

Restructuring African States to Achieve Sustainable Development Goals

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*If they can get you asking the wrong questions;
they don't have to worry about answers*
Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*, 1973

Abstract

This paper is framed around two questions: why were European-style states, without effective domestic development institutions, created on the continent of Africa? And to what extent have the colonial states matured in post-independence Africa? Answering these two questions can help clarify the extent to which the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) can be achieved by African states in 2030. I contend that the post-independence African States retained both their colonial nature and the purposes for which Europeans created these states. That means that the states created in Africa in 1884-1885 are resilient, therefore, without intentional restructuring and reforming of the colonial/postcolonial states in Africa, the idea of sustainable development will simply remain an idea. Seven suggestions are offered for transformative and sustainable development across Africa.

Keywords: State Restructure, Nation-building, Agriculture, Governance, ODA, Resilience, SDGs, Trade

Introduction

Compared to states in other regions of the world, most African states are institutionally weak and conflict-ridden. Some of those states like Nigeria, Somalia, Mozambique, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo are generally poor and suffer from insecurity and banditry. They are also

foreign aid-dependent and lack functioning healthcare and educational infrastructure. The persistence of these variables since the end of the colonial period lead many African scholars and policymakers to ask the wrong questions. Some of the questions include: Why are African states economically undeveloped and characterized by a high level of political and physical insecurity? The right questions include: why were European-style states without effective domestic development institutions created on the continent of Africa? And to what extent have the colonial states matured in post-Independence Africa? Answering these questions can help clarify the extent to which the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) can be achieved by African states in 2030. International Organizations like the UN can effectively discharge their responsibilities to the extent their economically and militarily powerful member states allow. Like the SDGs, the previous Lagos Plan of Action, NEPAD, and Agenda 2063 “Africa We Want” require states with institutional capacities and internally generated revenue for successful policy implementation. The reason previous efforts, like the Lagos Plan of Action and New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD), remain unrealized has much to do with African leaders’ expectations that these development agendas should be externally financed. I contend that the post-independence African States retained their colonial structure and the purposes for which Europeans created these states. Consequently, external interests will not finance Africa’s development to become their competitor. Thus, to the extent that the colonial structures as states remain intact, these states will remain unable to facilitate transformative economic and political change. That is because the states created in Africa in 1884-1885 have become factories for extracting resources for external interests. And, without intentional restructuring and reforming of the colonial/postcolonial states in Africa, the idea of sustainable development to strengthen domestic institutions, governance, security, and economic development for the masses will remain an unfulfilled dream.

A Resilient State and Its Functions

Contrary to the notion that European states emerged because of a social contract between the citizens and their rulers, Charles Tilly (1985) argues that states emerged from violent conflicts between self/profit-seeking, violent, and coercive forces across Europe. According to Tilly (1985: 169), “coercive exploitation ... banditry, piracy, gangland rivalry, policing, and war-making” are central to understanding the rise of

European social formation and system of government within the framework of the state. Power holders used war to extract resources from the populations over which they had control and to promote capital accumulation by lords who could help them borrow and buy what they desired. Thus, "War making, extraction, and capital accumulation interacted to shape European state-making" (Tilly, 1985: 172). Charles Tilly's core argument on the functions of States can be summarized thus:

- (1) A state's war-making function is to eliminate or neutralize external rivals for the same territory
- (2) State-making results from neutralizing all internal rivals within the claimed territory
- (3) neutralize the State's chief supporter's enemies by protecting those who paid for their services, and
- (4) secure resources extraction necessary to hold and maintain State security; for successful implementation of its functions of war-making, State-making, and protection (Tilly, 1985: 181).

Consequently, a state that emerges from violence and is successfully institutionalized will have a revenue-generating mechanism in the form of domestic taxation, effective external and internal security institutions in the form of a professional army, navy, customs, and police service with the capacity to maintain law and order and protect citizens against domestic and foreign threats. Arguably, the capacity to organize and deploy violence accounts for the emergence of the earlier form of states in European homelands. The consequent capacity to extract resources from the citizens enabled the state to provide economic and infrastructural development and wealth expansion incentives. Subsequently, the expansion of local resources sustained the popular resistance that forced European states and leaders to make concessions that further expanded the political rights of the citizens. For example, with a stable government and functioning institutions, citizens' agitations against the lords and monarchies led to an enhanced guarantee of rights, representative institutions, and courts of appeal as conflict management tools that lessened violence amongst citizens and the state. Expansion of economic opportunities and political rights within institutional norms and values increased state legitimacy and the citizens' support for their states, which ensured European states' resilience could withstand external and domestic political, economic, and natural uncertainties. European citizens' support for their states and governments is possible because states in European

homelands emerged from domestic contestations for power, authority and control that eventually enabled European colonization and domination of other people's homelands including the continent of Africa.

African States' Resilience without Sustainable Progress

On the one hand, Europeans violently fought and created their states, and institutionalized their various organs - executive, legislative, bureaucratic, and judicial that did not erase their indigenous monarchial/traditional institutions of authority- to serve and protect European citizens' economic, political, and security interests. On the other hand, contemporary African states did not emerge from domestic contestations for power and authority. Rather, Africa's contemporary states were created by Europeans - whose strategies included erasing and compromising monarchial and traditional institutions in places like Buganda, Sokoto, and Mali to serve European interests. Consequently, externally created and imposed postcolonial African states did not use inter-state war-making to survive. Without internal reform and restructuring at independence, post-independence African states remain outward-facing and continue to carry out the functions for which they were created by external non-African actors. In the contemporary era, that function remains disproportionately focused on natural resources extraction and export of raw materials to feed external manufacturing facilities. This means that the colonial function of the African states as exporters of raw materials to European territories creates employment and wealth for Europeans and other countries, while they import finished products into the continent. The resulting economic impact of mounting trade deficits and borrowing without the capacity to pay back renders contemporary African states and citizens unable to finance sustainable development.

And to the extent that African states remain focused on the purpose for which Europeans created them - that is, exporters of Africa's raw materials to European countries and firms and importers of European manufactured products -- they remain subsidiaries of their former colonizing European nations. In the evolving freedom-based international arena, African states' subsidiary status warrants their inability to engage in inter-state war-making because it is not deemed necessary for their advancement or survival. Economically, engaged in non-productive services that include the approval of licenses and accepting foreign loans

and aid, these states have become *gatekeeper-states* (Cooper, 2002) that extract meager revenue from import licenses and fees and loans that do not need engagement with the local citizens across African states. By not engaging and listening to the people, many African governments and leaders have lost valuable local knowledge about food crops, markets, sustainable environmental practices, and community conflict management techniques and processes.

In terms of protection for the lives of the people - the critical function of a normal state, the security of the citizens has not been sustainably ensured because the postcolonial army and police institutions did not emerge from internal negotiation between the rulers and the ruled but from resource extraction related transactions from the colonial era. Consequently, postcolonial external collaborations between the various security institutions in the continent remain constant. Their persistence is evident in the presence of French military advisers in various francophone-African countries and the thousands of British and U.S. military advisers across the continent. The resulting insecurity, coup d'états, banditry, insurgencies, and civil wars have become the hallmark of failed states across the continent. In their capacity as tools for generating extractive resources without negotiating with the masses, African states are perceived as prized targets for capture by rent-seeking networks of domestic elites in collaboration with external actors who have no interest in African peoples, state formation, institutions, and nation-building activities, especially those that lead to sustainable economic development and security on the continent.

Effective state formation emanates from specific and local historical outcomes mediated by familiar social and political forces. Although the state structure and norms may have resulted from the activities and creations of certain individuals or policy networks, their legitimacy, and therefore resilience, are eventually based on the state's capacity to refract ideas and preferences of specific groups in local societies into general-purpose outcomes like enabling infrastructure that will sustain economic development and wealth for citizens. Botswana and post-genocide Rwanda are examples that point us to a possible path of how traditional and modern institutions cohere to ensure stability and relevant political and economic progress. The people's capacity to adapt to changing knowledges that produce progressive changes is enhanced through policies that provide and maintain good schools and learning, access to good and affordable

healthcare, physical security, and access to fair and equitable justice systems. States/governments that enable people to lead sustainable and resilient lives are vectors (Caporaso and Levine, 1992) of political and economic development especially when such states evolve autonomously from their local societies.

Effective states must consistently act as a vector that sustains the development and ideological underpinnings of its constituent members. It accomplishes this through transparent and transformative uses of collective resources for the best and general purpose. The extent to which its institutions serve the general purpose mediates and maintains the state's legitimacy and the obedience/loyalty of citizens. As the COVID-19 and the Russo-Ukraine War demonstrate such states and their constituent parts are mutually resilient and, usually, will organically adapt to technological, economic, environmental, political, and social changes that threaten their existence. Many contemporary African states do not meet these requirements because state institutions do not cohere with traditional African norms and institutions; rather, they are linked to European colonial interests and consequent activities that led to state creation in a specific historical process in the continent.

To become sustainably resilient, African states must execute their basic function by ensuring that competent and effective security institutions and personnel are established and deployed to protect the state and its people against foreign and domestic threats. In building and maintaining educational institutions embedded in African traditional norms and values, specific states will enable citizens to acquire and maintain core values and ideas that lead to strong patriotism, justice, and equity without losing sight of advances in modern science and technology. A sustainable and resilient future for citizens and communities across Africa starts with African states building and maintaining effective social services infrastructure for local citizens. Social services infrastructure like functional and accessible education research institutions, healthcare facilities, road networks, electricity/energy supply, communications, and transparent protection of ideas and property rights of its citizens pave the path to sustainably resilient communities across Africa. Lastly, African states can become sustainably resilient by rethinking and reestablishing effective agricultural policies that enhance different communities' capacity for producing locally grown food to feed the people. Such agricultural/food production policies must include incentives for young

people to become farmers and to ensure that food is available to and affordable by rural and urban dwellers without unnecessary domestic and external constraints as demonstrated by the effect of the Russo-Ukraine War on food prices and availability across Africa since 2022 – an evident outcome of the outsourcing of Africa’s food systems and production.

The existing structures (states) and their agents (leaders) in post-independence African states lack capacities for roles as vectors of development because they were largely conceived as externally autonomous structures and agents of society. That means that the competition for state capture for private wealth accumulation is directly responsible for the anti-democratic behaviors, which undermine political and economic development policies in contemporary African states. Contemporary states in Africa reflect the materialist preferences of hostile and illegitimate social and political forces. And, sometimes those forces merge with organized criminal gangs that parade as insurgents in places like Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Somalia to act as if they are agents of states with general rather than accumulative consumptive interests.

Centralized government institutions located in the capital cities without effective road networks that connect the capital cities to many rural areas, enable state agents to support and sustain the underdevelopment and insecurity of different communities. Consequently, insurgents and criminal gangs use brute force to disorganize citizens’ basic farming activities, making it difficult for them to feed themselves and effectively collaborate with government leaders to locate, exploit, and manage extractive resources necessary for sustainable development.

Unlike state-making that emerged from war-making in the case of European states, captured states in Africa are unable to use the instrument of governance to build functional developmental infrastructure across different states, therefore leaving citizens vulnerable to insecurity, health and food crises, kidnapping for ransom, and begging in the streets. As a result, many communities have become dependent on mostly Western-financed multilateral and non-governmental organizations, and diaspora groups for their basic needs survival. This means that the social organization known as the state is the basis for exercising political influence and projecting power (Herbst, 200: 21). Centralized development and governance pronouncements from the seat of government without road,

security, economic, and health infrastructures that connect the entire state from the capital to various regions of the state essentially leaves the citizens, especially the rural farmers, vulnerable and abandoned without the means for ensuring community resiliency.

While it is problematic that Europeans created states in Africa to serve European colonial interests, that is not as important as the failure of contemporary African leaders to reform and restructure the states to serve the interests of their peoples since independence. Thus, politics in contemporary Africa continues to reflect the patterns of personalized and informal nature of both traditional and colonial exercise of power and authority. For example, like Europeans who were mainly concerned with resource extraction from various parts of the continent for European industrial needs, many post-independence African leaders also captured the state for private wealth accumulation. And; with the end of the Cold War, the Chinese and other Asian countries have become key exploitative participants of natural resources from Africa. Also, instead of re-thinking state and institution building and working to industrialize their economies, post-independence African governments continue colonial practices of exporting local raw materials to Western and Asian industrial markets.

In the tradition of the Weberian notion of the state, Chabal and Daloz argue that “the modern state is the outcome of a process by which the realm of politics is gradually emancipated from society and constituted into increasingly autonomous political institutions” (Chabal and Daloz, 1999: 5). An emancipated state thrives because of its “successful establishment of a truly independent bureaucracy [that] rests on the establishment and operation of a civil service unconstrained by the dynamics of social pressures” (Chabal and Daloz, *Ibid.*). Such an emancipated state with a functional bureaucracy is contextually necessary because it can enable citizens to seek employment in private and public sectors based on merit, rather than personal connections. Such an institutional framework ensures that incomes are commensurate with skills and qualifications and are paid consistent with employment contracts (Chabal and Daloz, 1999: 6). Indeed, if such a Weberian state exists, it is yet to be manifest in Africa, even as one could consider a Weberian bureaucratic state possible in Botswana, Rwanda, and South Africa. The point is that, beyond its claims to the legitimate use of force, the external-imposed African states are different from either European or Asian states because they lack the necessary institutions and capacities to mobilize local

citizens within a framework of active patriotism and nationalism for sustainable development purposes. And to the extent that the nature and character of state institutions in Africa largely remain the same as they were at independence -- unreformed, progressively unproductive, unreliable, and unmoored from traditional values and norms -- as a platform for economic development, (Kalu, 2011) these structures called states and their governments/leaders do not have the *bona fide* capacity for creating independent policies that could lead to sustainably developed and resilient communities, like the evolving progress in Botswana and Rwanda.

In Botswana, since independence, political stability and persistent development progress from poverty to a middle-income economy can be understood in (Pitcher, Moran, and Johnston, 2009:146) the context in which the domestic elites – mainly traditional power elites rooted in the village life – anchored their leadership on the personal connection and knowledge of what their communities need and therefore provide them with services to meet their basic needs. In return for the services by the leaders, the citizens reciprocally recognized and conferred legitimacy on their leaders and government, that, makes the democratic transition less onerous in Botswana compared to other countries in sub-Saharan Africa. In the case of Rwanda, the historical monarchical system of governance anchored on the Tutsi elite was upended by German and Belgian colonialism that subsequently unleashed the conflicts that culminated in the 1994 genocide. That colonial state architecture of division without economic development that the Kagame regime has sought to take apart, reorganize, and connect the people to the institutions of governance. And, working with traditional and modern institutions has started to lead to the coordination of resources to achieve the developmental needs of the citizens in post-genocidal Rwanda. This means the restructuring of the state, and building institutions of governance anchored on community norms and values of Rwanda. And, like Botswana, specifically and intentionally empowering women leaders in formal and informal government, anchors governance in the life of Rwanda's villages and communities with services the people need that can result in the achievement of the UN SDGs. Thus, irrespective of colonially intensified ethnic differences in both countries, the security and services that the government has provided the people consequently lead to the people's conferring of legitimacy and support for a consensus governance system that has stabilized Rwanda and Botswana.

Mahmood Mamdani has observed that colonial states in Africa were bifurcated to function in two parts: “Its one side, the state that governed a racially defined citizenry, was bounded by the rule of law and an associated regime of rights. Its other side, the state that ruled over subjects, was a regime of extra-economic coercion and administratively driven justice” (Mamdani, 1996: 19-20). Thus, at independence, a reformed and restructured state and its institutions “would have entailed the deracialization of civil power and the detribalization of customary power, as starting points of an overall democratization that would transcend the legacy of a bifurcated power” (Ibid, 24-25). Although the colonizers did not intend to build the foundations of a modern state in Africa, political independence offered opportunities for African elites to transform the colonial structures by connecting the state to local and indigenous societies through public education, and unify the bifurcated states based on reformed laws, institutions, and a prevailing ethos of collective destiny. Thus, like many European and Asian states where traditional monarchical or traditional authority structures are aligned with modern democratic institutions, reformed states in Africa moored to reformed traditional chiefly powers, Emirs, and other monarchical institutions should continue to aim to provide opportunities for the people to maintain their allegiance to consensus traditional governance/cultural institutions that hold them together while competing within the arena of contemporary electoral politics. The failure to create, at independence, a national platform that purposefully unified the citizens also paved the way for the emergence of different narratives based on multiple traditions and nationalities brought together by colonialism without a functionally institutionalized state apparatus independent of civil society and private enterprise.

Analytically, at independence, reforming and restructuring the state would have retrieved the African landmass from colonial European intentions and deployed the retrieved space for Africans in their various communities to collectively reimagine their lives and environment (Penrose, 2002). Jan Penrose observes that human beings perceive, experience, and interpret *space* as “structures of the real world ... [that result from] ... slow processes of long duration” (Penrose, 2002: 278). According to Penrose,

... space holds two sources of latent power for human beings. First, it comprises the substance ... land, water, and atmosphere ... the food that we eat, the water that we drink,

the air that we breathe, and the resources for protecting ourselves.... This relationship between space and human life in any form means that space is a source of latent material power: the power to sustain human life. Second, space is a source of latent emotional power ... [with] ... the capacity to invoke or release an emotional response. For example, where space is perceived as beautiful it moves us; where it is perceived as threatening it frightens us; where it is perceived as powerful, we respect it (Penrose, 2002: 278-279).

Thus, "space is present whether anyone knows about it or not, but space only becomes a place when it acquires a 'perceptual unity' ... and ... becomes a territory when it is delimited in some way" (Ibid., 279). Thus, "territories are the product of human agency, and this agency is usually referred to, as 'territoriality'" (Ibid.). Conceptually, "territoriality ... [is] the attempt by an individual or group to affect, influence or control people, phenomena and relationships by delimiting and asserting control over a geographic area ... called a territory" (Ibid.; Sack, 1986). And, ultimately, "the *control* of space is an extremely potent component of power relations ... [as] there is power in the actual *creation* of territories because the application of territoriality reflects the needs and values of those who design and maintain them" (Penrose, 2002: 279-280). The Weberian states in North America, Europe, and parts of Asia often reflect the memories, narratives, and hard work of the people and communities that created them. In the same vein, states in contemporary Africa reflect the materialist interests of those external actors whose paradigm of states in Africa was that of a frontier space colonized for its capacity to yield natural resources for exports. By accepting political independence without restructuring the systems of governance, economic, educational, and political orientations of the leaders and the people, states in Africa remain imbued with the narrative visions of European colonialists who saw Africa and its people as sources of raw materials for European economic needs.

With the end of the Cold War, Europeans, Americans, and Asians now see Africa and its people as problems to be solved. According to "experts," their gaze on Africa as a space of poor economic development, governance, disease, hunger, crisis-prone, and political instability can be reversed by following policies from various international institutions and governments. For example, western scholars and leaders have offered solutions to problems facing African states by urging Africans to follow the

examples of Western states that patiently reached the promised land of development through the free market economy without government interference. They suggest that, unlike European, Asian, and American societies, the use of subsidies to bolster basic government-supported activities like education, healthcare, and food production, and consistent subsidies to firms to enhance their competitive advantage, African states should look to Structural Adjustment Policies (SAP), the Millennium Development Goals, and now the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as policies and yardsticks that can help Africans to develop the institutions and governments of their states. While the basic argument and framework of the SDGs are what states and people need in Africa, I think the global focus on poverty in Africa is a diversionary policy argument because the challenge in Africa is at the intersections between the State and Government. Thus, without institutionally restructured, effective, and capable states across the continent, sustainable development goals cannot be achieved by contemporary governments in African states. This means that to the extent decolonization did not lead to the institutionalization of functional state apparatuses in Africa, states remain bifurcated, unproductive platforms for natural resources exploitation that benefits external interests and the few African leaders who support the exploitation of their homelands.

The unreformed state boundaries, territories, and space remain contested between different visions of the right approach to nationhood and sustainable development. Consequently, the imposed arbitrary boundaries with problematic state lines that forced the creation of states without unifying policies depend on the emotional power derived from the memory of "our space" by many nationalities. The resulting multi-ethnic and multi-national states remain economically unproductive platforms governed by greedy leaders. According to Chabal and Daloz, the *state* bequeathed to Africans at independence is *vacuous* and *ineffectual* and its disorder and chaos have become sources of political benefit for the African elites.

It is *vacuous* in that it did not consolidate, as was once expected, on the foundations of the colonial legacy ... instead [the states] rapidly disintegrated and fell prey to particularistic and factional struggles. It ... failed to acquire either the legitimacy or the professional competence that are the hallmarks of the modern state. It is *ineffectual* in that it has never been in the interest of African political elites to work for the proper

institutionalization of the state apparatus (Chabal and Daloz, 1999: 14).

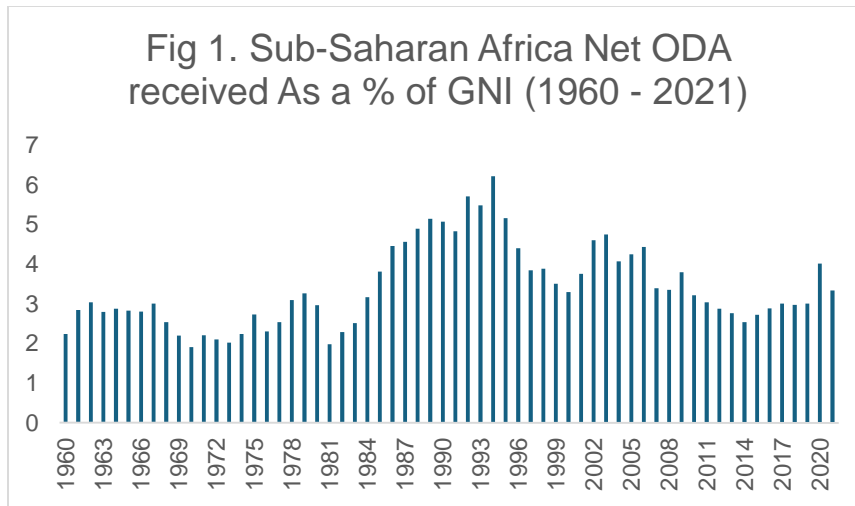
The challenge for African states is how to construct a narrative of community, unified by a love of space and territory and imbued with a narrative vision of possibilities crafted to reflect the values and norms of people within those communities. Put differently, the challenge is how to build one narrative of different nations that can sustain the contemporary states in Africa. An additional challenge concerns how to institutionalize a modern state apparatus, capable of acting in the interest of the citizens to solve problems for the collective good. Overcoming such a challenge requires transforming the colonial and post-colonial territory in ways that impose new and uplifting narratives in spaces with memories of state violence, abjection of the masses, and devoid of unifying patriotic emotions. The challenge for African states includes finding ways to build viable societies within the states where the citizens can all share in their civic responsibilities with pride and in peace. These challenges are at the core of African states' unproductive efforts to develop viable industrial policies to expand food production to feed people and advance economic and wealth-generating opportunities that enable families to end intergenerational confusions about both the state and government. Without restructuring and reforming state apparatuses across Africa, the expected results of the Sustainable Development Goals to institutionalize peace and security, promote gender equality, end poverty, provide healthcare delivery, and end economic and climate crises, banditry, insurgencies, and associated insecurities across Africa will not be achieved. Without restructuring and reforming the state in Africa, instead of ending insecurity and enabling accountable governments, improving food production, and eradicating poverty, African states will remain an economic appendage, exporting raw materials/wealth to industrialized countries, while importing manufactured products, poverty, and weapons that intensify conflicts and deaths in Africa.

Africa and Sustainable Development Goals¹

For example, with 169 targets and 232 unique indicators, African countries will need approximately US\$1.3 trillion yearly to meet the SDGs targets (The UN Economic Commission 2020). Given the above discussion about the inadequacies of the state in Africa, it is obvious that African countries lack the fiscal space to fund the implementation of the SDGs.

Public debt in African countries has tripled since 2010 and continues its upward trajectory (The World Bank 2023). Currently, 33 of the 54 countries are heavily indebted countries. And, while Africa's public debt is increasing, official development assistance continuously fluctuates, making it unreliable (see Figure 1) as a development strategy for fiscal poverty eradication. The weak fiscal state of African countries means they cannot initiate transformational projects without imposing additional severe economic and other hardships on their populations.

¹The SDGs data for this paper is from the 2023 Sustainable Development Report and is available here: <https://dashboards.sdindex.org/chapters> and from SDGs Tracker available here: <https://ourworldindata.org/sdgs>. Combined, this is the most comprehensive dataset on SDGs. The curators used the time series method to extrapolate trend lines from some data sets. For instance, they took the poverty headcount data from 2015 to 2023 and derived data from 2000 to 2014. Part of the problem with the resulting aggregate data is the lack of data for six African countries – Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Guinea Bissau, Libya, Seychelles, and Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic or Western Sahara – with the effect of presenting inflated data for sub-Saharan Africa as empirically more progressive than it should. And, except for Seychelles, most of the omitted countries have internal stability problems.



Source: World Development Indicators

Currently, Africa has over 1.4 billion people; and at least 500 million of her population is projected to be under 25 years of age by 2050. Admittedly, and based on existing data, 13 of the 54 states in Africa have low populations and unsustainable economies. One of Africa's main challenges is its low intra-continental trade. For example, if instead of trading mostly with their former colonizers, the 54 states collaborate and trade with each other, with over 1.4 billion people, Africa currently has the largest trading areas. However, despite free-market policies, foreign aid, and external loans for economic development, trade within the continent remains below 15%. Theoretically, the AU's planned African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is a move in the right direction – taking apart existing trade architecture, at least continentally, restructuring it or building new institutions that remove barriers that prevent the free movement of goods, and people, and services across the continent. The huge and foreseeable benefits, of that approach include enhanced economic productivity via trade, employment, reduction in poverty, and self-sustaining economic practices.

The challenge, however, is in how to implement the lofty goals in the planned AfCFTA without first restructuring and reforming existing state institutions and governance structures that continue to privilege trade with external partners, mostly former colonizing nations. Further, increased Asian interests in economic activities in the continent without regard to domestic or other human rights issues pose additional challenges

to these goals. For example, western public and private individuals with their home passports (an indication of the power of their states) can move freely across African countries – but the movement of *bona fide* Africans across the continent remains restricted. African Union’s seriousness with the achievement of the Agenda 2063 and the AfCFTA can start before the end of 2024 with the removal of state barriers that restrict the movement of Africans across the continent.

Without reforming African states to expand the domestic economies, especially food production opportunities, heeding external advice about the utility of the free-market approach will continue to undermine African countries' capacity for economic independence. In addition, it will continue to maintain Africa’s dependence on importation of food items from Western and Asian countries. For example, public debts that African countries accumulated since the 2019 COVID pandemic were mainly accumulated to finance food imports to feed a continent with a vast capacity to produce sufficient food for both consumption and export. This means that African countries cannot continue to outsource their food systems and hope to achieve sustainable development. Weak economic growth; combined with fast accumulation of public debt, has pushed the median public debt-to-GDP ratio from 32% in 2010 to 57% in 2022 (The Economist 2023). Regional variation in public debt puts the data at 56% for West and Central Africa; and, 64% for Eastern and Southern Africa.

Although; individual countries like Cote d’Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Kenya experienced positive investment growths of 67%, 8.6%, and 5.2% respectively in 2022; aggregate, investment in sub-Saharan Africa fell from 6.8% in 2010- 2013 to 1.6% in 2021 (The World Bank 2023). However; for 2023, a growth rate of 2.8% or lower is projected for Nigeria. In addition to observed variations in public debts, economic growth, and investments, resource endowment also affects varying rates of growth. For example, commodity prices in resource-rich countries are expected to grow at a slower pace compared to non-resources-rich countries with lower import bills and expansion of services that are projected to “grow 4.2% in 2023 and to pick up to 5.1% and 5.3% in 2024 and 2025, respectively” (The World Bank 2023).

In sum, with a focus on sustainable development goals, at least 43% of Africa’s 1.4 billion population had no access to electricity in 2022. And, while maternal and child deaths, and incidents of HIV, malaria, and

tuberculosis are decreasing, the material poverty rate is increasing at a geometric rate; to the extent that 5 out of every 6 poor persons in the world reside in Africa (Global Multidimensional Poverty Index 2023).

Concluding Remarks

The SDGs are presented as a basic perspective aimed at homogenizing policies of governance that combine liberal democracy and a free-market economy. It is a persistently refreshed international institutions' prescription for material poverty eradication in African states. Contextually, African states, with currently low manufacturing capacity, price-takers in the global economy, and outward-facing economic relationships, lack relevant economic development policies and institutions to create enabling environments for entrepreneurial activities to expand their economies to help the masses transition from abject material poverty to resilient and sustainable existence. The SDGs are widely promoted by Western intellectuals, governments and institutions as the best strategy for helping African states and peoples emerge from poverty. To be sure, African governments accepted the SDGs as contained in the Common African Position (Africa Union, 2014)² – albeit, without African states' development of the institutional resources and capacities for effective implementation of the SDGs. This means that African states lack either the capacity or willingness to implement policies that can eradicate poverty because it is not in the interest of the current group of leaders. To experience a transformative march toward development and political stability, African states need to do the following: (1) restructure the inherited post-independence states, (2) recraft their modes of governance, (3) significantly enhance mobility within the continent, (4) increase intra-Africa trade, (5) unabashedly institutionalize and practice norms of gender and human rights protections, (6) promote land tenure reforms, and (7) make farming and agriculture both income-generating and honorable ways of making a living again. Implementing the above will inoculate African states and citizens against future internal and external shocks like the COVID-19 and Russo-Ukraine War that devastated many states' capacity for affordable food

²See the document - *Common Africa Position (CAP) On The Post 2015 Development Agenda*. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, Africa Union, March 2014. Especially, see page 16, item 60 which reads "We call upon developed countries to provide sufficient and predictable financing to developing countries, mainly through effective use of the Green Climate Fund with US\$100 billion per year by 2020, as well as the transfer of technologies and capacity building in according with the relevant decisions adopted in Cancun.

and medicine. Handouts or foreign aid from Europe, America, and Asia should not become strategies for helping African countries end material poverty and build competitive industrial economies. External aid hoodwinks African leaders into continuing an unproductive economic relationship between African countries and external entities in economic relationships that increase rather than end material poverty. The legacies of weak post-colonial states with degraded institutional structures, suffocation of civil society, marginalization of groups using religious, ethnic, class, and racial differences, and the general unexamined acceptance of imported norms and values remain debilitating for political and economic governance and positive change in Africa.

The current situation supports and condones multidimensional poverty because it enables the lack of access to clean water, electricity, food, and affordable healthcare to flourish. It is difficult to confidently project the conditions under which African countries can meet the targets of the sustainable development goals by 2030 without a surgical rethinking of the extent to which political and economic development problems and their solutions must be anchored, directed, and implemented locally by Africans.

Lastly, it is unlikely that free-market and democratic liberal approaches have the development elixir to be effective in extricating African states from the ongoing economic and governance insecurities, the uncertain impacts of climate change, and the multidimensional poverty that is ravishing people who live in places that have both the knowledge and memories of exporting valuable raw materials to other global destinations. But, to reiterate, for African states to meet the UN SDGs targets, they can and must dismantle, rebuild, and reform the degraded institutional structures that they continue to rely on as the vehicle of advancement and growth.

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