

African economic boom to last

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Africa's population could reach 2.7-billion by 2060, its middle class grow to 1-billion and its economically active population triple — providing the basis for consistently high levels of economic growth, a report on the world's future predicts.

The Millennium Project's 16th State of the Future report confirms current analyses of Africa's future, expecting China to replace advanced economies as the continent's largest trade partner.

The project aims to provide a database that policy makers can use to frame and improve strategic decision-making.

Its report, released on Wednesday, was compiled from the contributions of 3,000 futurists, scholars, scientists, business planners and policy makers commissioned to estimate the extent of world development by 2060.

It said intra-African trade rates remained uncertain as its current level — only 10% — was too weak to alter trading patterns. This may change from 2017 with the establishment of a Continental Free Trade Area.

The report said Africa's "demographic dividend" provided opportunities for high levels of economic growth through greater labour availability, national savings and urbanisation.

But at the same time, the continent will face the challenges of increased population density, degrading soil fertility and the uncertain effects of climate change.

South Africa's National Development Plan released earlier this month noted that the country's current economic participation rate — people aged between 15-64 — was high at 64% of the population.

The Millennium Project and the National Development Plan concur on what is needed to raise economic growth and temper political instability: policy that results in improved educational standards; increased access to further and higher education; and easier entry into the labour market with greater labour mobility.

Speaking at the release of the report on Wednesday, South African Node of the Millennium Project chairwoman Geci Karuri-Sebina said as human society became more complex, "the scale of problems is getting bigger".

Thomas Mogale, director of the University of the Witwatersrand's Graduate School of Public and Development Management, said his institution was looking to partner with the Millennium Project on future reports, given the importance of South Africa in the region.

Wits "remained convinced" that documents such as the State of the Future report and the National Development Plan would increasingly underpin "suitable action" for a prosperous future.