

SEIZING THE MOMENT, SHAPING THE FUTURE: AFRICA'S SDG JOURNEY

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"Papa, these Sustainable Development Goals, they sound so grand, but what difference do they make in our world?" Uchendu inquired, setting his phone aside, his curiosity piqued. I smiled, adjusting my wooden stool under the mango tree where we often had our evening discussions. "My son, patience is a virtue. The *iroko*¹ tree does not grow in a day. Sit and listen." I cleared my throat and began, "Uchendu, in 2015, the world united to adopt the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a vision to end poverty, protect our planet, and ensure prosperity for all by 2030. But Africa, our dear motherland, carries a unique burden: the battle against hunger, the thirst for education, the struggle for clean water, and the dream of industrial strength. While others run, we must first learn to walk without stumbling." "Papa, but why does Africa seem to lag behind?" Uchendu asked, furrowing his brows. I chuckled. "Uchendu, you must first understand the mountain before you climb it. Africa's challenge is not merely in adopting the SDGs but in making them practical, achievable, and rooted in our realities. Let me show you the branches of this magnificent *iroko* tree we must climb."

The First Branch: Strengthening Home-Grown Policies

"Uchendu, tell me, if you build a house on borrowed pillars, will it stand?" I asked. "No, Papa, it will crumble at the first storm." He was beginning to see. "Exactly, my son. Too often, we rely on foreign frameworks, forgetting that true growth comes from within. Africa must craft policies that fit our soil, not just adopt ideas from foreign lands. We must integrate indigenous knowledge, strengthen local governance, and ensure that policies are not just paper dreams but living realities."

The Second Branch: Investing in Human Capital

"What use is a river that does not nourish its land?" I continued. "Papa, that would be a wasted river," Uchendu responded, nodding. "Correct, my son. Africa's greatest wealth is not its gold, not its oil, not its diamonds, but its people. Yet, too many of our children roam the streets uneducated, too many of our women remain unseen in the workforce, and too many young minds flee abroad seeking greener pastures. Education, healthcare, and skill development must become our priority. When the people flourish, the land prospers."

The Third Branch: Industrialising with Sustainability

"But Papa, isn't Africa already industrialising?" Uchendu interrupted. I sighed, patting his shoulder. "Ah, my son, but at what cost? The lion may run fast, but if it does not hunt wisely, it starves. Yes, we are industrialising, but often at the expense of our environment. Our forests fall, our rivers choke, and our air grows heavy with pollution. We must find the balance!

¹ Iroko is a native name for "baobab tree", Papa is a native name for "Father".

² United Nations Development Programme. (2015). *Sustainable Development Goals: 17 Goals to Transform Our World*. <https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals>.

Industries that create jobs without killing our soil, factories that produce wealth without poisoning our air. Renewable energy, green infrastructure, and technology-driven solutions must be at the core of our progress.”

*The Fourth Branch: Bridging the Gap Between Policy and Action*³

“Papa, is policy not enough? If the government declares something, should it not happen?” Uchendu questioned. I laughed heartily. “Ah, my son, a decree without action is like rain that never falls. Africa is rich in policies but poor in execution. Corruption eats at our roots, bureaucracy slows our steps, and lack of accountability leaves our leaders unshaken. We must build a culture where leaders answer to the people, where promises are met with action, and where transparency is the new tradition.”

Uchendu exhaled, deep in thought. “Papa, if all these branches grow, will Africa truly achieve its SDGs?” I placed a hand on his shoulder. “Uchendu, no tree grows without care. It takes time, effort, and unwavering commitment. Africa’s journey is not about perfection but progress. The *iroko* tree may take years to mature, but when it does, it stands mighty and unshaken”. He smiled, stretching. “Papa, I see now. Africa must nurture its roots before it can bear its fruits. The journey is long, but every step counts.” I nodded with pride. “Yes, my son, and now, you have taken yours. Goodnight, Uchendu.” “Goodnight, Papa. Tomorrow, we climb again.”

³ African Development Bank. (2021). *The High 5s: Priorities to Transform Africa and Achieve the SDGs*. <https://www.afdb.org>.