

Africa: The Other World: From Heart of Darkness to Shithole countries

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INTRODUCTION

The shift from a "rules-based" global order to a "**might is right**" self-ordained power that affects the entire world is the most severe challenge the global South, and particularly Africa, faces today. While many African leaders, scholars, and politicians have criticized the manner in which the existing rules-based order was founded, the emerging new system, designed by the few powerful, is worse. It is discriminatory, non-judicious, and exclusionary, and characterized by raw power and unilateralism. It presents unprecedented challenges to Sub-Saharan Africa in particular. (1) With the failure of **multilateralism**, the inability to enforce decisions of the ICJ, ICC, resolutions of the UN, violations of the UN to provide humanitarian assistance, to stop atrocities, human rights violations, wars across Africa and the Middle East, is the clearest manifestation of the collapse of the rule-based international order. The exchange of international law to a world of "**might makes right**" will likely return Africa to the days of the scramble for Africa through a strategy where Africa's sovereignty is ignored to advance the strategic, labor, resource, and consumer needs of global powers. There will be no legal or other means to deter the unbridled plundering through asymmetric threats, imposed land and resource deals, economic pressure, and eventually transform African states into full-blown neo-colonies. The traditional values and spiritual restraints that once held our communities together are being bulldozed by a global order where might create right, and souls are traded for property. Africa needs to wake up now, while its marginalization is out in the open. If we don't, we have truly lost our minds. We are losing the game. But if we say '**No**' and rise, refuse to live only for the needs of today, we can secure a destiny where the next generation finally owns their pride and true independence.

Being Black

It is generally understood that Africa is the "**Cradle of Humanity**. Back then, there were no black people, just people. Black was never a color, but the origin of all colors.

“As any rainbow will demonstrate, black isn't on the visible spectrum of color. All other colors are reflections of light, except black. Black is the absence of light. Unlike white and other hues, pure black can exist in nature without any light at all.” (2) While science defines black as the absence of light or the absorption of all colors, the view emphasizes black as foundational, creative, and powerful, "mother of all colors.” It is used as a neutral pigment that, when added to others, provides depth, contrast, and intensity. (3)

The history of Black people is the history of the world. In other words, to put African history in the framework of the colonial era is, as Atlantis Browder wrote, ‘like judging a 1,000-page book by its last five pages,’ or to refer to African history in two parts: colonial and pre-colonial. Africa was there before Europe and America, and therefore, its history should be integrated realistically into one wholesome civilization. The colonial approach centers the European experience and treats thousands of years of complex African development as a mere ‘prologue’ to the arrival of outsiders. Attitudes remain entrenched in post-colonial Africa, and Afrocentric focus on Africa is defined only by an unrealistic categorization of the continent into two historical time frames, Colonial and Pre-colonial; by what it is and not by what it was and what it had created, before their invasion.

In the bigger context of history, Africa has always been ahead of Europe. It is an important affirmation of facts for younger people who have been misguided by Eurocentric narratives. Numerous records and archaeological findings, historical and academic references, prove the existence of highly developed African civilizations forming the bedrock of current inventions across all sectors of our current world advancement, including political, economic, medical, spiritual, and educational systems. Walter Rodney (Guyanese author and activist) argues that Africa had a path of development that was roughly parallel to Europe's until the Atlantic slave trade and that subsequent colonization forcibly diverted African raw material and labor to drive European industrialization. In **John Thornton's** *Africa*

and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, he provides a powerful argument that pre-colonial (i.e., ancient) African communities were militarily and politically sophisticated. He highlights that initial interactions with Europeans were often on **African terms**, with African rulers managing trade and diplomacy as equals or superiors. (4). *Heart of Darkness*, published in 1899, centers on Joseph Conrad's fictional character, traveling up the Congo River, which he calls the Heart of Africa, and concludes that this was indeed The Other World. Conrad uses Africa as a "place of negations" or a "metaphysical battlefield," a primitive space that completely negates his perception of humanity. In the novel, he presents Africa as the direct opposite of Europe, and projects the image of Africa as **Achebe Chinua** writes in his review as the **Other World**; "the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilization, a place where a man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality. The book opens on the River Thames, tranquil, resting peacefully "at the decline of day after ages of good service done to the race that peopled its banks. But the actual story takes place on the River Congo, the very antithesis of the Thames. The River Congo is quite decidedly not a River Emeritus. It has rendered no service and enjoys no old-age pension. We are told that "going up that river was like traveling back to the earliest beginning of the world." (5)

1899 'Heart of Darkness' and 2026 'Shithole Countries'

After the decolonization of Africa and the creation of 54 states, and 126 years after *The Heart of Darkness* was published, these states are now being labelled as '**Shithole Countries**'. The latter remark of targeting African countries clearly echoes Conrad's disdain by framing them as inferior and not fit to migrate to Africa. Many liberal scholars of this century argue that while such attitudes are expressed more subtly and the *methods* of control changed from physical chains to economic dependence, the looting and exploitation of resources and the suppression of black people at every opportunity are still there for every black man and woman to see and experience in Europe and America. "**Shithole**" has even crossed the line of subtle racism and added fuel, making it look like it is an accepted reference to African countries. What they call the Global South (Black Africa) has always been considered as **The Other World**, treated under different standards, and held hostage to its economic needs under a global, monetary and security order, territorial partitions, under the Berlin Conference of 1884 (*The Scramble for Africa*) and the Breton Woods Agreement signed in July 1944 by 44 Allied nations (with no black

African Representations), United Nations Charter signed in June 24 1945, with only two African states, one ancient free country just liberated from Italian occupation with support of allied forces (Ethiopia) and the other nominally independent but under the colonial rule of USA (Liberia). Under these arrangements, Africa has been there for the taking since 1884. The continent copied political systems from European countries. The system of government and the new global order introduced a neo-colonial control, including economic and political interference, cultural subjugation, and power imbalances. It also enabled foreign aid and trade, multinational corporations, and international financial institutions to perpetuate colonial policies. This truth has been established and echoed in the halls of the United Nations and at all opportunities, told by most UN Secretaries General and members of the UN of the contemporary world, who are now 193. Recently, the **UN Secretary-General António Guterres** has argued that colonialism left a "poisoned legacy" of **institutionalized racism** and white supremacy that still restricts the potential of people of African descent. He stated in 2025 that "decolonization did not free African countries... from the structures and prejudices." (6)

Cultural Linguistics and external relationships with Europe create distinctive differences between Black Africa and Arab Africa when examining current and future issues of Africa. "Africa is Not a Country" by Dipo Faloyin is a fascinating book that illuminates the diversity of Africa.(7) The Mediterranean coast has historically been a "melting pot" of European, Middle Eastern, and North African ancestries, with Sub-Saharan genetic markers present but at lower frequencies (estimated at 1% to 10% in various genetic studies). (8) Wikipedia. When Conrad and all others like him call Africa the Heart of Darkness, they are not referring to the Arab Africans. Arab of North Africa (the Maghreb), which comprises Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Libya, and Mauritania, is distinctly different from black Africans (Sub-Saharan Africa). They are largely Arab and Berber (Amazigh). It will be misleading to group them when discussing the history, culture, development, economic, and social issues of Africa in general. This article refers to the Sub-Saharan countries, which Conrad labels as The Other World, though I am not sure whether President Trump's category of shithole countries refers to them.

The "Othering" of Africa is a post-colonial terminology used to portray Africans as fundamentally different and or inferior, and as defined by Conrad,

‘The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peacefully with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan no longer acts like one. He has put a knife to the things that held us together, and we have fallen apart.’ (7)

The Other World, where savages and primitives live, is associated with poverty, illness, and lawlessness. In 1925, biological scientist Henry B. Fantham advanced a racial theory at the University of the Witwatersrand that would shape South African education long before apartheid became law: Africans, he claimed, suffered from “arrested mental development” after puberty. When Hendrik Verwoerd imposed Bantu Education in 1953, a falsified architecture was already in the state’s thinking. Harold B Fantham, the first professor of Zoology at the University of Witwatersrand, was part of the global movement that drew significant support from elite academics, scientists, and politicians in both Europe and America. This framework -primarily rooted in eugenics and scientific racism -proved a biological justification for racial hierarchy that continues to influence modern systematic racism experienced under apartheid. (8)

Many people don't realize that before the "Scramble for Africa," the continent was home to a sophisticated community network. Judicial systems, spiritual and cultural life, along with intricate systems of trade, law, and medicine. Colonialism didn't just extract resources; it forcibly dismantled these existing social and political structures, often replacing them with borders and systems that didn't fit the local context and that were not familiar to their thousands of years of life. That "disruption" makes it impossible to see the natural trajectory those civilizations would have taken. Scholars often call this the "Great Divergence," a socioeconomic shift in which European countries advanced ahead of others during the modern period.” While we can't rewrite history, we can definitely see how the legacy of that era—like the extraction of millions of people during the slave trade—drained the continent of its human potential for centuries and directly contributed to the **Great Divergence**. (9) The shift in which Europe, along with former settler colonies of America and Australia, overcame European Middle Age growth constraints and emerged as the most powerful and wealthy world system. The "hunger for raw materials and a need for new markets drove European powers to Africa. This intense competition for labor and raw materials resulted in the partition of Africa.

Before industrialization expanded through the exploitation of raw materials and the massive labor from the Atlantic slave trade and colonial exploitation, Europe was a predominantly rural, agrarian society defined by a rigid feudal hierarchy. The Social and Economic Structure was rather “primitive” based on feudalism and was strictly divided into the "Three Estates": the Nobility (warriors/landowners), the Clergy (religious leaders), and the Peasantry (laborers). Power was derived from land ownership rather than money. The Lords gave protection and land to the peasantry in exchange for military service or agricultural labor. For many, there was no world beyond their villages. There were no schools in the villages, and therefore most were illiterate. Houses were made of thatched roofs and dirt floors shared with their livestock, and plows were wooden. In many parts of Europe (especially after the Black Death), labor was expensive and scarce. When humans are expensive, it becomes profitable to build a machine. In contrast, in many African regions, land was often more abundant than people, so wealth was measured by how many people a leader could influence, rather than how much "machinery" they owned. But at about the same time, Africa was moving forward on a different path.

There is a long-standing theory that in parts of tropical Africa, the abundance of natural resources and a climate that allowed for year-round food growth meant there was less "evolutionary pressure" to develop complex heating systems or winter storage. However, historians often point out the opposite: Africa's environment was actually incredibly "harsh" in terms of disease (like malaria and sleeping sickness) and unpredictable rainfall. Rather than "taming" nature, many African societies focused on living in harmony with it, a highly sophisticated survival strategy. Author Ed Gaskin writes in his research work titled *Rethinking ‘Western Civilization’: Africa and Europe in Historical Perspective*, analyzing and comparing these two civilizations. (10)

For great stretches of history, **African** civilizations were as advanced as, and in many cases more advanced than, those of Europe under the following topics:

- 1 Early Civilizations: Africa vs. Europe (c. 3000–1000 BCE)
- 2 Classical Age (c. 1000 BCE–500 CE)
- 3 Late Antiquity to Early Medieval Period (c. 500–1500 CE)
- 4 The Early Modern Period (c. 1500–1800 CE)

5 The idea that “Western Civilization” is inherently superior rests on deliberate distortions.

These findings expose the old narratives as racist constructs designed to justify slavery, colonialism, and white supremacy. The idea that Africa is the "cradle of humanity" while simultaneously being "inferior" is a contradiction between **scientific fact** and **historical myth**. Scientific evidence confirms Africa's foundational role in human existence, while narratives of inferiority were systematically constructed to justify external exploitation. Africa holds the highest human genetic diversity globally. All non-African populations represent only a small subset of the genetic variation found within Africa. Contemporary genomics has demonstrated that all 8 billion people on Earth share nearly 99.9% of the same DNA and can trace their lineage back to African ancestors. (11) Africa is considered the "Cradle of Humankind" because extensive fossil and genetic evidence confirms that *Homo sapiens* and our direct ancestors first evolved there. **Objective science** (African origins) and **Historical prejudice** (the myth of inferiority) cannot exist together.

"Debt is a cleverly managed reconquest of Africa... each of us becomes the financial slave, which is to say a true slave." **He also provided a solution:** “He who feeds you, imposes his will upon you... Let us try to eat what we control ourselves.” (12) **Frantz Fanon’s (Psychiatrist and Revolutionary)** work remains a primary reference for how colonialism "empties the native's brain" and leads the oppressed **to** "believe the worst about themselves.” (12) Poverty and dependency can make you feel that way. You will be conditioned to accept the narrative of the one who feeds you. The idea that dependency strips a nation of its pride, dignity, and the right to define itself is a core theme in Pan-African thought. When a continent relies on external help for its basic survival, those providing the "aid" often gain the power to dictate its narrative, label its struggles, and impose their own solutions. They can, at will, call you Shithole. Africa’s policy should emanate from the wisdom of the youngest current statesman **who** died untimely. He argued “that accepting foreign aid (specifically food aid) was not a gift but a trap that created a ‘beggar mentality’ and allowed donors to treat African nations as less than equals. Africa needs more young leaders at all levels to get rid of the shackles that are stuck

now in our brains since the times of slavery and direct colonialism. During the great Famine in Ethiopia, while touring Europe, America, and at the UN, I told the international community that they have obligations to assist and that we should not be obliged to kneel and beg them. In his book 'A Year in the Death of Africa', the well-known British correspondent Peter Gill wrote this:

“Dawit put blunt and unapologetic emphasis on his country’s requirements and then produced an unnerving, moral equation between rich governments of the West and the miserable poor in his own country. He defied categorization as either of those two better-known Third World applicants - the man with the begging bowl and a bit of gratitude or the man with a PHD who thinks it is all the fault of colonialism anyway.” In other words, we have to kneel and beg our colonial masters, who looted us and made us slaves, and then created the conditions to beg for the food that we produced through our sweat and blood.

Quo Vadis Africa in this Might is Right new world order?

“Africa is entering 2026 not at a moment of transition, but at a moment of reckoning. Across the continent, armed conflict, state fragmentation, humanitarian collapse, economic distress, climate shocks, democratic erosion, and geopolitical entanglement are converging with a simultaneity and intensity unseen in recent decades. What distinguishes this moment is not the presence of crisis per se, but the growing risk that instability is becoming structural rather than episodic normalized rather than exceptional.” (13)

Continued poverty and exploitation are manifestations of the continent's inability or unwillingness to put its acts together. The global security in 2026 is defined by a shift towards a more **fragmented, transactional, and multipolar world**. Driven by ongoing conflicts and an unpredictable U.S. foreign policy, based on pure might, traditional alliances are being redefined. Much like the "old order" created after 1884 and strengthened after the Second World War, the emerging global landscape further threatened Africa’s destiny without its input. This policy of exclusion has brought about a cycle of dependency, uncertainty, and existential struggle. Today, without a

unified voice, the continent risks being sidelined again, left to navigate the consequences of a future it did not participate in designing.

“The year 2026 has brought renewed scrutiny to the effectiveness of international law as global conflicts, geopolitical rivalries, and selective compliance continue to challenge its authority. Institutions such as the United Nations and the International Criminal Court (ICC), once seen as pillars of a rules-based global order, are increasingly questioned for their ability to enforce legal norms. While international law was designed to regulate state conduct, maintain peace, and ensure accountability, recent developments suggest that its practical impact is weakening in the face of political realities. This has led to a growing perception that international law may be losing its effectiveness in addressing modern global challenges” (14)

International law is primarily based on treaties, customary practices, and general principles recognized by states. The United Nations Charter, particularly Article 2(4), prohibits the use of force by states except in cases of self-defense or when authorized by the Security Council. However, recent military actions across different regions. Gaza, Ukraine, Iran, and the kidnapping of the President of Venezuela, and the complete disregard for vital human rights and humanitarian aid across the globe, proxy wars, coup états, and associated violence, export of terrorism and extremism, are all symptoms of an ailing world without law, compassion, and peaceful coexistence, as the power determines every global affair. The tendency of the Global South to be a mere spectator of this phenomenon is baffling.

“What marks this moment as distinct is not simply lawlessness, but the abandonment of even the pretense that law and ‘civilization’ constrain imperial ambition as was the case during the colonial era. The revival of overt colonial and imperial designs under the Trump regime in Washington is notable not because it has invented new forms of domination, but because it has dispensed with the traditional liberal rhetoric that once accompanied them. Where earlier empires cloaked themselves in development, humanitarianism, or the rule of law, this iteration speaks openly of seizure, exclusion, and coercion. The mask has slipped – and international law is now revealed as either incapable or unwilling to respond.” (15)

‘Africa in 2026 and Beyond by ASSODESIRE’ identifies seven strategic Inflection Points for the Continent’s Future and explains in brief but precise language the challenges of Africa 1. Democracy under siege: elections, coups, and the collapse of legitimacy: A continent moving away from democratic norms. 2 Conflict: symptoms of deeper governance failure and the Future of Human Rights. 4 Geopolitics: leverage, coercion, and the test of African solidarity 5 Digitalization and data governance. 6 Debt, cost of capital, and the structural trap: Unfinished business and concludes:

“Africa must act as one on global finance, coordinating positions on debt restructuring, correcting the structural bias that drives up the cost of capital, accelerating the creation of an African Credit Rating Agency, and negotiating as a bloc to prevent fragmentation and exploitation. Climate vulnerability must be transformed into collective leverage through unified African negotiating positions on adaptation finance, forest and nature-based revenues, and loss-and-damage mechanisms.” (16)

Amnesty International summarizes the crisis in Africa in 2026:

“Major armed conflicts in the region continued largely unabated, while diplomatic efforts to end them failed to stop associated violations, protect civilians, or hold perpetrators to account. External actors continued to fuel the conflicts, including by supplying ammunition and weapons to the parties involved.

The AU’s 2014 goal to “eliminate hunger and food insecurity by 2025” was unrealized. Fragile health systems in the region came under further strain due to US government aid cuts, resulting in essential health services being reduced, suspended, or cancelled.

Millions continue to be displaced across the continent

Governments and the international community failed to protect people in the region from droughts and floods exacerbated by climate change.

Societal norms and anti-rights actors continued to fuel discrimination and gender-based violence against women and girls.

Authorities undermined efforts to combat impunity and to ensure accountability, jeopardizing access to justice and effective remedies for victims and survivors of the most serious crimes. (17)

While there is a collective concern to address these issues, African states cannot implement the strategies that they have adopted because of their dependence on global powers for essential needs—such as security, trade, and aid—putting them in a position that would conflict with the whole. Africa faces significant hurdles in the shifting global order; it has to realize that its strength is in its unified position on big issues. This would certainly require sacrifices in the interest of long-term gains. If united, it would have stronger leverage and be in a position to influence major changes in the global order. We are always in a weaker position and prone to exploitation when we don't act in one voice. The continent continues to face economic dependence, corruption, and stunted development due to neocolonial exploitation. The exploitation of Africa's vast natural and human resources, unequal trade relationships, and support for authoritarian regimes have all contributed to the continent's ongoing struggles.

Africa holds over 125 billion barrels of oil reserves, more than 18 trillion cubic meters of natural gas, and nearly 40% of the world's renewable energy potential. Eastern Africa alone has proven crude oil reserves currently estimated at 4.7 billion barrels, according to the African Energy Commission (AFREC), dominated by South Sudan, Sudan, Uganda, and Kenya. These reserves account for about 0.3 per cent of global reserves and around 4 per cent of Africa's total. Despite these resources, only South Sudan and Sudan, together producing roughly 189,000 barrels per day of crude oil, produce significant amounts. This represents only 0.2 per cent of global production and roughly 3 per cent of Africa's output." (18)

The irony is that even this much crude oil cannot be extracted because the civil wars in both countries have further restricted production and infrastructure development. Eastern Africa faces a major fuel-supply challenge due to limited refining capacity.

Although the region has a theoretical capacity of about 263,400 barrels per day, only a small fraction is utilized, meeting just around 5% of total demand. Even if underused facilities were fully operational, they would cover only about 36% of needs, leaving continued reliance on imports. This shortfall stems from decades of infrastructure decline and refinery closures in countries like Eritrea, Tanzania, and Kenya. Today, only Sudan and South Sudan operate refineries. As the crisis continues, Africa will be the most affected economically and socially. Africa's "energy paradox" is not a lack of resources, but a failure to extract and refine. Despite holding 12% of global oil and 7% of natural gas reserves, the continent faces a deepening crisis characterized by extreme **energy poverty**. According to the International Energy Agency (IAE), as of early 2026, approximately 600 million Africans—nearly half the population—lack access to electricity, accounting for 80% of the global access gap

Moving Forward

To move from the current state of **dependence without destructive confrontation**, a lot of things need to happen. We need to do several things, perhaps more; something fundamental must happen to make Africa an equal partner of the rest of the world, so that we don't remain as The Other World. Several intellectuals, scholars, and visionaries have outlined a roadmap to self-reliance and beyond, but Africa has always lacked the collective determination to implement a radical program capable of stopping the decline of Black Africa. By 2050, Africa will account for 25% of the global population and half the global workforce, making it a critical hub for future global productivity and consumer demand. To change this to an economic dividend requires good governance and leadership. Otherwise, this bulge in population can be a liability and a threat to the continent's stability, which suits the global corporations. A few measures that have been discussed at various African forums are:

1 Visionary and Pan-African Democracy:

Pan-African democracy focuses on the "Human-Centric" (human beings as the central aspect of living) alternative and the "Ubuntu" philosophy (supports collectivism over individualism). Africa does not need to 'copy and paste' foreign ideologies that prioritize money over people. The current capitalist framework has traded our spiritual depth for material obsession, leaving a void where community

once stood. It is time to redefine progress. By centering our political systems on **Ubuntu**—the belief that 'I am because we are'—Africa can pioneer a new path. (19

2 Borderless Africa of free regulated movement of people. We can and should erase the colonial borders, physical and mental, and link Africa as it originally was. Undoing Berlin 1884 is within our power to do as Africans. A borderless Africa would unlock immense potential, reconnecting communities divided by colonial lines and transforming the continent into a truly unified bloc. Free movement of people would allow Africans to travel, work, and live anywhere without restrictions, while open borders would boost trade, lower costs, and create one vast integrated market. Shared management of resources and continental infrastructure projects would thrive, strengthening cooperation instead of conflict. Beyond economics and culture, a united Africa would give Africa greater bargaining power on the global stage, shifting her from a continent fragmented by colonial design to one that speaks with a single, powerful voice. (20)

3 Intra-African Trade: The adoption by the African Union of the theme of the Year 2023 as the “**Year of AfCFTA: Acceleration of the African Continental Free Trade Area Implementation**” is expected to generate greater political commitment and accelerate the effective implementation of the AfCFTA to fully benefit the African citizenry and achieve the Aspirations and goals of Agenda 2063. The yearlong activities will enhance the existing collaboration among the member states, the Regional Economic Communities (RECs), AU institutions, the private sector, development partners, and other stakeholders, to mobilize and implement actions that boost intra-Africa trade, particularly trade in value-added production and trade across all sectors of Africa’s economy. The AfCFTA will build on the progress achieved by the eight RECs under their customs unions, free trade areas, and other trading arrangements. (21)

4 Educational Reform: The significance of educational reforms in African countries is profound and multifaceted. These reforms are not merely Administrative adjustments: rather, they represent strategic responses to the evolving needs of diverse societies. The African continent, marked by its rich cultural tapestry and socio-economic diversity, faces unique challenges and opportunities in the realm of education. Educational reforms, therefore, become a crucial instrument for addressing historical legacies, fostering inclusivity, and equipping learners with the skills necessary for active participation in a globalized world. (22)

5 **Create regional hubs for technology** in the current digital landscape, Africa risks becoming a passive consumer of imported technologies, a dependency that threatens to deepen global inequalities and marginalize the continent. Unless Africa actively bridges the digital divide by cultivating homegrown expertise, it may face severe problems in growth. (23) Rwanda can be a model for this

6 **Strengthen the African Union: Institutional Transformation:** The AU is working to implement Agenda 2063, its blueprint for a "peaceful and prosperous Africa," which includes initiatives for an African credit rating agency and a unified African voice in climate governance. At this point, the gap between the vision of a sovereign, united continent and the reality of a budget is still largely dependent on European donors. Achieving fundamental change while many member states remain financially non-compliant or politically aligned with the West is a massive challenge, but at the same time, there are active "bold transformational" movements (some mentioned above) currently aiming to break this cycle. Mo Ibrahimn (British Sudanese billionaire and philanthropist and a major donor to the AU) expresses his dismay about the AU's excessive dependence, stating that '70% of the 650 million annual budget of the AU is funded by foreigners' is a farce. You call them colonizers, but when they give us money, they're partners, " (24)

Leaders owning palaces while their countries default on AU dues is a documented reality. According to the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, the amount of money lost to **Illicit Financial Flows (IFFs)** out of Africa every year (often linked to corruption and elite wealth) is estimated at over \$88 billion—far more than the AU's entire annual budget of roughly \$600 million” The issue isn't that the continent is "poor"; it's that the wealth is often privatized by a small elite while the public institutions remain "dependent" to maintain the status quo. (25) The "Beggar with a Bowl" at the doorstep of Europe (its Colonizer): Currently, the AU is heavily dependent on the EU, China, and the US for its existence. The overall budget of the AU for 2025, as captured in the July 2024 Executive Council decision, puts the balance of contributions between AU member states and partners at 32.9 per cent and 58.1 per cent, respectively. A major factor behind this dismal state of the self-financing of the AU is the non-implementation of the Kigali AU summit decision. In 2018, the AU reported that only 16 of the AU member states were implementing the Kigali decision of collecting the 0.2 levy. Between that time and 2025, that number increased by only one. (26) While African countries usually pay for the "Operational

Budget" (keeping the lights on at headquarters), they fund very little of the "Program Budget"—the visions that have been repeatedly declared and told and retold to transform Africa are not funded by Africans. “In 2024, nearly **76%** of program funding came from outside donors. As long as someone else pays the bills, someone else sets the agenda”. That is why Ibrahim Moi called the vision of a free, self-sufficient AU free from outside influence a "**farce**" that prevents Africa from being an equal partner in global affairs. It is worse regarding the UN, where Africa gets its most humanitarian and developmental support. The total contribution of African member states to the United Nations regular budget for **2025** is approximately **\$54.6 million**, which represents roughly **1.45%** of the total UN regular budget for that year. For **2026**, the estimated total contribution based on the same assessment scale is approximately **\$50.6 million**, or **1.45%** of the approved 2026 regular budget. (26)

Non- Existent AU Peacekeeping Capacity:

The AU's peacekeeping efforts have been constrained by budget. For the 2025 budget year, the AU's overall budget is split between member states (**32.9%**) and external partners (**58.1%**). In the specific area of **Peace Support Operations (PSOs)**, the reliance is even more extreme: The 2024 budget allocated **\$161.6 million** for peace operations, which was funded entirely by international partners. **The "25% Target"**: The AU has a landmark goal to fund **25%** of its own peace activities through its revitalized **Peace Fund**. While the fund has seen increased member contributions, it is not yet fully meeting these targets for active missions. (27) In the meantime, sub-Saharan Africa is ravaged by conflicts and instability. As of early 2026, serious conflicts are going on in Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, DRC, South Sudan, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, CAR, Libya, Chad, with an extremely high human toll in death, starvation, and displacement. There is continuing instability manifesting itself in the form of coup d'états, which the AU has outlawed. More recently there were coup états in recent coups d'état. Mali 2020, 2021, Guinea 2021, Burkina Faso 2022 Niger 2023, Madagascar, Guinea Bissau 2025. There are also extremist terrorists operating in some African countries with spill-overs to their neighbors. Burkina Faso, Niger, Somalia, Mozambique, Mali, and Cameroon, with Boko Haram on one side and separatists on the other. The Gulf of Guinea was considered the most dangerous maritime zone in the world. Not only has it shifted back to the Red Sea and Indian Ocean, making the coastal states very vulnerable to becoming victims. The Red Sea Mediterranean coast corridor and the

Gulf of Guinea Libya corridor is rife with illegal drugs and arms trafficking, including mercenaries from Russia and Colombia, with numerous young African desperate people joining any of the violent groups in search of livelihood. While migration across the Sahara towards the Mediterranean has decreased partly because of the vast interdictions by Europe, internal displacement has increased. The number of people living in internal displacement as a result of conflict and violence in Africa has more than tripled in the last 15 years, from 10.2 million in 2009 to 32.5 million in 2023. (28b). Again, the international community's compassion has enormously decreased, and as a result, the IDPs and people affected by famine and starvation are getting less and less. There is little that the AU can do unless member states pay their dues first.

Can Africa be an Equal Partner?

It is difficult to be an equal partner when you are asking for a seat at the table but expecting others to pay for your chair. The USA used to be the largest food aid donor to Africa. In 2025, U.S. food and humanitarian aid to Africa has undergone significant shifts due to major budget cuts and structural changes in how the aid is delivered. Following a government review that began early in the year, total U.S. overseas development assistance dropped from over \$12 billion in the previous administration to approximately **\$7.86 billion** for the current fiscal period. Mo Ibrahim Foundation. The reduction and restructuring of US foreign assistance in 2025 and 2026, including the dismantling of **USAID**, have triggered a severe humanitarian crisis across Africa. The US previously provided nearly half of the **World Food Program (WFP)** budget, and these cuts have led to office closures and drastic ration reductions in highly vulnerable regions. By mid-2026, an estimated **139 million people** across East, Southern, West, and Central Africa are projected to face acute food insecurity (27). While the AU has recently joined the G20 as a permanent member, this "global voice" remains hollow if the continent's security and development projects are still being bankrolled by the very powers it seeks to challenge. It is a shame and clearly a **crisis of political will**. The tools for self-funding exist (like the 0.2% levy), but they require leaders to prioritize continental strength over personal or even narrow national interests. Achieving fundamental change while many member states remain financially non-compliant or politically aligned with the West is a massive challenge. The problems are deeply complex and interwoven. They cannot be solved by one individual country's goodwill leadership

or investment. However diverse Africa may be, and even though there are 54 sovereign countries, the security, economic, and social challenges can only be solved together. There is no way without a common agenda and harmony amongst nations and amongst cultural and ethnic groups.

In 1960, South Korea, Kenya, and Ghana all shared remarkably similar economic profiles with GDP per capita levels that were roughly comparable. However, while South Korea transformed into a global economic powerhouse within a single generation—often called the "**Miracle on the Han River**"—Kenya and Ghana faced decades of stagnation or much slower growth. The lessons revolve around:

- 1) Institutional discipline and transparency, a holistic discipline that unites internal moral values with external accountability.
- 2) Education, skills, and exploration and harnessing natural resources, including rare earth (which we have).
- 3) Industrialization and Agriculture will be the only way out of poverty. Both go together and feed each other.
- 4) National unity and equality of all people under the law (no tribalism) It is called ‘han’ * a feeling of unresolved resentment against injustices suffered, a sense of helplessness because of the overwhelming odds against one, a feeling of acute pain in one’s guts and bowels, making the whole body writhe and squirm, and an obstinate urge to take revenge and to right the wrong — all these combined.” (28)
- 5) Integration with the other world: competing in international markets and developing the skills needed

To achieve these, we will need collective determination and Messiah-like leadership. To lead is like crossing the Red Sea like Moses. The will and the sacrifice needed is enormous—choosing long-term stability over short-term aid or consumption—is perhaps the hardest part of the leadership challenge. It requires a **collective mindset shift** where the goal isn't to beat the world at its own game but manipulate the game in your favor by using what you have as leverage. We are 1.6 billion people together with North Africa’s 280 million people. By 1950, we will be almost a quarter of the world’s population, with over 60% of the population below the age of 25. This will make Africa a powerhouse with a surplus of young,

productive force, which can push the manufacturing and services sectors to new heights at home and abroad. But it will have a growing middle class and a huge consumer base that can reach 1.7 billion by 2030. It will surely attract enormous foreign investment. What kind of force can stop us if we negotiate our way along our chosen path with a collective mindset, wisdom, and discipline like China and Korea? It is possible because the status quo is the fragmentation of Africa. If we surrender, Black Africa will continue to live under servitude. If it refuses to surrender, it needs one generation to suffer in the effort to bring the needed internal changes of leadership, discipline, confidence, pride, and the determination to guide the respective countries under an established, fair, and equal global order. The world is less compassionate than a few decades ago. Death, torture, genocide, displacement, and suffering of any kind do not move the conscience of states, though there are still billions of good people. For present-day mankind, social media algorithms get more “LIKES” than news on tragedies. News channels often highlight violence over virtue. Kindness, compassion, giving, and helping, in other words, massive death, poverty, and suffering, is no more sensational. Compassion is lost under the noise of conflict. According to a Pew Research study, nearly 64% of people across 17 economies believe their societies are more divided than before the pandemic. And the deeper issue? Empathy fatigue. We are bombarded with suffering, a crisis, a tragedy in Gaza, Ukraine, Ethiopia, Sudan, from racism to refugee crisis, people tune out because the pain becomes overwhelming, and at some point, they become numb. That is where we are now.

Of the top 200 entities globally, 157 are corporations. “The vast wealth and power of corporations is at the heart of the world’s problems-like in equality and climate change. The drive for short-term profits today seems to trump basic human rights for millions of people on the planet. Yet there are very few ways that citizens can hold those corporations to account for their behavior. Rather, through trade and investment, it is corporations that are able to demand that governments do their bidding.” (29). Governments are getting less and less say on global affairs, and the future of mankind will be determined by global business corporations whose purpose is profit. They don’t have values or morality because they are not human. They are owned by humans. Business corporations are heartless and brutal. In Africa, food grows. Africa produces the raw materials. But Africa imports the finished goods. So, tell me... does that make sense? We must produce what we consume. And consume

what we produce. “Shouts the new young leader of Burkina Faso, Ibrahim Traore. But this has been said over and over again since the days of independence. There must be a united stand and a population ready to sacrifice to get rid of dependence and neo-colonialism. Singular voices and commitments will not have any effect. Africans are used to such slogans, and yet they have not been able to stand together to face the repression that the international community does not care about. Here is a striking parallel between that period and the one we are living through today: the magnitude of the upheavals. The multilateral system conceived in the aftermath of the Second World War is arguably undergoing the most profound crisis in its history. National self-interest is resurgent, reflected in the rise of anti-migrant sentiment and a sharp decline in development assistance. International law—never fully insulated from the realities of power politics—continues to suffer serious violations.

This new global context is fraught with dangers for Africa. As the most vulnerable continent on the international stage, Africa is bearing the full brunt of the reduction in official development assistance. Geopolitical and other tensions are fueling renewed quests for influence and a growing internationalization of the crises that afflict the continent. The erosion of the multilateral system risks further marginalizing African countries, exposing them to bilateral power dynamics in which their structural vulnerabilities leave them at a severe disadvantage. Nonetheless, this crisis may also present an opportunity. As damaging as the decline in international aid may be in the short and medium term, it could serve as a salutary shock – a stark reminder of the urgent need for the continent to reduce its dependency. The ongoing reconfiguration of the global order can—and must—be harnessed as an opportunity, and only by capitalizing on its unity will Africa be able to contribute meaningfully to shaping the architecture of the emerging world order. Sub-Saharan Africa stands largely outside the inner circle of influence shaping these crises. It is not a driver of the global agenda but increasingly a theater of contestation. The continent risks becoming a victim of great-power rivalry: coerced through sanctions, bribed with infrastructure deals, blackmailed via debt dependencies, or pressured into alignment that serves external interests rather than African priorities.

Africa’s Faith is the and The Next Generation

Once relegated to the periphery, Africa is now the heartbeat of the global economy. From the minerals powering the green transition to a demographic surge that will

define the century, the continent should no longer be a bystander—it can be a key participant in the shaping of the new multipolar order. Africa is no longer on the sidelines; it is the heartbeat of the global future. From powering the green energy transition to global innovations and technology with critical minerals to driving the world’s digital and demographic growth, the continent is the new center of gravity in a multipolar world. But this isn't just about resources—it’s about Africa is no longer on the sidelines; it is the heartbeat of the global future. From powering the green energy transition with critical minerals to driving the world’s digital and demographic growth, the continent is the new center of gravity in a multipolar world. But this isn't just about resources—it’s about control and ownership. The "Defining Question" has shifted: Will Africa be the architect of this new era, or merely its stage? The answer lies entirely with the next generation. To move forward, the youth must reclaim the mantle of Pan-Africanism and ignite a new kind of revolution. Whether Africa’s youth will become the engine of global productivity, or a source of chronic instability will depend on institutional strength, industrial strategy and the ability to compete in a world where supply chains are becoming both more localized and more politically contested. The continent has a 2050 population to convert our demographic momentum into sustained growth The leadership task is to meet this energy by creating dignified work that is future-ready, aligning education with emerging industries, and ensuring that health systems empower individuals and strengthen societies.

The truth is that a youthful population without opportunities does not stay quiet. But the reverse is also true: when states credibly expand opportunities, a youth-majority population becomes a national advantage. For the first time in our history, more than 70% of sub-Saharan Africans are under the age of 30. This, with entrenched inequalities, poverty, unemployment, and socioeconomic fault lines, is reshaping how our societies interact with one another and the world. This is Africa’s most consequential decade. Leaders who take office over the next 10 years will have to deliver on difficult mandates within a political, economic, and social landscape that has been fundamentally altered. We see politicians responding to this pressure in different ways. This response is summed up by the Namibian president, Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, proclaiming that her administration would be doing “business unusual”. This year has been the most consequential in global affairs since the Second World War. The geopolitical landscape is undergoing a fundamental shift

from Western dominance towards, though the configuration remains unclear. Africans have rightfully been expressing their grievances on the unfairness of the global order stacked against them. The global South has been urging for urgent change. Reform was urgent to better reflect Africa's growing share of the world's population and ensure its voice was given proper weight in global decision-making. "Recent geopolitical changes have opened a window of opportunity. Yet, they simultaneously create risks that Africa could be further marginalized rather than moved closer to the center of world affairs. So, the future will not be easy to navigate, and Africa's statesmen and diplomats will have to adopt new tactics to take advantage of it. (31)

Africa needs to achieve greater unity and integration; otherwise, it risks becoming more divided and increasingly impoverished by conflict as rival powers back their own clients in pursuit of their own interests. As in the 1880s, Africa risked becoming a playground for outside powers, though this time through proxies rather than through direct intervention. Without a unified approach and without peace, Africa will not be able to challenge its internal and external destabilizers and, at the same time, try to play a meaningful role in the international arena. No Western or Eastern power or the Gulf Countries will engage with African countries constructively unless for their own benefits without a meaningful return. Africa will be pressured to give what it has because it has become dependent, including for its basic needs. Some African governments see this emerging multipolar, transactional world as an opportunity to play great powers off against each other, bargain their minerals for investment, or secure external support in local quarrels with neighbors or rivals. This may help keep a regime in power, but it will not benefit the majority of citizens. For autocrats, that scarcely matters: keeping power is all that they want. Yet for democratic governments, who risk being voted out, it is a serious problem – either to be seen as subservient to an external patron (whether American, British, French, Chinese, or Russian, UAE, Saudi Arabia) or as unable to secure sufficient resources from the rest of the world to meet local needs. As seen in Kenya, Nigeria, Ethiopia, DRC, South Africa, West Africa, Sudan, and other countries, young people are increasingly impatient with the failure of their governments to provide for their needs and are taking direct political action to change things.

The best way for African democracies to secure their interests in a transactional world is to trust each other more and present a more united face to the outside world: they need to cooperate to exercise greater influence than any of them can individually. Cooperation will also be the best way to secure as good a return for their raw materials as possible, attract increased foreign investment, and build a local market that will support a manufacturing base as a way of diversifying their economies. Only in this way will they be able to respond to the demands at home and resist the pressures from external powers abroad. As the African Transformation Index from the Ghana-based think tank ACET indicates, many African countries still need to establish the core economic foundations necessary for accelerated growth. This needs good diplomacy as well as sound economic policies. Only by accelerating integration and deepening cooperation can African countries turn today's shifting geopolitics into lasting autonomy and prosperity and secure a more influential place in the global order.

In its current shift, Africa should no longer be fighting for a seat at a crowded, fragmented table; it must be capable of defining its own strategy by identifying the leverage needed to shape the global transformation. A continent that strategically invests in its young populations today will define global innovation and competitiveness tomorrow. The continent's ultimate challenge is creating systems that nurture leadership pipelines capable of converting demographic momentum into sustained growth. This requires evolving the institutional power centers—both at home and abroad—that were built for an era that no longer exists. In the emerging world order where "might makes right" threatens to eclipse the rule of law, Africa stands at a critical juncture. The continent can no longer afford to be a spectator in a global landscape fragmented by great power competition and the erosion of international norms. To move from the periphery to the center of global influence, Africa must leverage its demographic and resource potential to demand a strategy based on agency rather than dependency.

1. (Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia
2. <https://adrianreynolds.ie/the-colour-black/?>.
3. <https://www.hermineharman.com1>
4. <https://www.persee.fr/doc/jafr>
5. <http://web.cocc.edu/cagatucci/classes/eng109/achebeonconrad.htm>
6. United Nations Archive
7. Chinua Achebe, Things Fall Apart
8. South Africa
9. **Great Divergence**
10. Rethinking 'Western Civilization', Es Gaskin
11. 8 billion people on Earth share nearly 99.9% of the same DNA
12. Frantz Fanon
13. <https://amaniafrica-et.org/the-gathering-storm-facing-africa-in-2026-entrenching-conflicts-fractured-order-and-eroding-agency>
14. <https://lawvs.com/articles/is-international-law-failing-in-2026-a-critical-analysis-of-global-legal-challenges>
15. <https://verfassungsblog.de/international-law-in-and-as-crisis/>
16. <https://assodesire.com/2026/01/04/africa-in-2026-and-beyond->
17. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/africa/#:~>
18. <https://panafricanreview.com/iran-war-exposes-africas-vulnerability-to-global-energy-shocks/>
19. UBUNTU
20. <https://www.africansrising.org/borderless-africa-the-reparations-africa-owes-herself/>
21. ACTFA
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23. https://www.uneca.org/eca-events/sites/default/files/resources/documents/TCND/ARFSD2024/ST/case_studies/rwanda_technology_transfer_draft_report.pdf
24. [//amaniafrica-et.org/the-funding-of-the-au-from-member-states-is-a-farce-mo-ibrahim/](https://amaniafrica-et.org/the-funding-of-the-au-from-member-states-is-a-farce-mo-ibrahim/)
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26. <https://amaniafrica-et.org/the-funding-of-the-au-from-member-states-is-a-farce-mo-ibrahim/>
(<https://360mozambique.com/world/africa/mo-ibrahim-urges-leaders-to-make-african-countries-more-self-sufficient/>)
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