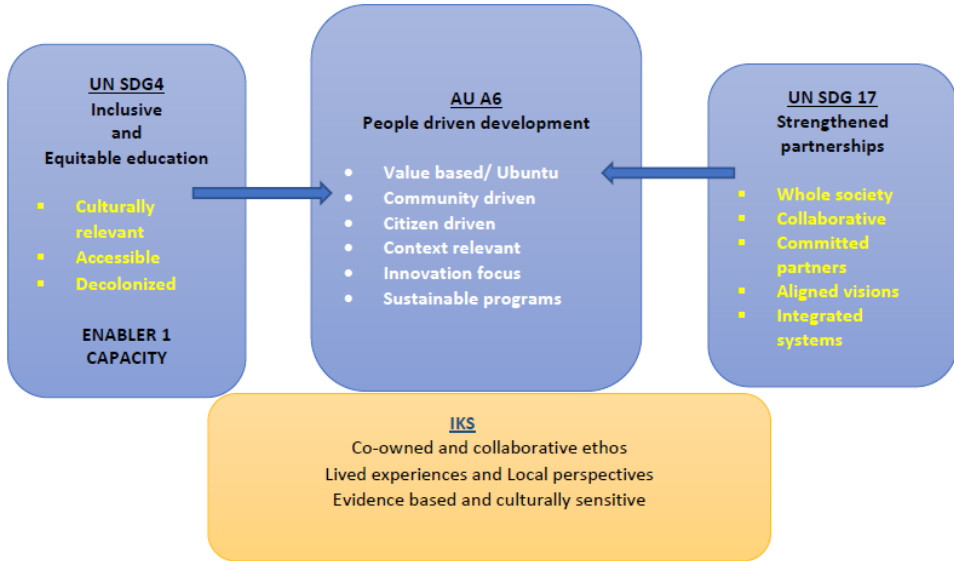
Repositioning and leveraging the IKS opportunity for people centered development

Within the context of people centered development, especially in the African continent, IKS presents an opportunity and a vehicle to mobilize all of Africa’s people to engage with developmental activities in a sustainable and integrated way (Halele, 2019). World Bank (1998) points to instances where IKS has added value to the development agenda in Africa (health education, mother tongue education in primary schools, and the management of natural resources are some examples). The opportunity presented by IKS for driving people centered development is premised on the fact that:

- IKS is integral to lived experiences
- IKS recognizes Africa’s most important resources – its people and their knowledge is valid. (people centered development).
- IK is not alien; it is accessible across the continent
- IK can be adopted, adapted across sectors and, reoriented into innovative ways
- IK provides pathways that connect communities with the AU aspirations
- IK is deeply rooted and sustainable

Below is a figure, showing the connectedness and the value of integrating IKS and a people centered development (supported by SDGs 4 & 17).

Figure 6: Nexus of people driven development and IKS



The integration of the elements above as anchored by IK, provides opportunities for developing both capacities and capabilities in the system. It encourages Africans to look inwards, actively seek, recognize IK opportunities, and take charge for their development by identifying IK solutions across sectors and exploiting the resultant opportunities. Leveraging the opportunity that IKS presents and placing IKS to anchor people centered developmental approach, will be a game changer. As it repositions and integrates people centered development with everyday activities and generates appropriate knowledge for innovation and sustainable practices, that are valid and owned by Africans for Africa’s development. Mugambiwa (2018) notes that local people in Zimbabwe have adapted various practices in ways that have reduced the effect of climate change on their activities and there are other IKS best practices that have positive development effect. Thus, IKS has been used for survival but can also be used for innovation, and problem solving.

Research Strategies to Support People Driven Development

The realization of the value that IKS can add to development quest will require that Africans, trust their truths and knowledge and document evidence of IKS best practices through sustained research across various sectors. In other words, anchoring IKS with scientific evidence, identifying best practices, innovating across sectors, and leveraging IK pathways will bring about the desired development outcomes. For instance, in the governance space, there are IKS practices that have been successful (e.g., indigenous monitoring systems). In the Ogba community in Rivers State, Nigeria, public cleaning



campaigns in the sanitation sector has been managed through whole society approach, where the announcements for public participation in clearing the water ways for instance, ensure that there is a massive turnout of all community members as people hold each other accountable. And where there is an absentee without valid reason, a penalty is levied appropriately. Thus, these indigenous monitoring systems have worked for generations in local communities and suggest that there may be insights from IKS to improve local participation and ownership of developmental activities. If these practices are not researched and documented, we will find situations where unfortunately, these IKS practices will be lost and replaced with western, individualistic approaches, with the resultant effect being environmental degradation (some of which is already happening due to unchecked oil exploration activities). If IKS could be rekindled in this instance, it may give voice to the voiceless (Ile, Eresia-Eke & Allen-Ile, 2019).

IK should be evidence based and scientific in nature if it is to be fully utilized for developmental purposes. Currently, Sub Saharan Africa research output is low as she accounts for 13.5% of global population yet her research spend is about 1% of global research expenditure (Quartz Africa, 2018). This suggest that research to support these developmental goals are less than sufficient and if this trend is to be reversed, Africans will have to consume their research and minimize consumption of other researches that are not relevant to their context.

There is a need for wide spread uptake of research activities to support development goals, including investment in research by government and non-government actors in such a way that subsidies can be claimed for IKS funded scientific innovations and breakthroughs that provide development benefits, especially economic opportunities. Below are key strategies to support research capacities and capabilities development in support of Aspiration 6:

- Strengthen networking capacities (amongst universities, think tanks) and seek multilateral agreements across Africa
- Strengthen national research institutions (e.g., National Research Foundation in SA) and develop IK as a cross cutting niche across most development research (e.g., in all National Departments or Ministries of Science, Technology and Innovation)
- Develop talents (training and retraining/research awards/scholarships/grants)
- Provide opportunities to minimize brain drain and increase 'brain gain' (where Africans in the diaspora can contribute to the continent's developmental agenda)
- Identify partners & philanthropists committed to continental research agenda,
- Nurture citizen groups and their participating in research
- Encourage private corporations to link their corporate social responsibilities to the research agenda/ AU aspirations



- Pursue bite-sized, practical, and contextually relevant, goal driven research
- Pursue scientist led but people owned initiatives (training, skills transfer focused and ownership)
- seek innovation-focused public sector improvement and reforms underpinned by IKS
- Strengthen links between research, innovation and entrepreneurship (numerous opportunities e.g., resource management - indigenous plants such as Rooibos, even harnessing solar energy)

Conclusions and Recommendations

This paper sought to unpack what the “African we want” (especially AU Aspiration No 6) really requires. The need for a strategic focus through guiding documents was established and in this regard, UN’s SDGs 4 and 17 were identified as key enablers to the people centered development Aspiration 6 of the African Union. A critical strategy for Aspiration 6 realization could be imbedded in IKS, which was identified as an opportunity to propel development across many sectors in the African continent. For the above vision to be actualized, there is the need to position research to mainstream and to support IKS to ensure sustainability. In this regard, the paper recommends that IKS will require:

- A whole of society approach to its implementations.
- Strong buy-in into IKS approach and strong participation of Africans in the developmental agenda (commitment to pursue collaborations, build sustainable linkages and shared knowledge)
- Affirmations of best practices through IKS innovations underpinned by scientific research
- Commitments to decolonised (and the amplification of IKS) education
- A call for a renewed research culture with a strategic agenda and increased funding; (including dedicated IKS Institutes under national Departments or Ministries of Science and Technology)
- And lastly, a call for transformative, collective, and Afrocentric leadership to drive the IKS linked vision.

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