Voices of Africa:
Harnessing Strategic Planning and Foresight to accelerate the Africa We Want

Supporting Sound Policy Making for Effective Governance in Africa

Policy Brief

An Institution of the
African Union

Agenda
2063
The Africa We Want

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ACRONYMS

APRM	African Peer Review Mechanism
AU	African Union
CEPA	Committee of Expertson Public Administration
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
EWSE	Early WarningSystems
LNOB	Leave No One Behind
NDPs	NationalDevelopment Plans
NPC	National Planning Commission
HLPF	High-Level Political Forum
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goal
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Defining Strategic Planning and Foresight

Strategic planning is a systematic process through which governments and institutions articulate long-term visions, set priorities, and allocate resources to achieve sustainable development outcomes. It involves the formulation of National Development Plans (NDPs) that align with continental and global agendas, such as the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Foresight, a complementary discipline, enhances strategic planning by enabling governments to anticipate future scenarios, identify emerging risks, and prepare for uncertainties through evidence-based scenario planning and risk anticipation. Together, strategic planning and foresight empower African nations to build resilient governance systems capable of navigating complex socio-economic and environmental challenges.

The African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), in collaboration with the United Nations Committee of Experts on Public Administration (UN CEPA) and a designated Taskforce of African development experts, has collaborated extensively over the past three years to explore potential guiding approach towards strategic planning and foresight in the continent. Consequently, the Strategic Planning and Foresight Toolkit for African Governance was developed by the APRM with inputs of many African experts and development practitioners to assess the extent of which Sound Policy Making can be strengthened through the strategic planning and foresight. As a core principle of the principles of effective governance of SDGs, African experts encourage assisting countries in the application of this principle at national level especially after the COVID-19 negative impact on national planning and economic growth.

This toolkit provides a structured framework to integrate strategic planning and foresight into national governance systems. It responds to lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic, which exposed systemic vulnerabilities in planning processes and threatened

progress toward Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By equipping governments with tools to anticipate challenges and allocate resources proactively, the toolkit supports the vision of "The Africa We Want" through future-ready governance.

This policy brief highlights key elements of the Toolkit and its relevance to the African Peer Review Mechanism processes including the assessment reviews. Further, the brief unpacked findings of the Toolkit, disseminated during the UNDESA-APRM Workshop in Cape Town (23– 25 October 2024. It displays inputs from development experts from fourteen (14) African countries who identified challenges and recommendations to enhance strategic planning and foresight to accelerate the implementation of the Second Ten-Year Implementation Plan (STYIP) of Agenda 2063.

1.2 Overview of the Toolkit and Its Elements

The APRM proposed Toolkit is a comprehensive resource designed to strengthen strategic planning and foresight in African governance. It provides a self-assessment framework to evaluate the integration of strategic planning into national policies, step-by-step guidance for establishing robust planning systems, and clear delineation of responsibilities for implementation.

The toolkit's institutional elements include regular plan reviews, inclusive formulation processes, comprehensive NDPs and empowered planning agencies with legal authority. Its policy elements emphasize evidence-based planning, policy coherence, scenario planning and risk anticipation through early warning systems.

The implementation framework features a flexible, non-sequential checklist, identification of key actors, and verification methods to monitor progress. Additionally, the toolkit underscores the importance of communication, coordination, and a supportive legal framework to ensure sustainability and stakeholder engagement.

Figure 1 Components of Strategic Planning and Foresight (Source: Authors, 2024)

Core Components: Institutional Elements of Strategic Planning

Regular Review & Updates
Ensuring plans remain relevant

Inclusive Plan Formulation
Participatory approach to planning

National Development Plan
Comprehensive framework document

Empowered Planning Agency
Independent body with legal authority

2. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The Strategic Planning and Foresight Toolkit was developed by the APRM to operationalize UN CEPA's Principles of Effective Governance for Sustainable Development. It specifically targets the principle of Sound Policy Making, addressing gaps exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which highlighted the need for resilient, forward-looking planning systems.

The toolkit aligns with the goals of Agenda 2063 and the SDGs, aiming to safeguard development progress by enabling governments to anticipate and mitigate risks effectively.

The validation process, conducted during the UNDESA-APRM Workshop in Cape Town (23– 25 October 2024), involved a diverse sample of African governance experts. Findings revealed varying levels of integration of strategic planning and foresight into NDPs, with countries like Uganda demonstrating strong articulation, while others, such as Botswana, noted that foresight remains a novel concept. Challenges identified include limited data availability, weak coordination, and resource constraints, which mirror issues highlighted in the LNOB policy brief.

3. PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The toolkit serves four primary purposes:

- Self-assessment framework which enables governments to evaluate the integration of strategic planning and foresight into national policies.
- Step-by-step guidance that provides actionable steps to establish robust national planning systems.
- Clear responsibilities identifying institutions responsible for implementing recommended actions, ensuring accountability.
- Future-ready governance that supports proactive resource allocation and scenario planning to address future challenges.

These objectives align with the APRM's mission to promote democracy and good governance, supporting African Union (AU) member states in achieving sustainable development and resilience.

4. CORE COMPONENTS

4.1 Institutional Elements

The toolkit outlines four institutional elements critical to effective strategic planning:

- Regular review and updates ensure NDPs remain relevant to changing national and global contexts.
- Inclusive plan formulation promotes participatory approaches involving diverse stakeholders.
- National Development Plan serves as a comprehensive framework for coordinated development efforts.
- Empowered planning agency establishes an independent body with legal authority to oversee planning processes.

4.2 Policy Elements

The toolkit emphasizes four policy elements to enhance foresight:

- Evidence-based planning relies on accurate data and forecasts to explore future scenarios and inform decisions.
- Policy coherence ensures alignment across sectors to avoid siloed approaches.
- Scenario planning prepares for multiple future trajectories to enhance resilience.
- Risk anticipation embeds early warning systems to mitigate potential disruptions.

5. IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

The toolkit provides a flexible implementation framework, including:

- Comprehensive checklist: diagnostic questions to identify gaps in planning systems.
- Key actors' identification specifies agencies responsible for each action item.
- Verification methods: offer tangible markers to track implementation progress.
- Flexible approach: allows adaptation to diverse national contexts without a rigid sequence.

This framework ensures that strategic planning is actionable, measurable, and adaptable, addressing challenges such as coordination gaps and resource limitations.

6. COMMUNICATION AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Effective implementation requires robust communication and legal structures. The Toolkit provides clear guidance to strengthen both dimensions. Communication and coordination mechanisms are essential to foster cross-sectoral alignment and ensure inclusive participation. The validation process confirmed that formal multi-stakeholder consultation processes are now a widely adopted practice in African national planning. However, challenges remain in embedding foresight considerations systematically across sectoral and intergovernmental coordination platforms. Respondents emphasized the need for robust institutional mechanisms to ensure that strategic foresight informs both the formulation and adaptive revision of national development plans.

In addition, constitutional and legislative elements are key to sustaining planning efforts over time. These include constitutional mandates for planning, specific enabling laws and regulations, harmonized legislation, and measures to ensure continuity of planning beyond political cycles. Embedding foresight within these legal frameworks will help institutionalize a future-oriented culture in public governance and protect long-term priorities from short-term political pressures.

7. FINDINGS FROM TOOLKIT VALIDATION

The Toolkit was disseminated during the UNDESA-APRM Workshop in Cape Town (23–25 October 2024) on 'strengthening institutional capacities in Africa for effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and AU Agenda 2063: Follow-up to the 2024 HLPF and Summit of the Future' which took place in Cape Town from 23-25 October 2025.

African experts engaged in the APRM-UNDESA Continental workshops since 2022 provided critical insights into the Toolkit's application and compatibility with the African context. The validation exercise highlighted broad participation across African Member States, with governance experts providing valuable reflections on the Toolkit's relevance and applicability. While many countries reported having strong constitutional or legal foundations

for national planning frameworks, integration of foresight principles remains at an early stage in several contexts. Some countries, such as Uganda, demonstrated advanced articulation of foresight in their planning processes, whereas others, like Botswana, are beginning to move beyond macro-fiscal projections towards more comprehensive foresight approaches. Uganda has embedded foresight into its national planning functions.

The National Planning Authority (NPA) leads continuous, multi-horizon planning under the Comprehensive National Development Planning Framework, which includes Vision 2040 and rolling five-year National Development Plans. Botswana is beginning to embed foresight within strategic development planning. Its National Planning Commission (NPC), established in 2022, coordinates national and district planning and is working on integrating foresight principles into Vision 2036 and NDP 124.

Participants also identified common challenges including coordination gaps, limited resources for foresight modelling, and the need to institutionalize anticipatory capabilities within planning agencies. The validation further underscored political economy dynamics around the operational independence of planning institutions, which in some cases remain subject to political influence.

These insights affirm the relevance of the Toolkit's emphasis on building future-ready governance systems and fostering institutional environments that support anticipatory, adaptive planning. This section presents the results of the Toolkit survey disseminated during the APRM-UNDEA workshop in Cape Town.

7.1 Background on the sample of respondents and gender

The respondents comprise experts from twelve (12) African countries. Ghana and Botswana are the most represented, each with two participants. The other countries each contributed one respondent, ensuring broad continental coverage. This distribution reflects a diverse and balanced regional representation, with no single country dominating the sample. Out of the 14 total respondents, 80% are male and 20% are female, reflecting a predominantly male participant pool. While women's representation is comparatively low, the three female respondents—hailing from Botswana, Malawi, and Cameroon—add important regional and gender diversity to the insights captured. This gender breakdown highlights a need for more balanced representation in future engagements to better reflect diverse perspectives in national planning and oversight.

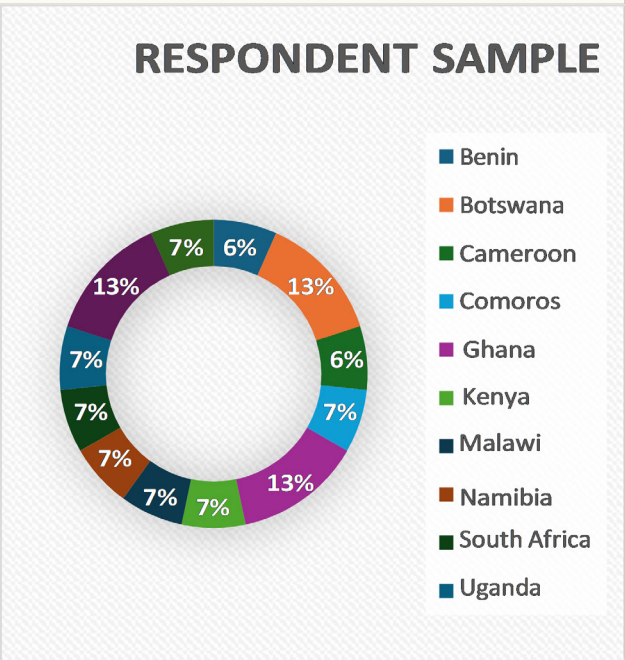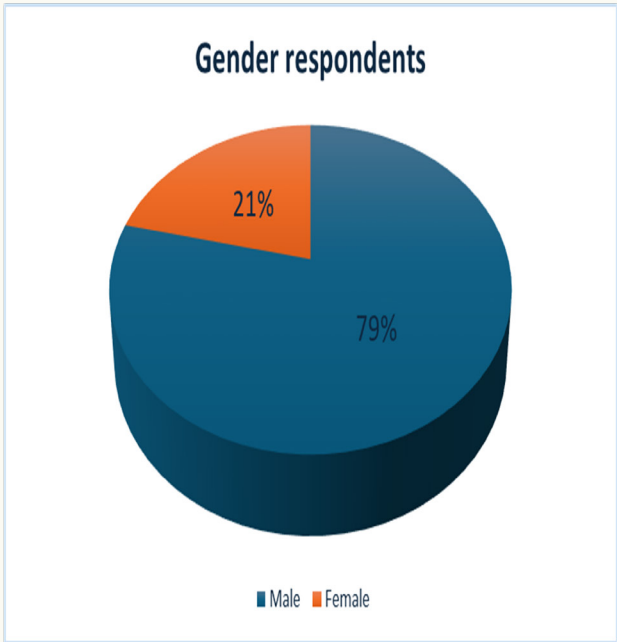Figure 2 Respondent Sample of the Toolkit

Figure 3 Gender Respondents

Years of Experience of Experts

The respondents bring substantial expertise to strategic planning and oversight. A significant 93.3% (14 out of 15) have over five years of experience, with over half (53.3%) in the 10–20- year range—underscoring a highly seasoned cohort. Most are mid- to senior-level managers with specialized backgrounds in national development planning, SDG monitoring, and evaluation. The group also includes civil servants and representatives from APRM national structures in countries such as Ghana, Namibia, South Africa, and Uganda, lending strong institutional depth to the insights provided.

Figure 4 Years of Experience of Respondents
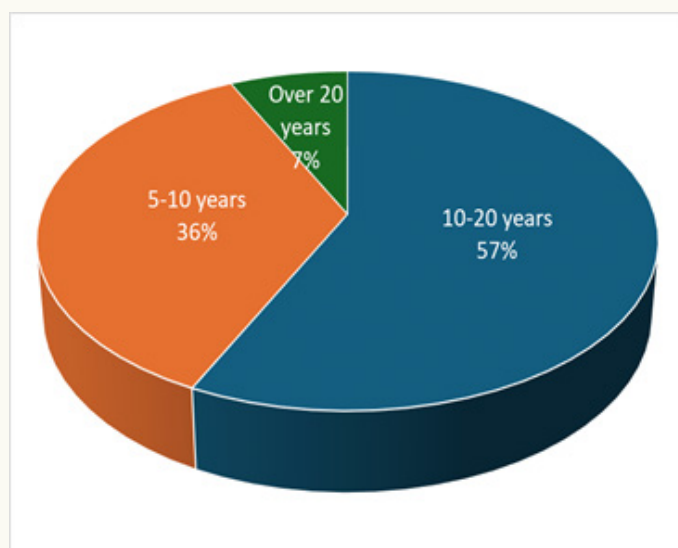
7.2 Institutional arrangements for Strategic Planning and Foresight

7.2.1 Constitutional Mandates for National Planning: A Continental Snapshot of Legal Anchoring and Institutional Architecture

An analysis of national planning frameworks across 12 African countries reveals that 83% have constitutionally mandated development planning systems. These mandates are grounded in supreme legal instruments—such as Ghana's Constitution (Article 87) establishing the National Development Planning Commission (NDPC) and Uganda's Constitution (Article 125) which underpins the National Planning Authority (NPA). In some countries, specific planning laws complement the constitutional mandates, such as Botswana's National Planning Act (No. 5 of 2024) and Namibia's National Planning Commission Act (2013).

The institutional anchoring of planning functions varies—from specialized bodies (e.g., Comoros' General Planning Commission) to planning units within finance ministries (e.g., Zambia's Ministry of Finance and National Planning).

Notably, Cameroon's Ministry of Economy, Planning and Regional Development (MINEPAT) exists without a constitutional mandate—highlighting that institutional presence alone is not sufficient for legal legitimacy. Malawi's "partial" status suggests evolving legal reforms or transitional planning arrangements. While these findings demonstrate widespread legal commitment to planning as a governance function, qualitative evidence emphasizes that legal provisions must be accompanied by operational capacity, financing, and integration into national development processes to yield tangible results.

Respondents highlighted that institutional arrangements and legislative framework and regulations to organise national development plans formulation at national level clearly exist and has been adjusted over the past ten years to meet the global and continental visions including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063: the Africa we want. However, it varies from one country to another. Further, the affirmative actions to ensure that foresight is considered as part of the national development planning are quite challenging to be adopted.

Figure 5 Relevant laws of NDPs

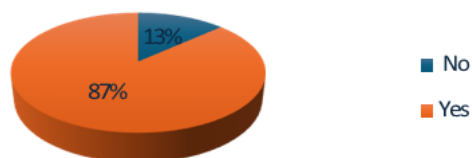**Are there relevant laws and regulations organizing how the national development plan is formulated?**

13% No
87% Yes

Figure 6 Harmonisation of laws with NDPs

Laws and regulations harmonized/domesticated to achieve the same national development plans?

Came... | Ghana | Kenya | Malawi | South... | Benin | Bots... | Como... | Ghana | Nami... | Uganda | Zambia | Zimb...
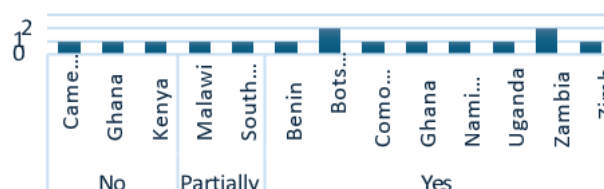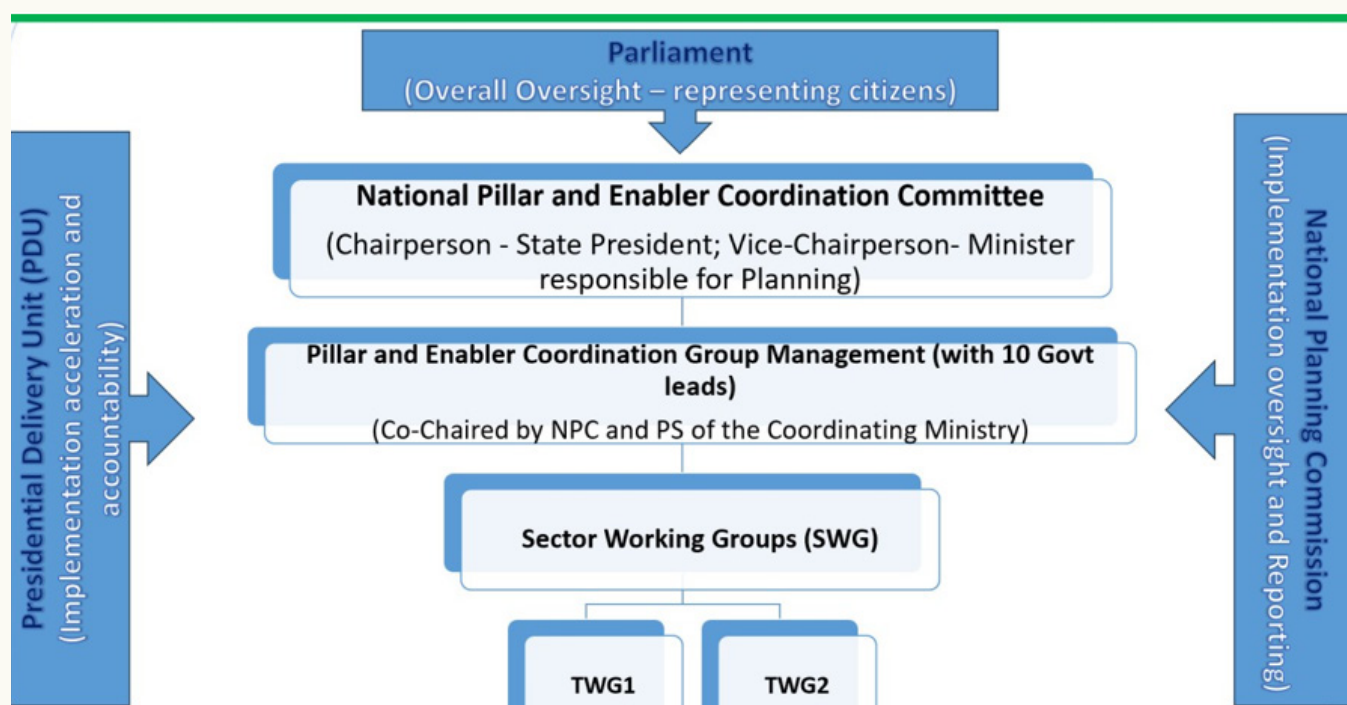
No | Partially | Yes

Figure 7 Malawi's Institutional Mechanism (Source: National Planning Commission, 2025)

Prevalence and Nature of Legal Frameworks for Plan Formulation. Quantitatively, 87 of the responses confirm dedicated laws governing national development plan (NDP) formulation. Ghana's National Development Planning Act (1994) and Local Governance Act (2016) exemplify robust statutory frameworks, while Botswana and Zambia rely on the Public Finance Management Act (2011) and National Planning and Budgeting Act, respectively. Qualitatively, these laws institutionalize planning processes: Uganda's NPA Regulations (2018) operationalize constitutional mandates, and Namibia's legislation explicitly tasks the National Planning Commission (NPC) with "prioritizing and directing development. However, Cameroon and Kenya (14%) lack specific laws, creating structural vulnerabilities.

Kenya's State Department of Economic Planning operates without legislative grounding, and Cameroon's planning division within MINEPAT functions on ad hoc technical mandates, risking policy inconsistency and fragmented implementation. In terms of harmonization of Laws

with National Development Objectives, only 57% of the respondents think that their countries achieve full harmonization between laws and NDP goals. Zambia's National Planning and Budgeting (NPB) Act (Article 16) domestically integrates "regional and international development initiatives," while Zimbabwe aligns all institutions with its National Development Strategy 1. Qualitatively, Uganda's NPA Amendment Bill (2024) merges economic and physical planning bodies to enforce coherence. Yet 3 countries (21%) report partial harmonization:

South Africa's DPME acknowledges needing legislative reforms for "integrated planning," Malawi's framework lacks comprehensive linkage, and Comoros' sectoral units face coordination gaps despite thematic dialogues. Cameroon, Kenya, and one Ghana entry (21%) explicitly lack harmonization, with Ghana noting misalignment between national and local planning laws. This highlights a critical gap where legal silos undermine unified development visions.

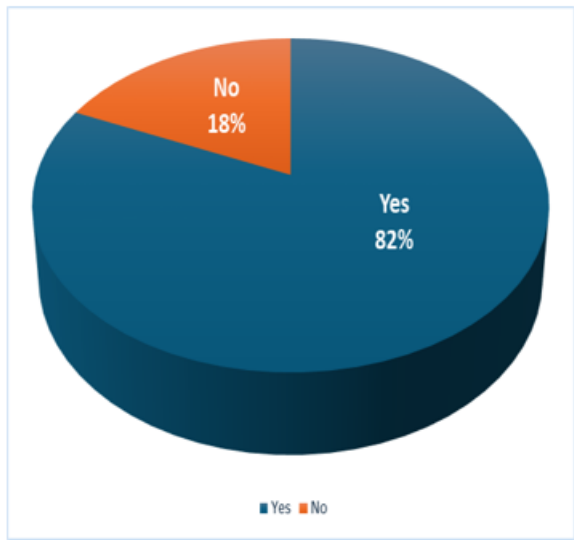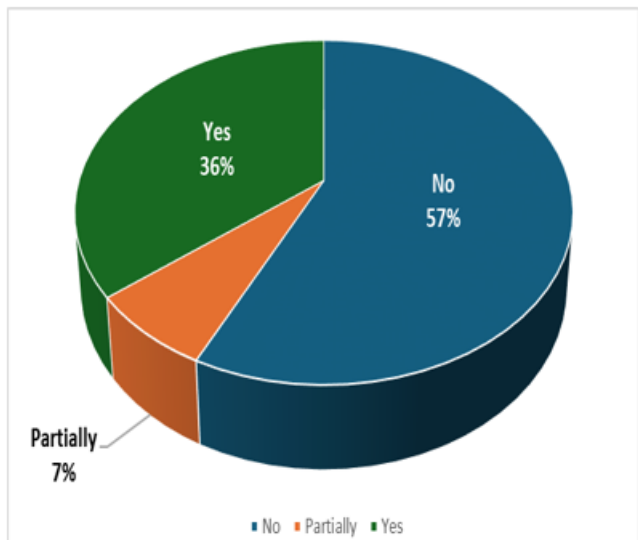Figure 8 Existence of National Planning architecture

Figure 9 Institutional Independence of Planning Commission

Out of 12 African countries reviewed, 9 have a national planning agency or equivalent structure coordinating development plans. Countries like Uganda, Botswana, and South Africa host dedicated planning commissions, while others—such as Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Kenya—embed planning roles within their Ministries of Finance or Economic Planning. Cameroon's function is departmental within MINEPAT, while Comoros and Benin lack formal agencies relying on ad hoc or fragmented mechanisms. Benin relies instead on a directorate for policy coordination. This underscores diverse institutional models for coordinating national development, with implications for coherence, mandate clarity, and long-term planning. Independence is exceptionally rare, with only 2 of 12 country agencies operating autonomously. Uganda's NPA and South Africa's NPC (staffed by "external experts appointed by the President") stand apart.

Quantitatively, 79% of respondents indicated lack of independence, typically embedded within ministries: Botswana's NPC reports to the Ministry of State President, Zimbabwe's ministry is "like any other government department," and Zambia's body juggles planning with other functions. Qualitatively, Benin's "partial" independence reflects weak institutional separation. This dependency risks politicization, as noted in Zimbabwe's experts that 'ministries are "headed by political Ministers. the near-universal lack of autonomy suggests planning is often subordinate to executive priorities rather than technical imperatives'.

Additionally, only 36% of the respondents argued that their national planning commissions (NPCs) have tangible political power. A good example is provided from Botswana. Botswana's NPC Advisory Council is chaired by the Vice President, ensuring high-

level access, while Comoros' body "benefits from full powers like a ministry." Zambia and Zimbabwe explicitly note ministerial leadership grants influence. However, 64% respondents report lack policy authority: South Africa's NPC is "purely advisory," Cameroon's division defers to the presidency for "strategic approval," and Malawi's agency "enjoys corporate powers only." Qualitatively, political influence correlates with leadership access—Botswana's VP-led council versus Kenya's State Department, which holds no sway beyond technical drafting. This disconnects between technical planning and decision-making undermines plan implementation.

7.3 Policy Elements and Implementation Framework

National Development Plans in place but vary in time horizons and strategic priorities. All 12 countries in the dataset confirm the existence of a national development plan (NDP) or framework. These NDPs vary in time horizons and strategic priorities. Countries such as Malawi (Vision 2063), Cameroon (Vision 2035), Kenya (Vision 2030), and South Africa (NDP to 2030) adopt long-term strategic visions, while others like Ghana and Botswana follow rolling medium-term plans aligned to national and continental goals.

The Ministry of Finance or related entities lead NDP coordination in Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Kenya, ensuring planning is linked to fiscal and economic policy. Core priorities across countries include economic transformation, job creation, governance, climate adaptation, and human capital development. Although Comoros reports strategic aspirations and alignment with Agenda 2063, it lacks a formalized NDP structure. The diversity of approaches reflects each country's unique planning maturity and institutional structure but underscores a shared commitment to structured national development
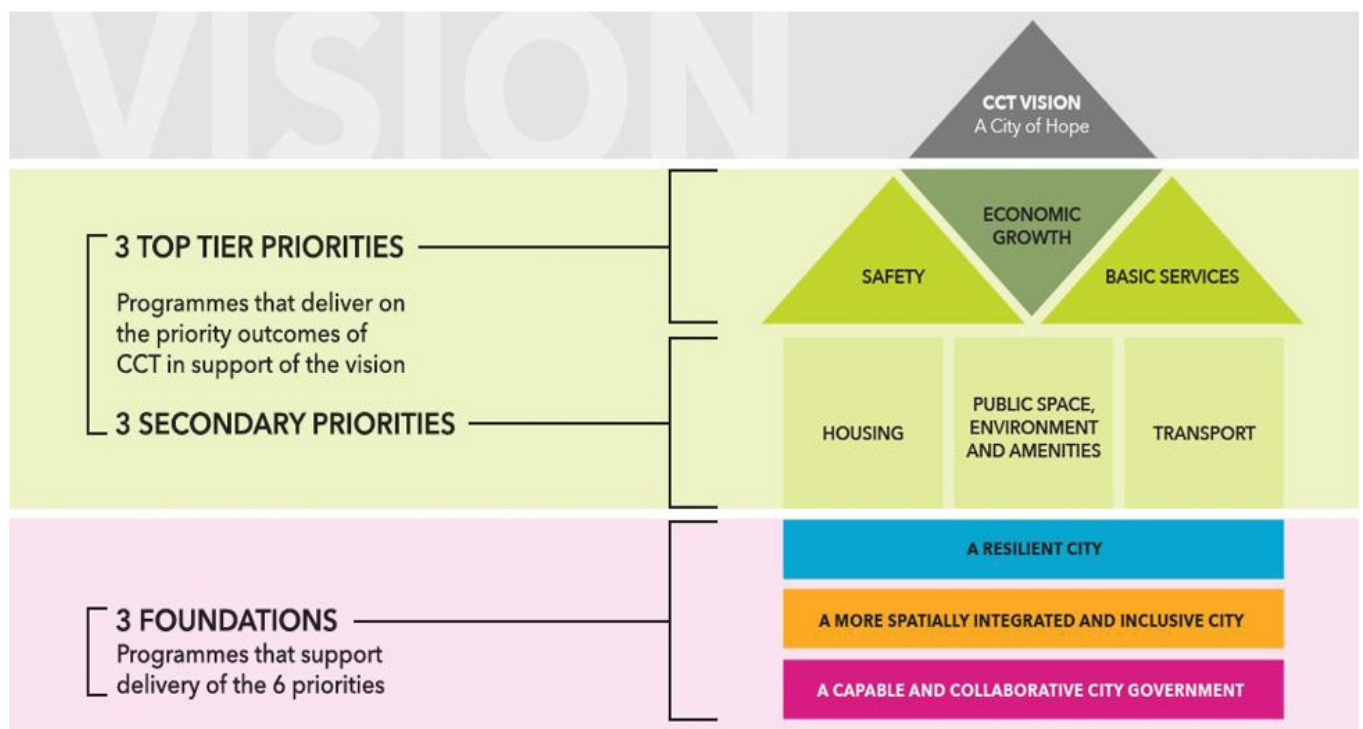
Strategic Foresight: Gaining Ground but Unevenly Institutionalized Across National Planning Systems. As far as the integration of Foresight element into the NDP is concerned, out of 12 unique countries, 7 countries (Ghana, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Cameroon, Comoros, Benin, and one partial from South Africa) report having some form of Strategic Foresight or similar unit within their national development

planning structures. Uganda stands out for having a dedicated Department of Strategic Planning focused on foresight and risk management. Zimbabwe locates this function within the **Office of the President and Cabinet, indicating high-level integration.

Cameroon and Benin operate foresight functions within planning ministries, though their operational autonomy varies. Comoros' unit is nascent and capacity-constrained, highlighting a need for institutional strengthening. Conversely, Botswana, Malawi, Zambia, Namibia, and Kenya have no such units, suggesting limited anticipatory planning capacity. South Africa's partial response reflects possible decentralization or an advisory foresight approach. This uneven institutionalization of foresight suggests that while the concept is gaining traction, operational frameworks and effectiveness vary widely across the continent.

Influenced by the district- planning model, the City of Cape Town showcased its adaptability model to mitigate disasters and build resilience through a futuristic approach. Disaster Risk Management Plans are put in place as part of building 'resilient city' while ensuring safety and economic growth. Resilience is part of the multi-criteria analysis for selecting projects for funding and every capital project in Cape Town is tagged for its resilience benefit. The city additionally segments its 10-year climate change response portfolio, which is tagged against drought, heat, flooding, fire etc.

FIGURE 21: LOCATION OF CLIMATE RESILIENCE INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS BY SHOCK TYPE
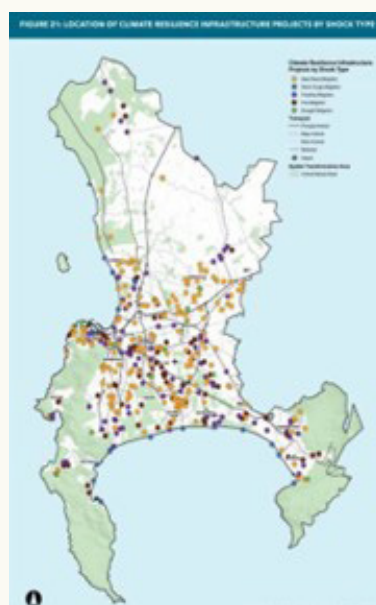
Vision of Cape Town City (Source, City of Cape Town)

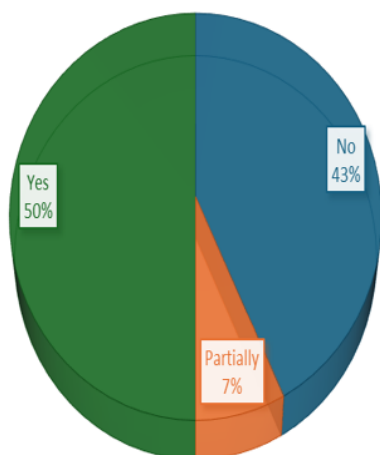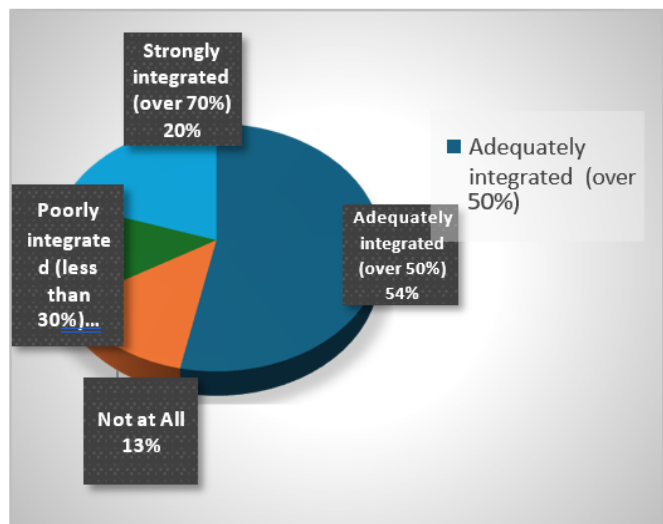*Figure 10 Strategic Foresight Units in NPC*

Figure 11 Integration of Strategic Foresight into Planning

Strategic Foresight Gains Ground, but Integration Remains Uneven Across African Countries. While most countries (10 of 12) report that strategic planning and foresight are either adequately (over 50%) or strongly (over 70%) integrated into national development processes, disparities persist. Uganda and Benin stand out for strong integration of strategic foresight into national vision and policies. In contrast, Botswana admits it has "not at all" integrated foresight—citing reliance on macro-fiscal projections. Zambia also reports weak integration. These gaps reveal a divide between rhetorical uptake and institutional embedding of forward-looking planning tools.

Multi-Level Alignment – Universal Rhetoric, Shallow Integration. All countries claim alignment with local to global frameworks (e.g., SDGs, Agenda 2063). Zimbabwe and South Africa explicitly cite international commitments, while Zambia notes "integrated" coverage. Yet substantive detail is scarce: Namibia, Uganda, and Benin offer no elaboration. Only Cameroon references "national consultations," implying vertical integration. Declarative alignment dominates, but operational linkages to subnational implementation or global accountability mechanisms (e.g., SDG reporting) remain largely unsubstantiated.

Universal evidence-based planning but constrained by data gaps. All the 12 surveyed countries affirm that their National Development Plans (NDPs) are evidence-based, though the depth and consistency of data use vary significantly. Countries like Uganda, South Africa, and Botswana demonstrate stronger integration through structured diagnostics, stakeholder consultations, and regular data use. However, others like Zimbabwe, Cameroon, and Malawi note outdated census data or limited statistical capacity, hindering accurate needs identification and forward-looking planning. While reliance on official statistics is common, very few countries mention disaggregated or real-time data, and foresight integration is rare.

The planning process in many contexts remains reactive, with strategic projections and scenario modelling still underdeveloped. Political and institutional dynamics may also distort data use, with some agencies constrained by resource limitations or short-term political agendas. To improve effectiveness, countries need to invest in real-time data systems, legislate evidence standards, strengthen statistical offices, and institutionalize foresight within planning frameworks.

Policy Coherence – Thematic Success, Integration Gaps. All countries report cross- sectoral approaches, primarily through thematic pillars (Botswana: economic/environmental/governance; Malawi: gender/climate). Kenya emphasizes "well-coordinated" sector-cabinet linkages. However, Cameroon exposes a critical flaw: plans prioritize "development guidance" over binding policy integration, delegating coherence to sectoral strategies. While thematic structuring exists, siloed operationalization risks fragmentation – particularly where political priorities override holistic frameworks. All countries confirm clear objectives, but quality varies: South Africa and Uganda define overarching goals (e.g., poverty reduction, 5 strategic objectives). Cameroon structures goals around four pillars, while Benin vaguely references "priority projects." Namibia and Comoros provide no specifics. Objectives are uniformly declared yet inconsistently articulated – suggesting compliance-focused checkboxes rather than actionable, prioritized targets.

Early Warning Systems in Place but Fragmented Coverage Undermines Proactive Crisis Management. While 10 of 12 countries claim early warning systems (EWS), functionality is inconsistent, and hazard coverage narrow. Environmental risks (floods, droughts, storms) dominate monitoring efforts, as seen in Botswana, Kenya, Benin, and South Africa's advanced meteorological networks. However, critical gaps persist: Cameroon and Comoros admit systems are "under development," while Malawi and Uganda lack EWS entirely. Only Zimbabwe and Kenya track non-environmental threats (economic/social risks), exposing severe blind spots to financial shocks or civil instability. Botswana's inter-ministerial coordination (meteorology + disaster office) and South Africa's multi-hazard SAWS platform demonstrate best practices, yet most systems remain siloed, underfunded, and reactive— prioritizing single hazards over cascading risks.

Figure 12 Early Warning system to track potential risks and disasters
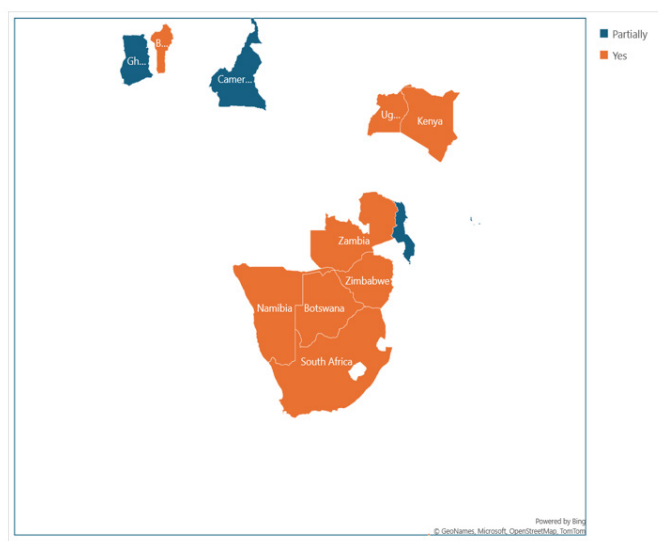
Risk Mitigation Strategies: Superficial Frameworks Mask Implementation Deficits 11 of 12 countries report risk mitigation strategies, but their design lacks enforceability and scope. Environmental threats remain the primary focus—Botswana's DRR framework and Benin's low-carbon strategy exemplify this trend. Economic resilience is notably absent except in Kenya (market shocks) and Benin (fiscal risks). Crucially, "partial" systems prevail: Namibia's district-level DRR lacks national integration, Cameroon and Comoros label strategies "under development," and Zambia offers no details beyond "climate-related risks." Only Botswana articulates actionable pillars (legal foundations, PPP cooperation, community resilience), while others rely on vague aspirations. The disconnect is stark: early warnings rarely inform adaptive mitigation due to institutional fragmentation, weak legal mandates (as Cameroon's response implies), and political neglect of non-environmental vulnerabilities.

7.4 Stakeholder, Coordination and Communication Framework

Stakeholder Mechanisms in Place, But Gaps Remain in Review Structures and Practical Coordination. All 12 countries confirm that national plans define stakeholder roles and responsibilities, although Benin and one Ghana entry qualify this as "Partially," indicating intent but with implementation gaps. Formal coordination mechanisms are present across most countries, including Botswana's advocacy unit, Uganda's National Development Policy Forum,

and Cameroon's inter ministerial secretariat. Yet Namibia's entry, citing "none" despite answering "Yes," highlights inconsistencies between formal claims and operational clarity. Communication channels are widely reported, with Zambia and Cameroon detailing structured platforms. However, Namibia again stands out for lacking specifics—suggesting uneven implementation. A major gap emerges on National Taskforces for regular NDP review. Only 7 of 12 countries confirm their existence. Ghana (in one case), Uganda, and Zambia lack dedicated structures, but roles are assumed within National Planning Authorities.

Widespread Formal Commitment, Questions on Depth of Collaboration and Participation predominate: While all 12 surveyed countries (100%) affirm using collaborative and participatory approaches in national planning, the combined narrative reveals both institutional strength and persistent gaps. Structured mechanisms are widely reported: Ghana's Cross-Sectoral Planning Groups (Act 479), Botswana's National Development Plan (NDP) Reference Group and Thematic Working Groups (TWGs), Zambia's decentralized planning architecture, Kenya's multi-stakeholder forums, and Comoros' DISMO pillar arrangements.

Benin also highlights engagement with ministries, private sector, CSOs, and development partners. Terms like "whole of society" (Zimbabwe), "inclusivity" (Namibia), and "public consultations" (South Africa) underscore rhetorical commitment. However, this uniformity of "Yes" responses masks important disparities in the quality, depth, and equity of participation. Several responses reflect vague implementation details—Cameroon cites a "guide without substantial narration. Namibia's "by invitation" model raises concerns about selective inclusion, and Kenya's siloed, sector-first planning risks undermining coherence. Although formal frameworks exist across the board, the extent to which they empower marginalized voices and enable true co-creation remains questionable. The challenge now lies in moving beyond consultative models toward genuinely inclusive, equitable, and influential participatory practice.

7.5. NDP Review. Monitoring and Evaluation Framework

Measurable Indicators: Widespread Adoption, Limited Utilization. Out of the 12 countries reviewed, 11 (92%) report including clear and measurable indicators in their national development plans. Botswana details thematic indicator frameworks, South Africa and Kenya apply SMART criteria and national handbooks, while Cameroon uses matrices aligned with priority actions. Uganda and Zambia incorporate results frameworks and implementation plans. Only Benin (8%) reports partial compliance. However, across all cases, there is a notable absence of evidence on the actual use of these indicators—whether for real-time monitoring, adaptive management, or policy correction. This gap suggests that while technical frameworks are present, enforcement and practical application remain weak, risking the relegation of indicators to mere bureaucratic checkboxes.

Review Cycles: Varied Frequencies, Uneven Institutionalization. The timing and structure of national development plan reviews differ significantly across countries. Botswana and Namibia conduct biennial mid-term reviews, while five-year cycles are common in Zimbabwe, Kenya, and South Africa. Ghana and Comoros cite annual reviews, with Ghana also undertaking a four-year cycle supplemented by yearly progress reports. Malawi employs a 10-year plan with quarterly monitoring, reflecting a split between long-term strategy and operational tracking. Uganda applies a 2.5-year cycle comprising mid-term and end-term reviews, while Zambia aligns its mid-term review with the third year of its five-year plan. Francophone countries such as Cameroon and Benin reference less standardized, phase-based evaluations. These variations highlight a lack of harmonization in institutional review practices, which could undermine comparability and long-term learning.

Evaluations in Practice: Formal Commitments, slow Execution. All 12 countries (100%) confirm conducting some form of evaluation—through mid-term reviews (Botswana, Comoros), annual sectoral assessments (Cameroon, Zambia), or public expenditure audits (Kenya). While this reflects broad regional commitment to performance tracking, the depth and utility of these evaluations are often limited. Namibia references a general "M&E department" without specifying scope or methodology. Uganda's approach is more structured, but many countries omit whether evaluations lead to strategic adaptation, policy reform, or budget reallocation. Overall, evaluations tend to measure outputs or activities rather than outcomes and rarely address accountability for implementation gaps. This suggests that while review systems are in place, their strategic impact remains underdeveloped.

8. CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Challenges

Drawing from the Toolkit validation and stakeholder feedback, a set of interconnected and systemic challenges continue to undermine the effectiveness of national development planning. These challenges cluster around four mutually reinforcing dimensions: capacity and data constraints, coordination failures, funding constraints and political economy and enforcement gaps.

1. Capacity, skills, and Data Gaps: Undermining Evidence-Based Planning

Only 42% of respondents reported having disaggregated data to support evidence-based decision-making. Respondents from Botswana, Cameroon, and Malawi highlighted limited data availability, while Benin cited statistical weaknesses. These data and capacity deficits constrain foresight functions, scenario modelling, and strategic prioritization. Furthermore, the need to build stronger modelling and analysis skills within planning institutions remains a priority across several countries. Though it is important to note that data alone is not sufficient—effective foresight also relies on the availability of appropriate tools, institutional capacity, and sustained commitment to translate data into forward-looking strategies

2. Coordination Failures and Weak Institutional Alignment

Coordination gaps persist within national planning ecosystems. Countries like Uganda and Namibia stress the need for improved inter-ministerial alignment and sectoral collaboration. Despite the existence of some formal mechanisms, many remain underdeveloped

or poorly operationalized. Botswana's comments on "sectoral silos" and Zimbabwe's observation on "inadequate consultation time" underscore the fragmented nature of governance that weakens policy coherence and implementation efficiency.

3. Political Economy and Enforcement Gaps: The Binding Constraint

Institutional independence remains limited, with several planning agencies vulnerable to short-term political pressures. South Africa, for instance, observes that the National Development Plan (NDP) is often sidelined in Favor of electoral interests. Cameroon highlights the absence of a binding legal framework to enforce plan implementation, while Ghana and Comoros emphasize the need for greater political will. Benin and Namibia's vague responses also hint at a broader reluctance to address accountability head-on. These observations collectively point to a silent crisis—without statutory enforcement and cross-sectoral accountability, plans risk remaining aspirational documents rather than operational tools.

4. The Dominant Funding Gap Masking Deeper Flaws

Financial constraints were cited by 11 of the 12 countries (92%)—including Zimbabwe, Botswana, Malawi, Zambia, Cameroon, Uganda, Kenya, and Benin—as a core barrier to planning implementation. However, the overemphasis on resource scarcity often masks deeper systemic issues. Botswana, for instance, attributes implementation failure not just to a lack of funds but to poor project management and institutional unreadiness. Uganda identifies structural economic weaknesses—low domestic revenue, a fragile private sector, and high borrowing costs—as root causes of fiscal instability. Kenya's "tight fiscal space" adds to this, revealing a cycle where national ambitions routinely exceed resourcing capacities. Ultimately, financial limitations should not obscure governance dysfunctions that equally erode efficiency and delivery.

8.2   Best practice and Recommendations

Box 1 on best practices and lessons

Adopting Transferable Best Practices: Countries highlight actionable models for strengthening strategic foresight. Ghana's institutionalized Cross-Sectorial Planning Group offers a blueprint for embedding diverse stakeholder perspectives directly into planning architectures, ensuring multi-layered input. South Africa's Montfleur Scenarios exemplify high-impact participatory foresight during volatile transitions – their structured scenario- building with political, business, and civil society leaders created shared narratives that guided policy coherence. Complementary approaches include Kenya's emphasis on codifying engagement through legal frameworks to safeguard against political discontinuity, Uganda's integration of risk management into planning cycles, and Benin's targeted inclusion of women/youth to enhance legitimacy. Zimbabwe's alignment tools further demonstrate practical methods for harmonizing global agendas with national execution. Collectively, these underscore that adaptable, legally anchored, and participatory structures are foundational for resilient foresight.

Systemic Enablers for Effective Integration: Overwhelming consensus identifies capacity development and enforceable mandates as critical for translating foresight into action. Botswana and Cameroon explicitly urge UN-facilitated capacity building to equip planning institutions with advanced methodologies and tools, addressing widespread technical gaps. Crucially, Cameroon, Kenya, and Benin advocate for binding legislation – elevating planning above short-term political cycles through statutory requirements for evidence-based processes and stakeholder integration.

Zambia recommends establishing dedicated foresight units to institutionalize horizon- scanning capabilities, while Benin highlights AI-driven analytics for dynamic data processing. Zimbabwe's alignment frameworks offer operational solutions for vertical/horizontal coherence. Fundamentally, success hinges on coupling stakeholder participation (as seen in Montfleur) with accountability mechanisms that ensure foresight directly shapes budget allocations and policy priorities – moving beyond consultation to codified influence.

8.2 Revised Recommendations: Addressing Key Challenges

To address the systemic challenges identified—namely data limitations, institutional coordination gaps, and weak foresight capacity—we recommend the following actions, grouped accordingly:

1. Data and Evidence Systems

First, improve national data systems by investing in real-time, disaggregated data collection and statistical capacity. This directly addresses the reported lack of robust, inclusive evidence to inform policy and anticipatory planning.

Second, acknowledge that while quality data is foundational, effective foresight also depends on having the right tools, institutional commitment, and analytical skills. Thus, countries should complement data efforts with the capacity to translate data into actionable foresight insights.

2. Capacity and Technical Skills

Third, strengthen technical capabilities across public institutions through targeted training in scenario modelling, risk analysis, and strategic foresight methodologies. Respondents from Cameroon and Botswana emphasized the urgent need for such UN-facilitated capacity development to close skills gaps.

Fourth, institutionalize foresight functions by creating or reinforcing dedicated foresight units within national planning bodies, as suggested by Zambia. These units can drive horizon scanning and build long-term planning resilience.

3. Institutional and Legal Reforms

Fifth, establish or strengthen legal frameworks that mandate the integration of foresight and long-term planning into the policy cycle. As advocated by Benin and Kenya, binding legislation helps shield foresight processes from short-term political cycles and ensures policy continuity.

Sixth, reinforce the operational autonomy of planning institutions. Without autonomy, agencies risk being undermined by political interference, as noted in the political economy analysis. Uganda's and South Africa's independent commissions offer instructive models.

4. Coordination and Implementation

Seventh, foster multi-stakeholder and cross-sectoral coordination through formal platforms (e.g., national taskforces, planning forums). These mechanisms improve coherence and help bridge "siloed" planning structures, as identified in Botswana and Zimbabwe.

Eighth, embed foresight into budget processes and policy review cycles, ensuring that long- term scenarios shape immediate priorities. Zimbabwe's alignment tools provide a useful template for linking foresight with implementation.

5. Culture of Anticipatory Governance

Finally, promote a whole-of-government and whole-of-society culture that values long-term thinking. This includes leadership buy-in, peer learning networks, and continuous professional development to ensure that foresight is not a one-off exercise but a sustained governance approach.

9. CONCLUSION

The Strategic Planning and Foresight Toolkit is a pivotal tool for advancing effective governance in Africa, aligning with the APRM's mission to promote democracy and the AU's vision for Agenda 2063. By integrating strategic planning and foresight into national policies, African governments can anticipate challenges, allocate resources proactively, and build resilient systems. The validation process affirmed the relevance of the Strategic Planning and Foresight Toolkit as a timely and practical resource to support African governments in navigating an increasingly uncertain governance landscape.

By promoting systematic foresight integration and empowering national planning institutions, the Toolkit contributes directly to the African Union's Agenda 2063 vision of resilient, inclusive, and future-ready governance. Building institutional capabilities to anticipate and adapt to emerging challenges will be essential in driving sustainable development across the continent. The Toolkit provides a flexible and actionable framework to guide this transformation. Moving forward, embedding a culture of foresight, strengthening legal and institutional frameworks, and investing in capacities for scenario analysis and strategic planning will position African countries to achieve more effective and adaptive governance for sustainable development. Development partners can play a critical role in supporting this shift—through investments in capacity building, data systems, and peer learning to reinforce national efforts.