

Africa in the World

Impact on Africa

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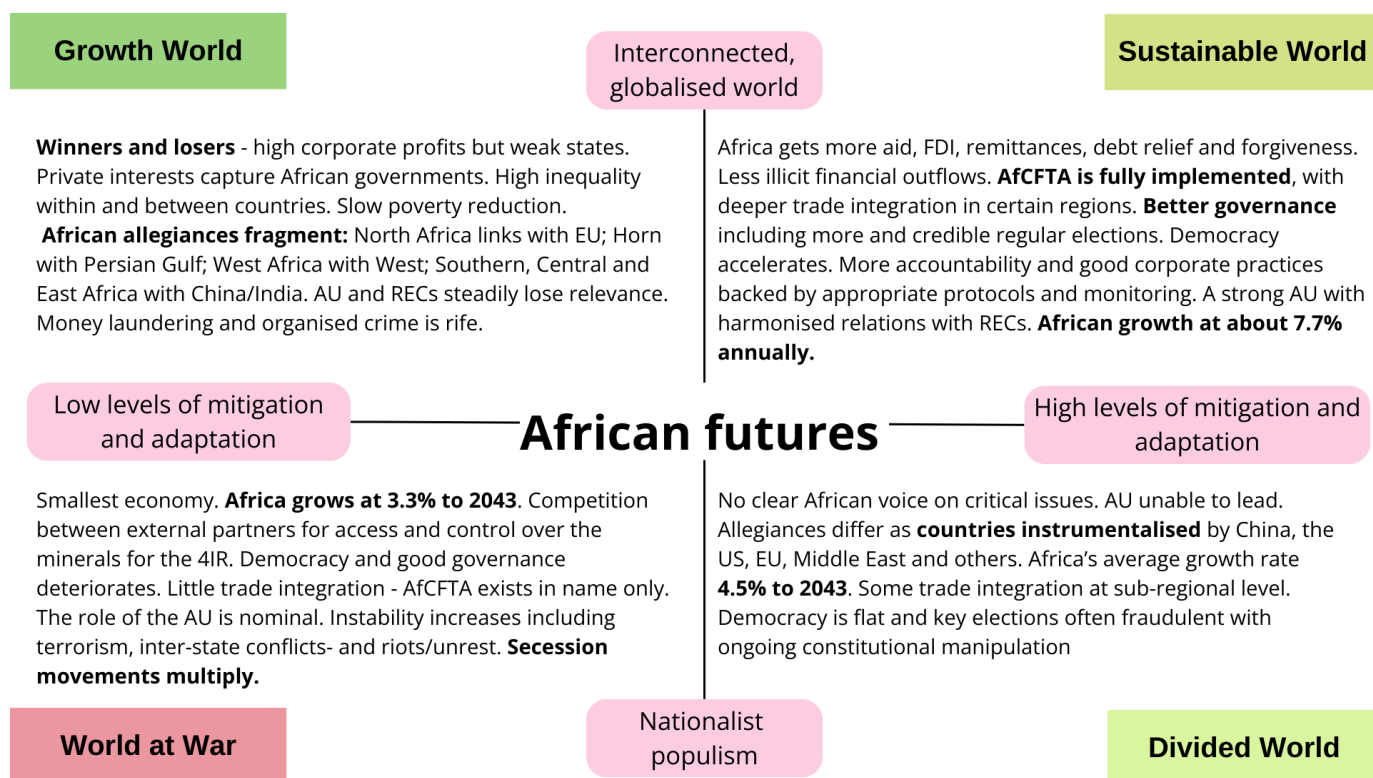
The primary driver of the divergent outcomes for African countries in the four scenarios is the success or failure of integration efforts such as the AfCFTA. But before proceeding with the differences, it is important to recognise the continent's complexity.

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 poor governance often characteristic of its elderly 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 in market exchange terms. Despite rapid population growth, Africa will only constitute 5.1% in 2043 in the Growth World scenarios, which, together with the Sustainable World, deliver the most rapid economic growth. Meanwhile, its population will increase from 18% to 24% of the global population. The size of the world economy will increase to US\$170.1 trillion by 2043 in the Growth World scenario, closely followed by the Sustainable World scenario at US\$169.6 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\$151 trillion in 2043. A World at War scenario results in a world economy producing a combined GDP of only US\$132 trillion in 2043, with Africa growing particularly slowly despite its much larger population.

The key characteristics associated with the four global scenarios for Africa are summarised in Chart 10.

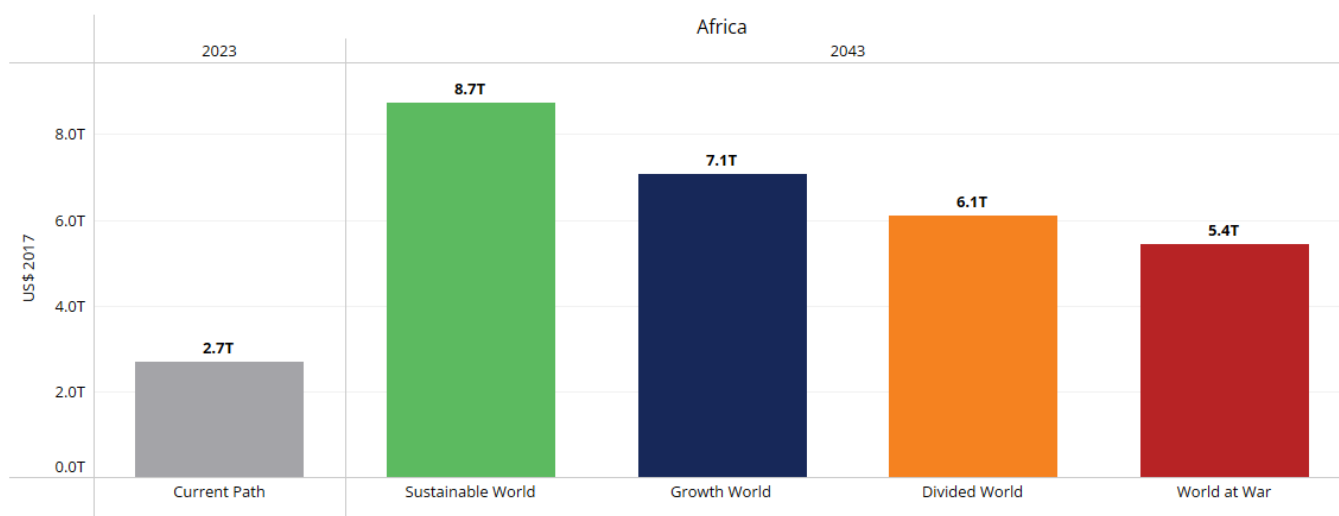
Chart 10: African scenario characteristics associated with each global scenario



Africa gains most in the Sustainable World, both in terms of the size of its economy (see Chart 11) and of its average GDP

per capita (see Chart 12).

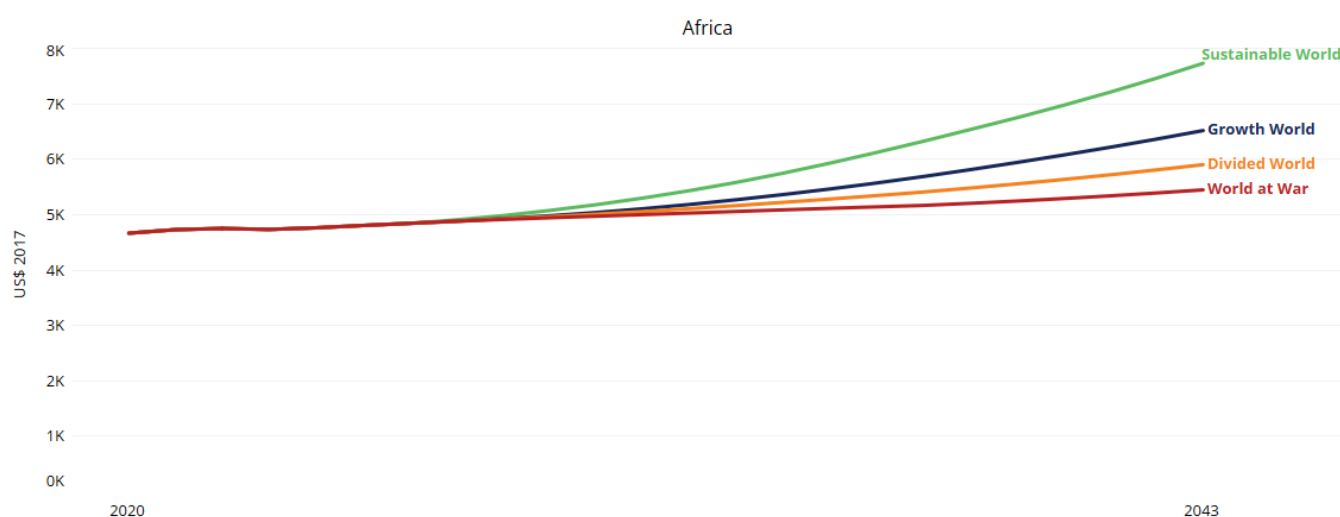
Chart 11: GDP per scenario, 2023 vs 2043



Source: IFs 8.34 initialising from WDI data

The nature of this type of ‘big picture’ analysis inevitably 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, Mauritius, Botswana, and Djibouti, experiencing more than a US\$5 000 increase in GDP per capita in 2043 compared to Africa’s current development forecast. By 2043, nineteen African countries have extreme poverty rates below 3% of their population compared to only seven in 2023.

Chart 12: GDP per capita per scenario, 2020-2043



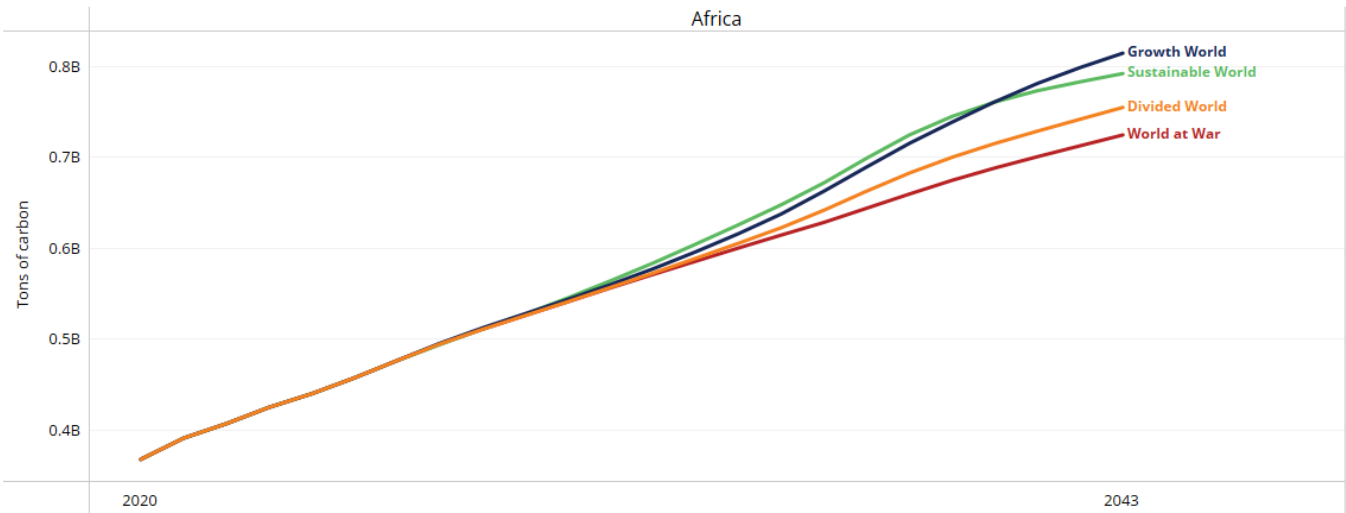
Source: IFs 8.34 initialising from WDI data

Carbon emissions from fossil fuel use in Africa will increase in all four scenarios, given Africa's current low levels of energy availability and growing population. Because the rate of economic growth in the Sustainable World scenario is significantly more rapid in Africa than in the Growth World scenario. Carbon emissions from fossil fuels in Africa are lowest in the World at War scenario which has much lower economic growth rates and higher poverty than other scenarios.

The [climate](#) and [energy](#) themes provide additional analyses of carbon emissions and Africa's energy transition.



Chart 13: Carbon emissions from fossil fuels per scenario, 2020-2043



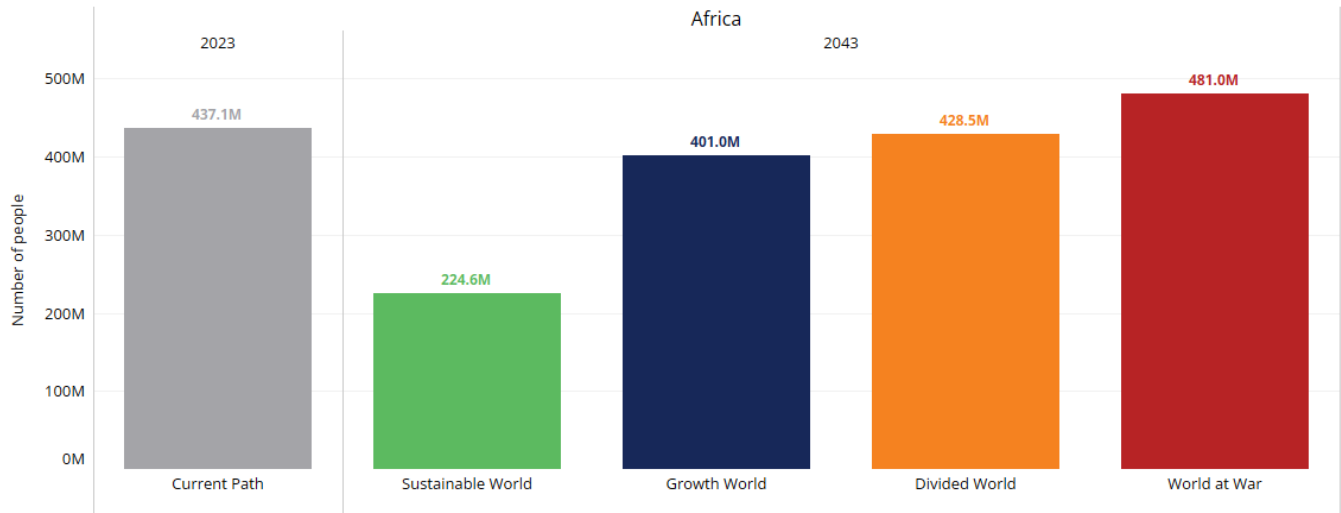
Source: IFS 8.34 initialising from Appalachian State University data

The differences in economic well-being are particularly evident in Sub-Saharan Africa, the region with the largest poverty burden globally at 434 million people in 2023, equivalent to 34% of its population. The extreme poverty rate in Sub-Saharan Africa will decline rapidly to 12% in the Sustainable World and be highest in the World at War scenario at 24%, equivalent to 224 and 479 million people, respectively. Note that Charts 14 are for Africa, not Sub-Saharan Africa.



Chart 14: Extreme poverty in the Current Path and scenarios, 2023 and 2043

Number of people



Source: IFS 8.34 initialising from PovcalNet data

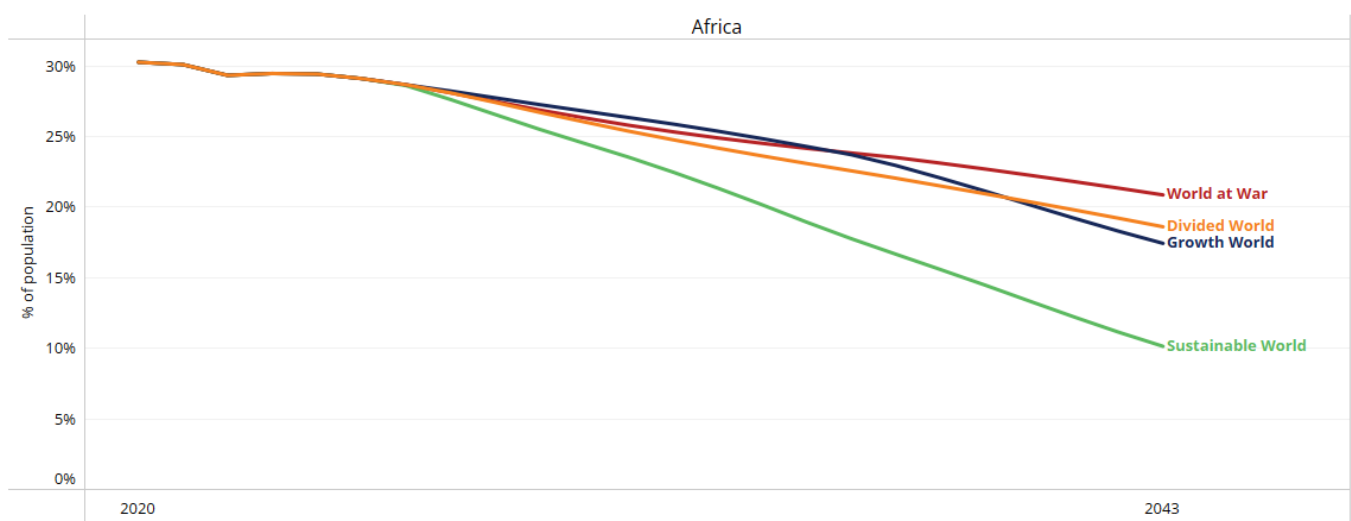
In the Sustainable World scenario, inequality in Africa decreases by six per cent between 2023 and 2043 despite rapid economic growth that, under normal circumstances, tends to increase inequality. The reason is that for Africa the Sustainable World scenario increases a large social grant programme as well as gender empowerment and greater participation of women in the workforce, leading to better outcomes on 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 two 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 typically support Israel and are typically more pessimistic than people from Asia, which is understandable since power and economic weight will continue to shift eastward 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, 2020-2043

% of population



Source: IFs 8.34 initialising from 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), but which leaves little room for Africa's private sector without clear policies on domestic investment? 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. Higher life expectancy, better literacy rates and education follow. However, given its historical deficits, it will still rank at the bottom compared to other regions. In contrast to the Growth World, the Sustainable World balances significant economic gains with greater equality and a smaller carbon footprint.

Given its marginal position in the global economy, a large and growing population and the impact of climate change on Africa, the Growth World scenario and its associated high carbon emissions are disadvantageous the continent. The World at War is a lose-lose scenario for all countries, and the current trajectory towards a Divided World constrains Africa's

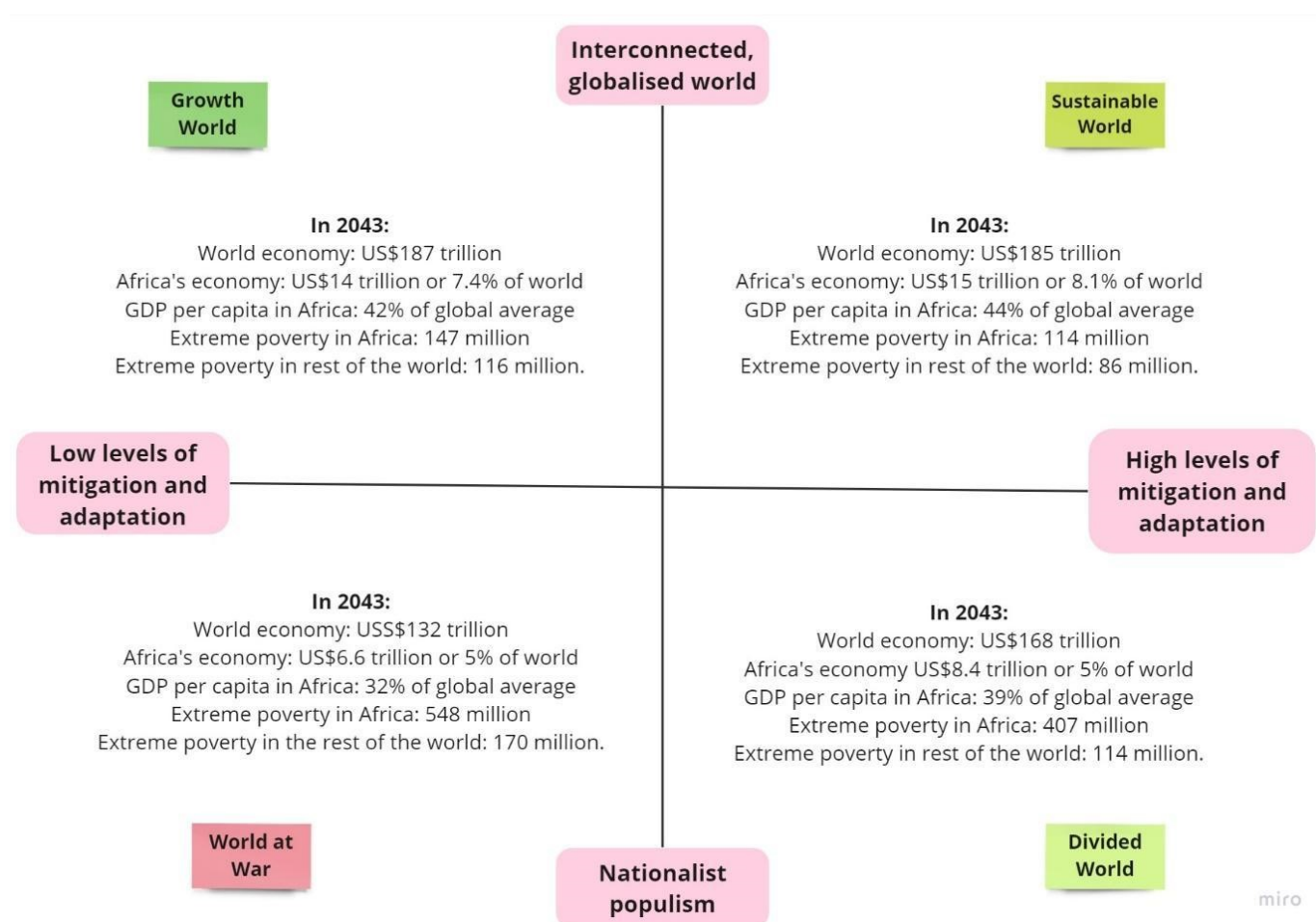
growth and development. For example, our analysis indicates that Africa's 'development potential' in the Divided World scenario is only 76% of that in the Sustainable World, using GDP per capita as an indicator.

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 its countries. For example, the tripling of Africa's GDP in the Sustainable World scenario from its 2023 size means Africa will see its share of global power increase by a mere two percentage points from its 2023 level to 6.6% of the worldwide total in 2043, using the DiME Index and 4% using GPI.

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.

Meanwhile, the current trajectory towards a Divided World places a cap on Africa's development potential. Compared to the Sustainable World, GDP per capita in Africa will be 24% lower (US\$5 907 vs US\$7 738), and extreme poverty in Africa will be 91% higher (429 vs 225 million), reflected in Chart 16.

Chart 16: Comparing scenario impact on economic size, GDP PC and extreme poverty



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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.

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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.