Development planning is an integral part and an expression of self-determination, a notion which includes the right or ability of persons to control their own fate. In Sub-Saharan Africa, self-determination became a reality, to some extent, only during the period of political independence from the 1960s, except perhaps for Ghana whose independence came slightly earlier in 1957. Even then, long-term development plans were conceived within individual nations and territories. The notion and pursuit of a united Africa was not until 1963 under the Organization of Africa Unity (OAU).

In spite of the inadequacies of the first generation of development plans of most independent Africa countries in the 1960s; including lack of implementation, they were largely hailed as nationalistic agendas and promoted by state-engineered economies. Ghana’s post-independence first seven-year Development Plan was a notable example of this. These first generation of nationalistic development plans were rather short-lived due to the spate of military adventurism for political power through incessant coup de tats and neo-colonial interference through their agents of the Bretton Woods Institutions.

The neoliberal Structural Adjustments Programmes (SAPs) did not only replace the state-engineered development planning framework but also effectively reorganized and directed development planning in many States, especially during the 1980 – 1990s. Structural Adjustments Programmes were notorious for their
one-size-fit-all formula with the common denominator being to reduce the role of the State in production and service delivery.

The social costs of these adjustments were lethal in many countries which was tacitly admitted by the very architects of the SAPs by funding new programmes to mitigate these social costs. In Ghana and elsewhere in Africa, these programmes came under the banner of Programme of Actions to Mitigate the Social Costs of Adjustments (PAMSCAD).

SAPs were soon replaced by Poverty Reduction Strategies programmes (PRSPs) during the period of the new millennium from about 2000, as an attempt to reverse the negative effect of a decade of structural adjustment on welfare and social conditions. PRSPs, as they were popularly called, must be credited for emphasizing fundamental principles of participation, consultation and ownership; yet remained at its core, an external-driven agenda.

**Africa’s Achievements in Development Planning**

A lot has changed and continue to change in Africa in a positive measure since the immediate post-independence period of the 60s till now. This is simply attested to by the change in the narrative about Africa from that of a continent of disease and squalor to economic growth, politically failed States are giving way to political stability, from weak institutions to systematic public-sector reforms and institutional building. All of these have led to the restructuring of the erstwhile Organization of African Unity to a more robust and proactive supra-national governance body called the African Union (AU). We are beginning to see the new dawn in Africa where the African Union is setting the development agenda in diverse areas, including migration, agriculture, economic partnerships and development cooperation which is expected to be domesticated in the respective Member States’ national policy frameworks.

Africa’s achievements in development planning cannot overlook the earlier efforts in adopting the Lagos Plan of Action as the first effort at long-term development planning from the 1980s. The Lagos Plan of Action (LPA) together with the Final Act of Lagos (FAL) were borne out of an overwhelming necessity to establish an African social and economic order primarily based on utilising to the full the region’s resources in building a self-reliant economy. The other complementary objective was the establishing of an African Economic Community by the beginning of the twenty first century. In adopting the LPA and the FAL it was recognised that national governments were to be responsible for implementing these strategies in their respective development plans. We have already discussed earlier the challenges faced during the same period in respect of national development planning which undermined the LPA.

Most African countries and indeed Africa to a large extent, took advantage of the global Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to address social dimensions of poverty. The MDGs were a global partnership for addressing the myriad of human development challenges that bevelled the planet towards the end of the twentieth century. A recent report concluded that several African countries are on track to meet the poverty target of the MDGs but the number of people in extreme poverty is growing.
Africa has made significant achievement in working towards its own home-grown integrated development planning under the auspices of the African Union. The New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD), founded in 2001, was a major herald and blue print as roadmap for the continent’s development. Arguably, it is the only development initiative available on an African scale and was sustained for 15 years. NEPAD has now been integrated into the formal structures of the new African Union (AU), as a technical body with responsibility for planning and coordinating, aiming to eradicate poverty and create sustainable growth. The NEPAD framework was useful in the process that led to the adoption of the African Union Agenda 2063 and its first ten years Action Plan. Agenda 2063 was not only a concrete celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the OAU but a transformational blue print for Africa’s development towards its centenary.

We have discussed how the NEPAD framework and Agenda 2063 represent Africa’s own home-grown development initiative to be pursued and used as basis for development cooperation and partnerships. This achievement had other wider ramifications. It is worth noting that Agenda 2063 also became the basis of Africa’s negotiations at very crucial international public policy dialogues and discourses. In recent time, we saw Africa’s united position in open negotiations during the Third International Conference on Financing for Development (FFD3) in Addis Ababa (July, 2015), United Nations Intergovernmental Negotiations (IGN) and General Assembly (UNGA) on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 and the Conference of Parties (CoP 21) on Climate in Paris (December 2015). There is little wonder therefore, that all the outcome documents from these international development discussions; namely, Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA), Agenda 2030 and Paris Agreement respectively make references to the Africa Union Agenda 2063. For Africa to not have been ignored and bypassed in these international development agendas, was not a mere coincidence but an outcome of conscious efforts worthy of noting as an achievement.

**Notable Challenges**

While noting the key achievements of Africa in the efforts towards integrated and sustainable development, we cannot ignore the challenges that remain to be overcome. For instance, Africa’s turbulent past cannot be ignored and while this should not hold the continent back, it remains a historical reality that ought to influence our future progress. We have cited earlier the sad legacy of the Structural Adjustment Programmes. In particular, how SAPs restrained social services delivery with budget restrictions, job losses, drastic economic decline in the 1990s and the brain drain from Africa as an escape from deprivation and search for greener pastures overseas. These situations had long lasting impact on the continent and remain a challenge to development planning.

The MDGs to Agenda 2063/SDGs Transition Report 2016 has observed as follows: ‘In the past, African governments have taken a sequential approach to sustainable development, adopting a “develop first and address sustainability issues later” philosophy’. However, the sustainable development goals require an integrated approach that simultaneously addresses economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainability in a balanced way. An integrated approach to implementation implies breaking institutional silos and strengthening sectoral (horizontal) and subnational (vertical) coordination across implementing entities. It would require a new mind-set and transformational processes to overcome the status quo in many African countries. Perhaps, Ghana’s independent and technical unit for development planning through the National Development Planning Commission (NDPC) and especially its recent processes towards developing a 40-year national development plan, would be a useful lesson to other African countries.

The opacity of governance and in the management of the public purse has resulted in endemic challenges of weak accountability mechanisms and corruption. African countries systematically and continues to score very low in the global corruption perceptions index (CPI). Until the Africa Union and its Member States take bold steps to overcome this quagmire, efforts towards integral and sustainable development would be an illusion.

Africa is losing a lot its extractive and human resources, a situation equated to economic haemorrhage, through illicit financial flows, unjust trade practices, organized pillage in tax evasion and uncontrolled migration. Africa’s effort at securing a global tax regulatory body under the ambit of the United Nations framework remains unheeded. Yet Africa’s authentic development would depend on effective deployment of its own resources which currently
serves the luxury and profligacy of external institutions and individuals. This challenge must be arrested and Africa takes full control of her resources in the shortest possible time in order to facilitate her sustainable development.

The Way Forward
The new narrative of Africa’s prospects has been positive in recent time. The ‘Africa Rising’ verdict of the IMF and its mantra in the public domain must be truly claimed and made an effective reality by sustaining it. How to do this would require a bit more discussion and analysis than can be written down as part of this brief essay. However, the following areas would require attention:

- Improve planning with reliable data, building consensus among stakeholders and establishing a robust monitoring and evaluation systems for objective feedback and learning from implementa tion. This is one-way to ensure that the principle of ‘leave no-one behind’ of the SDGs is pursued. In some cases, this might even mean strategic cooperation between State and Faith-Based Organizations, like Caritas organizations which have experience of reaching out to marginalized groups in society.
- Plug leakages in the public purse and other re sources. The looting of Africa must be stopped.
- Re-position and strengthen Local Government as the frontier and locus of development delivery.
- Ensure efficient national budget management so that it is aligned to national priorities and reduce the use of budget for partisan patronage.
- Africa needs a literacy campaign that would pro mote civic awareness, increase citizens agency in national affairs and create a new mind-set with respect to the use and management of public goods. In this regard, the earth with its flora and fauna are public goods for this and future generations, to be used in a more sustainable manner.
- Africa needs to find pragmatic ways for policy coherence and effective coordination. Silo approach es cannot deliver integral and sustainable development.
- Peer-learning and support mechanisms among African countries for knowledge management and adapting best practices need to be explored. We can strengthen the existing Africa Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) and build on it. Africa needs a new culture of looking within for solutions to her problems instead of always looking externally. Recent progress reports, for instance, point to countries like Cape Verde, Botswana, Rwanda and Mauritius making great strides in national development and improving well-being of their people. They must be doing the right things or doing something right that other African countries can learn from.

Conclusion
The 2016 transition report observed that both Agenda 2030 and Agenda 2063 are comprehensive, underpinned by an extensive consultation process, and share common aspirations of structural transformation and sustainable development. They provide guideposts to Africa’s integral and sustainable development. Yet, the two Agendas are not identical. Implementing both of them will require effective messaging about their content, coherent integration of both of them into national planning frameworks and an integrated results framework for follow-up. Caritas Ghana is following closely the aspirations and actions of Ghana’s National Development Planning Commission to achieve this. It is early days yet for a verdict on outcome.

However, it promises to be a turning-point of a comprehensive approach to integral and sustainable development in Ghana. We look forward to Ghana’s willingness and decision to submit for the Voluntary National Review (VNR) of the follow up and review mechanism of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) under the ambit of the United Nations’ High Level Political Forum (UN HLPF) in July 2017. This could be one way of Ghana to showcase the ‘Africa Rising’ mantra in a practical way to the international community.

The author of this article holds the view that Pope Francis’ encyclical letter – Laudato Si’ provides a solid and accurate moral compass on how integral and sustainable development ought to be done. Faith-Based Organizations, especially the Catholic community, ought to be proactive in promoting this master piece of a new and transformational agenda for the world and individuals for a better world – our common home.