

# Panorama of Africa's Underdevelopment and Its Antiquity Causes?

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## Abstract

The genesis emergence of underdevelopment in the African region compared to Asia, Western and Latin America is not a new phenomenon in development discourse and regional integration, but can be traced back to antiquity as a development crisis. Africa is the richest region in natural resources but is classified as a developing country. This is because internal and external historical events have led Africa down the path of underdevelopment. This is the main argument of this paper is that to trace this facts. There is growing evidence that colonialism and its legacy, the economic system and political interventions, slavery and the industrial revolution were the external historical events, while corruption, political instability and civil war, inadequate infrastructure, unemployment and lack of technology were the internal historical events that led Africa into underdevelopment. These historical events were interdependent and a curse to the development of the African people. Despite the above causes, the authors of this paper has found that there is still hope for Africa's development through the linkage of culture and development, emphasis on strong institutions in African states, technology transfer, and a strategic people-centered approach to development to position them in the capitalist world system in the region. Therefore, Africa must develop economic and social well-being, peace and security through the human development approach. The people-centered institutions and transformative leadership should be necessary to reduce corruption, poor governance, and underdevelopment in Africa and promote regional integration schemes.

**Keywords:** Africa, Development, History, Regionness, Underdevelopment

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## 1. Background and the State of Knowledge

It is well known that Africa is falling behind the rest of the world in terms of economic prosperity and regional development. Even though global poverty is declining due to rapid economic growth in India, China and other parts of the world, Africa's contribution to this decline is disappointing. The underdevelopment indicators, absolute poverty in many African countries is actually increasing (Sachs, 2005). Today, the idea of development stands like a ruin in the intellectual landscape. Deception and disappointment, failures and crimes have been the constant companions of development and they tell a common story: it did not work. Moreover, the historical conditions that catapulted the idea to prominence have disappeared as development has become obsolete. Most importantly, the hopes and aspirations that helped the idea break through are now exhausted as development has become obsolete' (Sachs, 1992:3).

The debate about the underdevelopment and development of the African continent and other equally poor parts of the world is not a new phenomenon in development discourse, but can be traced back to antiquity. There are a number of reasons for Africa's current condition, which could be called a development crisis. It is against the backdrop of Africa's development crisis that the debate on how to solve the development crisis in Africa emerged. This debate has been fierce and dominated by two interrelated issues: the dispute over the real meaning of the concept of development and the appropriate path to development (Ikenna, 2009).

## 2. Discourses of Development and Underdevelopment

There is little literature on the history of development and underdevelopment. It should be noted that the existence of a development gap between developed countries (core countries) and underdeveloped countries (periphery countries) remains a topic of debate among development experts, scholars, and policy makers. Various development theories of different types - meta- and micro narratives - have been developed, but the gap between developed and underdeveloped countries is widening by the day. Various factors are cited for Africa's underdevelopment, including internal and external factors such as colonialism and the scramble for the African continent, world capitalism, corruption, geography, and weak institutions (Senanu, 2014).

However, the origin of development and underdevelopment is associated with the speech of President Truman of the United States. On that day, the day Truman took office as the 33rd President of the United States, a new era was opened for the world - the era of development. President Truman stated in his speech that day that 'we must embark on a bold new program to harness the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas (Senanu, 2014; Melat, 2017).

Development is a universal goal of individuals, families, communities, and nations. It is also natural in that all life forms on planet Earth have an inherent drive to survive and develop. Generally, the concept of development is said to have its origins in the biological sciences and refers to some degree of change, growth and evolution. Development is never neutral, nor is it a purely scientific construct that expresses a particular reality. It is a conveyor belt that perpetuates old prejudices (Biswajit, 2012).

Development cannot be thought without the concept of its opposite, be it "underdevelopment" "underdevelopment"<sup>1</sup>, or non-development. The term underdevelopment can be used in many ways, such as when considering poverty, widespread ignorance, widespread disease, unequal income distribution, administrative incompetence, social disorganization, recurrent conflicts and civil wars, political instability, higher population growth, heavy dependence on the agricultural economy, high unemployment, low income, and strict adherence to traditional practices and customs. When applied to entire societies, this assumes an evolutionary lineage and the notion that some nations are above or below others (Alan & Alan, 2000).

**Objective and Review method:** In light of these problems, the purpose of this paper was to examine the internal and external historical events that led the African region down the path of underdevelopment. Accordingly, the author used secondary sources, i.e., published articles and reviewed related literature as review methods. Therefore, this review article summarizes all the studies that have been conducted on the causes of underdevelopment in the Africa region. Systematic selection of reports, commentaries, letters to the editor, and available indexed articles and journals was done to conduct this study. The author conducted the literature review from April 2021 to December 2022, and the available studies were included in this review.

### 3. External factors and/ historical events that Put Africa on the path of Underdevelopment

In the panorama of the history of Africa's underdevelopment, there are internal and external historical events that must be critically analyzed.

#### 3.1 Colonialism and its Legacies

The issue of imperialist exploitation and colonialism is linked to the underdevelopment of Africa, from the perspective of the exploitation of the valuable natural resources of the African continent, which are used to develop the territory of the colonizers to the detriment of African countries (Senanu, 2014). Colonial exploitation in Africa is most evident in the appropriation of land for European settlers or plantations and in the strategy of forcing Africans to sell their labor to European farmers, planters, or mine owners (Palmer and Parsons, 1977). Colonization essentially hindered the internal process of state formation and development in Africa, leaving a legacy of authoritarianism, corruption, and political instability. These colonial legacies, entrenched in the postcolonial state and perpetuated by foreign aid, are the greatest obstacles to development in postcolonial Africa (Fonchingong, 2006).

Both colonialism and imperialism involve the exploitation of the human and natural resources of one society by another. It entails the bastardization of the colonized culture and the attempt to replace it with that of the colonizer. Political and economic imperialism in Africa involved the integration of the continent into the Eurocentric political, economic and social system. In this respect, Africa became a source of raw materials and a market for European industries. The continent's pre-colonial political institutions were subjugated to Western European democratic governance, while the continent's culture was eroded by Western values. Scholars have argued that this phenomenon has hindered the continent's development (Awolowo, 1977; Rodney 2012 cited in Olukayode, 2014). The Westphalia order was based on two important principles - sovereignty and equality of states. However, the Eurocentric philosophy was later carried throughout the world by colonialism (Olukayode, 2014).

The extraversion and monoculture of African economies was widely deplored and condemned as the victory of colonial interests over African interests. However, the risks posed by extreme specialization must be weighed against the long-term income gains to be expected from exploiting comparative advantages. Ideological conflicts and, more importantly, the balance of power between different interest groups have been played out in different ways in African colonies (Austin, 2010).

Moreover, one of Africa's major problems is political instability caused by ethnicity, which manifests itself in interethnic and interstate conflicts, civil wars, military coups, and the tendency toward ethnic domination and retention of power. Ethnic affiliation is a colonial legacy resulting from the artificial and arbitrary boundaries of the colonial state, drawn to reflect foreign rather than African interests, and adopted intact by the postcolonial state (Fonchingong, 2006). Last but not least, smuggling brings us to one of the most notorious legacies of the

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<sup>1</sup> The term "underdevelopment" can be seen in many ways such as by looking into:

- incidences of poverty, prevalence of ignorance, occurrences of widespread diseases,
- inequitable distribution of the national income, administrative incompetence,
- social disorganization, recurrent conflicts and civil wars, political instability,
- higher rate of population growth, heavy dependence on agrarian economy,.

colonial division of Africa. The imposition of borders that separated people with a common culture, the demarcation of some states that were so small that their economic viability was questionable, and the creation of some states that were so large that they were potentially ungovernable (Nugent, 2002).

### **3.2 Slavery**

Slavery, according to the historical account, played a role in the underdevelopment of Africa. It promoted ethnic fragmentation and undermined effective states. Most slaves were taken from areas that were most politically underdeveloped in the late 19th century and ethnically fragmented today. An alternative explanation for this relationship is that the parts of Africa from which most slaves were taken were originally the most underdeveloped and poorest (Nunn, 2007). Britain, America, and Europe in particular benefited from the African slave trade. The trade also created, maintained, and relied on a vast network of shipping services, ports, finance, and insurance companies that employed thousands of people. The processing of raw materials harvested or extracted from slaves created new industries in which plantation owners benefited from the use of free labor (South Africa History Online (SAHO), 2019). Most notably, the Atlantic slave trade during the Industrial Revolution in Britain and its relationship is continued in the colonial period in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as the Industrial Revolution with the system of Negro slave trade and industrial capitalism in West Africa and the West Indies (Joseph, 2002).

### **3.3 Economic system, policy exposure and Intervention**

Colonial rule impacted historical constraints on political centralization in Africa, namely the difficulties in raising revenue, legitimacy, and authority of government. Although the European empire introduced the possibility of credit financing in Africa (at least in an impersonal, legally regulated, if undemocratic manner), colonial administrations were constrained in their recourse to money markets by the metropolitan requirement that each colony be fiscally self-sufficient and balance its budget. However, the adoption of a single currency as legal tender in each colony likely reduced net transaction costs. Metropolitan treasuries denied their colonial subjects the autonomy to print money (Herbert, 2000).

According to Olutayo & Omobowale (2007), state capitalism, which was advocated during the colonial period and the second half of the 1960s, is now perceived as an obstacle to development. The world capitalist system in which African countries find themselves is also responsible for Africa's underdevelopment. This school of thought is largely supported by the dependency school founded by Gunder Frank. It argues that it is not the existence of the world capitalist system per se that is characterized by neoliberal free market policies and the minimal role of states, but that it has to do with the role that individual states play in the world capitalist system. African countries have played a very weak role in the world capitalist system, focusing on the production of commodities with little or no value, which affects their relations in the world market (Senanu, 2014). Even in terms of the politics and ideology of the economic system, and from the perspective of dependency theory and rational choice institutionalism, the original sin of colonialism in Africa was that it did not establish a full-fledged capitalist system based on private property, thereby creating the pressure toward competition and accumulation necessary for self-sustaining economic growth (Austin, 2010).

Structural adjustment programs (SAPs) are launched with the aim of reducing the borrowing country's fiscal imbalances. The neoliberal prescription has led to more inequality in the world than ever before, SAPs have failed to restore economic growth in the short and medium term, the introduction of SAPs has led to a deterioration in the health of people in countries that have implemented SAPs, and SAPs do not address the economic constraints in sub-Saharan Africa (e.g., low technology levels, low human resource skills, small and fragmented markets) (Senanu, 2014).

### **3.4 External influence on Trade and Market Price**

From Africa, almost all SSA economies rely on primary products as their main exports, and often on only a small number of such goods. Such exports, it is argued, are (a) subject to a long-term trend of declining real prices and (b) vulnerable to greater instability in world prices. The first of these characteristics, it is argued, means that SSA is particularly vulnerable to adverse exchange conditions, a tendency reinforced by pressure from the IMF and World Bank (hereafter the IFIs) and other donors of development assistance on African countries to increase their export volumes in the face of weak world demand-what has become known as the 'fallacy of composition' (Killick, 1992). As is well known, per capita output in sub-Saharan Africa is the lowest of all major world regions and has grown slowly and haltingly on average since 1960. In policy terms, structural adjustment in the 1980s marked a turning point, a fundamental shift from administrative to market-based means of resource allocation. The change was less dramatic in most French colonies, however, because by maintaining convertible currency (except in Guinea), the government was able to avoid some of the additional price and quantity controls that had been increasingly introduced in most former British colonies outside the franc zone (Jerven, 2009).

### **3.5 Industrial Revolution**

Africa's economic transformation was inextricably linked to the increasing demand for industrial means of production from the industrializing heartland in the North Atlantic. Revolutions in transportation (railroads, steamships), the turn toward liberal trade policies in Europe, and increased GDP growth increased demand for new manufactures, raw materials, and tropical crops. The establishment of colonial rule over the African hinterland (c. 1880-1900) increased the growth of African commodity exports. The Scramble propelled African exports to new heights, but without the preceding era of commercialization, the African Scramble would likely never have occurred (Frankema, 2015). Between 1760 and 1840, Britain experienced the Industrial Revolution, which ushered in a period of economic growth and prosperity that we refer to as the Modern Age. Through the human labor and resources of the people of Africa, the standard of living of some people had improved during this period, but most of the population was poor. Although the Industrial Revolution had unlimited successes, it also had some negative effects, such as the increase of unskilled workers, the increase of female and child labor in unsanitary and risky conditions, the increase of slave trade, and the rapid increase of environmental pollution. There was no compulsory primary education in schools, and the number of child workers in factories increased. The great divide between rich and poor had emerged (Haradhan, 2019).

### **4. Internal factors that put Africa on the path of underdevelopment**

A different internal factors or a historical event puts Africa in underdevelopment. Many Africa specialists emphasize Africa's colonial history, its ethnic and tribal divisions, and its climate and geography to explain Africa's slow growth over the past 30 years.

#### **4.1 Geographic Location and Disease burden**

A study conducted in sub-Saharan Africa suggests that poor economic policies have played a particular role in slow growth, especially Africa's failure to open up to international markets. In addition, geographic factors such as lack of access to the sea and tropical climate have also contributed to Africa's slow growth (Jeffrey, Sachs, and Andrew, 1997).

Most of the African landmass is in a tropical climate and has no access to the Atlantic or Indian Oceans. I disagree with this because most of the countries that have access to the ocean are also not developed. Example: Djibouti, Eritria, and others. Africa, especially sub-Saharan Africa, may also have natural disadvantages: a larger proportion of landlocked countries, a higher proportion of land in tropical latitudes (soil quality and other climatic factors), greater dependence on natural resources, and greater ethno-linguistic fractionalization and climatic factors that make the continent more susceptible to endemic infectious diseases. Finally, Africa differs from other developing countries in that the demographic transition to lower fertility and lower mortality is not yet well advanced, so that the growth of the young dependent population (15 years and younger) exceeds the growth of the total population (Jeffrey, Sachs, and Andrew, 1997; Killick, 1992).

The impact of malaria on African development leads to an increase in both mortality and morbidity. Increased mortality causes households to increase current consumption and save less for the future. Increased morbidity, in turn, negatively affects productivity and reduces household income and savings. This slows capital accumulation and economic growth (Bhattacharyya, 2009; Bhattacharyya, 2007). HIV/AIDS remains a tragedy of overwhelming proportions in sub-Saharan Africa, although prevalence estimates have been revised downward in recent months. Worldwide, 24.5 million people are living with HIV; the epicenter of the epidemic is in southern Africa. The high birth rates still common in Africa mean that Africa's demographic transition has been delayed. The current situation results in high age dependency, which reduces saving and investment in human capital and leads to slower growth in the labor force (Ndulu, 2007).

#### **4.2 Natural disasters and climate change effects**

Natural disasters (floods, earthquakes) have caused population displacement, poverty, and food insecurity in some countries. For example, drought-stricken areas in the Horn of Africa have been experiencing famine for several years because conflict has left populations without access to quality water (Katana, 2022b). In addition, the fertility of many soils has been relatively low or at least fragile, making it costly or difficult to cultivate intensively, especially in the absence of livestock manure. Climate variability, such as the extreme seasonal distribution of annual rainfall, has resulted in much of the dry season being unavailable for agricultural work. The resulting low opportunity cost of dry-season labor reduced the incentive to increase labor productivity in artisanal production. Conversely, the characteristics of agricultural techniques were land- and labor-intensive (Austin, 2008).

#### **4.3 Weak Regional economic communities, Institutions and Poor government policies**

The fundamental challenge to economic development and liberalization in Africa is the multiplicity of regional economic communities (REC's) in the regions, with the associated overlap in country membership that impedes

the pace of a common market (Micheal et al., 2015). Weak governance institutions in African countries have been used to explain the causes of underdevelopment in Africa. Research has increasingly shown that weak, absent, or perverse institutions are the roots of underdevelopment. Other explanations for development, such as technological innovation, investment, or years of schooling, are not associated with higher rates of economic growth (Killick, 1992).

In addition, many African governments have pursued policies that hinder the continent's development. In many cases, these governments are responsible for the economic crisis and political instability. Many governments fail or refuse to be sustainable in solving national problems such as poverty, unemployment, and hunger (Katana, 2022a). Last but not least, the vast majority of Africans today live in countries that have failed to create or maintain strong institutions to promote exchange and protect persons and property. Most African countries suffer from this problem (Sudan, Congo, Somalia,) (Killick 1992).

#### **4.4 Corruption, weak infrastructure development and unemployment rate**

One of the biggest problems in Africa is corruption. The abuse of power by public officials for private interests or private gain is high. This occurs when people entrusted with power use their authority to their advantage (Katana, 2022a). We note that this is an obstacle to good governance and development of African people. Unfortunately, many of these nation-states have either made minimal progress or stagnated in terms of socioeconomic growth and development. Most African countries have inadequate infrastructure. This has been a major impediment to development as it has limited the ability of people to do business across borders. The level and standard of education is low in Africa. Many children do not have access to education due to poverty and poor infrastructure, especially after conflicts or disasters that damage school facilities. Africa has high adult unemployment rates, unfavorable business conditions, a shortage of skilled labor, poor oversight of public projects, lack of political will, and excessive regulation. Likewise, insufficient technology advancement in African countries can do the same but definitely there are challenges of acquisition and mastery of technology, both costly and time-consuming, acquired technologies often need to be adapted to local conditions- hence the issue of appropriate technology (Killick, 1992). We argue that, innovation and entrepreneurship habits are less in Africa. Africa's has engaged in labor intensive and time consuming tasks, and needs to transfer of technology and entrepreneurship skills.

#### **4.5 The political instability and Civil war**

The historical and social peculiarities of the continent have meant that a combination of demographic, social, and historical influences unique to SSA has led to a situation tailor-made for the proliferation of patronage-based political systems. The post-independence fragility of nation-states reinforced the incentive to employ clientelism and centralized authoritarianism. These factors, combined with the experience of late colonialism and various intellectual influences, have led to many political choices that have proven, in retrospect, to be inimical to development. Political instability is a source of problems, but we pay particular attention to 'patrimonial' models of African politics. Political unrest and civil wars are a problem for many African countries (Katana, 2022b). This means that instability has affected economic development because it prevents the government from effectively planning and enforcing its policies.

#### **4.6 Dependency on raw material exports, foreign aid and debt**

The rejection of aid and the cancelation of foreign debt is by no means an end in itself. It is only the necessary first step in a three-part way forward for Africa (Fonchingong 2006). Africa is known for its exports of natural resources such as diamonds, oil, and copper. Unfortunately, some African countries have become heavily dependent on exporting raw materials to other countries. Some studies have shown that foreign aid contributes positively to the economic development of African countries (Katana, 2022b), but also leads to dependency. I have argued that foreign aid makes African countries dependent on foreign aid because they rely solely on donor funds to finance their budgets and even to provide services to their citizens. Not only that, but many African countries have been forced to ask for aid to be cut off because they are tired of aid.

#### **5. Conclusion and Possible solutions**

In discourses on development and regional integration, Africa is classified among developing countries. This is because internal and external historical events have led Africa down the path of underdevelopment. For example, colonialism and its legacy, the economic system and political interventions, slavery, and the industrial revolution were the external historical events, while corruption, political instability and civil war, inadequate infrastructure, unemployment, and lack of technology were the internal historical events that led Africa to underdevelopment. These historical events were interdependent. Even though regional integration has only been practiced since the 1960s when African countries gained independence, the process of regional integration to address underdevelopment is low and still in the early stage of regional integration or customs union. Despite the above

reasons, the author believes that there is still hope for Africa's development through the options of the link between culture and development and the emphasis on strong institutions in African countries, technology transfer and strategic positioning in the world capitalist system.

Therefore, Africa must develop economically through human development approach. We need better leadership to curb corruption, improve capital, and stabilize government arrangements for Africans. There needs to be deeper integration among states in the African region with high political commitment, a reduction in the overlap in membership and the multiplicity of REC's, and good implementation of the institutional and legal frameworks. There should be a process of decolonization in Africa that includes an attempt to liberate the continent politically, economically and spiritually.

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