Africa must look inwards for workable solutions to its governance challenges


This, according to high-level speakers from the African Development Bank (AfDB), the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), is key to unlocking Africa’s potential and advancing its prosperity.

The three agencies, therefore, pledged their readiness to support the continent’s pursuit of an African agenda for stronger democratic states and rapid structural transformation that positively impacts on human development.

In his official opening address, the Prime Minister of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia, Hailemariam Desalegn, advocated for strong democratic states with zero tolerance for corruption and mechanisms for wealth-sharing.

“Conferences such as this are important in order to learn from experience and adapt practices to each country’s socio-economic conditions. There are no specific policy templates that work everywhere,” he stressed.

Executive Secretary of ECA, Vera Songwe, called on leaders, economists and policy-makers to “look beyond the standard indicators of good governance.

“There is a growing consensus that African countries require a more conducive governance environment for them to be able to pursue better public policies and ultimately to achieve better outcomes, including structural transformation and inclusive development,” she said.

Célestin Monga, Vice-President, Economic Governance and Knowledge Management, at the African Development Bank, called for greater focus on addressing the economic loss caused by institutional inefficiencies and incompetence.

Monga stressed how corruption endangers economic growth, but pointed to the hidden loss due to lack of strong institutions, noting how difficult it is to address this when people are hungry.
“A lot of governance work has not been very helpful to Africa as it is often seen as a precondition,” Monga continued. “We cannot expect a country with US $300 GDP per capita to have the same governance system as a country with US $78,000. You cannot compare Burundi to Switzerland.”

This is why the AfDB is rethinking governance in Africa, Monga said, stressing that good governance is also about learning.

Experts agree that notwithstanding overall improvement in governance especially in human development and political participation, the African region’s performance still lags behind other regions and hampers the successful reorientation of its economic activities.

“Maintaining growth of 5% should be seen as a favourable development. There have been setbacks, but Africa is gradually getting governance right,” said Lamin M. Manneh, Director of the UNDP Regional Service Center for Africa, on behalf of Abdoulaye Mar Dieye, UN Assistant Secretary-General and Director of the UNDP Regional Bureau for Africa.

Co-organized by the African Development Bank (AfDB), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) under the theme “Governance for structural transformation”, this year’s conference focuses on the achievement of structural transformation in Africa with an emphasis on developmental governance.

About 500 researchers, policy-makers and development practitioners attended Day 1 of the conference.

The AEC provides an opportunity for participants to assess the impact of current economic and political governance strategies on economic transformation, poverty, inequality and human development in Africa.

Delivering the keynote address, Richard Joseph, Professor at Northwestern University, underscored why bold policy interventions must emanate from Africa.

“In Africa, this is the time for relative autonomy in dealing with policy issues,” he said.

The AEC offers in-depth presentations of policy-oriented research by both established academics and emerging researchers from the continent and beyond, who debate and recommend policy options on how governance in Africa can better support the continent’s structural transformation.

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Bank (AfDB), the African Development Fund (ADF) and the Nigeria Trust Fund (NTF). On the ground in 38 African countries with an external office in Japan, the AfDB contributes to the economic development and the social progress of its 54 regional member states. [www.afdb.org](http://www.afdb.org)

**About ECA:** Headquartered in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa was established in 1958 with the mandate of promoting the economic and social development of its member States, fostering intra-regional integration, and promoting international cooperation for Africa's development. [www.uneca.org](http://www.uneca.org)

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