

STG Policy Papers

POLICY BRIEF

FROM EXTERNAL FOCUS TO INTERNAL REFLECTION: ENHANCING INTRA-GOVERNMENT COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE IN AFRICA

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Despite progress in inter-government reforms, Africa's intra-government collaboration remains highly dysfunctional. Fragmented intra-government coordination has led to policy incoherence, weak accountability, and escalating political instability in African countries. The result is a rise in autocratic governance, violence, and democratic erosion; it has also perpetuated increased political unrest, economic stagnation, and a deepening crisis of public trust in African countries. This policy brief calls for urgent governance reforms to foster effective intra-government collaboration, which is essential for the achievement of an Africa of good governance. Our recommendations include: establishing a joint policymaking architecture that engages all intra-government stakeholders to ensure policy coherence; approving binding cross-arms accountability agreements that promote interdependence and maintain autonomy; adopting digital governance platforms to streamline transparency, enhance policy monitoring, and strengthen the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), with an enhanced mandate on intra-government collaboration. These reforms are vital to realising the African Union's Agenda 2063, aspiration number three. Implementing this framework will strengthen good governance, restore democratic integrity, and sustain respect for human rights, justice, and the rule of law in Africa.

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1. INTRODUCTION: ISSUE IN BRIEF

The African governance agenda has long been a complex and sensitive topic. While inter-government [collaborations](#) and reforms have made significant progress in recent decades, Africa's intra-government cooperation remains weak and opaque, resulting in declining democratic values, rising tensions, and growing security challenges across the continent. Strides have been made towards establishing the independence of government institutions, but less focus has been given to fostering their intra-dependence.

Intra-government governance in many African countries is opaque and fragmented. The executive, legislative, and judicial branches focus more on their independence, resulting in isolation. This fragmentation has resulted in poor policy coherence and weak accountability, with the executive often overshadowing the judiciary and legislature. Moreover, the disconnect has resulted in [power struggles](#), weakened checks and balances, and eroded trust between governments and citizens.

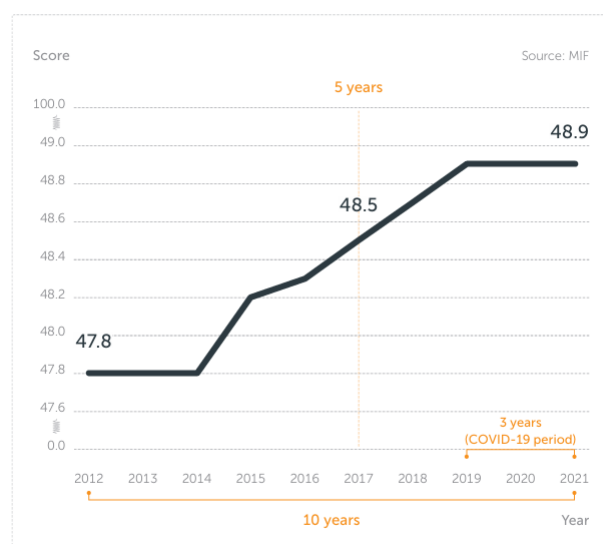
Moreover, the dysfunctional intra-government [gaps](#) in many African countries have resulted in increased autocracy, escalating [violence](#), unrest, and the militarisation of politics in many countries, such as [Sudan](#), [Mali](#), Zimbabwe, [Kenya](#), Uganda, South Africa, and Nigeria. This has led to the stagnation of the African Union's (AU) first decade transformational [outcomes](#) on a well-governed continent by 2023, highlighting the pressing need for democratic renewal.

Recent coups and escalating citizen unrest are some of the outcomes of such fragmented governance, introducing additional complexity for African countries. [Chin and Kirkpatrick](#) highlight that poor governance has contributed to the

resurgence of [coups](#) in economically disadvantaged and politically unstable countries, particularly those facing challenges in democratic consolidation.

Although [independence](#) allows each branch to operate autonomously, the absence of intra-collaboration mechanisms has resulted in siloed operations and growing autocracy in many African countries. A well-designed, intra-dependence framework could facilitate coordinated actions, balance power effectively, and mitigate inefficiencies from [fragmented](#) policy decision-making. This approach would strengthen and enhance the institutions' contribution to their countries' collective goals. Sustainable governance in African countries necessitates the collective participation of all branches of government, but the lack of an architecture of collaboration has hindered progress. This raises critical questions: Who truly holds the most significant interest in their country's welfare?

Figure 1. Overall Governance scores (2012-2021)

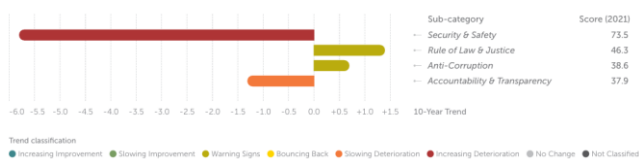


Source: Mo Ibrahim's 2022 Governance Index

Mo Ibrahim's 2022 Index on African Governance underscores a troubling decline in essential governance areas, with [systemic issues](#) such as youth

[unemployment](#), political instability, [corruption](#), and inadequate public services complicating [sustainable development](#) and peace efforts. According to the [Report](#), Africa's governance backsliding has adversely resulted in decreased security, rule of law, and participation rights. By 2021, nearly 70% of the continent's population resided in countries where security and the rule of law had deteriorated.

Figure 2. Security & Rule of Law scores and trends (2012-2021)



Source: Mo Ibrahim's 2022 Governance Index

Despite these challenges, there is a glimmer of [hope](#). As noted by [Antoinette M. Sayeh](#), Deputy Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), at the IMF high-level conference in Gaborone, Botswana: *"Improving governance and accountability in Africa is not only possible, but it is happening."* The concern is the pace and direction of [progress](#). This policy brief argues that strengthening intra-government collaborative governance can bridge existing gaps. We, therefore, advocate for an urgent reassessment of the [frameworks](#) governing democratic practices in Africa.

2. URGENT CALL TO REFOCUS

As the [African Union](#) and its partners reflect on the first decade of Agenda 2063, a critical opportunity exists to reaffirm governance as a top priority on the continent's agenda. Addressing the governance gaps in Africa is essential if we are to realise a prosperous, responsibly governed Africa. Without a sustained commitment to responsible governance, the continent's ability to achieve its

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the AU's Agenda 2063 is at serious risk.

Our contribution through this policy agenda underscores the urgent need for governance [reform](#) if Africa is to achieve the "good governance" vision laid out in the African Union's Agenda 2063. We propose an agenda prioritising intra-governmental cooperation, emphasising the need for African governments to strengthen collaboration between the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. We advocate for a [renewed focus](#) on responsible governance to address Africa's social, political, and environmental challenges through a structured interdependence mechanism. Strengthening intra-government ties will foster institutional alignment, robust intra-dependence legal frameworks, and enhanced public accountability. While our proposed framework is not a cure-all for Africa's governance challenges, it presents a promising path for Africa's [democratic renewal](#).

Moreover, we propose that the European University Institute's (EUI) Florence School of Transnational Governance engage in discussions on African governance, focusing on the importance of intra-government collaboration in addressing Africa's growing governance and democratic issues. Without continued dialogue, Africa's ability to achieve the SDGs and Agenda 2063 will be in jeopardy. Our recommendations align with the transformative outcomes of the [AU Agenda 2063](#) and the [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs).

In the next sections of this policy brief, we highlight [Africa's crucial role](#) in global affairs, advocating for a shift from focusing solely on its challenges to recognising its growing influence in innovation, culture, and leadership. We reflect on Africa's classical values and how they can address

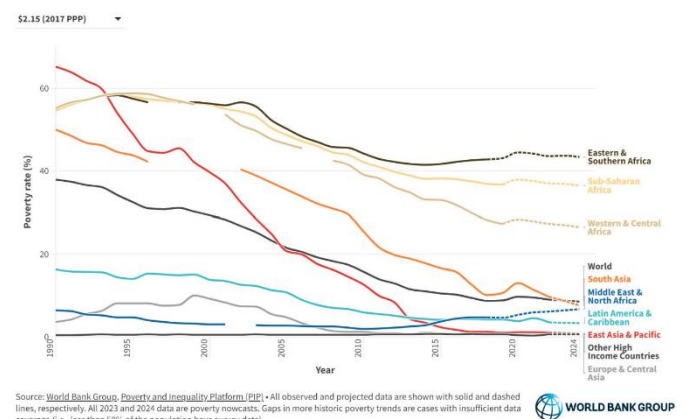
contemporary governance gaps. We posit that responsible governance in Africa is a function of responsible leadership and responsible politics. Consequently, we argue that [responsible governance is inherently collaborative](#). Finally, we outline an action-oriented collaborative governance framework with policy recommendations and guidance on how to overcome barriers to implementation.

3. AFRICA IN THE GLOBAL CONTEXT: AFRICA TO THE WORLD

Africa's significance on the global stage is undeniable, with a [population](#) of over 1.5 billion and [projected](#) to reach 3.92 billion by 2100. It is the [youngest](#) continent, with a median age of 19.7 years, and by 2050, 40% of the world's youth will be African. Despite [challenges](#), Africa remains a [fast-growing](#) region, driven by technology, agriculture, and renewable energy. [Urbanisation](#) is rapidly increasing, and by 2030, six of the world's 41 [megacities](#) will be in Africa. The continent is rich in [renewable energy](#) potential and is expected to lead global solar expansion by 2030. Additionally, Africa's [tech startup ecosystem](#) is booming, with \$2.3 billion in venture capital invested in 2023.

However, Africa faces significant challenges, including a \$170 billion annual [infrastructure](#) financing gap, high [poverty](#) levels, income [inequality](#), and [food insecurity](#). [Agriculture](#), which employs 60% of the workforce, remains inefficient, forcing the continent to import \$35 billion in food annually. Education quality and access to secondary and tertiary schooling also present significant issues, with half of the children in Sub-Saharan Africa lacking [basic learning](#) skills. These challenges highlight the urgent need for responsible governance to unlock Africa's full potential.

Figure 3. Poverty and Shared Prosperity Report, 2024



Source: World Bank Group

In reflecting on the ingredients of responsible governance in addressing these challenges, we revisit Africa's [classical governance](#) principles, which are rooted in communal values and shared leadership. Principles like [Ubuntu](#), [Harambee](#), [Ummah](#), and [Sankofa](#) represent traditional [Afrocentric leadership](#), focused on collective responsibility, equity, and shared decision-making. [Ubuntu](#) promotes inclusive leadership and decision-making through collective consultation. [Harambee](#), meaning "all pull together," emphasises unity in achieving common goals. [Ummah](#) fosters justice, equity, and accountability, while [Sankofa](#) encourages learning from the past to shape the future. Colonialism disrupted these principles, replacing them with centralised, authoritarian models. Revisiting these [principles](#) could offer a possible path towards responsible governance in Africa. By [integrating](#) these principles into contemporary governance architecture, Africa can develop more sustainable and inclusive governance structures, positioning herself as a model for global governance.

4. TOWARDS A RESPONSIBLE AFRICA

In this section, we argue the case for [responsible governance in Africa](#) as essential to achieving accountability, inclusivity, and sustainable development. A responsible Africa represents a transformative shift in governance, emphasising more accountability, transparency, inclusion, and responsiveness to citizens' needs. Aligned with the AU Agenda 2063 on good governance, this focus calls for a governance system that upholds ethical standards and the rule of law and prioritises public welfare. Leaders and institutions must be accountable, with decision-making open to scrutiny and consequences for misconduct. Moreover, inclusion ensures representation for all groups irrespective of ethnicity, gender, religion, or socio-economic status. A responsible governance system must protect citizens' rights, provide access to essential services, and foster [sustainable development](#) for future generations.

We argue that responsible governance is inherently collaborative, fostering coordination among the three branches of government. Intra-government collaboration is critical to achieving responsible [governance](#), requiring coordination between the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. Effective intra-government collaboration strengthens public accountability, policy coherence, and civic engagement, essential for embedding democratic values, promoting good governance, and fostering sustainable development. Despite challenges like historical tensions, competition for authority, and corruption, Africa's growing complexities and interdependencies make such collaboration more urgent.

Moreover, collaborative governance allows each branch to influence and support the

others beyond their direct authority, uniting in pursuit of common goals despite differences in beliefs, cultural backgrounds, or practices. Deliberate action is needed to [overcome](#) political, institutional, and [legal barriers](#) to implementing collaborative governance. It is, therefore, imperative to address fundamental questions—such as institutional foundations, driving forces, and measurable outcomes—that require engagement with intra-government actors and other stakeholders to ensure successful implementation.

Further, we propose an action-oriented collaborative governance framework rooted in responsible leadership and politics, aligning institutions within a legal framework that promotes accountability and civic engagement. The approach aims to [strengthen](#) governance practices, renew Africa's democratic values, and sustain good governance. The foundation of this framework is responsible citizenship, a critical pillar. Citizens are recipients and active participants in shaping policy, promoting accountability, and ensuring inclusivity. By engaging in responsible behaviours, providing oversight, and demanding transparency, citizens can strengthen intra-government collaboration and foster good governance.

We advocate for renewed practices and actions in African leaders and politics to implement the intra-government collaborative governance framework successfully. These renewed practices will create a transparent, functional, and responsive governance culture, ultimately fostering prosperity and unity. We discuss the renewed practices in the next sections.

4.1. Strengthening responsible leadership

[Responsible leadership](#) is the cornerstone of responsible governance. African leaders must guide institutions towards alignment

and coherence across the executive, legislative, and judiciary branches. This practice ensures that policies are consistent, aligned with national goals, and executed effectively.

- *Review institutional collaboration:* Leaders must actively work to align their institutions by fostering cohesive national strategies that bring all government branches together. This includes implementing a [unified national strategic plan](#) with contributions from all sectors focused on long-term goals like poverty reduction, education, healthcare, and sustainability.
- *Establish cross-branch committees:* To address critical issues such as economic reform, climate change, and youth unemployment, leaders should form specialised committees that include members from each branch of government. These committees ensure comprehensive and collaborative policy solutions.
- *Create regular dialogue forums:* Leaders should institutionalise dialogue by setting up regular forums where representatives from government branches and civil society organisations can discuss policy directions. These forums should aim to involve the public in national policy design and development strategies.

4.2 Embracing responsible politics

Responsible [politics](#) requires that leaders and institutions operate within transparent [legal frameworks](#) that foster cooperation between government branches. This practice is key to maintaining transparency and accountability in governance.

- *Establish oversight committees:* Committees should be established to

review executive actions, ensuring alignment with legislative priorities and judicial interpretations. These committees will help prevent policy inconsistencies and ensure the proper implementation of laws.

- *Promote judicial oversight:* Legal frameworks must include transparent mechanisms for judicial oversight of executive actions, ensuring that decisions comply with constitutional principles and are subject to scrutiny.
- *Develop feedback systems:* Legal and procedural frameworks should include feedback loops where the executive and legislative branches can offer insights on judicial rulings, helping to shape future policies while respecting the separation of powers.

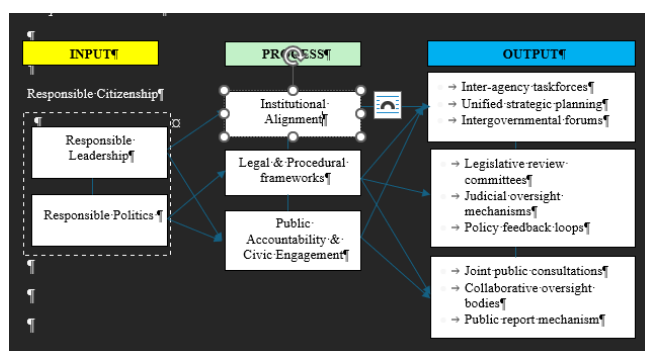
4.3 Strengthening public accountability and civic engagement

Responsible leadership and political practices must always be [accountable to the public](#). Public engagement is essential in ensuring that collaborative governance extends beyond government structures to include citizens as active participants.

- *Hold joint public consultations:* Governments must regularly hold joint public consultations involving all three government branches to gather citizens' input on national policies and development programmes. These consultations promote inclusiveness and build public trust.
- *Establish independent oversight bodies:* Public accountability requires the creation of independent bodies to monitor the implementation of government initiatives. These bodies should include the judiciary, legislature, executive branch, and civil society representatives, ensuring balanced oversight.

- *Implement transparent reporting systems:* Governments should adopt clear reporting systems that provide regular updates on the progress of key initiatives. Reports should be made available through digital platforms, traditional media, and open public forums, enabling citizens to track government performance and demand accountability.

Figure 4. Collaborative Governance Framework Founded on Responsible Leadership and Responsible Politics



Source: Authors

5. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The subsequent recommendations are derived from a comprehensive review of governance [discourses](#). Their successful implementation hinges on engaging stakeholders and understanding each country's context.

1. African governments should *institutionalise joint policymaking platforms* by establishing formal multi-stakeholder policy councils that bring together representatives from the executive, legislative, and judicial branches alongside civil society. These councils should have clear mandates and timelines, ensuring regular collaboration on critical national issues. To begin, countries could implement pilot joint councils to address policy gaps in sectors such

as education, healthcare, or infrastructure to test collaboration models before scaling up. Countries can create national platforms that drive policy coherence by leveraging frameworks such as [SADC](#) and [ECOWAS](#), which already promote regional cooperation. Enshrining these councils in national legislation will mandate their role in joint policy formation and ensure sustained commitment. Moreover, regular dialogue forums involving the intra-government arms, the broader civil society and the private sector will ensure broad representation, allowing diverse voices to shape policy outcomes.

2. African governments need to *develop cross-arms accountability agreements* by creating legally binding frameworks defining each government branch's collaborative responsibilities and accountability mechanisms. These agreements should include clear timelines for cooperation and conflict resolution mechanisms to handle inter-arm disputes. Countries can begin by enacting legislation that formalises the roles and responsibilities of the executive, legislative, and judiciary branches within a collaborative governance framework, embedding these agreements into national constitutions where possible. Independent mediation bodies composed of legal, political, and civil society representatives can oversee conflict resolution mechanisms. Additionally, each government branch should produce publicly available annual accountability reports detailing how they adhered to the agreements, further promoting transparency and ensuring the public

can track intra-government cooperation.

and enhancing governance across the continent.

3. African governments should *invest in digital governance platforms* to enable real-time communication and transparent collaboration between government branches. By establishing national e-governance portals, governments can streamline the sharing of documents, track initiatives' progress, and improve the monitoring and evaluation of policy implementation. The African Development Bank's [Digital Transformation Strategy](#) for Africa provides a framework for securing the funding and technical expertise necessary to develop these platforms. Governments should also ensure public-facing digital portals are created, giving citizens access to updates on policy progress and performance, thereby strengthening public engagement and trust.
4. The African Union (AU) should also *strengthen the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM)* by incorporating specific metrics that assess how effectively countries implement intra-government collaborative governance. The [APRM](#) should expand its focus to include criteria evaluating transparency, intra-arm collaboration, and the effectiveness of legal frameworks. Countries can use APRM reviews to align their governance practices with the objectives of Agenda 2063 and SDGs, ensuring that the review process supports national planning and governance reforms. Moreover, establishing peer-learning programmes will allow countries excelling in collaborative governance to mentor those that need improvement, sharing best practices

Through these recommendations, African nations can strengthen their governance structures, fostering transparency, efficiency, and accountability. These actions will help align national governance with the AU Agenda 2063 and UN SDGs, promoting a responsible, collaborative future for Africa that ensures sustainable development and inclusive growth.

6. OVERCOMING IMPLEMENTATION BARRIERS

While the proposed framework is both practical and culturally resonant, its implementation may face significant challenges. Political resistance could arise from power struggles between government branches and leaders who are reluctant to embrace reforms perceived as diminishing their autonomy or influence. Similarly, entrenched corruption and patronage networks seriously threaten collaborative governance, as increased transparency may undermine existing power structures. Resource constraints also present a barrier, as successful implementation requires an investment in capacity-building and legal reforms, which economic challenges may limit. Moreover, low civic awareness, government distrust, and restricted access to communication platforms in certain regions could hinder securing meaningful civic engagement.

A multipronged approach is needed to overcome these barriers. First, fostering political consensus through dialogue can help mitigate resistance by aligning diverse interests towards common goals. Second, anti-corruption measures, including stronger oversight mechanisms and institutional reforms, should be prioritised to build a culture of accountability. In addressing resource constraints,

partnerships with international organisations, donor agencies, and private sector actors could provide the necessary funding and technical assistance for capacity-building initiatives. Finally, enhancing civic engagement can be achieved by investing in public education programmes promoting civic awareness and leveraging technology to broaden access to communication platforms, thus facilitating greater public participation. Ultimately, overcoming these barriers will require leadership, political will, and societal commitment to create an environment that will enable the successful implementation of the proposed policy recommendations.

long-term development. By embracing collaborative governance, Africa can pave the way for the peace, growth, and prosperity its people deserve, ensuring a more sustainable future.

7. CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

The future of sustainable development in Africa rests on the ability of its governments to adopt collaborative governance. For too long, dysfunctional and fragmented governance structures have contributed to political instability, economic challenges, and social unrest across the continent. Collaborative governance presents a viable solution, fostering transparency, accountability, and inclusivity across the government's executive, legislative, and judiciary branches. The urgency of implementing this governance model must be addressed. The success of Africa's sustainable development initiatives relies on the ability of governments to cooperate and pursue common goals.

We have outlined a comprehensive framework for achieving collaborative governance in Africa and provided critical policy recommendations to ensure its successful implementation. Policymakers, civil society, and international partners must collaborate to champion governance models prioritising cooperation, transparency, and accountability. These efforts will drive democratic innovation and foster governance practices that support

The Florence School of Transnational Governance (STG) delivers teaching and high-level training in the methods, knowledge, skills and practice of governance beyond the State. Based within the European University Institute (EUI) in Florence, the School brings the worlds of academia and policy-making together in an effort to navigate a context, both inside and outside Europe, where policy-making increasingly transcends national borders.

The School offers Executive Training Seminars for experienced professionals and a Policy Leaders Fellowship for early- and mid-career innovators. The School also hosts expert Policy Dialogues and distinguished lectures from transnational leaders (to include the STG's Leaders Beyond the State series which recorded the experiences of former European Institution presidents, and the Giorgio La Pira Lecture series which focuses on building bridges between Africa and Europe). In September 2020, the School launched its Master-of-Arts in Transnational Governance (MTnG), which will educate and train a new breed of policy leader able to navigate the unprecedented issues our world will face during the next decade and beyond.

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