Section IV: Conclusions and Policy Perspectives

An assessment of Africa’s progress on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) would be incomplete if it was measured only by how close the continent is to achieving the targets. Measured in terms of effort, the continent would rank among the best. Africa continues to make remarkable progress towards the MDGs, especially in net primary enrolment, gender parity in primary education, women’s representation in parliament, literacy rates of 15–24-year olds and combating HIV/AIDS and malaria (mainly prevalence rates among the population ages 15–24). But progress has been slow in poverty reduction, employment and some health-related goals. Further, the quality of social services remains a concern, and high inequality has marginalized low-income households, women and rural dwellers. Recent trends in official development assistance are also worrying and point to shrinking resources for development financing.

Addressing these challenges will require a multisectoral approach and a mix of interventions that promote rapid inclusive growth while ensuring that the benefits of such growth are invested in strengthening the society’s health and productive capacities. The following policy measures are proposed to accelerate progress on the MDGs.

Promoting industrialization and structural transformation
African countries can increase growth and create jobs for its people through a commodity-based industrialization programme. Value chains linking raw material producers to end users can play a vital role in adding value to agricultural and other primary commodities and in creating jobs along the value chain. For countries that depend on extractive minerals, local content laws that obligate firms to procure inputs locally, train a cadre of local professionals and reserve artisanal mining activities for local entrepreneurs can be instrumental in creating jobs. Local content measures facilitate value-chain development by strengthening links with local suppliers. But to be effective, local content measures must be complemented by measures that strengthen the competitiveness of local suppliers. Such measures include skills development and upgrading, adoption and adaptation of appropriate technologies and access to capital.

Promoting intraregional trade will be necessary to expand markets for nascent African manufacturers. In this context, African countries must expedite the full implementation of the Continental Free Trade Area.

Improving the quality of education
Enhancing Africa’s quality of education is vital for making its labour force more productive and employable. Improving completion rates is linked to the quality of education and the perceived returns to completing a full course of study. Investments in education infrastructure, including quality teachers and buildings and rigorous enforcement of quality assurance mechanisms can enhance the quality of education and improve completion rates.

Alongside these efforts, cultural practices that undermine enrolment and completion can be addressed through conditional cash transfers that reward parents for enrolling and keeping their
children in school. For gender-biased cultural practices, transfers should favour girls’ enrolment. Such transfers could be linked to parents’ livelihoods. For instance, in predominantly agricultural settings, public–private partnerships could be established to guarantee markets for families that enrol and keep their children in schools.

### Addressing inequality

Sharp gender, income and spatial inequalities persist in access to social services. Investing in rural infrastructure to incentivize agricultural transformation and boost rural incomes will be vital for addressing rural–urban income disparities. Such investments will also catalyse economic activity and urbanize rural areas.

Gender inequality should be tackled at the educational, political and occupational levels. Gender disparities in education stem from patrimonial attitudes, sexual harassment and inadequate access to feminine sanitation. Advocacy campaigns can alter behaviour by creating awareness about the negative effects of gender-biased cultural practices. Prioritizing women in teacher training programmes and establishing mechanisms for girls to expose sexual harassment anonymously can reduce that harassment. Further, legislation that integrates feminine sanitation into the national education infrastructure blueprint will ensure that all classroom structures meet minimum standards for feminine sanitation.

At the political level, countries that have succeeded in empowering women have adopted legal frameworks that guaranteed seats for women in parliament (as in Egypt, Rwanda, South Africa and Uganda). And involving women in nonelective posts, such as ministers and top-level managers, provides a training ground for political office in the future.

At the occupational level, gender inequality is characterized by wage disparities for equal work and the concentration of women in low-paying occupations. Addressing such inequalities will require targeting skills-training programmes towards unqualified women and designing and enforcing equal pay laws and affirmative action programmes to ensure that qualified women are treated fairly in recruitment.

In addition, social protection mechanisms, including health insurance to improve access to high-impact interventions for children, will allow countries to mitigate the impacts of inequalities by refocusing on the poorest and most marginalized children and families.

### Improving health outcomes and the quality of health care

Improving Africa’s health outcomes will require focusing on child and maternal health. Infectious diseases, weak health systems, poor diets, limited access to skilled birth attendants, high adolescent birth rates and the high unmet need for contraceptives—all are contributing to high infant and maternal mortality. Reducing it calls for a sharper focus on neonatal deaths, which account for most infant mortality. A cross-cutting factor in child and maternal mortality is limited access to improved water sources and poor sanitation. State-supported sanitation projects that transform waste products into fertilizer or recycle such products are examples of measures that improve sanitation while addressing employment deficits.

Improving access to insecticide-treated bed nets will reduce malaria-related infections, while improved access to contraceptives will reduce adolescent birth rates. In this context, public–private partnerships that focus on producing insecticide-treated bed nets and contraceptives locally will not only reduce maternal and child mortality but also create much needed jobs for local communities.
Financing MDG-related interventions
Declining official development assistance flows calls for rethinking Africa’s resource mobilization strategies. Indeed, strategic partnerships with emerging countries should feature more prominently. A re-orientation towards foreign direct investment and trade is critical for growth, job creation and reduced dependency on aid. Africa’s partnerships must be informed by its strategic objective of achieving structural transformation as quickly as possible. This will require that external partnerships are oriented and aligned with Africa’s transformation priorities. It will also require giving greater importance to partnerships with the African Diaspora and domestic stakeholders, particularly in the local private sector.

Achieving food security
Adopting an intersectoral and coordinated approach
No single sector or group of stakeholders is responsible for achieving food security. It requires multiple sectors and stakeholders—and that they be well coordinated. The agriculture sector should deal with productivity issues. For example, transport and communications could contribute to infrastructure development; the health sector to nutrition, HIV/AIDS and related issues; and the trade sector to marketing and exports. Further, the practical experience of civil society organizations and the private sector can improve policy design, implementation and monitoring.

Committing to agriculture and honor pledges
African governments need to honour their pledges and commitments to agricultural development, like the 10 per cent Abuja commitment, which few countries have honoured since 2001. This goes hand in hand with strengthening political commitment to agricultural development in order to improve production and productivity. Similarly, Africa’s partners must deliver on pledges and partnerships aimed at improving food security. But agricultural development goes beyond increasing allocations; governance is just as crucial.

Processing agricultural commodities
Value addition, particularly agroprocessing, can improve food security by reducing the incidence of food spoilage, minimizing farmers’ exposure to the price volatility associated with perishable commodities and increasing incomes from agriculture. African governments should thus add value to their commodities and adopt agroprocessing strategies to create jobs, reduce poverty and boost food security.

Investing in climate adaptation measures
Climate adaptation and mitigation is crucial for agriculture and food security. African governments need to invest in measures to offset the challenges climate change poses for the continent’s agriculture. Adaptation measures need to be implemented countrywide in order to have broad coverage, reduce vulnerability to climate and enable countries to benefit as a whole. The policy and institutional actions that governments should take include financing the measures and providing incentives for smallholder farmers to invest in adaptation and mitigation measures.

Promoting social protection to build resilience to food system stresses
States can foster resilience through targeted social protection programmes that safeguard and enhance people’s access to food. To be fiscally sustainable, these programmes must not depend entirely on external financing.

Improving agricultural productivity
African governments should enhance the agricultural productivity frontier by investing in agriculture-related infrastructure, such as feeder roads, ir-
irrigation and storage facilities; facilitating access to credit; providing extension services to encourage the use of appropriate technologies; and improving the dissemination of market and price information. African governments should also establish strategic food stocks for emergencies, such as food shortages food price fluctuations.

**Documenting and sharing good practices**
Countries should identify and document good practices so that other countries can duplicate them. This saves policymakers from wasting resources on interventions that may not achieve the intended objectives.

**Developing early warning systems**
African countries need to develop effective regional mechanisms to monitor and respond to potential food crises in a timely manner. This will require building institutions’ capacity to monitor the continent’s food security, as well as ensuring that data is collected, subject to rigorous analysis and disseminated, to enable informed decisions.