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DRAFT POSITIONING PAPER

Thematic track 7: Poverty and inequality

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Workshop details

For this positioning paper, we draw on recent literature and practice in reflecting on the challenges of poverty and inequality in Africa and the achievement of the SDGs in Africa. Our specific focus is on understanding the prevailing relationships between growth, poverty and inequality as the basis for actions to ensure inclusive development and the Achievement of the SDG's with regards to poverty. We give attention to the impacts of the pandemic.

We draw on in-depth conversations from a Workshop that we held on 31 August 2021 on understanding the texture of Africa's growth over the last decade Table 1 provides an overview of the discussion undertaken in the workshop.

Table 1: Workshop programme

Panel	Title	Presenter
Panel #1	The outlook for Growth, Poverty and Inequality: The impact of the pandemic	Chair: Prof Ernest Aryeetey Secretary-General (ARUA)
		Key speaker: Dr Hanan Morsy Director (African Development Bank)
Panel # 2	Reassessing deindustrialization in Africa	Chair: Dr Anda David Research officer (Agence Française de Développement)
		Guest Speaker: Prof Kunal Sen Director (UNU-WIDER)
		Guest Speaker: Dr Pierre Nguimkeu Assoc Prof, Econ Dept (Georgia State University)
		Discussant: Assoc Prof William Baah-Boateng Assoc. Professor (Economics) (University of Ghana)
		Discussant: Dr François Steenkamp Senior Researcher, DPRU (University of Cape Town)
Panel # 3	Reflections and the way forward	Chair: Prof Murray Leibbrandt Professor of Economics and Director of (ACEIR) and (SALDRU) (University of Cape Town)
	Concluding reflections on Employment, Growth, Poverty & Inequality in Africa going forward	Guest speaker: Prof Finn Tarp Prof, Development Economics (University of Copenhagen)
	Key Gaps in the Growth & Employment Nexus to be tabled at the SDG Summit	Discussion
Conclusion		Prof Haroon Bhorat Director (DPRU, University of Cape Town)

Poverty, Inequality and Growth in Africa after 2021: How can we do better?

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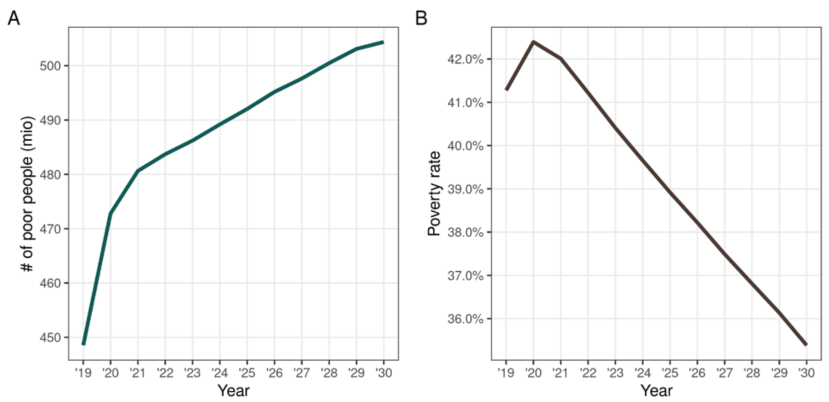
1. Introduction

For many the prospects for Africa in the decade before the pandemic looked promising. Positive economic growth rates that were higher than world averages were expected to lead to dramatic reductions in poverty and inequality. However, this economic growth occurred within a region that came into this decade carrying very challenging poverty and inequality circumstances. The continent was home to the world's highest levels of extreme poverty and 6 of the world's 10 most unequal countries (Zizzamia, David, Leibbrandt, 2021). Thus, while poverty rates have declined (and pre-COVID were forecasted to continue to do so), the number of people living in income poverty increased from 283 million in 1990 to 431 million in 2017 (Thorbecke (2021)). Figure 1[1] shows that, without new interventions, this trend is expected to continue to 2030 and we are highly unlikely to meet SDG targets.

Figure 1. Projected share of the population living in multidimensional poverty (A) and number of people in income poverty in millions and as a percentage in Sub Saharan Africa (B) between 2019 and 2030



Source: Tarp (2021) based on data from Flentø (2021). Data on poverty is from Lakner et al. (2020). Projections use the baseline configuration.
Note: A) shows the absolute number of extreme poor in SSA over time. B) shows the poverty rate in SSA over time, i.e., the number of extreme poor divided by population. Extreme poverty is defined as daily consumption below $1.90 PPP.

This positioning paper seeks to take stock of why we face a situation in which economic growth in Africa is less inequality and poverty reducing in comparison to other parts of the world. This positioning serves as the foundation for our work at the Summit to devise well-grounded, impactful contributions to promoting inclusive development and meeting the SDGs.

There is little contention about the fact that the responsiveness of poverty reduction to growth has been disappointing in Africa. The continent and its economies can be characterized as contexts in which the poverty elasticity of growth[2] is less than in other parts in the world. These growth, poverty and inequality relationships frame our work and the next section of this paper and our first session on the first afternoon of the Summit take forward this framing that we started in our workshop.

The levels of poverty and inequality that prevail in Africa relate to the structure of the economies in our region. While there has been positive economic growth, in general the texture of this growth in many African countries is based on the production of basic commodities, the extraction of mineral resources

[1] From Tarp's (2021) presentation to workshop.
[2] The poverty elasticity of growth is a term used to refer to the reduction in poverty rates associated with a change in gross domestic product (GDP) growth rates.

and agriculture (Bhorat and Oosthuizen, 2020). There is contention over whether Africa is undergoing a process of industrialization or de-industrialization, but our pre-Summit workshop highlighted many differences across countries in actual patterns of growth and industrialization make it unhelpful to try to resolve this discussion at the level of the continent.

Section 3 summarises these findings on the structural changes that African economies have undergone. This section also details the changes in employment patterns that are part of these structural changes and have conditioned the labour opportunities for individuals, making a key development challenge of the continent one of "employment quality" (Fields, 2021). The difficulties in creating equitable development are tied to the constrictions that limit the possibilities for creating quality jobs.

It is these employment changes that directly connect people and their skills to the economy and its growth and structural change. Understanding the challenges that these economic forces bring to labour force participants is key in identifying the social mobility barriers that impede citizens from accessing higher quality and productive jobs despite positive economic growth. Developing policies that address these constraints will not be easy and should not be expected to be a simple one size fits all program. But this is imperative if we are serious about the future of Africa after 2021 and the fulfilment of the SDG's.

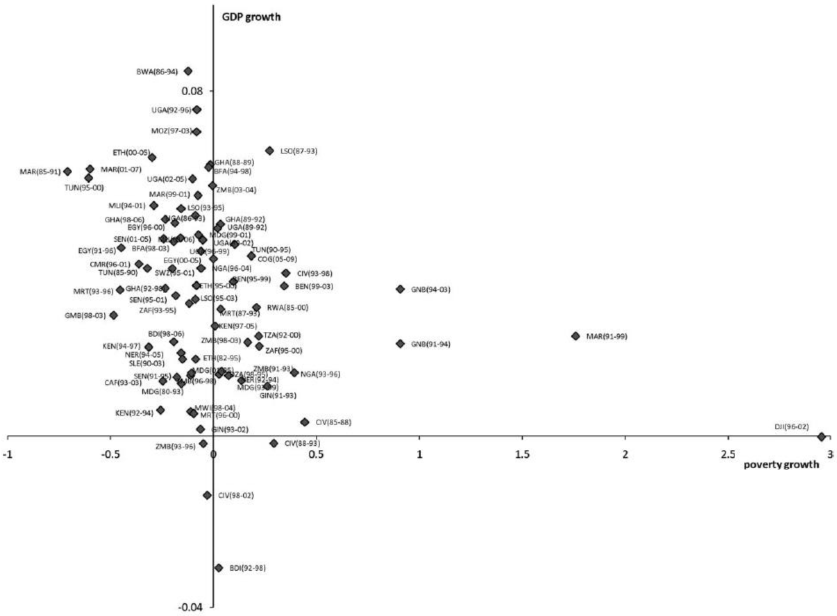
To further strengthen the connection between economic changes and household poverty and inequality changes we need to understand the multiple and diverse barriers that limit social mobility for any country's people. This understanding provides a platform for impactful social policies that ensure that growth is inclusive and has maximum impact on poverty and inequality. Section 4 engages with policy in this way and this connection will be explicitly explored in a dedicated session at the Summit.

The issues aired above present the prologue to the COVID-19 pandemic shock in 2020 and its ongoing impacts on poverty and inequality on the continent. The pandemic has made the task of inclusive development more difficult in each context. However, the differential impacts of the pandemic in each context have followed the same fault lines that have stifled the inclusivity of growth. COVID-19 has made it more rather than less important to have a detailed understanding of the prevailing realities of growth, poverty, and inequality upon which to chart our work at the Summit and future actions (Section 5).

2. The interaction between growth, poverty and inequality in Africa

As a starting point, the relation between growth, poverty and inequality can be understood by interrogating the relations between income, growth, and poverty (Thorbecke, 2021). Empirical work within this framework has consistently found that the translation of growth into poverty reduction in Africa has been less than global averages (Tarp, 2021; Fosu, 2018). High prevailing inequality and low incomes have emerged as key explanatory factor. It is clear that very poor people may not cross the poverty line even when there is positive economic growth, as is shown in Figure 2. It has been estimated that in a non-African country where 50% of the population is below the poverty line, a 1% growth rate in the gross domestic product leads to a reduction of 0.53 percentage points a year in the incidence of poverty. In contrast, in African countries, the same growth rate in the gross domestic product reduces the incidence of poverty by only 0.16 percentage points (Clementi et at., 2021; Fosu, 2018).

Figure 2. Poverty Growth and GDP Growth Over Poverty Spells Available for African Countries Between 1980 and 2008



Source: (Berardi and Marzo, 2017, p. 153)

It is important to recognise that poverty and inequality reduction are more likely and feasible in an economy that is growing, as this growth creates the potential for poverty and inequality reduction. However, it is equally important to recognise that growth can and has bypassed a great deal of poor people because of the links between economic precariousness and persistent poverty and inequality. High endemic poverty and inequality bear major responsibility for the low elasticity between higher economic growth and lower poverty and inequality in Africa (Clementi, Fabiani and Molini, 2021; Ravallion, 2020). At the same time, viewed ex ante, initial high levels of inequality retard growth (Ravallion, 2020 27).

Growth that is pro-poor and inequality reducing is contingent on conditions (opportunities) that allow the poor to participate and benefit from economic growth. This is daunting because it is collective deprivations in assets, education, health and social protection that work together to make the poor less reachable and less able to connect to the economy (Ravallion, 2020). Restricting poverty and inequality to the metric of incomes without accounting for the nature of these deprivations will fail to understand how poverty and inequality are reproduced as part of economic growth processes. As Sen reminded us long ago, poverty and inequality speak of the lack of access to market and non-market goods and to opportunities (Sen, 2000). It is essential to detail prevailing constraints on capabilities and social mobility in explaining why poverty and inequality are so resilient in Africa alongside the positive income growth observed in the last decades (Thorbecke; Zizzamia, David and Leibbrandt, 2021; Berardi and Marzo, 2017).

3. Structural transformation and the structure of employment in Africa

A useful starting point is to understand the changes that have taken place in African economies over the last decade. While there has been progress, the modes of production of African countries can in general terms be described as based on the production of basic commodities, the extraction of mineral resources and agriculture (Bhorat and Oosthuizen, 2020). Under the forces of increased integration of the world economy since the 1990's, this set of initial conditions now interact with a process that has been described as a process of de-industrialization (see Kruse et al. 2021) or, alternatively, as one in which industrialization has not been fully attained (See for example Rodrik, 2016, Lopes and te Velde, 2021).

Irrespective of whether Africa observes a process of limping industrialization or de-industrialization, the continent and its economy can be characterized as one in which the poverty elasticity of growth[3] is less than in other parts in the world, and this is highly problematic for its economic and social development[4].

In general terms, the economic structure of the continent can still be characterized as a dualist one. However, within general development models labour leaves traditional sectors (such as agriculture) and moves to urban areas in a process that shifts labour into more productive and higher paying jobs (Lewis, 1954). However, as shown in Table 1, in Africa the movement of labour out of agriculture was accompanied by growth in employment shares within wholesale and retail trade services and construction, towards a service industry bypassing industrialization as a stage.

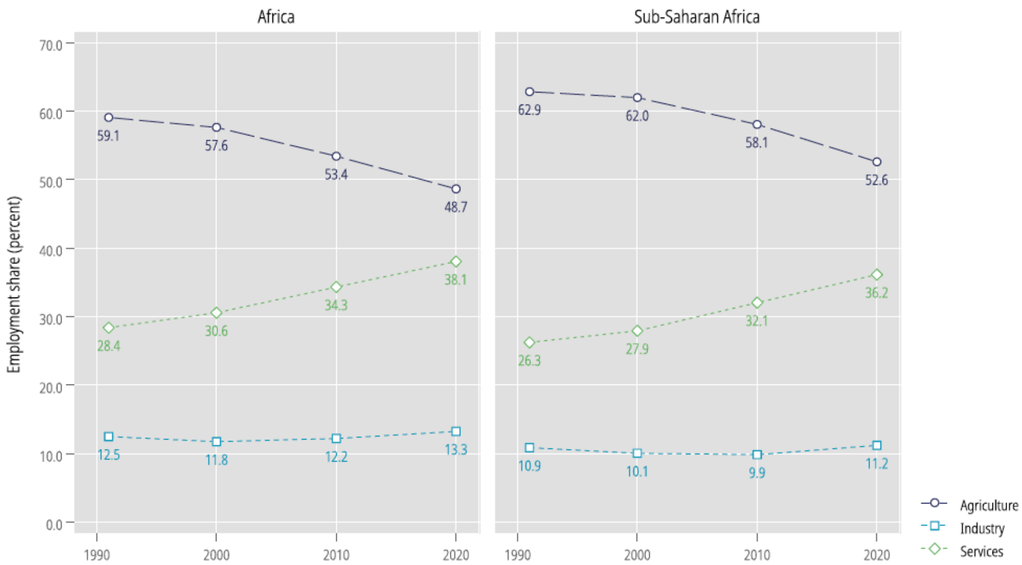
Table 1. Composition of gross value added (Percentage), 1994, 2018 for Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa.

	Africa		Sub-Saharan Africa	
	1994	2018	1994	2018
Agriculture	16.2	16.0	15.8	17.4
Industry	37.5	30.2	37.6	27.8
Services	46.3	53.8	46.6	54.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: (Bhorat and Oosthuizen, 2020, p 17)

In addition, Figure 3 shows a reduction in the number of jobs in the agriculture and mining sector and the shift towards the service industry.

Figure 3. Distribution of employment by broad sector in Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa, 1991-2020



Source: (Bhorat and Oosthuizen, 2020, p. 21)

[3] The poverty elasticity of growth is a term used to refer to the reduction in poverty rates associated with a change in gross domestic product (GDP) growth rates.

[4] Following fields (2021, p.7) we understand economic underdevelopment of individuals as "the existence of severe constraints on people's abilities to achieve satisfactory standards of living".

Despite these sectoral changes in employment, the continent remains defined by low productivity, high informality and limited social protection. The evidence from Africa suggests a shift of jobs from rural areas into informal and precarious jobs in cities (Rodrik, 2018). Most of the employment growth away from the agricultural sector has been into informal activities that are not highly productive and remain poorly paid (Bigsten, 2018; Bhorat, Naidoo & Pillay, 2016; Lopes and te Velde, 2021).

This partially explains why the shift of labour out of agriculture in Africa has contributed only half as much to poverty reduction as elsewhere in the world (Paci and Tuccio, 2016, p. 1) and prompts questions about the challenges associated with the transmission of productivity gains to the poor (Paci and Tuccio, 2016).

The failure to shift labour into more productive jobs also relates to low base levels of industrialization and an economic model in which industrial production follows an enclave model in which the spillover effects of commodity booms have not translated into improvements in productivity, or broadened structures of production or technical progress (Bigsten, 2018, pp. 1-4).

Globally, the shift out of agriculture and mining into the modern service sectors is skills intensive and highly reliant on high levels of human capital. Here too African countries perform poorly (Bhorat and Oosthuizen, 2020, p 25). This lack of skills and human capital means that an important segment of labour is trapped in low productivity, high seasonality, and variability of incomes in both urban and rural areas (Clementi et al., 2021) and places in the forefront the questions about the capacity of African economies to absorb the growing working age population into productive employment.

Such a situation highlights the importance of identifying and understanding the different barriers impeding individuals from changing their employment in a way that moves them into higher productivity jobs. Such barriers impede those vulnerable, poor, and marginalized from reaping the benefits of economic growth (Mkandawire, 2010). Rather they result in differential opportunities that are starkly manifested along gendered, “ethnic” or “racial” lines (Bigsten, 2018; Leibbrandt and Díaz Pabón, 2021).

These barriers illustrate why the demographic shifts in a country can be a threat rather than a demographic dividend, as rapid labour force growth is interacting with a structure where Africa’s fastest growing economies are creating the fewest jobs that exclude vulnerable groups (Tarp, 2021).

These structural challenges will be exacerbated by other shocks such as the expected impacts of climate change. We will devote a special session at the Summit to weave this “Just Transition” perspective into the growth, poverty and inequality discussion.

Importantly, responses to these challenges require interrogation of what sort of institutions and policies can facilitate social mobility and promote equitable development against the “prevalence of extreme inequality in Africa” (Bhorat, Naidoo & Pillay, 2016; UNDESA, 2021). These uneven and unequal processes set the background for the arrival of the COVID pandemic and have mediated the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic.

4. Understanding COVID’s impacts and the role of social policy

Africa entered the pandemic with the world’s highest prevalence of poverty and extreme poverty. Despite this, it has been estimated that in 2021 a further 38 million Africans will fall into extreme poverty due to the pandemic (African Development Bank, 2021). In nearly all cases, this income shock is occurring in circumstances in which there is limited health, social protection[5] and social assistance[6] coverage. It is harrowing therefore that Africa is also the region in the world with the lowest vaccination rates as deaths due to the pandemic are increasing on the continent. The pandemic has made it impossible to look past the fact that vulnerabilities in terms of income and wealth are mediated and compounded by many other inequalities.

The pandemic has brought huge shocks to the economies and labour markets of many African countries and has forced consideration of how these economic shocks intersect with vulnerabilities within households to heighten the chances of sickness and loss of life. As illustrated by case studies such as in South Africa (Spaull, et. al, 2021), shocks in educational attainment, malnutrition, and gender inequalities that have been significantly deepened by the impact of the pandemic. Such dynamics will have long-lasting effects on vulnerable households.

Given the extremely high levels of informality on the continent - estimated above 85% (ILO, 2018) - it is highly likely that the economic impacts observed since February 2020 will have deep and significant effects on the livelihoods of millions on the continent. Informality is usually linked to lack of access to social security. The ILO estimates that in sub-Saharan Africa only about 10% of the economically active population is covered by social security and social protection policies remain limited (Hickey et al., 2020). Several new programmes were introduced on the continent since the start of the pandemic. However, even in contexts where these programmes have good coverage and targeting (as in South Africa), they have struggled to reach vulnerable populations. Often, the populations most at risk are invisible in administrative data systems, including the formal sector's labour market and tax information systems.

The pandemic has sharpened the pressing need for coordinated and well-designed social protection systems in which the state is the provider of a safety net which requires "enhancing the resources of the poor, such as human capital and financial endowment" (Fosu, 2018). The effectiveness in reducing poverty and inequality of any economic development policies is greatly enhanced by a platform of basic services, social protection and social assistance. This approach was important before 2020 and is imperative now.

But, dauntingly, the implementation of such policies now takes place with reduced finance resources for the fiscus due to the economic crisis. This financial constraint makes it even more important than before that all programmes are well designed and targeted within each country context. Much can be learnt from international policy experience. But such design also requires an understanding of the diverse barriers that limit social mobility and cause poverty and inequality persistence in each country context (Zizzamia, David, Leibbrandt, 2021; Palacio Ludeña, M.G. and Díaz Pabón, F.A. 2021). There is a crucial role for the research community in providing this understanding of how a set of policies are likely to impact the constrained day-to-day lived realities of all households.

[5] Social protection programmes address risk, vulnerability, inequality, and poverty through a system of transfers in cash or in kind (Osabohien, 2020).

[6] Social assistance programs are programs that provide temporary support to vulnerable populations or specific target groups. For example, those living in poverty. Thus, social assistance programmes can be seen as a subgroup of social protection programmes. Social assistance is one component of social protection, which also includes social insurance and labour market regulation (Hickey et al., 2020).

5. The way forward for research, and policy recommendations

This positioning paper has sought to understand why in many African contexts each increment of economic growth is less inequality and poverty reducing than in other parts of the world. This situation has been worsened by the seismic shock to economies and societies from the COVID pandemic. Such a positioning serves as the foundation for our work at the Summit to devise well-grounded, impactful contributions to promoting inclusive development and meeting the SDGs.

It is important to recognise that growth creates the potential for poverty and inequality reduction. We have given attention to describing and understanding recent patterns of growth and employment in Africa in this document and in a workshop. We return to the growth-poverty-inequality triangle in TT7's first session on Monday, but now with a lens on policies and actions to turn many vicious cycles between growth, poverty and inequality into virtuous ones.

All consideration of policies and actions must start from the post- COVID landscape. This has been our framing in this document. They also have to take account of the impact of climate change. While we have not addressed this issue to this point, we will hold a parallel session to interrogate the complementarities in actions to promote a just climate transition and those to address growth, poverty an inequality.

Even if growth is essential, it is equally important to recognise that growth can and has bypassed many people. We argue that the failure to translate economic growth into greater equity and less poverty is the outcome of the structure of economies in intersection with the barriers to social mobility and access to opportunities that confront the poor and vulnerable in each country context. COVID has made the importance of supportive social policies even clearer. We will hold a parallel workshop at the Summit to push forward this social policy agenda.

Preceding COVID, African countries were falling short of their SDG commitments with regard to poverty and inequality. To this point the growth, poverty and inequality discussion has not insisted on confronting this with such an integrated framing of the linkages between economic change and the capabilities and possibilities of people. We are pushing into new terrain that requires new research and new data to frame impactful actions against poverty and inequality. This places huge responsibilities on Africa's research community in interaction with policy communities and with civil society. On day two of the Summit we convene a series of workshops to push forward each of these data, research and societal engagement agendas.

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