

## The Categorical Imperatives of a United States of Africa in the Age of Global Economic Competition

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**Abstract.** Africa has found itself in the background of socio-economic, political and technological developments. Long before the European incursion into Africa, the continent was the credo of civilization in various fields of human endeavors. It took three epochal events: slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism to lay the foundation for the penetration and exploitation of the African peoples and societies. It is against this background we must understand and appreciate the present marginalization and underdevelopment in the continent. These epochal events distorted and disoriented the continent and its people to the extent that presently it is one of the poorest continents in the world. Therefore, the clamor for and move towards a United States of Africa are long overdue and inevitable. It will pull resources together, give the people itself in themselves and their abilities to develop their own way and give the continent respect in the community of nations. The paper argued that, all these can only be realized if certain normative obstacles are removed. These include: the subservient role of some African leaders and would be leaders to international capitalists; opposition from the developed countries that may lose out if such adventure succeeds, scarcity of political and economic resources to achieve such enterprise. The paper concludes that, the goal of United States of Africa is realizable provided the necessary steps as mentioned are taken, sustained and achieved.

**Keywords:** Economy, globalization, sustainability, progress, neo-colonialism

### 1. Introduction

Africa has consistently influenced the world community since the very origin of humankind. Africans participated in the growth and development of knowledge, the arts, and spirituality. The Pan-African movement was essentially anchored in this historical legacy and the imperative necessity of the continent and its diaspora to regain its dignity after centuries of slavery followed by colonial rule. The Pan-African movement, which was spearheaded mainly by the African Diaspora, was based on three main pillars, namely: (i) Shared historical and cultural values, (ii) Collective self-reliance and self-sufficiency, and (iii) Political freedom. The interaction between the movement and African researchers and political leaders has greatly influenced the struggle for independence in Africa, of which the search for unity and collective action was part and parcel. Since political independent, African countries have made several efforts to individually address the economic and social challenges confronting them with limited success. This and lack of good governance and an unfavourable international economic order has been some of the various impediments of African countries towards improving their development performance (Igbokwe-Ibeto, Osawe & Alegbeleye, 2014)

As an expression of the will to act- collectively on issues of common interest, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) now African Union (AU) was established on May 25 1963 as a result of a compromise between supporters of a full political integration and those preferring a loose cooperation organization. The OAU made important

contributions, mainly through its Liberation Committee, to the freedom fight of countries that were still under colonial rule and to the struggle against apartheid in South Africa and the minority rule in former Rhodesia. Its membership, which includes all regions of the continent currently consist of 54 countries.

Africa has enormous potentials for development but, it has continued to baffle many scholars of Africa's political-economy that the continent of Africa remains one of the poorest and least developed in the world. For example, according to Igbokwe-Ibeto (2019), Africa epitomises the phenomenon of abject poverty and penury in the midst of plenty. No wonder the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation report revealed that by 2050, more than 40% of extremely poor people in the world will be living in Africa precisely Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Vanguard, 2018:3). This is in spite of the fact that it hosts some of the world's most endowed human and material resources. Yet the continent and its peoples have failed to translate her enormous potentials into productive use for the benefit of its people in terms of physical and human development. Presently, the continent of Africa has some of the world's poorest people with abundant cases of hunger, diseases, ethno-religious conflicts, and endemic and chronic economic crises. While several efforts have been made by successive governments in Africa to launch their countries on the path of economic development and industrialisation, however, wrong development paradigm, overreliance on foreign precepts and techniques of management are some of the challenges facing Africa's quest for economic development (Igbokwe-Ibeto, 2019).

But these have not always been the case in the continent before now. In many aspects of human development, it was a trail-blazer. The continent at a point was the nerve centre of trade and commerce and in many respects showcased breakthroughs in science and technology that drew worldwide attentions and commendations. The continent experienced a down turn when imperialist interests began their penetration of Africa, first through trade expeditions and later by political and military adventure coupled with the cultural receptivity of Africa.

Thus, it took the tragic events of slavery colonialism and neo-colonialism to lay the foundation for the socio-economic and political crises that are presently being experienced in Africa. This is in spite of efforts made to address and redress the situation. These efforts have not impacted fundamentally on the

multi-faceted challenges that confront the continent and its people.

The question that necessarily comes to mind at this juncture is, why is wide spread poverty prevalent in Africa when citizens live in the midst of plenty? Indeed. Why is Africa still basking in underdevelopment when she has all the required human and material resources to become a highly development economy? Why has it been difficult to resolve the crises of socio-economic and political development in Africa? What is the nature of these crises that confront the continent? Can the putative United States of Africa bring about the long awaited resolution of the hydra-headed challenges in the continent? Or would it be just one of the same things experienced across the continent in the past. These are some of the puzzles that we seek to unravel in this paper, with a view to laying the basis for a lasting development in this continent.

To discuss issues central to this paper, it is organized into the following sections. The first section examines conceptual and theoretical issues. The second examines the background to Africa's development. Third, explores the idea of the United States of Africa; how practicable it could be to the states in Africa and its people. The fourth, discusses the obstacles to the realization of the vision of the United States of Africa, in a global economic competition. The final section explores the implications of the creation of the United States of Africa.

## **2. Methodology**

This study, which is theoretical in nature, drew its arguments mostly from secondary data, which included, textbooks, journal publications and internet sources. Subsequently, relevant sources of this research were fairly and professionally scrutinised, understood and tested with the available literature for the purpose of the research. Inter alia, it included scan-reading, comprehensive and critical reading and writing down ideas. Authoritative scholarly sources were reviewed, during a desktop study. The purpose was to identify the relevant publications and apply them in the research.

## **3. Conceptual and Theoretical Orientation**

Concepts in social and management sciences do not easily lend themselves to universally agreed definition. This is rightly supported by Ewuim, Agbodike and Igbokwe-Ibeto (2015) who argued that every definition perhaps is only relevant within the

parameters set for a given investigation. The ultimate goal of every human organization, be it a state or business entity, is to bring about development in such a way and manner that at any given point in its evolution, it experiences a state that is progressively better than the previous one. In this progression from one state of being to another, the socio-cultural values of the forces driving the process must be distinct and clear. This will give their final output and outcome a formidable character. It is against this background that development has been conceived of, as a multi-dimensional process involving the reorganization of the entire economic and socio-cultural value system (Todaro, 1990). And in addition to improvement in income and output, it typically involves radical changes in institutional, social and administrative structures as well as in particular attitudes and behaviours even in customs and beliefs (Todaro, 1990:87). Yet, development as a concept refers to the ability of people to use their cultural values to improve the lives of the people and their environment. However, this process should not be pursued in a manner that is injurious to future generations. In other words, development should be pursued in such a way that takes care of the present needs without hindering the ability of future generations to cater for their own. Rudeback (1997:84) posits that development is a:

Comprehensive process through which population recovers its own resources and put them to work according to its own cultural values in order to resolve its individual and collective problems by creating over a period of time a frame of life where each stage is better than the proceeding one. Development should result from the dynamic and durable linking together of the natural environment and the socio-cultural setting of the population.

From the views expressed above, it is clear that development must involve the use of a people's cultural values to solve its challenges so that the synthesis that would be arrived at will be indigenous to the people, durable and an improvement on what they have had in the past. This kind of development takes a unique character that the people can truly call their own. This means development should be sustainable.

Sustainable development is seen as development that meets our present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (UN/ISDR, 2009). The United Nations identified three elements which should work together to ensure sustainable development. These are economic development, social development and environmental

protection (UN General Assembly, 2005; Mekeown, 2002).

However, in the history of developed nations, development paradigm is guided by socio-economic and political ideology. The Japanese call theirs confucianism. With this ideology, they have been able to pursue development with unparalleled commitment and enthusiasm. The exponential growth they have experienced in very short period of time, attest to the efficacy of this ideology. Western Europe and North America call their modernization and have strived hard to persuade the rest of the world particularly Asia, Latin America and Africa to embrace this form of developmental process. Modernization is the total transformation of a traditional society into the types of technology and associated social organization that characterizes the advanced economically prosperous and relatively stable nations of the west. It is along this line of thought that Olugbemi (1990:11), graphically put modernization as: The process of change towards those types of social, economic and political systems that have developed in Western Europe and North America from the seventeenth century to the nineteenth and have then spread to other European countries and in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to South America, Asian and African continents.

- Africa is endowed with abundant human and material resources that are capable of transforming the continent into a developed economy, but then due to internal and external reasons, the continent is still underdeveloped. This is in spite of the observations of Goulet cited in Igbokwe-Ibeto (2003:30) that underdevelopment is shocking: the squalor, diseases, unnecessary death and hopelessness of it all no man understands if underdevelopment remains for him a mere statistical reflection of low income, poor housing, premature mortality, the most emphatic observer can speak objectively about underdevelopment only after undergoing personally or vicariously, the shock of underdevelopment.

The above submission of Goulet depicts the seriousness with which underdevelopment should be rejected by Africa and Africans and indeed all societies. The infiltration into Africa of western socio-economic and political systems and values has displaced and distorted the evolving indigenous systems and values in Africa that should have served as foundation of an indigenous developmental process. But the socio-economic and political penetration and distortion of Africa's development patterns have continued to pose the greatest obstacle

to integrated and cohesive continent and a united people.

The current neo-liberal economic and political reforms going on in Africa is just another name for propagating western hegemony. In other words, it is modernization by other means. While African countries have strived hard to come out of their developmental cul-de-sac, the monstrous obstacles posed by western ideology, have so far proved a hard nut to crack for many African countries. Thus, years of development planning in Africa have not been able to effectively launch the continent on the path of sustainable development process. The reason for this situation cannot be properly understood by merely looking at the current deregulation of the continent's economy or the untidy multi-party democracy. There are structural reasons both political and economic for this state of growth in the continent.

Ironically, there have not been agreements on why Africa has remained a continent in distress. It is common to find conflicting accounts and discordant tones on the African predicaments. Mandami, 2002; Ake, 1993; Ekeh, 1975) have all identified the derooted manner in which the state emerged in Africa and the implication of this for development in the continent. For them, this has led to the alienation of the people in civil society from the state and its actions and activities. The conflict between the neo-traditional systems and the legal rational system of modern government can be explained from this perspective (Amuwo, 1998:187).

Scholars of the dependency genre are quick to identify the mal-integration of developing states in Africa into the world capitalist order that is based on unequal economic relations as the cause of the continent's many challenges. Amin (1987), Ake (1981), Rodney (1976), Galthung (1971), have all provided graphic details of how the unequal and unjust global capitalist system has rendered Africa underdeveloped at the expense of the developed West. When the above arguments are examined, a framework of analysis is arrived at that which encapsulates historical approach for the purpose of detailed and objective examination of categorical imperatives for United States of Africa in the age of global economic competition.

#### 4. The Nature of Africa's Political-Economy

Africa is the most populous black continent in the world. It is potentially a great continent by reason of the enormous resources found within its boundaries but begging to be harnessed for the good of the

common wealth. Today, Africa has found itself in the background of socio-economic, political and technological developments. Long before the European incursion into Africa, the continent was the credo of civilization in various fields of human endeavors. It took three epochal events: slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism to lay the foundation for the penetration and exploitation of the African peoples and societies. It is against this background we must understand and appreciate the present marginalization and underdevelopment in the continent. These epochal events distorted and disoriented the continent and its people to the extent that presently it is one of the poorest continents in the world.

Africa is a paradox which illustrates and highlights neo-colonialism. Her earth is rich, yet, products that come from her soil continue to enrich not Africans predominantly but groups and individuals who operate to Africa's impoverishment (Nkrumah quoted in Mutiso and Rohio, 1975).

Several developments have mediated and shaped the contemporary African state. Slavery, colonialism, neo-liberalism, cultural receptivity of Africa, and the cold war had been mentioned. In spite of these forces of change, African societies still maintain some of its cherished traditional values that gave them their unique characters prior to the coming of the Europeans. While some of these values have been assimilated into the emergent social structure in Africa, substantial part of its original form remain strong and vibrant in many communities across the continent. Ake (1993:17) reminded us that: African cultural "values" the communication of being rather than its privatization which is what Western culture values. In the western tradition, being is seen in terms of separation, independence, and conflict. African cultures regard being as communal. Persons have identity only because they belong to a community, their freedom lies in the concrete capabilities, privileges, and immunities, which derives from communal capabilities, privileges and communities which they derive from communal life.

Mandani (2002:41) has noted the customary basis of African political system and how it emphasized consultation, restraint to the abusive use of political power. Rulers in Africa's communities were not arbitrary but sought wide spread approval before, during and after decisions are made. Furthermore, "although tribes organized under the domination of elders, they contained redistributive mechanisms that thwarted tendencies to reproduce inequalities in a cumulative fashion" (Mandani, 2002:41).

All these however changed with the infiltration of Europeans into the hinter-land of most African communities and the introduction of the “process of commercial divide and rule programme” (Mandani, 2002:497). The emergent to colonial economy brought unequal relationship between the African farmer who produces mainly agricultural products and the Europeans who brought in semi-processed and processed goods. This period also witnessed the introduction of a new set of norms that saw the transfer of resources from the African economy to the colonial economy. Therefore, this new norm turned to be disadvantageous to Africans. Gavin and Oyemakinde (1980) put the issue succinctly thus: One speaks of “norms” but one of the norms that come with the new importance of the colonial economy was the very waywardness and uncertainty that resulted from the strengthened linkage between (Africa) and the world market which at that particular time and as it is today, was unusually unstable.

Apart from the waywardness and uncertainties in the world capitalist system, its exploitative character accounts for underdevelopment and dependence of the African continent upon the other continents of the world. One area this has been well demonstrated is in the negative balance of trade and payment between Africa and the western world i.e. Europe and North America. Yet, upon the combined influence of Christianity and Islam in Africa, no African country has officially allocated a national holiday in honor of gods of indigenous religion. All African countries have national holidays that either favours Christian or Muslim faith believers both of which are imported religion and festival. The indigenous religion is at best ethnical rather than national occasions. Also typical is, the political importance which European languages have acquired in Africa. While nobody talks about Francophone or English speaking Asians, African countries are usually categories in terms of the European language they have adopted as official medium of expression e.g. English or French speaking country. A number of people in former French African colonial territories retained dual citizenship with France even after political independence. It is speculated that some African heads of state may still secretly be citizens of France. Annual holidays in France continue to be part of the elite culture of francophone West and North Africa.

The emphasis on export of agricultural produces by African countries has not led to development of both its producers and the continent. One reason for this is the unequal terms of trade between the developed and developing countries in Africa. This argument is graphically presented by Goulbourne (1986). In his

words, developed capitalist countries have found a way to arrest the tendency for the rate of profit to fall partly by political means – these countries are able to set the price for manufactured as well as imported agricultural goods through control of the market place and support of their government. By the same process, the expected benefits from greater productivity are reversed because African countries, like other Third World primary – goods producing countries, constantly need to produce more and more but receives less and less through adverse terms of trade.

All these distortions in a supposedly free market system do not come by chance. There are structural mechanisms put in place by the West to ensure their sustenance and by implication the widening gap between poor and rich countries. Galtung calls them vertical trade and feudal interaction patterns (Galtung cited in Weede 1993:349).

With particular reference to trade relations between the developed and underdeveloped countries, the latter exported raw materials while he imported processed goods. The developed countries demonstrate the reverse pattern. But while production of raw material created few positive outcomes, export of sophisticated processed goods contributes to human capital formation among other advantages (Weede 1993:349).

Thus, the underdevelopment of Africa is “structural, historical and tantalizing” (Valenzuela and Valenzuela 1993:205). The industrialized countries structurally and historically have an edge and are properly positioned to compete and resist any emerging economic force from the underdeveloped world. It is against these backgrounds that the idea or concept of a United States of Africa is being contemplated to pull human and material resources together in order to compete favourably with the world economic powers.

What should be the nature of this union? What should be its modus operandi? What are the challenges that may face it? What are the possibilities or seeds of hope? These are some of the questions we shall examine in the section that follows.

##### **5. United States of Africa and Global Economic Competition: Limitations and Possibilities**

One of these responsibilities facing Africa leaders is to come together in a union in order to move the continent out of its present socio-economic

quagmires, is by pulling human and material resources together for the good of Africans and development of the continent. Giving the competitive edge the industrialized countries has over underdeveloped countries, only proactive measures based on conscious economic actions and disciplined leadership can put the continent of Africa on a good stand with their counterpart in Western Europe and North America. This is captured by Nkrumah when he admonished “let me remind all of you irrespective of your colour, creed, race or tribe that a great responsibility lies on us all and honorable responsibility by closing rank and uniting our efforts in the service of our motherland’ (in Mutiso and Rohio, 1975).

While this imperative has long been appreciated by Africa’s foremost statesmen and industrialists, the global economic structure of domination, negative political leadership, the global crises of capitalism, past cold war politics, among others, combined to frustrate this vision of a United States of Africa. These pressures have continued to the present time, to the extent that Africans seem to have lost the believe in themselves and their abilities to solve their development challenges.

While it is widely acknowledged that self-reliance is the best form of preservation and competition with others, the loss of confidence to develop the “African way” has led to the application of foreign ideas and solutions to the continents economic challenges. The neo-liberal monetary reform programme of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank may not bring Africa’s economies out of its distress state. The view of Olukoshi (1998:27) in this regard is apt. According to him:

The neo-liberal monetarist reform of the adjustment model, with its emphasis on a zero sum market approach, was one which from the onset carried huge social cost. Not surprisingly, resistance to the implementation of the adjustment programme has come not only among the popular social groups that are the biggest losers from its adoption but also among the more privileged groups that profited from the effort at economic liberalization.

African leaders have experimented on so many ideas, concepts and models of development without much to show as positive dividends. Most recent of these efforts are the New Economic Partnership for African Development (NEPAD); African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM); African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), etc. However, the United States of Africa concept is not just an addition to the

litany of name dropping with little or no realistic chance of success. It is a novel and vigorous challenge to African nations to become one.

While there had been inflow of foreign aids and other resources into Africa in recent years, Akinbobola (2007:2) notes that these “...resources were seldomly invested in production and their conditionalities have tremendously depleted the growth of African economies”.

This prevalence of kleptocratic politics has been a major source of Africa’s development dilemma. The degree of corruption is so widespread that a former African leader had to advise on how to steal public funds and use them. On May 1, 1976, Marshal Mobutu Sese-Seko, former president of Zaire now Democratic Republic of Congo, declared to a bewildered nation that, ‘f you steal... do not steal too much at a time. You may be arrested. Steal cleverly little by little. And if you succeed in stealing, invest what you have stolen in the country itself. Those who export what they steal are the enemies of the Republic’ (in Amuwo 1998:187).

All efforts to curb political corruption in Africa had proved abortive. The recent adoption of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) is supposed to bring some degree of financial sanity to African countries as it attempts to promote transparency and accountability in the use of donor aid. It is however, doubtful if this initiative will have reduced the propensity for corruption among African sit-tight rulers. Most African leaders that reluctantly embrace democratic rule still find old authoritarian was of governance more profitable than the democratic method.

## 6. The Possibilities of United States of Africa

As huge as the challenges that confront the African continent are, they are not insurmountable and the realization of a United States of Africa would be a step in the right direction. There is enormous potential for success of the project.

One of the obstacles to economic development in Africa is authoritarian rule. Fortunately, however, democracy irrespective of the variant, has become the only “game in town” paving the way for multi-party system of government. While most African countries are yet to consolidate democracy, the process is ongoing and its sustenance could bring about true democracy. However, free and fair elections are crucial to liberal democracy, which must therefore be encouraged.

But a major challenge to the competitiveness of African economics vis-à-vis world economic powers, are the prevalence of migrated ideas from Europe which are considered indispensable to Africa's economic recovery and development. It has long been acknowledged that foreign ideas and techniques cannot bring Africa out of its crises of socio-economic and political development. As Balogun (1981:155) has rightly noted, "it is fatal mistake to expect management problems in one country to be effectively tackled by concepts and techniques developed in a completely different setting". The failure of some policies from Europe, such as modernization and Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) are demonstration of this fact.

In a globalized economic system, African countries must strive to carve a niche for themselves especially in a global context dominated by Multi-National Companies (MNCs) and Trans-National Corporations (TNCs) that have enormous resource base and technological know-how. In such context, emerging economies in Africa like their counterpart in Asia should, concentrate on their areas of strength in relation to their foreign competitors.

They must exploit their local content and better understanding of the local market to their advantage. In some developing economies like India and the Asian Tigers, indigenous companies have managed to hold their own in spite of competitions from the bigger and larger multinationals. For example: Khanna and Palepu (2006:5) have argued that in spite of the enormous constraint facing emerging markets in developing countries, in the areas of access to capital or talent, institutional void, lack of sophisticated technologies, etc. However, many emerging markets and companies have become world class businesses by capitalizing on their knowledge of local product markets, they have kept multinational rivals at bay by judiciously adopting to the special characteristics of customers and business ecosystems at home. The emerging giants have also exploited similarities between geographically proximate developing markets to grow across borders, but a sound political focus and direction could be provided by the continent's leaders. Most of them still believe in maintaining an enclave where they can have total authority and power. This is old fashion because the world is coming together, becoming a global family. The European Union is waxing stronger by coming together. But some African leaders are balkanizing their societies. This point is made poignantly by Legun (1965:121) that, "from the evidence at our disposal, it would appear that whilst European nations may be rightly accused of balkanizing Africa in the nineteenth century, yet

they have atoned for it by federating many African territories, which are now being balkanized by African nationalists on the attainment of the independence of their countries'.

Many years after the attainment of independence in many African countries, national unity still remains elusive. Wars of attrition provoked and sustained by African leaders' ethnic chauvinism and rapid quest for power, still remain major issues affecting national and continental development. Unless these occurrences are reduced or minimized, it will be difficult to achieve the United States of Africa.

## 7. Conclusion and Implications

Africa and Africans have the potentials for success as a continent and people. But it requires statesmen and leaders who are selfless to actualize these potentials. The vision of a United States of Africa is more forceful today than ever before due to development in the world that requires pulling together of human and material resources in order to mitigate the challenges of the global system. Africa must not be left out of this drive. But how prepared is the continent? We identified some of the limitations to the attainment of a United States of Africa in its competition with the World economic powers. Africans must change their mindset and be pragmatic in approaching issues of change and competition from outside. But the state should champion this process of change and development by providing the funds, general framework and the legal backing for a private sector driven economy.

African countries should be able to achieve a mix, as China has done of central planning and free-market economics. Also, through development plans that are rigorously pursued, development targets could be set and realized. But such plans must have the people in mind and involved them from conception to execution of such plans. Development plans in Africa had often failed, because the people were not carried along and involved as stakeholders in the process.

Science and technology should also be embraced. We may not fully understand why the West experienced an exponential leap ahead, 'but we know some of the reasons why Africa, Asia, etc slipped behind: a religious mindset that spurned the material World, a lack of belief in idea of human progress, a natural deference to authority, and a lack of critical questioning were responsible" (Mahbubani 2008:58).

These gaps between the Western and African mindsets must be bridged if Africa must have a

competitive edge against the West. Of course, these could come from qualitative education and researches. By implication African government should spend more on education.

Emphasis on merit rather than parochial considerations should be adopted and entrenched. Anything short of this will draw Africa backward and make them ill-equipped to compete with World powers on the economic front.

It is often said that ‘no nation is an island unto itself’, Africa must apply Western best practices in a pragmatic manner in order to compete successfully with World powers economically. The United States of Africa when it evolves must approach the challenges of modernizing Africa with “no ideological perception or blinders” (Mahubani, 2008:79). Japan was “willing to consider Western best practices from any country and were prepared to mix and match policies in an eclectic fashion” (Mahubani, 2008:79). Africa must endeavor to mix and match policies not embracing them without modification and adaptation to its environment, as the case of SAP has aptly demonstrated in Africa.

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