

“Structural Economic Transformation in the context of the AU Vision 63 and the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals: What does equitable and sustainable economic transformation look like in Africa?”

This two-day round-table dialogue in Addis Ababa, hosted by UNECA, and organised by Third World Network Africa, Tax Justice Network- Africa with the support and partnership of Christian Aid and CAFOD, brings together Africa-based thought leaders (including researchers, activists, NGOs, networks and farmer organisations) to discuss economic transformation in the context of Agenda 2030 and the sustainable development goals. Through this event we aim to initiate a dialogue between UNECA and African civil society on the African economic transformation agenda to come up with strategies for an ongoing critical engagement of African civil society in the discourse and implementation of the transformation agenda. This will also be an opportunity to share current research with other thought-leaders and key institutions for feedback and triangulation and to enrich participants’ work and positions on this topic. Finally, this will be an opportunity to network and build relationships with the aim of identifying key issues and scoping the possibility of collaboration.

BACKGROUND

African and international development institutions are increasingly optimistic about the prospects for economic development in Africa after two so-called “lost decades”, characterised by economic stagnation and deteriorating socio-economic indicators. Improved macro-economic performance in many African countries has given renewed impetus to the continent’s long-standing socio-economic ‘transformation’ agenda. Institutions such as the African Union and the UN Economic Commission for Africa have recently been consulting widely to help them frame such an African transformation strategy.

Nonetheless, the engagement, momentum and impact of these pan-African level conversations is not yet clearly discernible on the existing development trajectories of individual African countries, with some notable exceptions.

Furthermore, it is not yet clear whether the debate on the transformation agenda will bring about broader societal well-being by charting and innovating more environmentally sustainable and socially equitable growth paths; or if African countries will continue with a development vision aimed at improving their economies’ competitiveness vis-a-vis the advanced and newly industrialised countries via methods that might replicate and proliferate (among others) the environmentally destructive and inequality-creating growth paths of the advanced and emerging economies.

In light of this agenda the role of major thematic pillars important for equitable and sustainable development must be interrogated: structural constraints to economic transformation, environmental sustainability, gender and income equality, prospects for an agriculture-based economic transformation, and, the role of the state and democratic governance. What other alternatives can underpin the transformation of African economies from their dependence on natural resource extraction and extensive primary commodity production? What opportunities exist for African governments to formulate and implement strategic policies and cooperate meaningfully with a range of development partners, including those operating in the private sector, given the current architecture and purpose of global economic governance? What innovations in the policy institutional landscape and processes in Africa can diffuse and deepen the constituency for socially equitable and environmentally sustainable transformation? What opportunities do flagship continental and international agendas, namely, the AU Agenda 2063 and the UN Agenda 2030/SDG’s offer? And importantly, how do we ensure Africa’s own autonomous agenda?

The proposed workshop provides an important opportunity for participant African policy makers, network organisations and development actors to engage and contribute towards an agenda of issues which address the challenges for structural economic transformation in Africa. Furthermore, it will allow stakeholders the opportunity to continue building the policy research, advocacy and dialogue relations needed to address this agenda.

Given the complex global dimensions of Africa’s development efforts, the workshop is simultaneously an opportunity for strategically allied international organisations to establish working relationships and, alongside leading African policy organisations and networks, identify a menu of issues to inform their ongoing advocacy globally and in their

respective countries. Overall, the workshop will aim to catalyse new collaborations in and for Africa, among non-governmental development, climate, environmental and farming networks, as well as between these networks and research and pan-African institutions.

KEY SPONSORING ORGANISATIONS:

Third World Network Africa (TWN Africa) seeks to contribute to a better definition of the terms 'structural economic transformation with equity' in Africa and the package of policies needed to achieve it. It also seeks to build the constituency needed to develop and realise these policies. This focus reflects TWN Africa's strategic location and role as a leading contributor and actor in integrating and synthesising policy dialogue, advocacy and networking initiatives and processes across economic development vectors such as trade, investment, finance, mining, and environment, political economy of development, agro-industrial policy and regional integration among others. As such TWN Africa's role in convening multiple actors across local, national, continental and global locations; as well as across disciplines, sectors and constituencies; and between civic, non-governmental and official agencies and actors is key.

Tax Justice Network – Africa (TJN-A) aims to promote Africa's economic transformation through retention, ownership, control and development of her economic surpluses and fiscal means. The role of a fundamentally restructured fiscal regime in relation to foreign capital and trans-national companies (TNCs) in Africa is a central focus of TJN-A work along with a focus on the major natural resource and commodity export sectors and related investment, trade and financial flows. In the process, TJN-A continues to scale up its work with likeminded African CSOs and its collaboration/interface with official institutions such as UNECA to alter thinking and approaches to the fiscal landscape in Africa. Within this context, TJN-A is a leading advocate in the campaign to curb illicit financial flows in both official and non-state spheres in Africa. The organisation is increasingly being involved in research and policy advocacy pertaining to different aspects and policies for financing the transformation agenda.

CAFOD and Christian Aid share an understanding of the importance of sustainable and inclusive development for poverty eradication and a common analysis of the risks of the growth paths followed by most advanced and newly industrialised states. This has informed their work, both separately and jointly to influence the global SDG agenda and UKaid's agriculture and economic development strategies and approaches. It also informs their work with a range of international actors and, importantly with country-level partners and pan-African networks on economic justice and environmental issues. Recently, CAFOD and Christian Aid have commissioned joint research on economic transformation and small agri-enterprise in relation to issues of equality and environmental sustainability. The proposed workshop would be an opportunity to test and refine the research findings with leading African stakeholders but also to catalyse new collaborations on this agenda.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES AND OUTPUTS:

- Workshop document with key messages around pro-poor, inclusive and environmentally sustainable approaches to economic transformation and/or economic development in Africa.
- Initial mapping of a joint collaboration plan, including relevant themes, potential opportunities for joint influencing and a mapping of other key stakeholders.
- Key messages on joint priorities for economic development for both UK-based advocacy and in-country / regional advocacy established.

WHY PARTICIPATE IN THE WORKSHOP?

1. An opportunity to engage with thought leaders beyond our normal networks including to establish working relationship between UNECA and workshop participants.
2. An opportunity to collaborate on future research and funding proposals.
3. An opportunity to share research and thinking and to explore ways of ensuring this has further reach and influence.
4. An opportunity to engage with international development agendas, inter alia, the SDGs with the aim of promoting coherence with Africa's own needs and initiatives and to support the policy autonomy of the latter.