

Environmental Sustainability: a key governance challenge, in need of better measurements

The impacts of climate change are being felt everywhere as global emissions reach record levels. Although among the least responsible for climate change, African states can do little to stop it, though the continent's populations are among those to bear the heaviest brunt of its effects. Adapting to climate change and the impact it will have on the environment and on citizens is one of the key governance challenges facing Africa.

The African continent has not been caught unaware. In 1968, the predecessor of the African Union (AU), the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), adopted the African Convention on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources which was revised in 2017 and has been signed by 44 member states to date¹. The Convention outlines the importance of the environmental issues for the African continent, stating that Africa's natural environment and resources are an integral part of its heritage and that the conservation of the environment constitutes a primary concern of all Africans. The relevance of environmental issues for the African continent is also reflected in the AU's Agenda 2063 whose Goal 7 aims for environmentally sustainable and climate resilient economies and communities. The AU Convention assigns governments a direct responsibility of protecting and conserving the environment and the African Environment Outlook (2013) calls on African countries to put these issues at the top of their national and continent-wide policy agendas as they are vital for the well-being of their citizens.

Governance, defined by the Mo Ibrahim Foundation as the provision of political, social and economic public goods that citizens have the right to expect from their state, is therefore key to ensuring environmental sustainability. One of the major outcomes of the next Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG) dataset update to be released in October 2020, will be the inclusion of a new sub-category revolving around the topic of *Environmental Sustainability*.

The Foundation, consulting relevant literature and experts, has identified nine main dimensions that are relevant for assessing government's efforts and performance with regards to *Environmental Sustainability*: Promotion & Enforcement of Environmental Sustainability, Absence of Air Pollution, Absence of Greenhouse Gas Emissions, Sustainable Energy, Sustainable Management of Land & Soil, Sustainable Fisheries & Aquatic Ecosystems, Wildlife and Biodiversity, Sustainable Forests and Recycling & Waste Management. However, finding suitable data to measure all of these dimensions is challenging.

For example, data on waste management is only available for a small number of African countries or only provides data for a single year, making it impossible to track improvements or declines in performance. Data on greenhouse gas emissions, on the other hand, are available over a time-series and for almost every African country, yet the latest available data year is 2010, 2012 or 2014 depending on the variable. Large data gaps are also found with regards to data on sustainable fisheries or wildlife trade.

There are improvements in other areas on the way. Through their Tracking SDG 7 Initiative, a coalition of international organisations, including the International Energy Agency, the International Renewable Energy Agency, the United Nations Statistics Division, the World Bank and the World Health Organization, are providing data on renewable energy and energy efficiency for the large majority of African countries, covering over ten years. The joint website State of Global Air by the Health Effects Institute and the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation presents time-series data on air pollution which covers 54 African countries.

For such a critical area for the well-being of citizens, the data landscape must be improved. The Foundation looks forward to contributing findings for the African continent to help aid evidence-based decision making in the governance of environmental sustainability.

For more information on the IIAG, sources, definitions, and to access the dataset, visit <http://mo.ibrahim.foundation/iiag/>

¹ <https://au.int/en/treaties/african-convention-conservation-nature-and-natural-resources>
https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/7782-sl-revised_african_convention_on_the_conservation_of_nature_and_natural_resources.pdf