AFRICA AND THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM: A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT
Up until the early 15th century, the regions now known as the global North and South were developing at a fairly comparable pace, as measured by the development index. But that comparable development was later truncated by a large-scale expropriation of resources from the south to the north, giving birth to international division of labour. The position of Africa in the international system can be understood within the context of this international division of labour, prompted by the spread of capitalism and engendered by the advanced industrialised countries of the world. It is against this backdrop that this paper reviewed from a comparative perspective the position of Africa in the international system with a view to highlight Africa's strengths and weaknesses in the face of contemporary realities. The paper adopted a qualitative comparative research design. Data and information used were basically sourced from secondary sources such as reports, researched articles, and books. The paper provides a review of how Africa was integrated into the global economy by highlighting the instrumentalities of barbarian domination, imperialism, colonialism, and neo-colonialism. The consequence of which is the marginalization of Africa in world affairs. The paper indicated that global institutions, multilateral organisations, and external influence on national policies remain potent threats to Africa's extrication and development. The paper assessed the call for a New International Economic Order and a New Partnership for Africa Development as attempts by Africa to ask for a more equitable international economic regime. The paper made recommendations on the way forward for Africa and concluded that even in the 21st century, the unequal relationships between the Western industrialised countries and Africa still persist. However, Agenda 2063 offers Africa a template for extrication.

Keywords: *Africa, International system, Development, Global south and north.*

INTRODUCTION
The position of Africa in the international system can be understood within the context of the international division of labour, occasioned by the spread of capitalism and engendered by the advanced industrialized countries of the world. In the same vein, it is impossible to understand the development of modern states without taking into account the way European states constructed an interconnected global order by means of conquest, trade, religious conversion, and diplomacy (Opello & Rosow, 1999, p. 161). In the early 15th century, the North and South were developing at a fairly comparable pace, based on the index of development. But that relationship was later underpinned by a larger-scale expropriation of resources from the periphery to what has become the core of the global economic system. The "global economy" is a convenient phrase to describe the growing trend for economic activity to operate between countries (Hague & Harrop, 2004, p. 30). As a matter of fact, the global economy presents states in the developed world with a reasonably favourable balance of opportunities and threats. But the developing countries remain in a dependent position, surviving by exporting basic foodstuffs or minerals in competition with other equally poor states (Hague & Harrop, 2004). This arrangement caused underdevelopment in Africa, while the West continued to flourish in development. This trend continued with slavery and colonialism but was later maintained by neocolonialism. The thrust of this paper is to examine the historical trajectory of Africa in the international system in a comparative perspective.

Specifically, this paper begins with an introduction. After a discourse on Africa's integration into the global economy, it proceeds to examine Africa and the new international economic order. The next section explores the marginalization of Africa in global affairs/the dilemma of Africa in the era of globalization. This was followed by an analysis of Africa and the western style of democracy in relation to capitalism. The next part investigates Africa's response to marginalization. And the last segment is the conclusion.

Africa's Integration into the Global Economy

European colonialism has been the source of African domination by the Western political economy. Amuwo (2012) argued that Africa's location in the contemporary global political economy is inextricably linked to the continent's history of sustained subordination, exploitation, and pillage vis-à-vis Western and increasingly oriented powers. This process of integration is what Wallerstein (1974) referred to as the political economy of capitalism, which created, dominates, and operates the modern world system. This forceful integration of Africa into the global economy has been responsible for its massive exploitation, subsequent underdevelopment, and marginalization.

For most of the period from 1885 to 1960, seven European countries—Great Britain, France, Belgium, Spain, Portugal, Germany, and Italy—made a concerted effort to conquer, administer, and hold on to Africa. According to Okolo (1986), there are five stages of western incursion and domination of Africa. These are (1) barbarian domination, (2) imperialism, (3) colonialism, (4) neocolonialism, and (5) dependency domination. The barbarian domination stage was regarded as a pre-capitalist era when the West was rising from the deep slumber of feudalism. This period witnessed the rapid technological advancement of the West, which led to the increased wealth of the European merchants via transatlantic trade routes. This Atlantic trade later transformed into a slavery business that led coastal peoples to orient their economic activities toward the procurement of human beings for export. Although Africans were developing at their own pace, their forceful integration into the global economy, with primitive accumulation of wealth, resulted in African exploitation and domination. As Rodney rightly observed:

> It has already been indicated that in the 15th century, European technology was not totally superior to that of other parts of the world… Europeans trading to Africa had to make use of Asian and African consumer goods, showing that their system of production was not absolutely superior. It is particularly striking in the early centuries of trade; Europeans relied heavily on Indian cloths for resale in Africa, and they also purchased cloths in several parts of the West African coast through the European middlemen. Yet, by the time that Africa entered the colonial era, it was concentrating almost entirely on the export of raw cotton and the import of manufactured cotton cloth. This remarkable reversal is tied to technological advance in Europe and to stagnation of technology in Africa, owing to the very trade with Europe (Rodney, 1972, pp. 112-113).

Consequently, the pre-capitalist era, with the rise in slave trade, did not only destroy African culture, but it was also a period marked by sustained and organized destruction of the African traditional political system. The total effects of this period in Africa can be briefly summarized as follows:

- Massive depletion of the African population—especially among the most relevant and productive groups;
- Massive dislocations of the entire African society—disruptions in socio-cultural relationships and, above all, the diversion of interests from productive activities to plunder and looting as a way of life and
- The scorching and pillage of Africa under the guise of international trade (Okolo, 1986, p. 298).

The barbarian domination stage, in the form of a pre-capitalist system, introduced some structural changes in Africa, whereby slave trade provided a new source of wealth, status, and power, and subsequent appearance of new elites. This Atlantic Slave Trade and the partition of Africa led to Africa's exploitation, domination, and underdevelopment.

In the second stage, imperialism played a crucial role in integrating Africa into the global economy. The legacy of imperialism remains a strong influence upon Africa's place in contemporary world politics (Chazan, 1988). Imperialism as a theory derives its concepts from Marxist sources. It is a situation in which the wealth and poverty of nations result from the global process of exploitation. The problem of the poor countries is not the lack of technological know-how, cultural traits conducive to development, or modern institutions, but that they have been subjected to the exploitation of the international capitalist system and its special imperialist agents, both domestic and alien (Offiong, 1980, p. 14). In order to realize their imperialistic objectives, the advanced capitalist countries of Europe conquered and dominated the nations of Africa for decades. Thus, imperialism is the monopoly stage of capitalism in Europe, while for Africa it represented the epoch when capitalism began its first serious attempt to create conditions favorable to a more permanent stay. Ironically, the struggle for Africa by the advanced capitalist countries took place without the consent of African peoples. Together with the dominance of foreign ownership, norms and procedures in the social, political, and economic infrastructures that supported these activities, this transformation created national economies that became oriented to foreign trade in Europe.

Colonialism is the third stage of capitalist domination in Africa. Colonialism gave the Western capitalists monopoly control of labour, raw materials, and markets over vast territories. Colonialism created a dual economy in that Africa produced some varieties of groundnut, peanuts, and cotton before the coming of Europeans, but the demands of the European market led to the introduction of new crops. In view of this, coffee, cocoa, bananas, oranges, palm products, etc., were introduced, and Africans were forced or attracted to their production. One goal of the Europeans was to introduce what they called national production of industrial crops for export and for taxes in place of the mere collection of wild products like rubber. This situation elevated European factories above the production of food crops for the domestic population in the colonies. In essence, colonial regimes erected a global system of unequal capitalist development between the center and the periphery of world capitalism (Amin, 1984). Thus, the ultimate basis of colonialism is conquest and domination, but its principal motive is economic.

The fourth stage of capitalist domination in Africa is neo-colonialism. While independence was granted to the colonies, the colonial powers still retained essential colonial economic relationships. These retained colonial relationships were import–export trade, domination of major sectors of the post-colonial economy by European transnational corporations, foreign investment, and technology transfer (Onimode, 2000, p. 74). This process of granting independence to the colonies and retaining essential colonial economic relationships is known as neo-colonialism. Neocolonialism was the solution to both internal and external pressures. Internally, neo-colonialism was the fracturing of the national movement consisting of the petit bourgeois, proletariat, and peasants threatened to achieve genuine independence in which the riches of Africa would be used to uplift its devastated populations. Externally, neo-colonialism was an accommodation of interests between the imperial bourgeoisie and that fraction of the native bourgeoisie who were ready to compromise with imperial agents. To be sure, the post-colonial government inherited economies with low levels of education, poorly developed infrastructure, few African entrepreneurs, little technical change in agriculture, undiversified economies with manufacturing capability, a reliance on a few crops or minerals for export earnings, and state structures and policies that were quite intrusive (Stein, 2000, p. 13). Thus, during neo-colonialism, the former masters still dominate the independent nations of Africa in economic terms.

The last stage of capitalist domination in Africa was the dependency period. Most African countries entered this phase of dependency domination from about the 1970s, a decade after their political independence. While neo-colonialism was the period when the former colonial masters exercised influence over the affairs of the newly independent nations, dependency is the period of real international domination of Africa. During dependency, the political, economic, and socio-psycho-cultural obsession with one country (the former colonial masters) is substantially reduced, and attention to other industrial nations is increased (Okolo, 1986, p. 307). Africa has played a definite role in the international economy, but the internal development of Africa has been conditioned by the needs of the dominant international market. It is imperative to know that in the dependency era, Africa's integration into the global economy has been completed, and it will be very difficult for Africa to extricate itself. However, this integration was established within the context of an externally dominated international division of labour, which consigned the African states to an inferior status and constrained their ability to reorganize their economy in ways they deem fit, including the establishment of lateral relations with the other African countries, the other Third World States, and the socialist bloc (Nnoli, 1978, p. 61). The table below shows a comparative share of intra-regional trade during 1965/66.

Table 1: Comparative global intra-regional trade shares

Region	**Share of intra-trade in the total trade of region (%)**
Africa[a]	7.7
West Africa sub-region[b]	2.7
Latin America	9.8
Asia and Far East [c]	24.5
Eastern Europe	63.2
Western Europe	64.0
a. Excludes South Africa; b. Excludes Guinea and Liberia; c. Excludes the Socialist Countries.	

Source: Onimode, B. (1988). *A political economic of the African crisis.* London: Zed Books.

Essentially, Africa's intra-regional trade was, and still is, the lowest of all the regions of the world: less than that of Latin America, one-third of that of Asia and the Far East, and barely one-ninth of that of Europe (Onimode, 1988, p. 186). The continent is the least integrated in the world, with low levels of intraregional economic global trade (Oyeranmi, 2014). This low level of intra-African trade is due to the high level of external dependence for trade on the industrialized countries. It also indicates that Africa's integration into the global economy within the context of dependency led to an unequal exchange of Africa's external trade.

Africa and the Search for a New International Economic Order

The forceful integration of Africa into the global economy through colonialism, neocolonialism, and dependency perpetuates underdevelopment in the continent. Also, the

collapse of the international commodity market and massive transfer of capital from the South to the North further enhanced Africa's exploitation in the international capitalist arrangements. Indeed, the capacity of African countries to grow and develop has been undermined by the structure of the international economic system.
African countries have been aware of this unequal arrangement in the international economic system, sought an increase in their control over trade, and sought an increase in the share of the profits from it that comes their way. Africa's response was thus a call, not only for a redistribution of income and wealth from rich to poor countries, but also for a similar transfer of political influence. This tendency towards acquisition of permanent sovereignty over natural resources has been reinforced by the United Nations Declaration on the establishment of a New International Economic Order (NIEO). A summit meeting of the nonaligned movement in 1973 first called for a *New International Economic Order* (Hudson, 2005). The group brought their demands to a special session of the United Nations in May 1974, signaling their call for a NIEO.

Basically, the IEO has been given so many different interpretations. An international economic order, according to Anell and Nygren (1980), may reasonably refer broadly to the rules of the game that regulate the economic cooperation of sovereign states in various spheres and that are sustained by the existing distribution of power. Along with these rules are also certain norms and regulations that guide, or are expected to guide, the behavior of states, corporations, and individuals as they deal with others either in trade or business transactions. The international economic order also refers to the general functioning of the international economic system.

What may then be referred to as the old international economic order has been in existence in two stages. There was an old economic order before the Second World War. The first one was dominated by Great Britain, while the second has been under the domination of the United States. Both countries are capitalistic and western. The features of this old economic order include:

1. The structuring of the international division of labour that put Africa at a disadvantage.
2. The establishment of an international trade circle for the exclusive benefit of the West.
3. Polarised accumulation and the strengthening of African dependence on external economies.
4. The total incorporation of Africa into a capitalist world economy with its contradictions and misplaced values.
5. The subordination of Africa to the political and economic needs of the West and the setting in motion of dependent growth and development.

However, to reduce the burden, especially the inherent injustice in the "Old" (but still prevailing) economic order, the South (including Africa) began to explore the possibility of NIEO through which to eliminate some of the prevailing inequities in international economic relations.

The South sought changes in six major areas of international economic relations, and these are:

- *Change the terms of international trade:* Stabilize, then raise the price of exports from the South for primary commodities (coffee, cocoa, tin, and sugar) to keep up with the price of capital goods and finished products (computers, automobiles, machinery) imported from the developed North. Index price regulation and establish commodity cartels and multilateral commodities agreements.

- *Establish a common fund:* Link prices of commodities together in order to establish a joint fund to help countries whose economies have been adversely affected by price declines.
- *Regulate Multinational Corporations:* Regulate to require technology transfer from the MNCs to the South.
- *Relieve the debt burden of the South:* Restructure debt burdens, reduce interest rates, and/or cancel debt.
- *Increase foreign aid to the South:* Improve the terms and conditions of aid; grants and untied aid are preferred.
- *Change the structure of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund:* Modify the weighted voting system so that the South can use these organizations more effectively (Adeniran, 1986).

The above proposals are unified by the belief that fundamental change in international political economy is necessary and that regulation of both markets (prices, exports) and institutions (donor states, multinational corporations, the World Bank, and the IMF) is imperative. We must take into consideration that these demands are consistent with the radical theoretical perspective in international political economy.

The success of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) provided a model, in part, for the demands of the South. Recalling the success of Muammar Gaddafi's nationalization of the Libyan oil industry in 1973 and the dramatic increases of petroleum prices that followed, the oil exporters formed and strengthened the OPEC cartel. In 1974, the Arab members of OPEC used an embargo to withhold oil from states supporting Israel, causing both a significant increase in oil prices and also substantial economic disruption in the United States and the Netherlands, both of which were embargoed.

Similarly, the South won some concessions through the 1975 Lome Convention, which gave countries of the South preferential access to European markets and more favourable terms for commodity price-stabilization plans. Some states of the South were able to reschedule their debts, in part through innovative refinancing plans. However, on most critical issues, the North refused to negotiate concessions. No common fund was established. No mandatory code to regulate multinational corporations was negotiated. No widespread debt cancellation was undertaken. No major changes were made in the World Bank or IMF institutional structures.

It should be added that the major problem that states from the South (especially African states) have had in their endeavor to achieve success in their search for a NIEO is that it cannot be achieved merely by expecting the Western world to give up some of its privileges. Even if the Western world does, there would still be problems with regard to African economies whose underlying values are Western-oriented. This category of problems includes:

1. Lack of proper ideological orientation to guide economic planning.
2. Misplaced priorities of African leaders in terms of developmental goals.
3. Inefficiency and ineptitude in the public sector as well as misuse and underutilization of skilled personnel.
4. Widespread corruption and irresponsible leadership.
5. The connivance of the West at the multinational corporations' criminal exploitation.

In this context, the NIEO never became much more than a rallying cry for the global South, partly because of the South's lack of power and partly because disparities within the South created divergent interests among states there.

Marginalization of Africa in World Affairs

Rubin and Weinsten (1974) have argued that despite Africa's increasing role in world politics, politics in Africa continues to be dominated by world politics and world economics. The marginalization of Africa in world affairs cuts across economic, technological, industrial, political, and social spheres. However, this marginalization can be attributed to both internal and external factors. While the internal factors involve domestic governance, the external factors involve foreign domination.

One key internal factor is lack of good management on the part of African rulers. African leaders are corrupt and unaccountable to their citizens. Most African leaders live opulent lives, while the majority of the people are poor. Perhaps the major element of this form of marginalization is the rampant looting of an entire country's treasury and the stashing of the same in foreign accounts. Examples of African leaders in this category include Mobutu Sese-Seko of Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo), Sani Abacha of Nigeria, Emperor Bokassa of the Central African Republic, Samuel Doe of Liberia, etc. These African leaders stole their country's money to the tune of billions of dollars, which they stashed away in private overseas accounts. In addition, the repressive nature of African leaders in relation to their citizens is another form of internal marginalization. When African elites succeeded the colonial regimes, the authoritarian style of governance inherited from the latter was maintained. This is manifested in the spate of military dictatorships, authoritarian one-party rule, and corrupt, sit-tight leaders across Africa for three decades. Their rule is characterized by institutionalized socio-economic repression, mass alienation, massive brain drain, and prolonged political instability that made nation building and development very difficult if not outright impossible (Onimode, 2000, p. 87). In applying this logic of repression, African leaders used state power to control the economy and at the same time appropriate the state wealth.

More important is the external form of Africa's marginalization, which is more serious than the internal form. This is because some of the external factors—like external domination, commodity trade collapse, debt traps, etc.—aggravated such internal factors as domestic authoritarian rule, conflicts, and corrupt capital flight from Africa (Onimode, 2000, p. 88). It is not too difficult to perceive how this external form of marginalization serves the needs and interests of the advanced industrialized countries.

The tripartite form of foreign domination—colonialism, neocolonialism, and dependency—resulted in the foreign debt crisis of the 1980s. The debt crises faced by African countries have become new avenues and means of siphoning extra cash to the developed North from the developing nations of Africa (Ajayi, 2011). Not only has debt servicing escalated in Africa, but the policy responses from the industrialized countries are not appropriate and even make the situation worse. This depressed the indebted African countries economies through high interest rates and large budgetary cuts, and many of the countries concerned have remained indebted. In view of this, the repayment of foreign debt with unfavourable terms further weakened and marginalized African countries. In addition, the industrialized countries have manipulated foreign trade in an unequal exchange, whereby Africa received low foreign direct investment (FDI). Also, Africa's intra-regional trade as a proportion of total trade has been quite low when compared with other regions (see Table 2). Although this ratio rose from 8.1% in 1992 to 10.5% in 2002, Africa remained slightly ahead of the Middle East, while Latin America achieved intra-regional trade ratios that were roughly twice those of Africa (Bankole and Ogunkola, 2009, p. 18).

Table 2: Intra-regional exports as proportion of total exports, World Regions, 1992-2008

Countries	1992 (%)	2002 (%)	2008 (%)
Africa	8.1	10.5	9.6
Asia	44.5	48.9	50.1
Latin America	17.2	15.4	26.5
Western Europe	71.9	67.3	72.8
Other Europe	18.5	25.5	28.3
North America	33.4	40.3	49.8
Middle East	7.7	7.1	12.0

Source: Bankole, A.S. and Ogunkola, E.O. (2009). Removing obstacles to intra-African trade. *Ibadan Journal of the Social Sciences* 7(1): 17-32.

Consequently, the world trading system has been favouring the exporters of manufactured goods while proving to be disadvantageous to many African countries, whose main participation in global trade has consisted of the export of raw materials and commodities and the import of finished products. However, most international trade today takes place through the growth of regional value chains (GVCs), and structural factors such as market size, industrial structure, and level of development play a large role in determining participation in GVCs. For this reason, Africa's many small economic developments find it hard to integrate into GVCs, other than as a supplier of raw materials to foreign companies (Woolfrey & Karkare, 2021, p. 16). Although most of the countries in Africa attempted to obtain fairer prices and demand more stable conditions for their commodities through commodity agreements involving producer and consumer countries under the auspices of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), most of these agreements collapsed when the industrialized countries, being the major consumers of commodities, withdrew support in the 1980s. It can be argued further that, while Africa is dependent on industrialized countries for trade, industrialized countries, on the other hand, failed to be dependent on Africa.

Dilemma of Africa in the Era of Globalization

One of the reasons for the study of international systems is the interdependence of nations. International systems today have become truly *international* or global, because they are characterized by a high degree of interaction and interdependence (Dunmoye, 2014, p. 26). This global interaction is premised on the concept of globalization. Thus, globalization has become the hallmark of international economic relations. Globalization has different interpretations by many scholars of international relations. Held (2000) contended that globalization has produced a significant shift in the links and relations among political communities. In other words, there has been a growth in cultural, economic, and political interconnectedness within and among states and regions, with uneven consequences for different countries and locales (Held, 2000, p. 177). However, Khor (2001) points out that economic globalization's most important aspects are the breaking down of national economic barriers, the international spread of trades, financial and production corporations, and international financial institutions in these processes.

The most important and unique form of Africa's marginalization in world affairs has been the dilemma of Africa in the face of globalization. It is imperative to note that the current phase of globalization is different from the earlier phases. The main forces in the earlier phases of globalization were the political actors, which comprised the imperial nation-states with a mercantilist era of strong states for international economic competition. On the other hand, the current phase of globalization has the international corporations and international finance capital (e.g., oil companies and banks) as the main actors. To the proponents of the new economic order, such as Anugwon (2001), Hoogveit (1997), and Held (1995), globalization will bring more development to the underdeveloped countries by increasing the efficiency in industries, competitiveness, and speedy growth of the economy in general through the mutually beneficial North-South relations. But as the 21st century grows old, the roads to attain most of the old promises are getting narrower. Not only that, the vast majority of humanity in the global South (especially in Africa) is still groaning under heavy economic burden and socio-political dislocations, but global cooperation and integration (in tackling these problems) had largely remained an illusion (Oyeranmi, 2014, p. 2).

From all indications, this current phase of globalization is greatly affecting Africa in so many ways. First, its unique feature is the “globalization” of national policies and policy-making mechanisms. National policies, (including in economic, social, cultural, and technological areas) that until recently were under the jurisdiction of states and people within a country have increasingly come under the influence of international agencies and processes or of big private corporations and economic players (Khor, 2001, p. 4). The multinational firms act as agents in the global economy. This aspect of globalization is typified by the growing concentration and monopolization of economic resources and power by transnational corporations and by global financial firms and funds. In this case, fewer transnational corporations are gaining a large and increasing proportion of world economic resources, production, and market shares. However, the large corporations have taken over a large part of decision-making in African countries, at the expense of the state or their political leaders. Secondly, the multinational corporations are also backed by their state of origin, with a high stake of great intensity. As a result, they have sucked even the most marginal companies, states, groups, and individuals into their vortex, bringing everyone into close proximity, shrinking everything into one small intimate space, which has to be fought incessantly (Nnoli, 2003, p. 19).

Accordingly, globalization pushes for market liberalization. However, this liberalization involves development in the area of technology. Therefore, economic liberalization leads to the breaking down of national economic barriers and the international spread of trade, finance, and production activities, but this free flow of capital involves large sums, and this leads to the unchecked power of big players and financial speculators. Thus, this makes it difficult for African countries to control the level of their currency and the flow of money in and out of their countries. As the major firms controlling the majority of the world trade increasingly use information communication technology (ICT) as the means of coordinating that flow, so the barriers presented by poor quality and lack of access to communication technology in Africa become worrisome. This is because certain technological developments make it difficult or virtually impossible to formulate policy. Khor (2001, p. 5) has observed that the establishment of satellite TV and the availability of small receivers, and the spread of the use of electronic mail and the internet make it difficult for governments to determine cultural or communications policy or control the spread of information and cultural products. In this regard, African countries now have to implement policies that are in line with decisions and rules of these international institutions. As Nnoli rightly pointed out:

> In the relationship between internal politics and external affairs, globalization has shifted the balance of power in world economy and society from territory – based governments to transnational corporations. Transborder production, markets, monies and business are now important elements in African economics. But they readily evade most political controls that are attempted through the African states. Moreover, no mechanisms have been devised thus far to guarantee transparency, open debate and accountability

> in relations between African states and the supra-territorial companies operating within them (Nnoli, 2003, p. 19).

In addition, the underlying principle behind the current phase of globalization is a shift of power away from the state to the controller of capital. The argument is that replacing state economic management with liberalized markets and neoliberal policies will speed up the integration of the global market. But the net effect of the withdrawal of the state has been the emergence and subsequent domination of the productive sectors of the economy as currently being witnessed in Africa by a crop of multinational or transnational concerns and their local collaborators (Anuguon, 2001, p. 88). Therefore, the pro-globalization argument for the withdrawal of the state is untenable because it has increased the economic space for private capital and subsequent domination of African economies by the industrialized countries.

More importantly, global institutions (especially the World Bank and IMF) wield tremendous authority in a majority of African countries. Countries requiring debt rescheduling have to adopt Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) that are mainly drawn up in the Washington institutions. In particular, the World Bank has assisted the spread of an uncritical optimism about globalization because it has been so keen to "talk up" African growth (Bush & Szeftel, 1998, p. 175). Part of the argument of these international institutions is that policies of liberalization, structural adjustment, and the withdrawal of the state from economic activities can generate economic growth. Also, SAPs cover macroeconomic policies and, at the same time, cover social policies and structural issues, such as privatization, financial policy, corporate laws, and governance. However, the mechanism of making loan disbursement conditional on these policies has been the main instrument driving the policy moves in the indebted African countries towards liberalization, privatization, deregulation, and a withdrawal of the state from economic activities. SAP, to some extent, represents an attempt by the imperial powers to recolonize Africa through information channels. The harsh conditionalities that are imposed by the Bretton Woods institutions, through SAP, lead to a complete reintegration of African economies into the global market along colonial lines by destroying local manufacturing industries and promoting exports of primary commodities.

Consequently, neoliberalism has become the dominant development paradigm during the last 30–35 years. To the extent that loan conditionalities have been the major mechanism for the global dissemination of the macroeconomic policy packages that are favoured by governments of the industrialized North. Attempts not to comply with these conditions can result in sanctions in the form of an embargo on a country's export through the dispute settlement system, thus giving the World Trade Organisation (WTO) a strong enforcement power. With this, national governments have to comply with the disciplines and obligations in the already wide range of issues under WTO purview. Many domestic economic policies of Africa are therefore being made in the WTO negotiations rather than at the national level. Carmody has observed that:

> The inability of African populations to challenge their marginalization within the global political economy is maintained not only through direct use of conditionality, but also through discourse (Carmody, 1998, p. 28).

Political and Economic Change in Africa: Capitalism Versus Democracy

The upsurge in democracy reflects the transformation of the world's political landscape in the final quarter of the twentieth century. Over this short period, the number of democracies more than doubled. This shift to democracy, while important in itself, will also have international ramifications. Understanding the forms taken by democracy in today's world is therefore a central task for comparative politics (Hague & Harrop, 2004, p. 35). However, one of the most intense debates in all of political science relates to the relationship between political and economic change. In the branch of comparative political studies that focuses on developing countries, a major point of debate is the link between capitalism and democracy. Most comparative work focuses on the question of whether democracy affects socio-economic development and has not generally offered a convincing answer (Linder, 2005). The argument is that if a country were able to adopt traits of capitalism, it would soon adopt the other (democracy). The idea was that if either democracy or capitalism could be introduced into a country under communist dictatorship, then it would soon transform into a capitalist democracy. This idea became popular during the Cold War when most communist countries were under dictatorship.

The basic premise of capitalism and democracy is that adopting liberal democracy will transform into economic growth. While intuitively, it may seem that democracy and growth have a strong positive relationship, empirical studies to this day have not been able to determine a conclusive relationship between the two (Das, 2021, p. 2). Scholars of economic development also questioned the idea that democracy plus capitalism was the best way for a country to move from being poor to being rich. China and South Korea rapidly developed under dictatorships, while many of the new democracies in Africa have failed to improve their economic situation. Although Africans have become more committed to the question of democracy, the extent to which they will succeed depends in part on the international environment in which the West has to play a decisive role.

Western leaders have articulately proclaimed their support for democracy in Africa, but the wave of democratization projects in Africa from the 1980s can be attributed to three factors. Firstly, the global movement that saw the transformation of undemocratic regimes and the need for other parts of the world to democratize. Secondly, democratization was seen as the necessary context for economic liberalization, which was conducive to the reconstruction of civil society to serve the end of liberalization. Thirdly, western powers and their international donour community allies, for whom post-Cold War democratization was largely a hegemonic project, ensured that the African continent toed the line. On the other hand, sanctions were applied against countries found to have contravened the human rights principle and those with no genuine commitment to democracy (Durutoye, 2001, p. 47). It is obvious that global institutions, such as the IMF and the World Bank, have dictated development programmes to many African countries that overrode the preferences of their governments. Indeed, the adoption of western-style democracy has increasingly become a precondition for loans, in addition to economic adjustment. Leaders of economically disadvantaged countries (including Africa) often argue that their struggle to feed, clothe, and otherwise attend to the needs of their people does not allow for the “luxury” of Western-style democracy, with its incessant political bickering and its attention to the individual (Rourke, 2006, p. 175).

Evidently, the changing attitude of the West towards democracy in Africa was the tendency of the West to make their African counterparts vulnerable to the global world. Thus, both positive and negative measures were applied for the purpose of providing material and technical assistance for democratization and human rights projects in African countries. The adoption of Western-style democracy in Africa is monitored by global institutions, with the introduction of macroeconomic policies. This was the origin of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). However, SAP leads to complete reintegration of African economies into the global market along colonial lines by destroying local manufacturing industries and promoting exports of primary commodities. Furthermore, there is a strong correlation between the adoption of SAP and a rising wave of globalization. Toyo (2001) has argued that globalization is an imperialist policy and a successor to SAP. This is because the campaign for SAP ended in the early 1990s, and the campaign for globalization replaced it in the late 1990s. It shows that there are wider inequalities among countries as well as among income groups within countries, which are closely associated with globalization processes. The widening gap between the advanced industrialized countries and the poor African countries, through the uneven processes of globalization, with an unequal distribution of benefits and losses, leads to polarization between the few countries and groups that gain and the many countries and groups in society that lose out or are marginalized.

Africa's Response to Marginalization

The cry against Africa's marginalization in global affairs has become widespread, and many scholars and institutions have expressed gross disappointment over Africa's failure to achieve development. However, some policy reforms have been proposed in the past by donor nations and external agencies for Africa's development and political problems. This has nevertheless translated to any meaningful development of the continent. If the state of Africa is anything to go by, external development initiatives have failed to bring about development. Africa's conditions at the beginning of the 21st century indicate that the extent of capacity gaps and poverty and social, economic, and political tensions and conflicts has made the dominant domestic and international relations of African states and the survival of African states in their current forms increasingly unsustainable (Garba, 2004, p. 67). Hence, African states sought their own development initiatives.

Specifically, the Lagos Plan of Action was articulated as an African initiative for attaining economic development. The LPA emerged as a response against the background of intensified marginalization, economic underdevelopment, and increasing impoverishment experienced by the African continent, in spite of the United Nations Decade (1960–1970) for the development of developing countries (Wordu, 2004, p. 161). In fact, Africa's development crisis between 1960 and 1970 called into question the appropriateness of externally imposed development initiatives. Thus, the Lagos Plan of Action was designed by African leaders to ensure enhanced African participation in the international development processes. Unfortunately, the LPA was an important development programme that was not effectively implemented. This is because the policies that were externally imposed (particularly SAP) could not re-float the economy. In this vein, the political-economic problems arising from the debt crisis helped to precipitate poverty. At the same time, the debt crisis undermined the ability of the state to provide basic social services to the majority of the populace in African countries.

In view of the economic crisis and development situation in Africa, African leaders sought the articulation of a new strategy for Africa's development. It was against this background that the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) emerged in 2001 as a new African initiative and programme for sustainable development. NEPAD represents a pledge by African leaders, based on a common vision, a firm and shared conviction, that they have a pressing duty to eradicate poverty and to place their countries, both individually and collectively, on the path of sustainable growth and development and, at the same time, to participate actively in the world economy and global politics (Adetula, 2010, p. 105).

The key features of NEPAD are a closer relationship between African governments and their people on one hand and integrated development and partnership with developed countries and other countries in the South on the other hand. The NEPAD document acknowledges the marginalization of Africa from the globalization process and the exclusion of the vast majority of its people, as well as its poverty and backwardness that stand in stark contrast to the prosperity of the developed world (Garba, 2004). In addition, African leaders acknowledged that Africa's crisis of poor economic growth stemmed from the uneven distribution of wealth globally, and through NEPAD, they were seeking more equality and fairness in the area of trade, investment, capital flow, and debt reduction. In the first point of the NEPAD document, the emphasis is that:

> This New Partnership for Africa's Development is a pledge by African leaders, based on a common vision and a firm and shared conviction, that they have a pressing duty to eradicate poverty and to place their countries, both individually and collectively, on a path of sustainable growth and development, and at the same time to participate actively in the world economy and body politic. The programme is anchored on the determination of Africans to extricate themselves and the continent from the malaise of underdevelopment and exclusive in a globalizing world **(**NEPAD Document, 2001).

Essentially, the progrmame stipulates that the promotion of development in Africa is the primary responsibility of Africans themselves, but at the same time, successful implementation of the progrmame requires the cooperation of the international community. It requires the partnership of development partners to support the creation of favourable international economic environment and support for the priority projects identified by African countries. However, NEPAD is based on the principles of good governance as the basic requirement for peace, security, and sustainable political and socio-economic development. Indeed, the NEPAD document was linked to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in order to achieve its set objectives.

Table 3: Targets of NEPAD

Development Indicator	Initial Conditions	Target	Target Date
GDP growth	-4.8 (Congo Democratic Republic) and 8.8 (Equatorial Guinea)	7%	Over next 15 years
Population under poverty	340 million	Reduce by half	1990-2015
Enrolment in primary school	-	100%	By 2015
Infant mortality rate	140 in 1000	Reduce by two third	1990-2015
Maternal mortality rate	-	Reduce by three quarters	1990-2015
Access to reproductive health	-	100%	By 2015
Implementation of national strategies for sustainable development by 2005	None	Reverse loss of environmental resources	By 2015

Source: Garba A. (2004). "The future of African Development in a Globalising World: An Assessment of the Cotonou Agreement and the New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development". *Ibadan Journal of the Social Sciences*, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 63.

The policy of strategic partnership emphasises a partnership of three sectors involving:

- Government (state sector)
- Business (private sector, i.e., domestic investors and foreign investments operating in a privatized and deregulated economy)
- Civil society organizations as non-state, public interest advocacy (Wordu, 2004, p. 163).

The tri-sector partnership of NEPAD assigns specific roles to each of the sectors. The state is assigned the role of formulating and implementing laws, facilitating the provision of essential infrastructures, as well as providing an enabling environment for democracy and good governance to thrive. The business group (private sector) is required to practice social responsibility and corporate citizenship by making profits, generating employment, and paying taxes; promoting integrity and transparency by also offering to engage in the fight against corruption (Wordu, 2004, p. 163). While the civil society is assigned the role of representation in the NEPAD decision-making process towards developing a monitoring mechanism to evaluate the performance of NEPAD, particularly with respect to governance, democracy, youth development, and conflict resolution.

It is also remarkable to note that NEPAD has some targets, as pointed out in Table 3. However, achieving these laudable objectives would stem from an average Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate of above 7% per annum for the next 15 years in line with MDGs. It is expected that achieving these objectives of eradicating poverty in Africa and placing African countries, both individually and collectively, on a path of sustainable growth and development would result in economic growth and development, reduction in poverty and inequality, diversification of productive activities, and enhanced international competitiveness, as well as an increased pace of African integration into the global economy. However, Africa is lagging behind other regions in achieving the MDGs. The number of poor people in Africa has actually risen, while the average income of the poor has declined, indicating worsening income distribution within the countries.

Several questions have emerged about the possibilities of achieving the objectives of NEPAD. First, can African countries achieve the 7% economic growth on the target date? Second, are the majority of Africans aware of the relevance of NEPAD programmes? Third, can NEPAD solve African problems of poverty and underdevelopment? Fourth, is NEPAD a truly African initiative to attain sustainable development? As earlier pointed out, the attainment of 7% economic growth is not feasible, given the existing state of domestic and international relations. This is because it will be unrealistic for the authors of NEPAD to assume that a partnership is possible between two unequal partners whose relationship has, over the centuries, been characterized by one partner exploiting and appropriating the resources of the other. Historical experience suggests that partnerships between Europe and Africa pose a lot of challenges. While the inauguration of NEPAD as a development initiative is significantly influenced by some global dynamics, it cannot be said to represent an effective response to global pressures that are under the manipulations of the dominant international powers in the North (Adetula, 2010, p. 105). In fact, the reliance of NEPAD on external funding to pursue some of its goals, especially on aid flow to Africa, shows that the NEPAD conception of a new partnership is a flawed initiative.

Consequently, NEPAD is not a truly African initiative; this is because, by adopting the MDGs as its targets, NEPAD has failed to learn from Africa's historical limitations of capacity to innovate, adapt, and be globally competitive. That NEPAD is hoping for an aid flow of about US$64 billion to meet the 7% annual growth rate needed to achieve even the barest minimum of the MDGs by the year 2015 is a demonstration of a lack of understanding of changed attitudes towards Africa (Eyinla, 2004, p. 178). This asymmetrical relationship continues to deepen African dependence by relying on global financial institutions regarding aid flow. In view of this, NEPAD has been described as a neoliberal economic policy that cannot promote sustainable development. To be sure, NEPAD is dependent on external funding, and Africa has not yet been freed from every tepid manipulation by external forces. Therefore, the NEPAD initiative is a foreign idea, and its implementation depends on begging from outsiders while at the same time succumbing to foreign ideologies and influences. Like the LPA, the emphasis on external support as well as partnership with the international community is one of the risk factors for the success of NEPAD (Adetula, 2010). In this regard, NEPAD has been unable to set the African continent on the path of regional integration and sustainable development.

On the other hand, Africa has developed an integrated institutional framework for her development known as Agenda 2063 (Ndizera & Muzee, 2018; Samura & Akayezu, 2022; Kisira & Jack, 2024). The framework is a strategic long-term instrument for the development of Africa within the time frame of fifty years. The framework was developed by the African Union Commission to commemorate the OAU/AU golden jubilee in 2013 (AU Agenda, 2063). Agenda 2063 is built on Pan-Africanist ideas and the African Renaissance. Unlike the previous initiatives for sustainable development, for instance, the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Structural Adjustment Program (SAP), and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which were ideas packaged by foreign interests and were foisted on Africa. Agenda 2063 is home-grown and home-owned. It provides a robust institutional framework for dealing with developmental issues in Africa in the 21st century. It has well-articulated developmental plans and programmes for national governments and regional economic bodies for articulated development—economic, social, political, scientific, and cultural (Ufomba, 2020). According to the African Union Commission (2015, p. 4), Agenda 2063 highlighted seven critical aspirations that are necessary for moving the African continent to the next level. They are: inclusive growth and sustainable development; an integrated continent based on the ideals of Pan-Africanism and the vision of Africa's Renaissance; good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice, and rule of law; peace and security; strong cultural identity, common heritage, shared values, and ethics; people-driven development that recognizes the potential of youths and women; and Africa as a strong, united, and influential global player and partner. Ufomba (2020), in his study, posited that African leaders have demonstrated the willingness for the implementation of Agenda 2063 and the commitment to achieve sustainable development in Africa by 2063. His study further shows the correlation between the current socio-political and institutional frameworks in Africa and the achievement of the Agenda 2063 developmental plan. The study suggested that Africa currently has the institutional frameworks that have the capacity to drive development in the region. Hence, we are of the view that Agenda 2063 provides an excellent vision for driving development in Africa. However, the continent will have to take seriously the issues of limited finance, lack of political will, and conflict of interest, which were responsible for the low performance or failure of previous initiatives. Consequently, there must be genuine commitment by African leaders to pursue the Agenda 2063 visions; otherwise, it will end up like other developmental initiatives in the past.

Conclusion

This paper has examined and analysed the position of Africa in the international system with a view to identifying Africa's strengths and weaknesses from a comparative perspective. The present-day international system is the product of a particular civilization—Western civilization, centered in Europe. For most states in Africa, the history of having been colonized by Europeans is central to their identity, foreign policy, and place in the world. For African states, international relations revolves around their asymmetrical power relationships with industrialized states. Through colonialism, new-colonialism and dependency strategy, Africa has been forcefully incorporated into the global economy. Therefore, the present economic crisis in Africa is said to be historically located in the structure of the international economic system. Following independence, African states were left with legacies of colonialism, including their basic economic infrastructures that made wealth accumulation difficult in certain ways. Although African states responded to their domination in global affairs, especially in the current phase of globalization, the continent was not placed well to determine the globalization agenda. Beyond these unfavourable international factors, many African countries have also been characterized by dictatorship, abuse of power, and economic mismanagement, which undermined the development process. Thus, the present international system is a contradiction between a developed North and a developing South (Africa included). From a comparative perspective, the gap in wealth distribution between the industrialized regions (North) and Africa is very feasible. It is not surprising, therefore, that in the 21st century, the unequal relationships between the western industrialized countries and Africa still persist. However, Africa can take advantage of the Agenda 2063 to build more formidable and developmental internal collaborations that will guarantee mutual development of the African countries.

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