


Social economic transformation in a dynamic world

**Author:**Hardlife Zvoushe¹ **Affiliation:**

¹Department of Governance and Public Management, Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences, University of Zimbabwe, Harare, Zimbabwe

Corresponding author:Hardlife Zvoushe,
hzvoushe@gmail.com**How to cite this article:**

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Social economic transformation became a buzzword in postcolonial sub-Saharan Africa and went on to animate policy spaces as post-independence governments confronted the realities of skewed development, socioeconomic inequalities, and widespread marginalisation authored by colonial rule (Mhlanga & Ndhlovu 2023:1–3; Stokke 1994:123). Today, more than half a century into Africa's independence, the subject still retains its visibility, and its centrality in regional development discourse is not in doubt. A key reference point is Africa's *Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want* which is meant to be the continent's 'blueprint and master plan' with a strategic framework for socio-economic transformation of the region in five decades (2013–2063). Numerous other regional instruments have been created with the same agenda of social economic transformation, but prior to these recent efforts, the pursuit of such transformation was anchored on diverse strategies and policy initiatives that were expected to generate positive impacts on lives and economies. Various countries attempted the route of formulating and attuning industrial policies to achieve economic transformation, but as evaluative studies have shown, the policies have not produced the expected outputs and outcomes over time (Whitfield et al. 2015:37–59).

With the failure of past and present efforts aimed at social and economic transformation, the search for the magical key continues. International experiences point to the requirement for multi-pronged approaches targeting the entrenchment of practices such as accountable governance, participatory democracy, adherence to value-for-money principles, prudent public finance management, gender-sensitive development, and zero tolerance for corruption. In view of these global standards, many countries in Europe, Latin America, and the Arab world are implementing various kinds of reforms meant to improve the trajectory of social economic transformation within their territories. Understandably, the content and process of the reforms are, on the one hand, conditioned by the pace of global technological advancement, and on the other, predicated on innovative pathways that are informed by the production of policy-relevant knowledge and evidence adequate for spurring the transformative capacities of public sector institutions. The public institutions themselves have not been left out of the reform efforts. Considering the sluggishness of most bureaucracies, reforms have been deemed necessary to effect adjustments in the orientation of their operations towards the ideals of efficiency and effectiveness.

The ongoing global societal changes do call for new innovative policy responses that are in keeping with the dynamism of the volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) world of the present day. Many political and socioeconomic developments including the global economic crisis, collapsing social security, increasing vulnerability, the COVID-19 pandemic, and political upheavals have negatively impacted the social contract, social inclusion, equality, and economic opportunities of citizens. As governments are already directing efforts towards crafting responses to these emergent challenges, discussions on the theme of social economic transformation have gained renewed relevance to policymakers, development practitioners, academics, and society in general. While a huge body of literature on the subject has sufficiently captured various facets and developments on the theme over time, the emerging challenges have eaten into the social and economic gains recorded from past efforts, implying that fresh efforts have to be expended in keeping countries on track to achieve lower rates of poverty, improve per capita incomes, raise standards of living, and reinvigorate national economies for resilience and performance. As the discourse unfolds, some of the key questions that future researches have to tackle include: What should be the design of effective social policies in the context of ongoing global changes? How has the globalisation wave impacted social systems of developing countries? How can transformative strategies produce socio-economic changes without upsetting the ecological balance in a given environment? How can social economic transformation be achieved sustainably? What are the trade-offs between global regulations and national economic and social policies?

Note: Special Collection: Social Economic Transformation in a Dynamic World.

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This Special Issue presents articles that reflect an attempt to initiate conversations, report developments, and analyse challenges in selected themes and sub-themes of the social economic transformation discourse. The collection is just one of the many necessary research efforts that should be made over a period of time, to sufficiently cover a subject as broad as social economic transformation. The collection covers the themes of governance, public service delivery, complaints management, and corporate governance. Munzhedzi, Mudzusi, and Mahole's empirical paper analyses the challenge of governance in the provision of municipal services in the South African local government, using the case study of Vhembe District Municipality. The major finding of the paper projects a picture of a governance standard that is falling far below the benchmarks of good governance. It reports challenges of prolonged waiting times for services, mechanical and technical resource challenges, and a creeping culture of incompetence. Mogotloane and Louw's article assesses the customer complaints management systems in the South African public service, using the case of the Department of Employment and Labour. Its findings are a testament to an inefficient system fraught with challenges

of inadequate communication, persisting staff training needs, and underreporting of complaints. The paper by Shopola, Mukonza, and Manyaka focuses on the rise of what they term a 'consultocratic culture' in the public sector, following an observable trend of outsourcing public services by public managers. In their observations, what sets apart public managers and the consultants they hire is the possession of critical thinking skills by the latter, which is the reason for their relevance. Zammar and Garohe's study analyses corporate governance practices in Moroccan construction companies, and observes 'a weak positive correlation between company size and the percentage of independent directors on the board'. Their findings point to the necessity for improving the standard of corporate governance in construction companies.

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