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United Nations Economic
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COMMITTEE: Economic and Social Council

***Topic: Exploring the roles of Affirmative Action
Policies in Bridging Socioeconomic Gaps and
Promoting Inclusive Economic Growth***

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Exploring the roles of Affirmative Action Policies in Bridging Socioeconomic Gaps and Promoting Inclusive Economic Growth

Introduction

Affirmative Action policies have long been recognized as a powerful tool for promoting equality and inclusion in societies plagued by historical injustices and systemic discrimination. In the context of Africa, where socioeconomic disparities are deeply rooted in colonial legacies and structural inequalities, Affirmative Action policies play a critical role in bridging these gaps and fostering inclusive economic growth. By actively promoting the participation of marginalized groups in education, employment, and other key sectors of society, these policies aim to create a more equitable and prosperous future for all. Affirmative Action policies are designed to address the barriers that have historically prevented certain groups, such as women, ethnic minorities, and people with disabilities, from fully participating in the economy and society. By providing targeted support and opportunities to these groups, Affirmative Action seeks to level the playing field and ensure that everyone has an equal chance to succeed. In doing so, these policies not only address the injustices of the past but also lay the foundation for a more inclusive and resilient economy in the future.

Affirmation Action Policies in African Context

Promoting diversity and inclusion, Affirmative Action policies can drive innovation, enhance productivity, and foster social cohesion. Research has shown that diverse teams are more creative and better at problem-solving, leading to better outcomes for businesses and society as a whole. Moreover, by empowering marginalized groups to participate fully in the economy, these policies help to build a more

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skilled and dynamic workforce, which is essential for sustainable economic growth. However, despite their potential benefits, implementing Affirmative Action policies in Africa is not without its challenges. Resistance from dominant groups, concerns about reverse discrimination, and a lack of political will can all pose obstacles to the successful implementation of these policies. It is therefore essential for

policymakers to carefully design and implement Affirmative Action measures in a way that is fair, transparent, and effective, taking into account the specific context and needs of the region. In this context, this topic park will explore the roles of Affirmative Action policies in bridging socioeconomic gaps and promoting inclusive economic growth in Africa. By examining the potential benefits, challenges, and best practices associated with these policies, we can gain a deeper understanding of their impact on economic development and social progress in the region. Affirmative Action policies refer to a set of measures aimed at promoting the representation of historically disadvantaged groups in various sectors of society, including education, employment, and public office. In the context of Africa, where significant socioeconomic gaps exist due to historical injustices, colonial legacies, and systemic discrimination, Affirmative Action policies can play a crucial role in promoting inclusive economic growth and bridging these gaps.

Promoting Equality of Opportunity

Affirmative Action policies can help level the playing field by providing historically disadvantaged groups, such as women, ethnic minorities, and people with disabilities, with increased access to education, employment, and other opportunities. By ensuring equal access to these opportunities, Affirmative Action can help address socioeconomic disparities and promote inclusive economic growth. An example of

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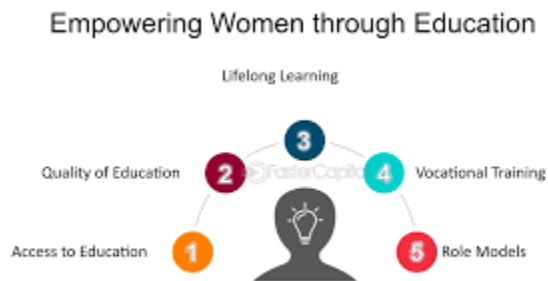
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promoting equality of opportunity in the African Union is the Funder Equality and Development. The Aspiration 6 of Agenda 2063 calls for “An Africa, whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth, and caring for children.” The Agenda 2063 tries to accommodate everyone in the society so that all citizens are actively involved in decision making. The AU recognises that that gender equality is a fundamental human right and the Article 3 of the Protocol on Amendments of the Constitutive Act of the African Union recognises the critical role of women in promoting inclusive development and calls for the AU “to ensure the effective participation of women in

decision-making, particularly in the political, economic and socio-cultural areas.” It has also developed the strategy focuses on 6 pillars:

1. Women’s Economic Empowerment and Sustainable Development – Women’s empowerment is to growth, prosperity and sustainability.
2. Social justice, protection & Women’s Rights – woman’s rights are human rights; they span all spheres- social, political, legal and economic.
3. Leadership & Governance – good governance demands equal and effective participation by women.



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4. Gender Management Systems – providing access and investing resources (financial and other technical resources) to support women
5. Women, Peace and Security – Ensuring women’s perspectives are included on issues of Peace – Prevention, Protection, Promotion Programmes
6. Media & ICTs – Given women a voice in African media and access to technology for knowledge.

Addressing Structural Inequalities

Affirmative Action policies can help address the structural inequalities that have perpetuated socioeconomic disparities in Africa. By actively promoting the inclusion of marginalized groups in key sectors of society, these policies can help dismantle barriers to economic participation and empower individuals to contribute to the economy. Affirmative action policies play a crucial role in addressing structural inequality in Africa by providing opportunities to marginalized groups, such as women and ethnic minorities, in education, employment, and other sectors. By implementing these policies, governments can help bridge socioeconomic gaps by ensuring more equitable access to resources and opportunities. This, in turn, can contribute to inclusive economic growth by tapping into the talents and potential of previously disadvantaged groups, leading to a more diverse and dynamic workforce. However, it’s important for such policies to be carefully designed and implemented to avoid unintended consequences and ensure long-term effectiveness in addressing structural inequality. South Africa has implemented some strategies that can be used in bridging the Social inequality gaps. According to Kawaka (2024) in the [Perspective Chapter: Determinative Factors for Bridging Social Inequality Gaps – A South African Perspective](#) : The government has implemented various policies and programmes to address historical injustices and promote equal opportunities for all citizens. The South African

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government has enacted the most comprehensive affirmative action to reduce social inequality. Affirmative action in South Africa is a significant government policy to rectify past injustices and promote social equality. It is a term that originated in the United States of America (USA) and includes a series of measures implemented by employers, university admissions offices, and government agencies to go beyond mere non-discrimination. The programmes aim to address the historical inequalities caused by apartheid by providing opportunities and resources to previously disadvantaged populations.

The government has taken steps to enhance the representation of historically disadvantaged groups in different sectors, including education, employment, and business ownership, through affirmative action. These policies have provided opportunities, ensured fairness for marginalised communities, and promoted diversity in all areas of life. This is particularly true after the end of apartheid in 1994. Archibong and Adejumo state that the Employment Equity Act (EEA) 55 (1998) and the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (BB-BEE) Act (2003) and subsequent amendments serve as the primary legal structures for the enforcement of affirmative action in South Africa. Companies are required to adopt affirmative action measures to ensure the inclusion of previously disadvantaged groups in the workplace.

**Broad-Based
Black
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The Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) programme is a policy in South Africa aimed at enhancing the involvement of historically disadvantaged black individuals in the economy. It achieves this through preferential procurement and employment equity, creating opportunities for disadvantaged groups and addressing social inequality. Unfortunately, only a few black individuals and their companies have emerged as prominent black partners in specific deals, some of which seem connected to the ruling party.

In addition, the government has implemented various skills development programmes and initiatives to enhance access to high-quality education and skills development programmes. These initiatives empower underprivileged individuals and equip them with the necessary resources to enhance their socio-economic status. They have disrupted the cycle of poverty and facilitated upward social mobility by implementing strategies such as providing additional financial resources to schools in disadvantaged regions and offering grants to students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.”

Building Social Cohesion

Affirmative Action can also help build social cohesion by reducing social exclusion and promoting a sense of belonging among marginalized groups. By creating more inclusive societies, these policies can help foster social stability and create an environment conducive to economic growth. Kenya has created 4 strategic priorities to assist the youth in building social cohesion. The strategies include:

1. Modernising agriculture through technology and innovation: “Kenyan participants saw technology and innovation as key to transforming the country’s agricultural sector for greater prosperity. While farming practices such as precision agriculture may be capital intensive with high government and private sector investments, solutions such as portable soil testing kits empower

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farmers to address nutrient issues. Mobile apps and SMS services providing localised weather, market and pest information on basic phones boost decision-making. Strengthening extension through demonstration farms highlights drought-tolerant varieties and sustainable practices, motivating their adoption”.

2.



Investing in youth’s talent, skills and leadership:

“Expanding access to technical and vocational training, particularly in information and communications technology (ICT), green jobs, healthcare and oil/gas, can produce a skilled workforce as Kenya develops. Regular monitoring helps refine approaches over time based on youth feedback. There is a clear indication of interest, as demonstrated by the enrolment in technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programmes, which has been increasing over the years”.

3. Advancing technology and AI capabilities by prioritising internet access, technology hubs and digital literacy: While Kenya has made significant strides in expanding internet access and growing its digital economy, more must be done to close the digital divide and ensure the benefits of emerging technologies reach all citizens. Participants recognised both the immense potential of

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technologies such as AI and their limitations if not deployed inclusively. Over 17 million Kenyans are internet users, representing a 32.7% national penetration rate. However, there is a major disparity between urban and rural access – 44% of households in cities can get online versus just 17% in rural areas”.

4. Strengthening social protection for vulnerable populations: “The government should widen existing cash transfer programmes and boost funding to better support disadvantaged populations. Healthcare subsidies ought to be reworked to improve access to health services for those without employment and recent tertiary education graduates. Investing in education, technical training and skills-building programmes is necessary to open up more opportunities for underprivileged groups. Key social protection institutions such as the National Safety Net Programme and National Health Insurance Fund should undergo reforms to heighten transparency and accountability. This could involve better coordination, enlarged budgets, strong monitoring systems, independent audits and public financial reporting”.

<https://saiaa.org.za/research/kenya-leveraging-youth-for-inclusive-development-and-resilience/>

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Enhancing Human Capital

By providing increased access to education and training opportunities, Affirmative Action policies can help enhance the human capital of marginalized groups. This, in turn, can lead to a more skilled and productive workforce, which is essential for sustained economic growth and development. According to the 'World Bank African Human Capital Plan', the potential productivity of the next generation is measured by the Human Capital Index (HCI) developed by the World Bank. Africa's HCI score is 0.4, whereas the average for the world is 0.57. According to the score, this indicates that children born in Sub-

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Saharan Africa today will only be 40% as productive as they could be as adults if they have full education and optimal health. This directly affects not just the general well-being of individuals and families but also the health of entire economies. The nations at the bottom of the Index will see the greatest loss of income and will lag behind the rest of the world economy.

While the index is a forward-looking measure, Africa also faces significant challenges with its existing working age population, many of whom are unemployed or underemployed in low productivity work. Of Africa's nearly 420million youth aged 15 to 35 years, one third are Unemployed.

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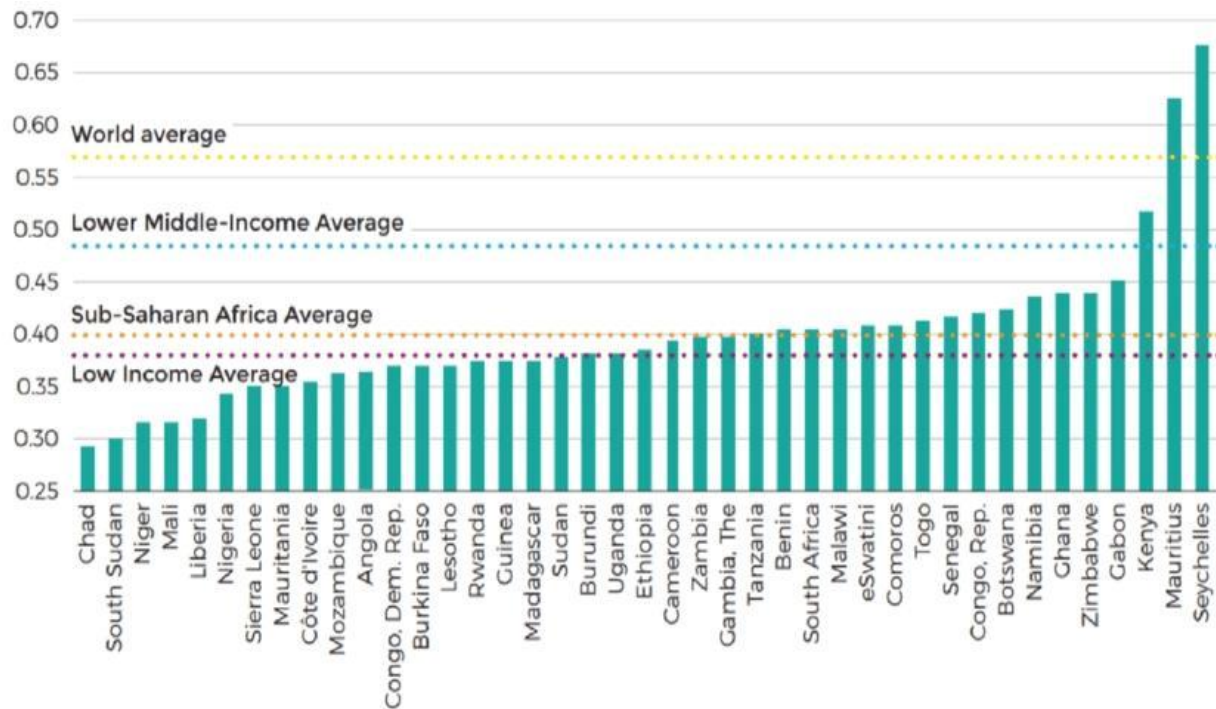


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The World Bank's Human Capital Plan for Support to Countries

To support African countries as they work to develop their human capital, and to respond to their priorities, the World Bank is gearing to help them achieve the following targets in Africa by 2023:

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- **Survival:** Reduce the under-5 mortality rate from 75 deaths Per 1,000 live births to 45, saving 4 million lives.
- **Health:** Reduce the stunting rate from 32% to 26% of all Children, saving 11 million children from stunting. And to Increase the overall adult survival rate from 0.73 to 0.81 through improved prevention and stronger health systems.
- **Education:** Increase learning-adjusted years of school from 4.94 to 5.88 years, a 20% increase.
- **Social Protection:** Increase social protection coverage from 20% to 30% of those in the poorest economic quintile in low-income countries, adding coverage for 13 million people.
- **Fertility:** Reduce the adolescent fertility rate from 102 to 83 births per 1,000 women age 15 to 19 years.

Conclusion

Overall, Affirmative Action policies can play a crucial role in bridging socioeconomic gaps and promoting inclusive economic growth in Africa. South Africa's history of colonialism and apartheid has had a profound and enduring impact on its society, resulting in entrenched inequalities in terms of race, class, and gender. Historical factors have played a significant role in shaping the social structures and institutions that perpetuate inequality. South Africa has a highly unequal income distribution, with a minority owning a significant proportion of the nation's wealth. This economic disparity exacerbates social inequalities, as people with limited resources face challenges in accessing basic necessities and opportunities for social mobility. By providing opportunities for historically disadvantaged groups and addressing structural inequalities, these policies can contribute to building a more equitable and prosperous continent.

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