

# 2013: The Year of African Renaissance

Despite several political challenges Africa's economy made steady gains in 2013 By Zhang Zhongxiang

**AFRICA'S collective economy maintained a** good momentum of rapid development throughout 2013. The security situation in Africa remained stable in general. The international community, both established powers and emerging powers, are attaching more importance to Africa. But at a crucial stage of transition, Africa still needs to strengthen internal processes for further development.

## Rapid economic growth

The 2013 economic growth rate of African countries as a whole is predicted to be 4.8 percent, according to the 2013 African Economic Outlook released by the African Development Bank in August. In July's IMF World Economic Outlook, the expectation for economic growth rate of Sub-Saharan Africa was revised from 5.5 percent to 5.1 percent. Meanwhile, 12 out of the 54 Africa countries are predicted to have a growth rate of more than 7 percent in 2013, according to estimates by Ibrahim Assane Mayaki, CEO of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) Planning and Coordinating Agency.

Africa's rapid economic development in recent years is attributed to many factors, including the overall political stability, African integration progress and cooperation with emerging powers. Five East African Community member states signed a treaty on November 30 to establish a monetary union. It's a key step toward implementing a single currency system within 10 years, one of the community's established goals. In addition, South Africa, Kenya and many other African countries are paying more attention to infrastructure and have started new rounds of construction. On November 28, Kenya launched an ambitious, \$13.8 billion infrastructure project to update and extend its railway system.

Despite these gains, there was still an imbalance of economic growth in Africa. Since the North African unrest in 2011, the political situation in countries like Libya and Egypt remained unstable, affecting their economic development. The latest report from the African Development Bank says

**In 2014, the African economy will maintain a rapid growth momentum. Economic development and improving people's livelihood have become the most important focuses of African countries. More and more countries are learning from the rise of East Asia as they strive for continued development.**

that among 10 African countries with the fastest economic growth in 2013, three are from West Africa, three Southern Africa, two Central Africa, one North Africa and one East Africa.

## Overall stability and local tensions

In 2013, the Central African Republic and Egypt both experienced a non-constitutional regime change. On March 24, Seleka, a Central African rebel force, captured the capital Bangui and overthrew the Bozize government. In Egypt, military intervention came after consistent political instability and on July 3, ousted President Mohamed Morsi, who had been in power after a presidential election for only one year and three days. In addition, the situation in Libya remained grim, with the spillover effect of the Libyan war contributing to a deteriorating situation in Mali. French military intervention there came at the beginning of 2013 and the subsequent war and lingering drought sparked a severe humanitarian crisis in the region. It's estimated by the UN that over 18 million locals are subject to serious food shortage and more than 500,000 have become refugees. In addition to the



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terrorist organization "Boko Haram," which provoked persistent bloodshed in Nigeria, the Somali Youth Party launched a terrorist attack on September 21 in a shopping mall in Nairobi, Kenya, killing and injuring over 200 people.

Despite local tensions, the overall situation of politics and security in Africa turned out to be good in 2013. Kenya and Zimbabwe successfully held elections, without any after-election unrest as in 2008. Relations between Sudan and South Sudan improved when the two sides agreed to develop a detailed schedule on implementing peace agreements. Madagascar's presidential election held on October 25 is a crucial step in solving its five-year-long political crisis.

Meanwhile, some African countries expressed dissatisfaction toward the West's interference in African affairs. Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni publicly criticized the ICC's (International Criminal Court) accusation against Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta. The African Union also strongly urged the ICC to postpone the trial of the Kenyan leader in order to maintain political stability. All of these actions show the confidence and determination of African countries in maintaining stability and unity in the area.

## AU's active role

The year 2013 can be seen as a year of African Renaissance. The 20th African Union Summit in January and the 21st in May both adopted the theme of Pan-Africanism and African Renaissance. The 21st AU Summit proposed the "Agenda 2063," planning to achieve an African renaissance in less than 50 years. Therefore, to promote African integration and to play an active role in maintaining peace and security are the AU's two overarching missions.

According to the AU's plan, a unified free trade zone will be established in Africa in 2017. Before that, a small-scale free trade zone will be first established in 2014 through integrating three regional economic communities including the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, the East African Community and the Southern African Development Community. As such, cross-border infrastructure will become the AU's new focus, and it hopes China and other emerging economies can play a bigger role in related fields.

During the 21st AU summit, a consensus was reached on founding an African peacekeeping force as soon as possible, with many countries expressing their willingness to send troops for the cause. In January 2013, the African Union decided to sponsor \$50 million to the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA), sending a message that "Africa is committed to solve their own

problems with African mechanisms," and that sub-regional organizations should also play an active role in peace and security. The Economic Community of West African States has sent at least 1,000 peacekeepers to Mali. The Economic Community of Central African States also announced its plans to send more peacekeepers to the Central African Republic.

## International status rise

With an economic take-off, Africa is becoming a hot spot for foreign investment. The United States, France, Japan and other developed countries have all increased investment in Africa. Emerging countries like India, Brazil and Turkey have also followed suit. In March 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Tanzania, South Africa and the Republic of Congo, and attended the Fifth BRICS Summit held in South Africa. The new Chinese leadership dedicating its first official overseas visit to Africa indicates the great importance attached to the continent. The successful dialogue between BRICS countries and African leaders not only enhanced the international status of Africa, but also further promoted the diversification of international cooperation in Africa.

On the other hand, big powers' competition in Africa intensified. In 2013, U.S. President Barack Obama paid a visit to Africa, his second but most extensive during his term of office. In June, Japan held the Fifth Tokyo International Conference on African Development in Yokohama, and meanwhile increased its aid to Africa. The United States and France increased their military presence in Africa on the pretext of fighting terrorism and intervened militarily there in the name of "responsibility to protect," raising worries among some African countries.

In 2014, the African economy will maintain a rapid growth momentum. Economic development and improving people's livelihood have become the most important focuses of African countries. More and more countries are learning from the rise of East Asia as they strive for continued development. But meanwhile, Africa is facing challenges in economic transformation and upgrade. It's urgent to strengthen its endogenous drive, since most African countries still rely on the extraction of resources to stimulate their economic growth. In addition, there's vulnerability in Africa's socio-economic development. The economic growth still cannot benefit most common people, and unemployment rates remain high in some countries. The capacity of African countries to withstand emergencies is generally weak, which makes it difficult to prevent local unrest. **CA**

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