

African Governments and Reliance on the Western Powers for Addressing Global Challenges: Challenges and Opportunities

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ABSTRACT

African continent has long been grappling with a multitude of global challenges, ranging from economic disparities and environmental degradation to health crises and political instability. It is a known fact that Africa has relied on Western countries and international organizations to provide aid, support and solutions to these pressing issues. These issues and more were among the things this paper tried to examine. Some pertinent research questions were raised in the paper which are; what are the reasons for Africa's dependence on the West in tackling global issues as was the case during the global pandemic of the Covid-19? Does Africa have the potentials for self-sufficiency and sustainable development? Furthermore, the paper adopted a qualitative design with a mixed method approach. It used the dependency theory as a theoretical framework to analyze the paper. The paper found out that Africa is still affected by the effects of colonialism which has made the continent to still suffer from identity imperialism as a result forced merging of different nationalities. The paper also discovered that Africa has potentials for sustainable development as a result of the efforts made by African governments and regional bodies for sustainable development. Finally, the paper recommended that Africa should develop its traditional technologies while forging cooperation with the West.

Key words: Africa, Reliance, Global Challenges, Challenges, Opportunities

INTRODUCTION

There has been a range of complex, interrelated issues that affect countries and populations worldwide. Addressing these challenges often requires international collaboration, since they transcend national borders. However, an observation has been made that in the face of these global challenges, Africa has always depended on the West for solutions to these challenges. Scholars have tried to look at this issue from different dimensions but rooted in all of them are historical, economic, political and cultural factors.

Much of Africa was colonized by Western powers between the late 19th and mid-20th centuries. Colonial rule often imposed Western values, languages and institutions. Even after gaining independence many African countries continued to rely on their former colonizers for aid, trade and policy advice. The economy of most African states were structured and made dependent on exporting raw materials to the West and importing finished goods. This dependence on commodity exports makes them vulnerable to global price fluctuations and has often led to an imbalance trade.

But even before the end of the first decade of independence, there were already many signs that countries in Africa were descending into a deep political crisis and almost endemic economic lethargy. Between 1960 and 1999, there were sixty military coups in sub-Saharan Africa, not to mention failed attempts to overthrow governments and rebellions that led to regime changes (Gueye, Okyerefo, Diedhiou, and Bogale, 2020). As political instability worsened year after year in many countries, economic development efforts were inevitably undermined. Despite an abundance of natural resources, and sometimes a strong political will to take up the challenge of development, national economies had shown signs of running out of steam, which the implementation of structural adjustment policies, from the second half of the 1970s onwards, was supposed to curb.

As Mbeki pointed out decades ago, in Africa we must “discharge our responsibilities to ourselves” and in the

process cooperate “with all nations to meet ... common challenges” (Mbeki, 1998). Although COVID-19 infections were not as high in Africa as in many other parts of the world, the socio-economic impact of the pandemic on Africa will reverberate for some time to come and is disproportionate to its impact on public health (World Bank, 2020).

METHODOLOGY

This paper engaged the descriptive research design. We got information on the current status of the subject matter under study. This aided the understanding of the circumstance that has always led Africa’s dependence on the West for solutions to global challenges. Data were gotten from secondary sources. This involved a meticulous library research and extensive review of existing literatures.

Theoretical Framework

The study used the dependence theory as its theoretical framework. This analysis aims to provide insights into the phenomenon of economic underdevelopment, with a particular focus on the perceived limitations imposed by the global economic system. Initially, proponents of dependency theory claimed that the most effective means to escape the cycle of reliance and address global inequality was for peripheral nations to detach themselves from core nations. However, the post-Cold War period saw a trend towards increased integration rather than separation (Serkhri, 2009). This theory emphatically talks about the centre-periphery relationship. While the developed countries of the third world constitute the centre states, the underdeveloped countries constitute the periphery states. This elicits critical questions as to why some countries are rich whereas, others are poor? It has been noted that underdeveloped countries in this relationship are the producers of raw materials for the metropolitan industries of the capitalist countries. Okeke (2006), observed that the consequence of this is the expropriation and appropriation of surplus from third world countries to the advanced industrial countries.

For the dependency theorists, development and underdevelopment are two sides of the same coin and it implies that the activities, which brought about development in advanced countries, also bring about underdevelopment in third world countries. Rodney (1972), argued that Africa developed Europe at the same rate Europe underdeveloped Africa. This he noted was as a result of the incorporation of Africa into the world capitalist system has continued to militate against her development even in the present post-colonial era.

There should be a discontinuity of this relationship that has bred inequality in the global economic order. This is to allow the economies of these developing countries to breath, develop by themselves and most importantly find solutions to their basic problems.

This paper raised two questions which are; what are the reasons for Africa’s dependence on the West in tackling global issues as was the case during the global pandemic of the Covid-19? Does Africa have the potentials for self-sufficiency and sustainable development? In providing answers to these questions, we are going to look at the issues inherent in Africa- and the prospects thereof.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

As we pointed out earlier, Foreign aid to Africa has a long and complex history, rooted in colonialism, the Cold War, and post-colonial development efforts. The dynamics of aid to Africa have evolved over time, influenced by geopolitical, economic, and humanitarian factors. Here is an overview of the historical background:

European powers colonized most of Africa during the late 19th century. While the colonial powers invested in infrastructure, the primary goal was exploitation of Africa's resources rather than genuine development. Aid in this period was minimal and mainly served colonial interests. As African nations gained independence in the 1950s and 1960s, many countries, particularly from the West, began offering foreign aid. The goals of this aid were to support nation-building, development, and to maintain influence in these new states.

Then, came the era of cold war. During the Cold War, both the U.S. and the Soviet Union used foreign aid as a

tool to win the allegiance of African nations, offering financial, military, and technical assistance to support governments that aligned with their ideological blocs. After the Cold War, the focus of aid shifted from political alignment to poverty reduction and development. The end of apartheid in South Africa, democratization in many African countries, and the increased focus on governance reforms led to a renewed emphasis on good governance, human rights, and economic reforms. During this period, foreign aid programs became focused on development, driven by the emerging field of international development. The World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and donor countries began offering financial assistance for infrastructure, agriculture, and health programs.

The 1990s and early 2000s saw a surge in humanitarian aid to Africa, largely in response to conflicts (e.g., the Rwandan Genocide, civil wars in Sierra Leone and Liberia), famines, and health crises like the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Humanitarian organizations like the United Nations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and donor countries responded with emergency aid packages.

In all of these, many African countries began accumulating significant external debt, as loans were provided on less-than-favorable terms and were often mismanaged by corrupt or unstable regimes. Internal issues in these African countries played significant roles in the lackluster growth in these nations thus, making them to rely more on these foreign aids.

It is estimated that the continent has received \$1.2 trillion in the last 30 years alone, though distributed very unevenly across the continent. As Wescott (2022), puts it that few African countries have achieved economic growth seen in much of Asia- South Korea, China, Vietnam, Indonesia, India or Bangladesh- in the same period. Wescott went further to raise certain questions. Why has so much aid failed to deliver the economic transformation seen elsewhere? Is it too much or never enough? Has it helped or hindered? Can it be useful and productive, or should it be stopped. Answers to these questions will be provided by the time we look into the challenges.

Challenges

These issues can be said to be internal and external in dimension. For the purpose of this paper, we are going to dwell specifically on the internal issues. The internal issues have such factors as; poverty, bad leadership, corruption, and identity crises.

Poverty

That Africa is rich in natural resources is an undisputed fact but what marvels everyone is how poor the continent is. Many countries in the continent have experienced political instability, wars which hinder economic growth and redirect vital resources away from development. Resources that are meant for development are used to fight political opponents and wars further deepening the already poor nations into more abject poverty. On the other hand, many African countries have accumulated large external debts. Often, debt repayments take a large portion of national budgets, limiting funds available for development.

According to the statistics published by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), a notable reduction in poverty levels was noticed throughout a majority of African nations. The data indicates that there was a decrease in the percentage of African families living below the poverty line of \$1.9/day from 40% in 2010 to 34% in 2019. The poverty rate saw a decline from 63% to 59% for those living below the threshold of \$3.2/day. Similarly, for those below the threshold of \$5.5/day, the poverty rate decreased from 83% to 80%.

Conversely, there has been a notable increase in inequality within African nations. The Gini index, which serves as a metric for income distribution, exhibits a range of values from 27.6% in Algeria to 63.3% in South Africa. A Gini index of 0% signifies a scenario where revenue is uniformly distributed among all individuals, while a value of 100% shows that a single family has the whole income. The paper delved further into elucidating the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic across the region. According to available data, Africa has emerged as the region most significantly impacted by the reduction in income among impoverished

households. It is estimated that the poverty headcount rate for 2021, measured at \$1.90 purchasing power parity (PPP) per day, has experienced a three-percentage-point increase as a direct consequence of the pandemic. This increase is in comparison to pre-COVID-19 projections of poverty levels for the same year. In 2019, the global population experiencing severe poverty amounted to 478 million individuals. However, recent estimations indicate that in 2021, around 490 million individuals residing in Africa live below the poverty threshold of \$1.90 PPP/day. This figure represents an increase of 37 million people compared to pre-pandemic projections.

Bad Leadership

For Wangari Mathaai, winner of Nobel Peace Prize, ‘what has held Africa back and continues to do so, has its origin in the lack of a principled, ethical leadership’. Bad leadership has played a vital role and to a greater extent the central factor in the underdevelopment of Africa. It is either the unwillingness or inability of the leaders to rise up to the challenges. Campbell (2016), noted that poor political leadership informs the bad governance that is Africa’s greatest barrier to social and economic development. This phenomenon has been a significant concern for many decades. A number of reasons could be adduced for this ugly trend of bad leadership in Africa. Firstly, the abrupt departure of colonial powers left a power vacuum in many African nations. The structures left behind were often exploited by elites who prioritized their interests over greater good. Secondly, many African countries have diverse ethnic and religious groups. Some leaders have manipulated these divisions, favouring one group over another, leading to tension and conflict. In Nigeria currently, this phenomenon is conspicuously present. After the general elections of 2023, the division has further widened. This is the same case with many African countries and the political leaders have capitalized on these diversities to play on the minds of the gullible people. Thirdly, reliance on a single commodity for export or heavy dependence on foreign aid which has made corrupt leaders embezzle funds meant for development. Fourthly, lack of institutional checks and balances which resulted in weak institutions enabling autocratic leaders to remain in power unchecked, leading to longer reigns of poor governance. At least seven African presidents have maintained their hold onto power for a minimum of two decades. Teodoro Mbasogo, the leader of Equatorial Guinea, has been in power for 44 years. Paul Biya, the leader of Cameroon, has held his position for 40 years. Denis Nguesso, the leader of Congo, has been in power for 38 years. Yoweri Museveni, the leader of Uganda, has governed for 37 years. Isaias Afwerki, the leader of Eritrea, has held his position for 30 years. Paul Kagame, the leader of Rwanda, has been in power for 23 years. Lastly, Ismail Omar Guelleh, the leader of Djibouti, has governed for 24 years. Cumulatively, they have held onto power for 244 years. Finally, frequent military coups in some countries have resulted in leadership changes without the democratic process, often leading to authoritarian rule. On the other hand, Friedman (2018), made a very apt observation that the ‘leadership’ explanation begs a surely obvious question. If African leaders are almost uniformly not good for African countries, why is this so? This debate is still raging on the remote causes of the leadership problem we have today in Africa. Gebremeden (2016), in trying to give reasons for poor leadership noted that African leadership fails due to two major leadership failure dimensions; ethical and effectiveness (skill) failure. It could be observed that African leaders lack the necessary leadership skills for governance. Most of them are products of coups or failed electoral systems. The so called democracy we have today has failed in the direction of ensuring that popular and charismatic leaders are elected into power. There is a decline of progressive democracy in Africa and this can unarguably be fingered as responsible for the military coups we have witnessed in many African states in recent times. Recent elections in Africa have shown that the rights of the people to choose their leaders are undermined and the rule of law subverted. This has resulted in many leadership failures encountered today in most African states.

Corruption

Barte-Konecny (2018), averred that in resource dependent countries, African governments are earning billions of dollars from the exportation of its natural resources while its people receive almost nothing, as if the money is corruptly managed to benefit the economically powerful. He further stated that questionable deals between transnational corporations and African governments have been reported to occur, enabling both parties to accomplish their ulterior motives involving openly accessing Africa’s resources in exchange for large sums of money.

According to Transparency International, Africa is often seen as one of the most corrupt regions globally. This perception is believed to be a contributing cause to the limited progress and economic challenges experienced by most African nations. Out of the 10 nations that are widely acknowledged as having the worst levels of corruption globally, six are located within the sub-Saharan African region. In 2002, the African Union published a report which revealed that corruption incurred an annual cost of \$150 billion for the continent. This highlights the detrimental impact of corruption on the African continent. The allocation of resources intended for the development of the continent is misappropriated by authorities entrusted with the task of overseeing these resources.

Another very big issue that should be looked into under this is that of the institutions saddled with fighting corruption in most of these African states. The strength and transparency of institutions play a significant role in checking corruption. In some African nations, these institutions are weak, underfunded, or compromised, making them ineffective at combating corrupt practices. In some other instances, political power is used to distribute favours, jobs and resources. This patronage system promotes loyalty but also fosters corruption as individuals seek to gain personally from their positions.

Identity Crises

Identity which is the distinguishing character of an individual or group is a decisive factor in politics (Oguejiofor, Okonkwo and Akogwu, 2023). They further averred that the imposition of identities upon African sovereign states through past colonialism and current imperialism and neo-colonialism, have continued to pose great challenge to development in the continent. The arbitrary borders drawn by colonial powers often grouped together different ethnic, linguistic, cultural groups, leading to conflicts and tensions. Leaders in most African nations favour their own ethnic group or use ethnicity to mobilize political support, which can lead to divisions and sometimes even violence. This issue of identity crises make citizens to be loyal to the different ethnic nationalities instead of the country. A typical example of this is Nigeria where there is a sharp division among the citizens along ethnic lines. This has made unity especially among the low class virtually impossible and in turn has hindered developmental strides in the country. In other instances, there are tensions between religious groups. This is mostly between the Muslims and the Christians.

Opportunities

In as much as Africa is still lagging behind in most areas which have culminated in her dependence on the West, there are still many prospects for even development. Some of these prospects are in areas of; demographics, natural resources, agriculture, regional integration.

Demographics

Africa has the youngest population in the world. By 2030, it is projected that the continent's under 25 age group will increase by nearly 20%. This can be a potential demographic dividend if there is investment in education, skills training and employment opportunities. With a large and young workforce, Africa has immense economic potential. Sectors like agriculture, technology and manufacturing present opportunities. There is need for investment, good governance and policies that promote innovation and entrepreneurship. However, if not addressed, it could lead to increased unemployment and social unrest.

Also, cities like Lagos, Kinshasa, and Cairo are among the fastest growing in the world. There is need for planned urban development and sustainable city planning.

Natural Resources

Natural resources play a significant role in Africa's economy and have the potential to drive the continent's development if managed well. Africa is rich in minerals like gold, diamonds, copper, cobalt, platinum, and uranium. The Democratic Republic of Congo, for instance, holds more than half of the world's cobalt reserves, a mineral vital for producing rechargeable batteries. Also, countries such as Nigeria, Angola and Algeria are significant oil producers. Other countries like Kenya and Ethiopia are major exporters of coffee, while Ghana

and Cote d'Ivoire lead in Cocoa production.

Furthermore, Africa's vast forests, such as the Congo Basin, not only serve as carbon sinks but also provide timber, non-timber forest products, and opportunities for ecotourism. The Nile, Niger and Congo rivers, among others have potentials for hydropower generation and irrigation. The Sahara desert holds massive solar energy potential, while East African System has geothermal prospects.

Agriculture

According to data by Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations as cited in Chimbi (2023), Africa possesses around 60% of the world's unused arable land. With proper investment and modern farming techniques, this land can be utilized to feed not just the continent, but also export to other parts of the world. It is worthy of note that a large proportion of Africa's population relies on agriculture for their livelihoods. Enhancing the agricultural sector could create millions of jobs, both directly within farming and indirectly through related industries. This can also significantly contribute to Africa's GDP. Furthermore, there will be reduced dependence on imported food, ensuring food security and reducing the strain on foreign reserves.

Regional Integration

This is seen as a promising approach to promote socio-economic development, peace and stability. In the area of trade, which has to do with fostering intra-African trade, larger markets can be created, promotion of economies of scale and attraction of foreign investments. When investors see that the region is stable with relative peace, it will make them cite industries within the continent. The implication of this is that technology will be transferred to the locals for production in these industries. The dependence on the West for most of Global challenges will drastically reduce as countries will be able to tackle such challenges.

Furthermore, it will provide a platform for member countries to formulate common policies and strategies on issues such as climate change, health and agriculture. These issues are not peculiar to Africa alone but globally.

Way forward

Reducing Africa's reliance on the West for solutions to global challenges requires a comprehensive and multi-faceted approach that builds on Africa's strengths, enhances intra-continental cooperation, and promotes self-sufficiency. Here are stronger policy recommendations:

1. Strengthen Intra-African Trade and Economic Integration

- a) **Accelerate Implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA):** The AfCFTA is key to creating a unified African market, reducing dependence on external markets. African governments should prioritize removing trade barriers, harmonizing regulations, and investing in infrastructure that facilitates trade between African countries.
- b) **Boost Manufacturing and Industrialization:** African nations should focus on value addition and industrialization within key sectors (agriculture, mining, energy). Regional industrialization strategies can help Africa move beyond the export of raw materials to producing finished goods, thereby reducing dependence on Western imports.
- c) **Strengthen Regional Economic Communities (RECs):** RECs such as ECOWAS, SADC, and EAC should play a stronger role in coordinating economic policies, promoting regional trade, and pooling resources for development projects. Building stronger economic blocs within Africa will create a foundation for self-reliant growth.

2. Promote African-Led Research, Innovation, and Technology

- a) **Invest in African Research and Development (R&D):** African governments must increase funding for

R&D, particularly in sectors like agriculture, health, and clean energy. Collaboration between African universities and research institutions, as well as partnerships with private-sector innovators, will ensure that African solutions are developed to meet African needs.

- b) **Encourage Tech Entrepreneurship and Innovation Hubs:** Africa's burgeoning tech sector is an engine for innovation. Governments should incentivize and support tech entrepreneurs by providing grants, improving access to finance, and creating innovation hubs. Digital infrastructure and internet penetration should also be enhanced to foster innovation across the continent.
- c) **Develop African Data Sovereignty and AI Capabilities:** Strengthening data collection, ownership, and analytics in sectors like agriculture, health, and governance will allow African nations to develop locally-tailored solutions. Investment in Artificial Intelligence (AI) for African contexts, such as smart agriculture and health diagnostics, can help reduce reliance on Western technologies.

3. Strengthen African Union (AU) and Continental Leadership

- a) **Reform and Empower the African Union (AU):** The AU must be reformed to become a stronger political and economic organization capable of solving continental challenges without heavy reliance on external actors. This includes giving it the power to enforce key policies, strengthening its peacekeeping capacity, and enhancing its ability to address governance and corruption issues.
- b) **Pan-African Financing Mechanisms:** African countries should explore the creation of a continent-wide development fund, supported by sovereign wealth funds, African banks, and regional development institutions. This would allow for African-controlled financing of large-scale infrastructure projects and development initiatives, reducing the need for Western loans and aid.
- c) **Promote Unified African Foreign Policy on Global Platforms:** African nations should coordinate and unify their foreign policy positions on global platforms like the UN, G20, and WTO. Speaking with one voice will increase Africa's bargaining power on global challenges, from climate change to trade rules.

4. Develop Sustainable Financial Systems and Reduce External Debt

- a) **Strengthen Domestic Resource Mobilization:** African countries should work to increase tax revenues by improving tax administration, broadening the tax base, and curbing illicit financial flows. Greater financial autonomy will reduce dependency on Western financial aid and loans.
- b) **Promote Sovereign Wealth Funds and Investment in Local Capital Markets:** African countries with resource wealth should establish or expand sovereign wealth funds to invest in strategic sectors like infrastructure, education, and health. Similarly, the development of local capital markets will provide African businesses with better access to finance and reduce reliance on foreign investors.
- c) **African Debt Reduction and Sustainability Strategies:** African countries must push for more favourable debt relief terms and develop strategies to ensure future borrowing is sustainable. Establishing a continental framework to manage debt restructuring could provide African nations with greater control over their financial health.

CONCLUSION

Africa's vast potential for growth and development has been impeded by a confluence of factors, including a dearth of educational opportunities, suboptimal governance, and an overreliance on external assistance and imported ideologies. To foster comprehensive development, Africa must cultivate endogenous solutions that leverage the rich tapestry of indigenous knowledge and pragmatic approaches inherent to the continent. The implementation of an educational framework rooted in the traditional values of communalism, industriousness, and ingenuity holds the potential to furnish the youths of Africa with tangible proficiencies and a mindset

conducive to entrepreneurial pursuits, thereby catalysing the growth and development of indigenous economies

at the grassroots level.

Simultaneously, the African continent necessitates altruistic statesmen who prioritise communal welfare over personal aggrandisement and partisan politicking. Leaders who exhibit a steadfast commitment to fostering the empowerment of individuals through grassroots development endeavours, as opposed to engaging in self-enrichment, possess the potential to engender enduring and constructive transformations. Through the facilitation of robust local leadership, communities are empowered to engage in active participation and foster civic engagement. This enables them to effectively identify and pursue common objectives, thereby fostering a collaborative approach towards enhancing various aspects such as health, food security, infrastructure, and market accessibility. The confluence of traditional indigenous knowledge, contemporary technological advancements, and interconnected global networks holds the potential to catalyse the establishment of African-owned and operated industries, thereby effectively addressing local demands. Through the implementation of pragmatic, locally-driven educational initiatives and the establishment of unifying, selfless leadership, the African continent can unlock its vast potential and navigate a trajectory towards sustained prosperity.

The idea of incessant borrowing should be discouraged as evidences have shown that instead of alleviating the challenges inherent cause more problems on the long run. This has also made the leaders in most countries of the continent not to be proactive but rather rely on the fact that aids will come from advanced nations. Africans should look inwards and tap from her potentials. There are a lot of prospects in the continent.

However, it's crucial to note that while these prospects are promising, they also come with challenges. Issues such as political instability, poverty, corruption etc can affect the realization of these opportunities. Still, with concerted efforts, strategic investments, and collaborations, Africa has the potential to realize significant economic and social growth in the coming decades. Just like the countries of Asia, Africa's dependence on the West will drastically reduce and become a force to reckon with both politically and economically globally.

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