



Large Infrastructure

The current situation and future prospects

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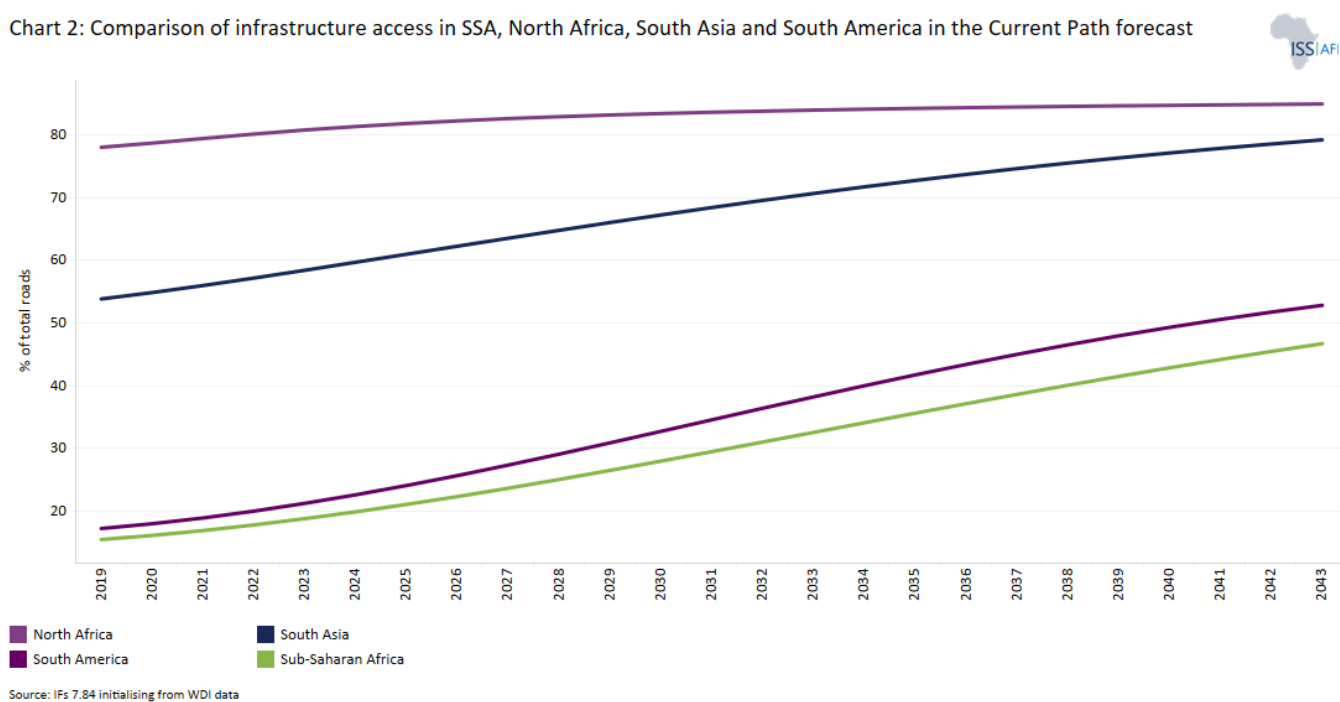
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The current situation and future prospects

Rapid population growth in Africa increases the demand for more infrastructure such as roads, railways and ports while the continent simultaneously also faces major expenditure requirements in education and health. The challenge is less serious in North Africa, which boasts the best infrastructure regarding both quantity and quality on the continent.

Chart 2 provides a snapshot of infrastructure in sub-Saharan Africa and North Africa in a comparative context. Sub-Saharan Africa is expected to make significant improvements in the coming decades. However, in 2019, it lagged behind North Africa, South Asia, and South America in all four categories, and the lag is projected to continue until 2043. This is also not simply a case of watching sub-Saharan Africa catch up, as Africa's stock of infrastructure is much smaller than that of China and India when they were at similar levels of development.[1]

Chart 2: Comparison of infrastructure access in SSA, North Africa, South Asia and South America in the Current Path forecast



In recent years, infrastructure development has been driven by Chinese interest in Africa, as examined in the themes on the AfCFTA and Financial Flows, culminating in the Belt and Road Initiative. As a result, China has become Africa's single biggest trade partner, investor and lender and is driving the expansion of trade-catalysing infrastructure such as ports and railways, particularly on the eastern seaboard. In the process, Chinese state lending practices closely resemble that of Western private banks, with punitive conditionalities and secrecy compared but are often much more expensive than the concessional terms that Africans can obtain from the (Western) international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF.[2]

Chinese-funded projects initially led to the displacement of local communities in Zambia and elsewhere and many of the jobs created by these projects went to imported Chinese nationals and not to local people. However, China has adapted and recent practices do not differ substantially from those of Western countries that have steadily adopted more of a capacity building and local training approach.[3]

The African Union Development Agency New Partnership for Africa's Development (AUDA-NEPAD) Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA) intends to pull in foreign state and private funding while centring on pan-African interests. PIDA has already facilitated hundreds of projects across the continent, although it remains to be seen whether Africa has turned the corner on closing its infrastructure deficit.

Endnotes

1. African Development Bank, *African Economic Outlook 2018*, 2018.
2. D Brautigam, Y Huang and K Acker, *Risky business: New data on Chinese loans and Africa's debt problem*, Briefing Paper No. 3, China Africa Research Initiative, 2020.
3. K Ernske, *The dragon's neocolonial white elephant development: China's urban infrastructure in Lusaka, Zambia*, senior thesis, Trinity College, Hartford, 2020.

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About the authors

Dr Jakkie Cilliers is the ISS's founder and former executive director. He currently serves as chair of the ISS Board of Trustees and head of the African Futures and Innovation (AFI) programme at the Pretoria office of the Institute. His 2017 best-seller *Fate of the Nation* addresses South Africa's futures 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) take a rigorous look at the continent as a whole.

Dr Blessing Chipanda joined the African Futures and Innovation (AFI) programme in January 2023. Before joining the ISS he worked as an assistant lecturer/research assistant at the University of Pretoria, Department of Economics. He is particularly interested in tasks within the wider realm of international trade, development economics, public policy, monetary policy, and econometric modelling. Equally interested in economic and socio-economic activities that impact social welfare. Blessing has a PhD in economics from the University of Pretoria, South Africa.

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