



Africa in the World

Impact on Africa

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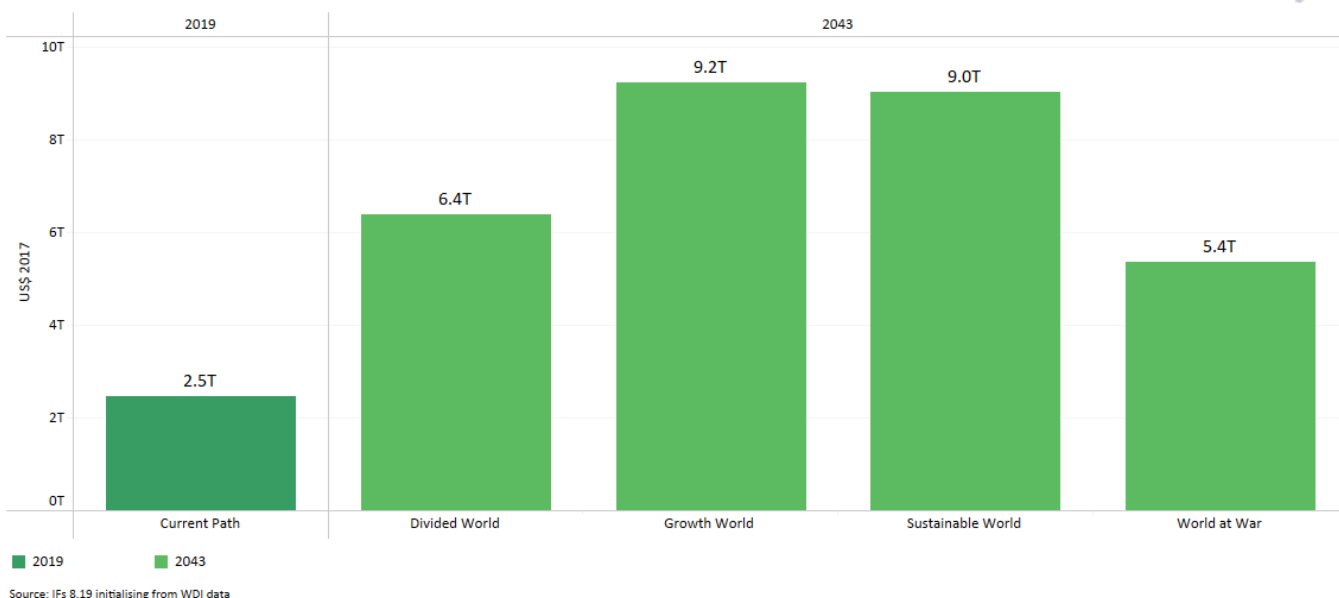
The analysis presented in this theme often refers to Africa as if it were a single country, despite its vast diversity. The reality is much more complex with cultural, linguistic and other differences.

Most African countries have small populations and economies. In 2023, only seven countries had economies larger than US\$100 billion, while 18 were less than US\$10 billion. While a few countries, such as Nigeria, have large populations, 21 African countries had fewer than 10 million people in 2023. Africa is also divided politically, and the imprint of Belgian, German, Spanish, Portuguese, British and French colonialism continues to affect domestic and foreign policies as well as the orientation of its ruling elites. Because the various regional organisations such as ECOWAS and the African Union have no supranational powers, Africa seldom speaks with one voice on international issues.

In 2023, Africa constituted less than 3% of the world economy. Despite rapid population growth, Africa will only constitute 5.5% in 2043 in the Sustainable or Growth World scenarios, which deliver the most rapid economic growth. Meanwhile, its population will increase from 18% to 25% of the global population. The size of the world economy will increase to US\$173 trillion by 2043 in the Growth World scenario, closely followed by the Sustainable World scenario at US\$166 trillion, but with significant differences in the number of extremely poor people, the majority of whom will be in sub-Saharan Africa. A Divided World would result in global economic output of US\$161 trillion in 2043. A World at War scenario results in a world economy producing a combined GDP of US\$133 trillion in 2043, with Africa growing particularly slowly despite its much larger population.

While Africa gains more in the Sustainable World than in the Growth World, both in the size of the African economy (see Chart 11) and in average GDP per capita terms (see Chart 12), the reverse is valid for the rest of the world.

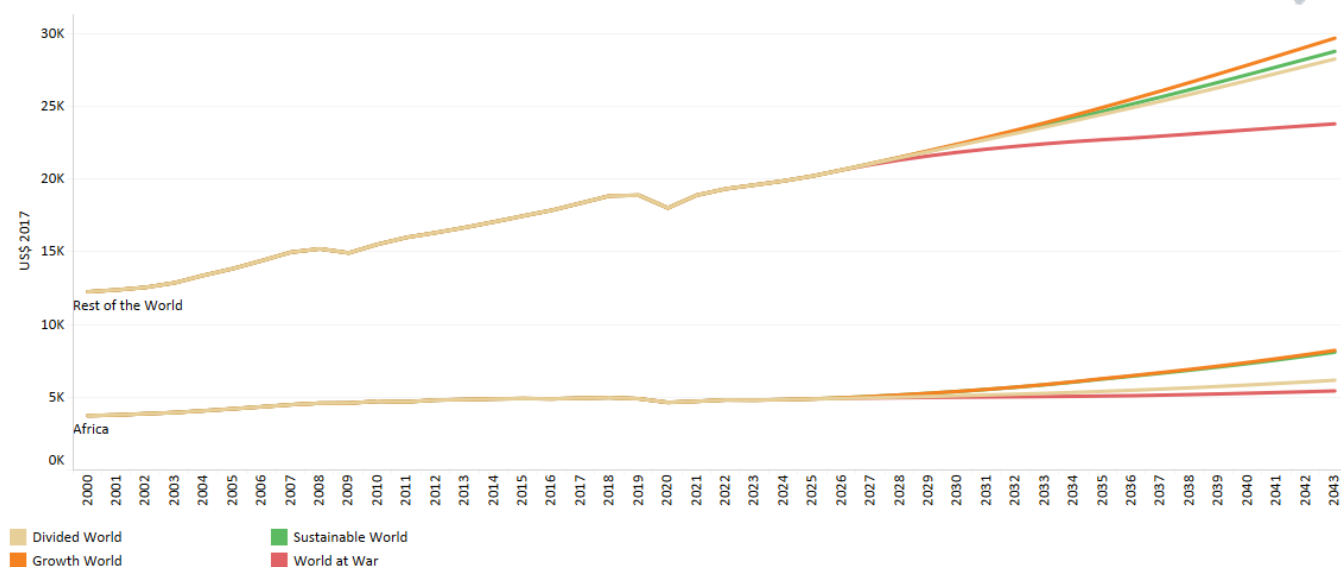
Chart 11: Africa's GDP in 2019 and 2043 by scenario



The nature of this type of 'big picture' analysis also glosses over the different impacts that each scenario has on individual African countries. For example, the countries that get the most significant income increase — in the Sustainable World scenario — are Seychelles, Eswatini, Djibouti and Egypt, seeing a more than US\$5 000 increase in GDP per capita in 2043 compared to Africa's current development forecast. Countries that gain the least are Guinea Bissau, Lesotho, Niger, Republic of Congo, Malawi, Eritrea, the Central African Republic, Chad, South Sudan, Burundi, Somalia and the DR Congo. In these countries, GDP per capita in 2043 is above the Current Path forecast but below US\$1 000. However, Guinea

Bissau, Mozambique, South Sudan, Madagascar, Eritrea, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Malawi, Burundi and Liberia are countries that will experience more than a 20 percentage point decline in extreme poverty in 2043, reflecting the complex trade-offs in considering the impact of the various scenarios.

Chart 12: GDP per capita from 2000 to 2043 in thousand 2017 US\$

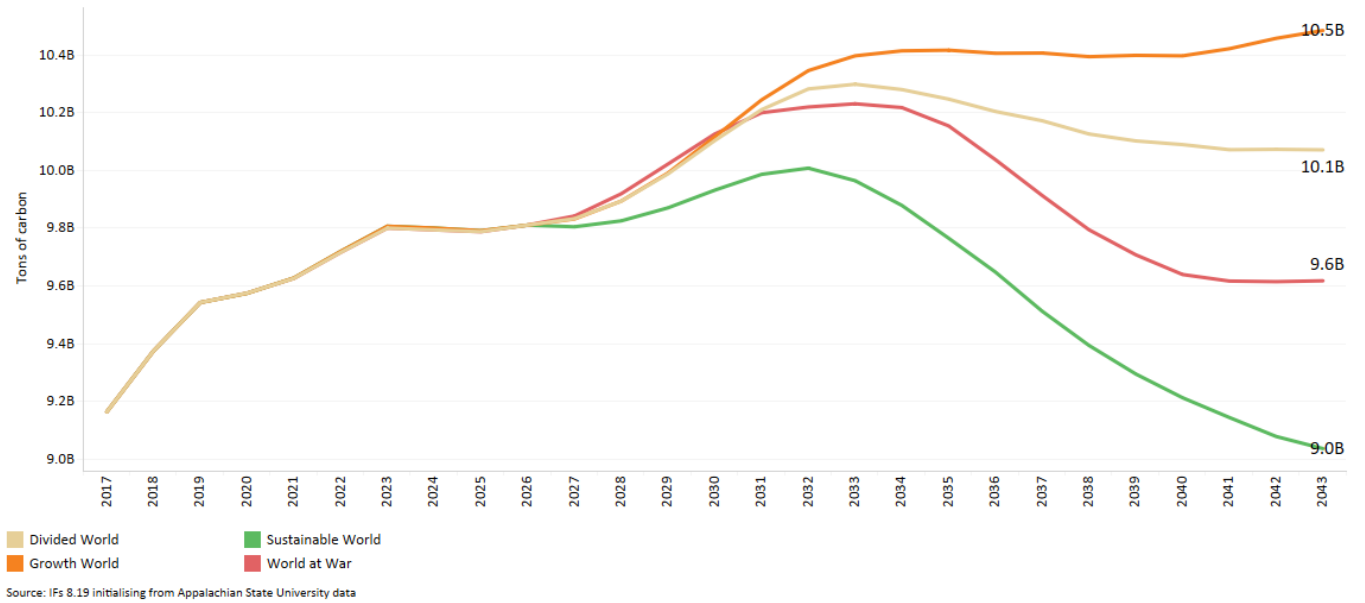


Source: IFS 7.84 initialising from WDI data

The difference in economic growth in the Growth World comes at a high price: elevated greenhouse gas emissions that do not peak within the forecast horizon and continue to increase beyond 2043. At this point, carbon emissions from fossil fuels are at 10.6 billion tons of carbon (equivalent to 39.9 billion tons of CO₂). The result is more severe global warming than in any other scenario. Even though the global economy in the World at War scenario is significantly smaller, this scenario has the second highest carbon emissions in 2043 at 9.6 billion tons due to the associated increase in fossil fuel use as a portion of total energy. Conversely, emissions in the Divided World scenario peak in 2030 and decline to 10.2 billion tons (equivalent to 37.4 billion tons of CO₂) per annum by 2043. As the name suggests, in the Sustainable World scenario, emissions peak earlier, in 2030, and decline to 9.3 billion tons (equivalent to 34.1 billion tons of CO₂) by 2043, continuing to reduce thereafter.

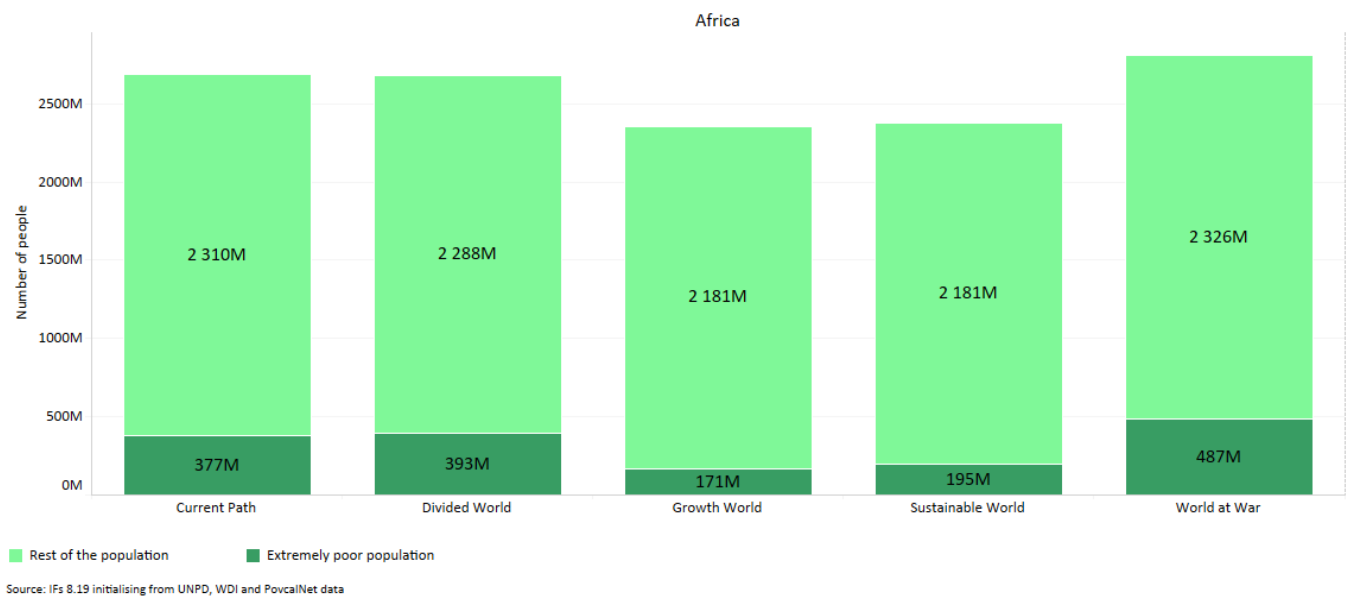
Carbon emissions from fossil fuel use in the rest of the world (i.e. the world without Africa) peak in 2033/4, and decline at different rates after that (Chart 13). In comparison, carbon emissions from fossil fuel use in Africa increase in all four scenarios, given Africa's current low levels of energy use and growing population. In absolute terms, emissions are highest in the Growth World scenario (at 1.08 billion tons of carbon in 2043) and lowest in the World at War scenario (at 840 million tons). The [climate](#) and [energy](#) themes provide additional analyses of carbon emissions and Africa's energy transition.

Chart 13: Global carbon emissions from fossil fuels: 2017 to 2043



The differences in economic well-being are particularly evident in Sub-Saharan Africa, the region with the largest poverty burden globally at 565 million people in 2023, equivalent to 45% of its population. The extreme poverty rate in Sub-Saharan Africa will decline rapidly to 16% in the Sustainable World and be highest in the World at War scenario at 33%, equivalent to 316 million and 630 million people, respectively (Chart 14 and 15).

Chart 14: Africa: Extreme poverty and total population in 2043

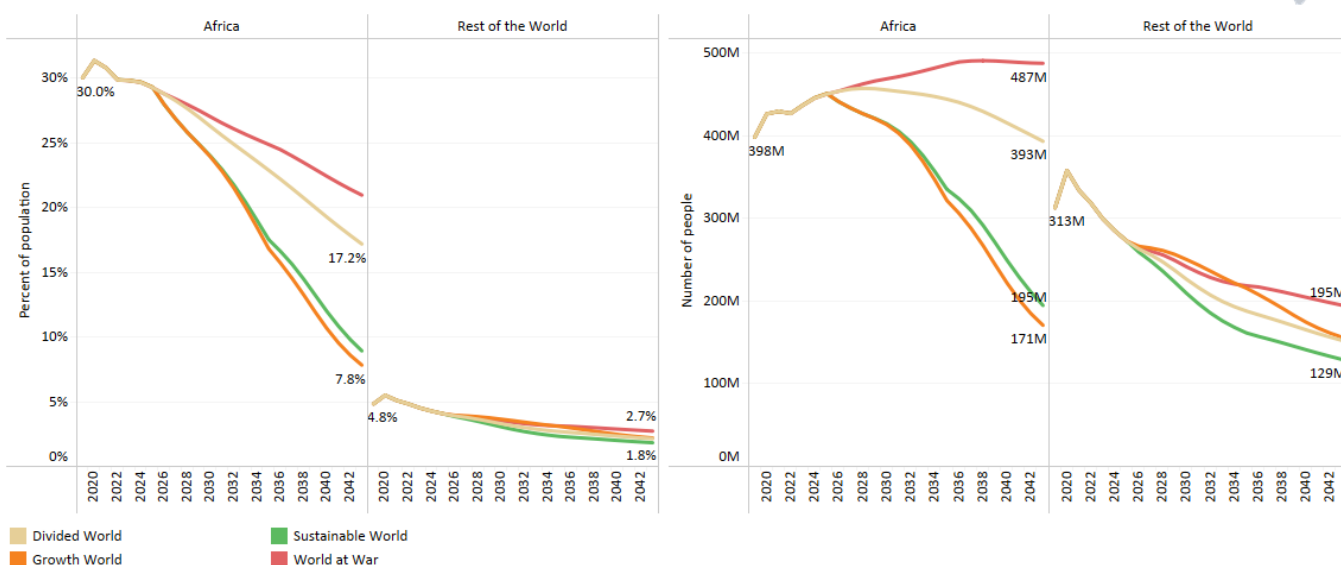


In the Sustainable World scenario, inequality in Africa decreases by 4 percentage points between 2019 and 2043 despite of rapid economic growth. The scenario increases gender empowerment and greater participation of women in the workforce, leading to better outcomes on the Gini and other indices that reflect income distribution.

A closed, rigidly divided world (the World at War and even the Divided World) will not benefit Africa. Africa did not do well

during the Cold War, and instability increased significantly in the years leading up to the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989. The pattern could likely repeat itself in these scenarios, which is worrying as the current global trajectory is closest to the Divided World scenario. Russia's invasion of Ukraine and events in Gaza have accelerated global divisions. In the former, a permanent member of the UN Security Council that is mandated to ensure international peace and security has invaded another and in the latter, Israel violates international law and ignores Council decisions. Views differ, however. Westerners are typically more pessimistic than people from Asia, which is understandable since power and economic weight will continue to shift towards Asia in all four scenarios. Still, a lot depends on what happens between the US and the EU, the choices made by India, the extent to which China and Russia cement a potential alliance, and who joins them.

Chart 15: Extreme poverty per scenario in Africa and rest of the world in each scenario, 2019–2043



Source: IFs 8.19 initialising from UNPD, WDI and PovcalNet data

Furthermore, the choices made in areas such as digital sovereignty will have a long-term impact. Does Africa pursue an approach with an emphasis on the rights of the individual on the one hand, as is the case in Europe, or the prioritisation of the collective interests of the state on the other, as is the case for China? Or does Africa allow for private sector competition that drives costs down and allows the continent to pursue the least-cost solution (such as the approach of the US) which leaves little room for Africa's own private sector? For example, procurement choices on digital infrastructure could create a path dependency with geopolitical implications. African governments with low state capacity, large youthful populations and characterised by insecurity may, for instance, prefer the state-centred stability approach of China over the EU's orientation towards individual rights and democratic freedoms.

Africa will significantly close the gap with other regions in the Sustainable World scenario regarding electricity access, literacy rates, the human development index (HDI) and malnourishment. However, it will still rank at the bottom compared to other regions. Higher life expectancy, better literacy rates and education follow. In contrast to the Growth World, the Sustainable World balances large economic gains with greater equality and a smaller carbon footprint.

Given its marginal position in the global economy but a large and growing population and the impact of climate change on Africa, the Growth World scenario and its associated high carbon emissions are not advantageous to Africa. The World at War is a lose-lose scenario for all countries, and the current trajectory towards a Divided World constrains Africa's growth and development. Our analysis indicates that Africa's 'development potential' in the Divided World scenario is only 63% of that in the Sustainable World, using GDP per capita as an indicator.

In material power terms (using GPI or the DiME Index), Africa remains a minor player in international affairs, regardless of

the scenario — and the reader is reminded about the large number of African countries that constitute the continent, meaning that the effective exercise of 'African' power is invariably lower than the sum of all countries. For example, the tripling of Africa's GDP in the Sustainable World scenario means Africa will see its share of global power increase by a mere two percentage points from its 2023 level to more than 7% of the global total in 2043, using the DiME Index.

Still, as a collective, the African continent could carry more weight towards the middle of the 21st century in the Sustainable World scenario. If the African Union could speak with one voice globally and maintain that unity, Africa would become a swing region with significant soft and discourse power mainly because of its large population numbers and the collective voice of its 55 member states.

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About the authors

Dr Jakkie Cilliers is the ISS's founder and former executive director of the ISS. 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 ISS. 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.

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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.