Leapfrogging

Impact of the Large Infrastructure and Leapfrogging Scenario

Jakkie Cilliers

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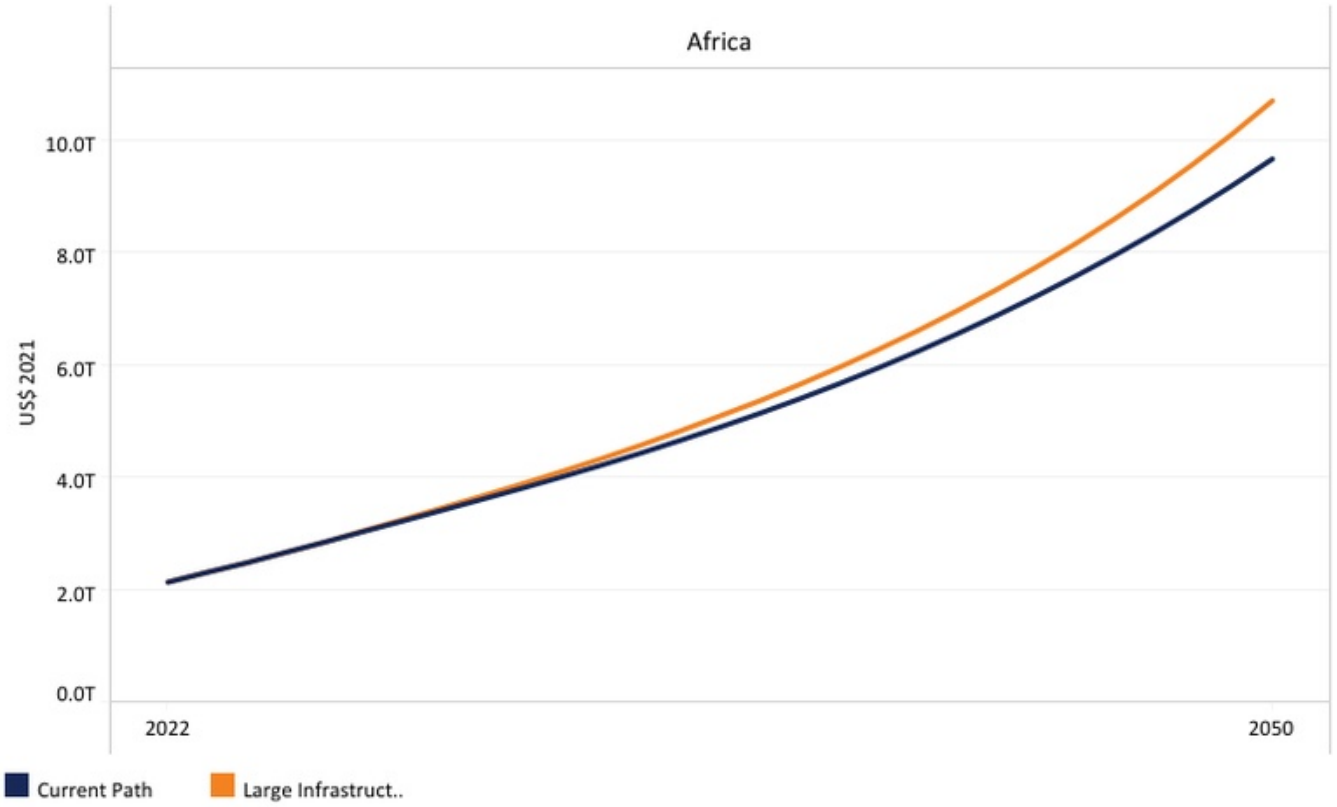
Chart 9 presents the size of Africa's economy from 2020 to 2024, with a forecast to 2050. Under the Large Infrastructure and Leapfrogging scenario, Africa's economy will expand at an average annual rate of about 6% between 2027 and 2050, one percentage point faster than the 5% growth projected under the Current Path over the same period. This performance will result in a substantially larger economy, with total GDP nearly US$1 trillion (US$948 billion in 2017 dollars) higher by 2050 compared to the baseline.

While all countries will experience gains relative to the Current Path, the largest economies, including Nigeria, Egypt and South Africa, will record the most pronounced increases in absolute terms.

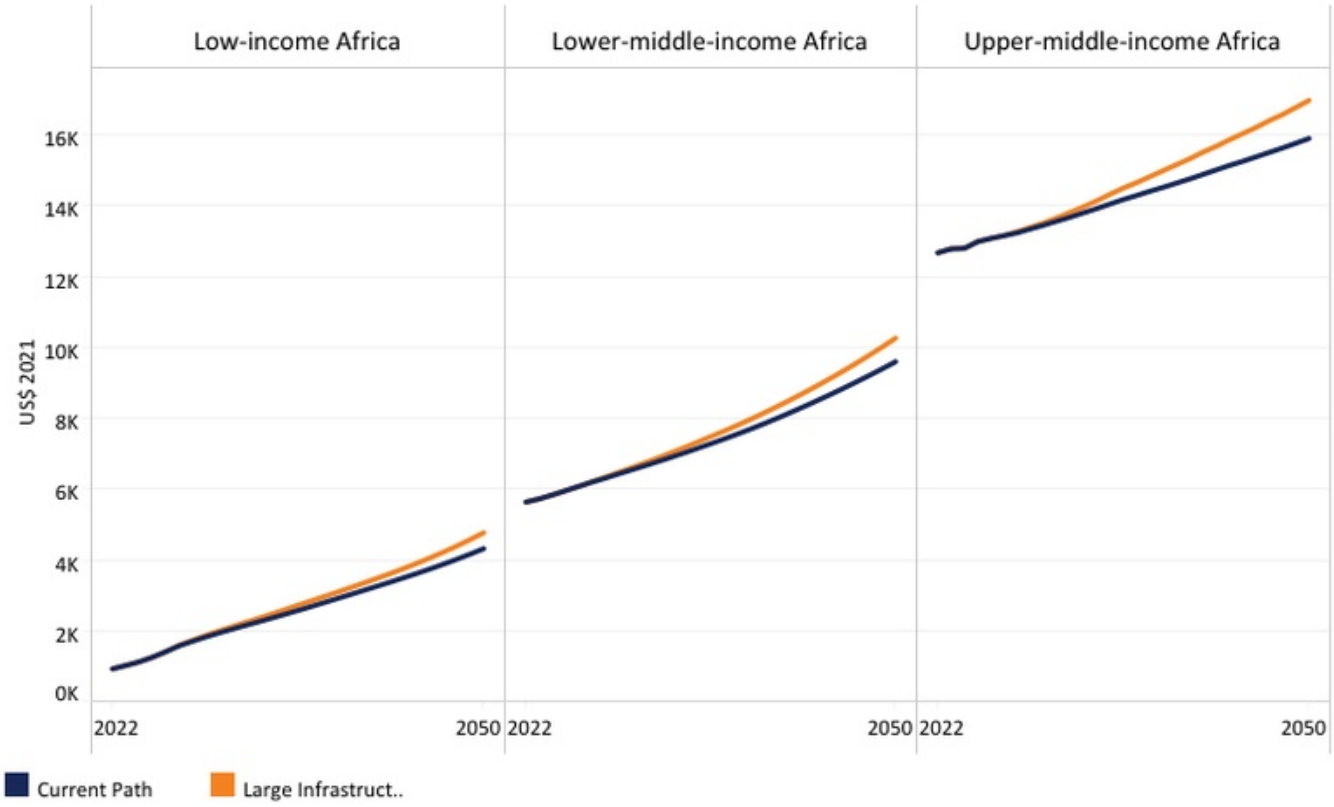
Chart 9: GDP (MER), Current Path vs scenario: 2022-2024 with forecast to 2050



Source: IFs 8.50 initialising from WDI data

Chart 10 shows GDP per capita from 2020 to 2024, with a forecast to 2050. By 2050, Africa's average GDP per capita (at purchasing power parity) will be approximately US$510 higher in the Large Infrastructure and Leapfrogging scenario than under the Current Path. This represents a significant gain, especially given that the continent's population is expected to exceed 2.5 billion by that year.

Chart 10: GDP per capita (PPP), Current Path vs scenario: 2022-2024 with forecast to 2050

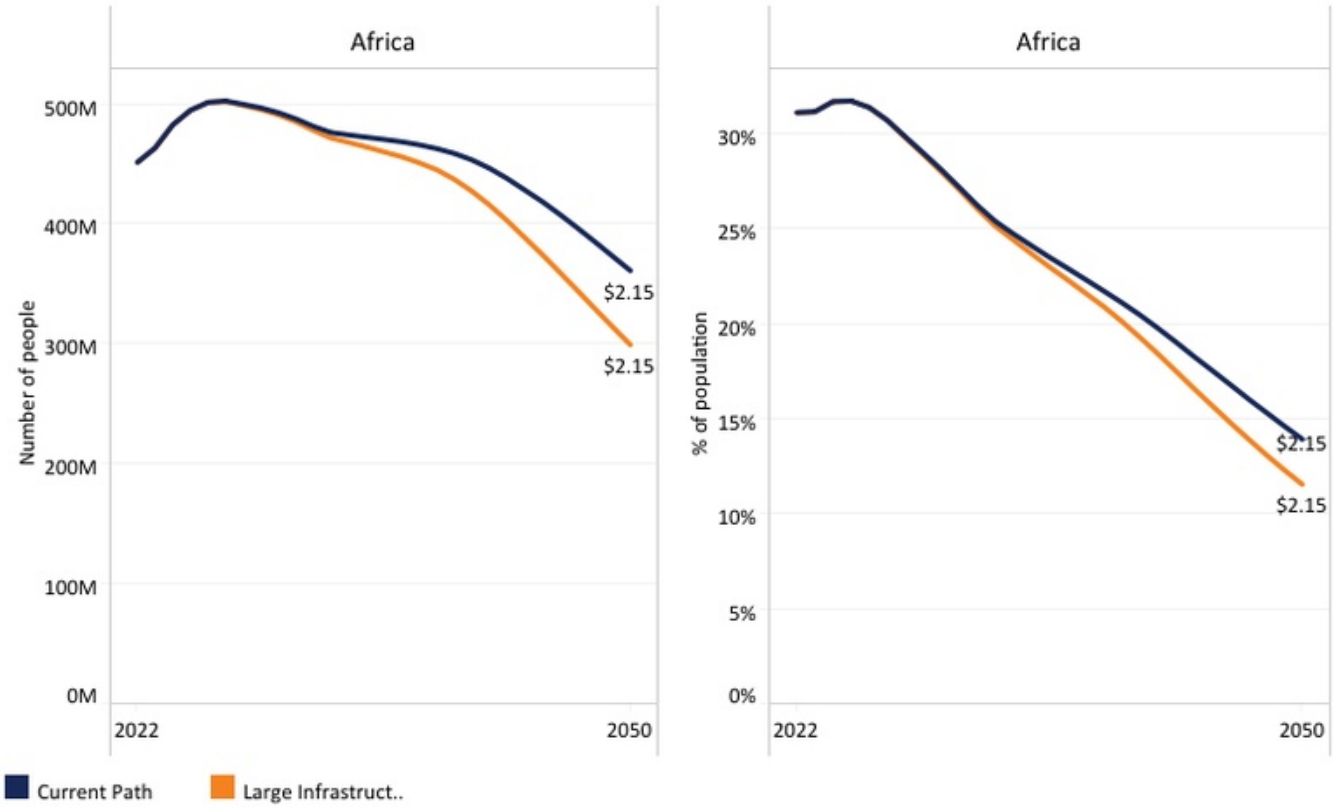


Source: IFs 8.50 initialising from WDI data

Chart 11 depicts the extreme poverty rate from 2020 to 2024, with a forecast to 2050. The Large Infrastructure and Leapfrogging scenario shows how these innovations, combined with improved energy and transport infrastructure, can lift millions out of extreme poverty. By 2050, the number of people living in poverty will fall to 299 million, 63 million fewer than under the Current Path. This will reduce the poverty rate to 11.5%, 2.4 percentage points lower than the baseline. Low-income countries will see the largest gains, with 38.6 million fewer people in extreme poverty, followed by lower-middle-income countries with 23 million fewer. Countries with large poor populations, including DR Congo and Nigeria, will experience the biggest absolute reductions. These outcomes demonstrate that technological leapfrogging and strategic infrastructure development not only drive economic growth and expand opportunities but also directly translate into measurable improvements in human development, lifting millions out of poverty and promoting more inclusive economic prosperity across Africa.

Chart 11: Extreme poverty, Current Path vs scenario: 2022-2024 with forecast to 2050

Measured as % of population and number of people



Source: IFs 8.50 initialising from World Bank Poverty and Inequality Platform

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About the authors

Dr Jakkie Cilliers is the founder and former executive director of the ISS. He currently serves as chair of the ISS Board of Trustees, head of the African Futures and Innovation (AFI) programme at the Institute's Pretoria office, and an extraordinary professor at the University of Pretoria. His 2017 best-seller Fate of the Nation addresses South Africa's future from political, economic and social perspectives. His three most recent books, Africa First! Igniting a Growth Revolution (March 2020), The Future of Africa: Challenges and Opportunities (April 2021), and Africa Tomorrow: Pathways to Prosperity (June 2022) offer rigorous analyses of the continent as a whole. From August to December 2025, Cilliers was a Richard von Weizsäcker Fellow at the Robert Bosch Academy in Berlin.

About African Futures & Innovation

Scenarios and forecasting can help Africa identify and respond to opportunities and threats. The work of the African Futures & Innovation (AFI) program at the Institute for Security Studies aims to understand and address a widening gap between indices of wellbeing in Africa and elsewhere in the world. The AFI helps stakeholders understand likely future developments. Research findings and their policy implications are widely disseminated, often in collaboration with in-country partners. Forecasting tools inspire debate and provide insights into possible trajectories that inform planning, prioritisation and effective resource allocation. Africa's future depends on today's choices and actions by governments and their non-governmental and international partners. The AFI provides empirical data that informs short- and medium-term decisions with long-term implications. The AFI enhances Africa's capacity to prepare for and respond to future challenges. The program is headed by Dr Jakkie Cilliers.