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## **Why is Africa Lagging Behind in Economic Development? A Critical Review**

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**Abstract:**

*The majority of African countries have passed the threshold of fifty years of Independence. Yet, the majority of them, save the Republic of South Africa, and a few ones here and there, are still struggling to develop the basic social and physical structures and infrastructures that can put them on the path of development and modernity. Against this backdrop, countless development theories and arguments have been proposed about why Africa is not developed and still is poor despite being the second largest continent and by far one of the richest ones there is. As a result, development has become an elusive quest and challenge for generations of African leaders and their frustrated populations. This paper is set to explore why Africa is not developing and shed light on other arguments that are overlooked when analyzing or debating why African countries are lagging behind in their socio-economic development quest. The paper intends to answer those questions in an interdisciplinary manner and touches upon social, cultural, religious, political, economical, and international relations factors. For, to understand Africa's economic problems, one has got to go beyond the mere economic indicators such as the GDP and GNP and bring to the fore other non-economic factors that are hampering Africa's development.*

**Keywords:** *Africa, Development, Foreign Aid, Debt Management*

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## **Background**

Africa as a whole plays a marginal role in international trade. Its total share of global export represents 2.4 percent while Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) by itself accounts only for 1.7 percent.<sup>1</sup> Yet, international trade for so many SSA countries is crucial for the growth of their economies given that foreign trade represents a high percentage of their GDPs (see Table 4). However, when Africa's total share of global exports is compared to other major countries in the global economy such as the United States (US), the European Union (EU), China, and other export leading nations, it becomes clear that Africa is not a major actor in the global economy despite what many Africans like to believe or tell themselves (see Tables 1 & 5). This misperception of Africa's importance in the world economy in the eyes of many Africans emanates from Africa's having some of the most sought out raw materials and minerals that the industrialized nations of Western Europe, the US, Japan, Australia, China, and many emerging economies such as Turkey, Brazil, and India all covet. This contradiction baffles many Africans and also gives them a tremendous amount of misplaced pride to claim that Africa is under-developed simply because of the rest of the world. As such, they squarely blame Africa's economic under-performance on former colonizers and the West in general without acknowledging part of Africa's dismal economic performance emanates mostly from a failed African leadership. This narrative, though true and substantiated in many instances, does not tell the whole story even though the asymmetric economic and political relations of Africa with its former colonial powers do not generally equally benefit it. This is so because the international economic relations of the majority of African countries with the West and the rest of the world are of dependence

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<sup>1</sup> See World Trade Organization International Trade Statistics 2014.

rather than complementarily in a true sense.<sup>2</sup> For example, the bulk of Africa's export products to the rest of the world are soft commodities, petroleum products, and extractive resources. And thus, Africa does not substantially export industrial products or technology needed in developed countries (see Table 2). This export deficit of manufactured and technological products from Africa to the rest of the world prevents it from creating wealth derived from value addition of its know how. And consequently, a high percentage of the GDPs of many African countries that are engaged in the international trade comes from oil and extractive industry products such as coltan, platinum, uranium, gold, diamond, and soft commodities such as coffee, cocoa, and cotton. With that said, yes, Africa is certainly rich and richer than many continents, but still, it is not a major player in the world economy. Therefore, Africans should beware of this reality in order for them and their respective leaders to look for real solutions for the economic stagnation of the Continent.

## Introduction

Africa's development discourse has consumed generations of Africans since the years of colonization and decolonization era.<sup>3</sup> The same discourse, arguments and theories on why Africa's development efforts have been sputtering and languishing are held by the new generation of African leaders and their bulging youth populations.<sup>4</sup> The African Independence leaders had all grappled in the early '60s to late '70s with the questions of how to develop their respective countries and put them at par with the rest of the then so-called developed nations of the Western Europe, the US, and Japan. The second generation of the African leaders, that is, leaders that took the rein of power in their respective countries from early to mid-eighties until the first

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<sup>2</sup> For conceptual understanding of this phenomenon, see Africa: Beyond the "new" dependency: A political economy by Luke Amadi in African Journal of Political Science and International Relations Vol. 6(8), pp. 191-203, December 2012

<sup>3</sup> See *AFRICA LEADERSHIP THE SUCCEEDING GENERATION CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES* by Prof. Ahmed Mohiddin.

<sup>4</sup> For further details, see Population Facts Youth Population Trends and Sustainable Development United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division at [www.unpopulation.org](http://www.unpopulation.org), May 2015 No. 2015/1.

decade of the 21st Century had all had to deal with the same challenges of the development questions that consumed their predecessors. While these development questions were the agenda of the day in Africa's respective capitals, the African populations at large had also been grappling with the same questions as well. In addition, Africa's development or underdevelopment challenges were also being discussed in places such as Washington, Brussels, Paris, London, Tokyo and Rome, to say the least. These discussions were usually held under the auspices of either the International Institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, or the Club of Rome and the Organization for Economic-Cooperation and Development (OECD). The same interests and discussions about why and what is keeping African countries from economically growing and responding to their social, political, educational, and cultural challenges were also being debated in venues such as the Universities, Colleges, Mosques, Churches, High Schools, and other learning institutions with interests in Africa's development and economic growth across the Continent and the world at large. Moreover, with the dissolution of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR), the end of the Cold War, and the embrace of the liberal and market economic ideology in the early '90s by the African governments, the explosion of Global Development Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) and private philanthropic organizations such as the *Gates and Melinda foundation*, among many others, Africa's development challenges again became the discourse of those mentioned organizations. Yet, despite almost a half of a century of these Africa's development debates and interests by the International Community and African leaders of all ideological stripes and their respective populations, it has become clear to any astute observer with interests in Africa's affairs that Africa has not made the development progress that everyone has been expecting of her. On the contrary, things have even gotten worse in many African countries when one takes a close watch at the Human Development Index Rankings and many

other socio-economic indices.<sup>5</sup> In short, the question then is, why have African countries failed to get on the development track that many other natural resources deficient countries of Southeast and East Asia have successfully been able to do so? Further, are all these development theories such as the trickle-down theory or export-led theory<sup>6</sup> that were sold to the African leaders in the '80s simply not compatible with Africa? Or are those theories simply not the adequate theories for true Africa's development? And given that there are so many additional theories or arguments such as corruption, bad governance, bad leadership, lack of proper education, skills, and competence, and health care infrastructures among many others that many critics of Africa's failure to develop cite, again, the reality of many countries of the world that had faced the same issues and challenges that Africa has been facing, demonstrate the weakness and shortcomings of those arguments. Among many of those countries that just a few decades ago were no better than Africa as a whole, some have climbed the ladder of economic development and even joined the ranks of middle and upper income countries.<sup>7</sup> Some are even what we call today the emerging economies<sup>8</sup> and members of the G20. Therefore, if that is so, what is it then that is keeping Africans from economically finding the magic formulas to develop their own countries? Or else, are there other hidden reasons that are keeping Africa from economically developing the way other nations are doing? Hence, attempting to answer these questions and shedding light on Africa's internal

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<sup>5</sup> 36 out of 54 African countries are ranked with low human development and only 12 are ranked with medium human development and 5 with high human development; go to [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_African\\_countries\\_by\\_Human\\_Development\\_Index](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_African_countries_by_Human_Development_Index).

<sup>6</sup> See *The Rise and Fall of Export-led Growth* by Tomas I. Palley New America Foundation July 2011, Working Paper No. 675, Levy Economics Institute of Bard College.

<sup>7</sup> Out of 20 emerging markets today, China, South Korea, Turkey, and Brazil, Indonesia, Peru and the Philippines for instance, were no better than the majority of post-independence African countries in the '60s and '70s. For further information, see <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/photo-essays/2013-01-31/the-top-20-emerging-markets>.

<sup>8</sup> Indonesia, China, Brazil, and the Republic of Korea are emerging economies and members of the G20 that a few decades ago were not economically better than many SSA countries. Yet, they are middle and income countries today.

challenges that go counter to its social and economic development are the main objectives of this paper.

## **Where Did the African Leaders Go Wrong?**

### *1. Foreign Aid as the Panacea of Development*

The conception of foreign aid by the African leaders and a large number of their populations to a certain extent, is the key to addressing the *problematique* of why Africa has been economically lagging behind in the last four decades. That is, many African leaders in general have naively thought and many are still thinking today that foreign aid is development. When in fact, this is further from the truth. Development therefore as defined here shall be a number of objectives set by a given government to develop its own society and progress towards the achievement of standards that are deemed acceptable to its population and in accordance with its local and national contexts. This in essence, has got to be thought out, conceived, and framed from the national perspectives by national leaders themselves, and subsequently be turned into policies that local, regional, and central governments implement and measure at an agreed and acceptable time frame. That is, development has got to be an indigenous initiative and realization. Once framed from that perspective, it will then become clear to the African citizens and their leaderships that this idea of outsourcing the social and economic development of the Continent to a group of foreign experts that may miss or not understand the local and national idiosyncrasies, however well intentioned they may be, is simply unwise and counterproductive. Therefore, foreign aid should simply be understood as a helping hand and not be confused with the development itself. Yet, this myth or complete misunderstanding of what development aid is, has supplanted national development strategies conceived and concocted by early national leaders that were more in tune with their local, regional, and national

development agendas.<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, International Community, led by the NGOs, and development and policy organizations such as the IMF and the World Bank, *inter alia*, are fully responsible for the misreadings of what development aid has become for many African leaders and their respective populations. For, they have been at the driver's seat advising and counseling African leaders in their elusive quest for economic development and social progress in the last four decades.<sup>10</sup>

## **The Concepts of Development and Foreign Aid: Where Did It All Begin?**

### *1. Origin of Foreign Aid: 1945 to Present*

Foreign Development Assistance (FDA) or Foreign Aid as commonly known came into existence at the end of the Second World War along with the establishment of the Bretton Woods Institutions; i.e., the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the General Agreements on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). Since the end of World War II, the world of then and now are two different worlds. For instance, in 1945, only Ethiopia, Liberia, and South Africa (Apartheid) were independent. As such, over 90 percent of the current 54 African countries were still colonies of various Western European colonial powers. Subsequently, the Cold War has come and gone (1944-1991); the Berlin War has come and gone (1961-1992); Richard Nixon and Deng Xiaoping have normalized the US-China diplomatic relations (1974); the two energy crises (1973, 1979) have come and gone; economic and financial globalization has become a household term since the late '90s; Al-Qaeda and September 11, 2001 have become synonymous on the minds of millions of people around the world; the invasion of Iraq by the US and its allies and the War in Afghanistan (2001, 2003) have come and gone; the historic Presidency of Barak Hussein Obama

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<sup>9</sup> See *AFRICA LEADERSHIP THE SUCCEEDING GENERATION CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES* by Prof. Ahmed Mohiddin.

<sup>10</sup> See EIR Volume 10, Number 15, April 19, 1983 Documentation African Officials Blast Club of Rome, IMF; and Le Président Denis Sassou Nguesso le Pouvoir et la Vie available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QfaMF3BbxCI>.

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(2008-2016) has come and gone; the great financial crisis of '07 and '08 has come and devastated millions of pensions and years of financial savings and wiped out millions of former Middle Class families in the US, Europe, and many parts of the world; the Arab Spring has come and gone (2011); the UK has voted to exit the EU (dubbed *Brexit*) after 43 years of membership (1973-2016) and called into question the future of the European Integration itself (1957 to today); and the shocking presidential election victory of Donald J. Trump on November 8, 2016, and his Administration are upon us today. Yet, the Bretton Woods Institutions as mentioned-above are still operating just like when they were established. And despite numerous reform attempts, no significant reforms to this day have been undertaken by either the International Community or the sole remaining superpower, i.e., the US and the EU member countries that established the above-cited Bretton Woods Institutions in order to reflect the changing international economic and political realities of the 21st Century.

The Marshall Plan<sup>11</sup> which is credited of having helped the beneficiary Western European countries to recover and rebuild their shattered economies in the aftermath of the Second World War, convinced the US and its allies and the world at large that rich industrialized nations could help developing countries grow economically and become part of the global economy and international trading system. As a result, former European colonial powers took the cue from that and started their official development assistance programs for the majority of their former African colonies in the early '60s. In a way, they felt a sense of responsibility and historic debt towards their former colonies. Peace and Trade and Commerce and Security between the colonial powers and their newly independent former colonies became the rationales of the new Post-Independence International Economic System. On the European Continent, the US would guarantee the security of its allies (former colonial powers) through the North Atlantic Treaty Organization

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<sup>11</sup> The Marshall Plan Concept was presented to the world at a speech delivered on June 5, 1947 at Harvard University by Secretary of State George Marshall. The program was officially known as the European Recovery Program (ERP). For further information, see the George C. Marshall Foundation.



(NATO) established in 1949.<sup>12</sup> On the economic side, the US, through the Marshall Plan and the Treaty of Rome establishing the European Economic Community (EEC, 1957) which would later become the European Union (EU) through the Treaty of Maastrich in 1992, would support and promote the trans-atlantic trade and commerce. Meanwhile, during the height of the Cold War, the US and its allies and the former USSR extended their ideological rivalries to the developing world of Africa, Latin America, and Asia. And consequently, they astutely conditioned their development assistance with their geopolitical and ideological interests. As a result, good governance, development policies and projects, aimed at fighting poverty and uplifting the socio-economic conditions of African citizens were not a priority to either the Americans or African leaders themselves. What mattered then was to secure and prop up Dictators such as Mobutu and Mengistu Haile Mariam and authoritarian regimes, and sway them away from the influence of the former Soviet Union. That is, making them renounce or avoid espousing a Socialist Economic and Political Model or ideology. Then came the Arab-Israeli War of 1973. The direct consequence of that war was the high oil price (s) on the global economy caused by the embargo of the Arab oil exporting countries against the US and European countries that they accused of supporting Israel. As a result, the surplus of the oil money revenues from the same Arab oil exporting countries were deposited into the Western Banks, which subsequently, were lent to many developing countries of Asia, Latin America and Africa. And with the global economic slowdown of the early '80s and the drop of the commodity prices of the late '70s, many African countries found themselves unable to service their debt to their international creditors. As a consequence, the result of those unfortunate international events was the explosion of the debt crises that have been hindering the socio-economic development of numerous African countries ever since.

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<sup>12</sup> The North Atlantic Treaty Organization also known as the North Atlantic Alliance was established based on the North Atlantic Treaty signed on 4 April 1949. For further information, see [www.nato.int](http://www.nato.int).

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Furthermore, the unexpected end of the Cold War in 1991 due to the disintegration of the former Soviet Union, along with the Fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and the advent of the Economic and Financial Globalization in the '90s, brought with them other implications for the socio-economic developments of Africa. Thus, with the new world order ushered in as pronounced by former President George H. W. Bush, international debt creditors decided to engage in debt cancellation or relief, and all the while pressuring debtor African countries to liberalize and privatize their economies (thanks to the Reagan Administration and the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) imposed by the IMF and the World Bank). Further, with the advent of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, and the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the West decided to make its Foreign Aid conditional to its national security. Moreover, with the environmental threats of Climate Change and its highly publicized consequences on the international security and global economy, environmental policy concerns became another add-on agenda attached to the granting of foreign aid by the West to the developing countries. Subsequently, international development policies gradually became what came to be known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in force since January 2016.<sup>13</sup> And with the signing of the Paris climate agreement in December 2015, and the Marrakech climate conference of November 2016 convened to operationalize it, foreign aid is now anchored to the international environmental diplomacy. Hence, this *tour de force* of the International Trade, Economics, Security, Finance, Environmental Policy and Relations, and the conditioning of the foreign aid are the factors that have been shaping policy directions of the Political Economy of the Official Development Assistance Programs. Therefore, understanding this is key to coming to terms with why foreign aid should not be confused with development per se. For, it is clear that Africa has been a passive actor in all of these cited events; and major powers and global actors are unequivocally the ones that have been

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<sup>13</sup> For further information, go to <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>; and <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>.

setting up policies regarding development assistance that are in accordance with their ideological and geopolitical interests, and thus directly or indirectly, affect the social and economic development of Africa.

Challenges and Obstacles to Africa's Economic Growth and Development: 1960 to Present

### *1. Political Instability and Crises and Africa's Leadership Failure*

Political instability and crises are and have been part of Africa's political culture since the early years of Independence (1960s). Coup d'États, Civil Unrests, Civil Wars, and Regional Wars are all part of the Africa's political staple.<sup>14</sup> Not accepting this reality and their pernicious consequences on Africa's social and economic progress and development, is simply either naive or looking at Africa's challenges from a bad faith. This assertion applies to Africans in particular who sometimes overlook the prices that Africa has dearly paid for those political unrests and conflicts that haunt her today. As an example, the crumbling of the educational system in many African countries and the dilapidated or simply non-existent basic and acceptable health care facilities across the Continent in the last 4 decades, are the direct result of political instability and incessant conflicts that have destroyed the social and physical infrastructures, and capacity building of many post-Independence African countries. Though it is true that for some ideological motives and geopolitical reasons, some external powers or hidden forces have been and still are behind a number of political conflicts that take place in Africa.<sup>15</sup> Yet, one cannot help but also point fingers at the Africans themselves that have participated, and in some circumstances, are still participating in the destruction of their own countries and neighboring

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<sup>14</sup> For further details, see Conflict Trends in Africa, 1946-2004 A Macro-Comparative Perspective DFID Department for International Development.

<sup>15</sup> See The causes of conflict in Africa Consultation Document DFID Department for International Development.

ones in order to advance their personal and selfish political gains.<sup>16</sup> In addition, the inability of the African countries to successfully confront and eradicate health epidemics such as Malaria, Aids, Ebola, among many others, without the direct assistance of foreign powers, has again its root cause in the political instability and civil conflicts that have bankrupted many of the African economies.<sup>17</sup> The same goes with the debt crises that have afflicted Africa since the end of the '70s and early '80s to today. Servicing those odious debt that are eating the meagre State resources of many African countries could also be derived from the political instability and constant change of governments in Africa since the early days of political independence in the early '60s. That is to say, were African governments stable enough to devise a clear and consistent economic development policy, African populations, along with honest foreign investors, would more than sacrifice to help their respective governments repay those debts, and allocate whatever economic means they may have available for their own national development priorities. Therefore, one can say that, even though some of the Africa's debt lenders have cancelled some of the debts that were suffocating many African countries some years ago, since the underlying political and economic strategies of many African countries are not devised by the African themselves, as of today, no real social and economic progress is to be shown for the majority of the Africans<sup>18</sup> (see Table 6). And it is true that the international economic conditions of the late '70s and early '80s had adversely affected the development programs and the drive of the post-independent African governments, i.e., the fall of commodities prices in the late '70s, the two oil crises of 1973 and 1979, the global economic slowdown

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<sup>16</sup> See World Policy Institute *Deadly Legacy: U.S. Arms to Africa and the Congo War* by William D. Hartung and Bridget Moix; and see the Charles Taylor War Crimes Trial A Global Witness briefing on a dictator, blood diamonds and timber, and two countries in recovery, May 2012.

<sup>17</sup> See President's Emergency Plan for Aids Relief (PEPFAR) founded in 2003 by President George Walker Bush with initial \$ 15 Million guarantee to be spent in the first five years on prevention, treatment and research on HIV/AIDS in Africa; and see also *Tráfico de influencias en África: El eje de las finanzas islámicas* *Le Monde diplomatique en español enero 2017* where it is reported that Saudi Arabia made a donation of \$ 34 Million to Africa for fighting the virus of Ebola.

<sup>18</sup> See *The Economic Decline in Africa* by Les Picker in the National Bureau of Economic Research available at <http://www.nber.org/digest/jan04/w9865.html>.

of the early '80s, and the subsequent debts that resulted from those crises, and as a result of all that, they all have contributed to shackle African countries ever since.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, one cannot absolve the African leaders and peoples themselves from being co-responsible for the unaccounted ills, and never-ending social and economic woes and crises that have afflicted Africa and keep her from economically growing in a sustainable manner and providing basic social safety nets to the majority of her populations.

## *2. Security and Homegrown Terrorist Organizations*

Another crippling challenge to Africa's economic development and social progress since the late '90s is Terrorism. Security issues have become another challenge that many African leaders did not foresee in the years after the Independence and before the end of the Cold War. That is so because many of the post-Independence African leaders were being absorbed in their own political dalliances while cultivating their image of 'Big Man', and therefore, failed to understand the implications of security on economic development. As a consequence, the lack of political stability and the failure of the African countries to economically grow in the '90s in particular, opened the doors to homegrown terrorist organizations such as the Nigerian-based *Boko Haram* and Somalia's *Al Shabaab* and turned them into the offshoots of global terror networks of *al-Qaeda* and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) today.<sup>20</sup> All of this could be traced back again to the political instability and lack of governments' strategic planning and care for their own populations because of the Africa's leadership failure to provide for basic social and economic needs for its own people. As an example, in the Sahel today, a faction of Jihadist groups that form part of the al-Qaida in the Magreb (Aqim) has been destabilizing the entire region, and with Mali as its prime target. In 2013 for instance, they almost succeeded in toppling the Malian central government and Bamako (the capital city) was almost overrun

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<sup>19</sup> See Africa rising? The economic history of sub-Saharan Africa by Biodum Olamosu and Andy Wynne, Issue: 146 and posted on 12th April 2015.

<sup>20</sup> See Quietly resurgent al-Qaida bides its time by Jason Burke International news The Guardian Weekly 06.01.17 7.

by them if it was not for the United Nations (UN) mandated French intervention in extremis. Consequently, Mali today is under constant threats of terrorist activities and battling narco-trafficking challenges and the preservation of its territorial integrity. As a result, this new plague of terrorism has become another disrupter against Africa's economic development. This in effect, has led affected African governments that were already facing great socio-economic challenges to divert their meagre resources in security matters rather than allocate them in sound national development projects.

### *Cultural Issues as Obstacles to Economic Development*

#### *1. Family*

It is rare that one speaks of cultural issues when debating or analyzing economic development challenges of Africa. However, we think some outdated Africa's cultural elements have a lot to do with Africa's failure to economically develop along with the rest of the countries of the world. That is to say, alluded cultural elements here understood as a mindset, values, norms and identity approach that many Africans exhibit when confronting issues and challenges that have afflicted the Continent since the early '80s of the last Century. That is to say, cultural norms, mindset, attitudes before life and sheer deflection of responsibilities onto others have all contributed and are still contributing to the deteriorating situations of millions of Africans while condemning them to a state of subsistence in their daily lives. For reasons beyond any reasonable person's logic and rational interpretations of life's realities, Africans, whether Christians or Muslims or non-religiously denominated ones, simply refuse to admit that Africa's dismal economic performance in all measures of life has a lot to do with how our families are structured and run their affairs in a world that has completely been transformed since the end of the Cold War and the advent of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. For example, we all know that life has gotten expensive to get by nowadays. Yet, Sub-Saharan African women on average bear 5.1 children

compared to a European, American, and Asian woman.<sup>21</sup> And everyone knows that having an uncontrollable number of children can only exacerbate the daily difficulties of any family in this world where money has become the measuring stick of anything and everything. And that, as well, hampers life and educational opportunities of those children whose parents cannot afford them proper education and prepare them to excel in this competitive world. As a consequence, not acceding to those educational opportunities would obviously put them in a disadvantage and marginalizes them from participating in the true development of their own countries and successfully fomenting their own families later in life. Hence, as an example, one can say that the root cause of corruption that has permeated every institution in Africa and endless problems that are suffocating millions of Africans today emanate from their own families. For instance, a member of a large African family that is successful is called upon by his relatives to become a de facto savior by shouldering everyone else's responsibility. This family generosity and assistance that has always been the hallmark and cultural trait of Africa then becomes an expected, demanded, and unwritten responsibility of the one that is shouldering it. Thus, from the family members' viewpoint, this *largesse* is then expected to extend to the clan and tribe members themselves. This in essence is what pushes so many Africans to live beyond their means and in many instances, engage in corruption practices at work and in the establishments where they serve. This mindset is at the root of the great evil of corruption at the local, regional, or central government institutions in many African countries. As another case in point, when a member of a given African family holds a Government or Corporate position, regardless of his or her rank, he or she is expected to attend and assist a large number of relatives; in addition to caring for his or her immediate family. That is, to work and attend problems that go beyond what that person earns in his or her respective work is an invitation that leads to temptation for corruption. As a result, the hidden or unspoken family pressure on many hardworking and honest Africans simply pushes many of them to mistake public resources

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<sup>21</sup> See World Population Data Sheet 2014 available at <http://www.prb.org/publications/datasheets/2014/2014-world-population-data-sheet/data-sheet.aspx>.

with personal resources; and the higher up they go in their administrative functions and responsibilities and private dealings, the worse it gets. As Samuel Ikhuwue, a Nigerian National based in Europe said, “intense family pressure to send money back home for instance is unbearable.” As an example, he said *“if two Nigerians live in the same European city and come from the same town or neighborhood in Nigeria, if one of the two is able to send money to his respective family, regardless of how he or she generates their income, and the other Nigerian is incapable of doing the same for his own family, no amount of reasonable explanation will suffice to convince that family about why he or she is not sending them money.”* He went on to give another example where he said *“if a Nigerian immigrant sends a car to his family, and another one who comes from the same city or town is unable to do likewise, the family of the one not sending a car to them will be so upset that they will tell their son or daughter to just pack and go back home since they have proven to be useless while living in Europe.”* He added that *“this pressure is so much that it drives so many honest, hardworking Nigerian immigrants, Men or Women, to simply engage in making money at any cost regardless of the consequences.”* Nonetheless, it is worth noting though, that not all Africans engage in corruption practices simply because of their immediate family demands; and those who fall into that category may be doing so for personal reasons such as greed and selfishness just like people everywhere in the world may engage in corruption practices for their own personal selfish reasons. With that being said, what happens then when one does not cater or attend to those family, clan, relatives and tribal demands? In many instances, that person simply becomes an outcast or a subject of derision. In certain circumstances, that person is even shunned away and psychologically punished by his or her own family members. For, not attending to those unbearable demands is seen as a betrayal and a great deception to the family. As a result, that rejection in itself brings intense jealousy within the family towards the intended target and breeds unnecessary division and tension among its members. As a consequence, a climate of suspicion sets in within the family and erodes trust, cohesion, and group efforts to overcome any serious challenge that that family may face.



This proclivity towards corruption practices is then extrapolated into the public spheres and governmental arenas. This in essence is fundamentally the root cause of why values such as *Accountability, Personal Responsibility, Transparency in one's Dealings, True Leadership, Public Stakeholdership, Team Work and Group Thinking, Love for what is Public, True Love for one's Nation and not Tribe or Religious Community*, are foreign to the mindset of many African leaders and millions of their fellow countrymen and countrywomen.

## *2. Religion*

Africans are among some of the most religious people on this planet.<sup>22</sup> Whether they are Muslims, Christians, or Traditionalists in religious sense, they all are fervent in their beliefs and have no qualms displaying them whenever and wherever they may be. However, this strong belief in one's faith has become another disrupter to Africa's quest to economically develop itself, revamp its cultures and do away with cultural traits that are anachronic, and establish social and physical infrastructures that could effectively help it compete with the rest of the world. In fact, this reality is overlooked by many Africans and a number of leaders on the Continent. As of today, religion has become another development killer in Africa. That is, religious tensions and conflicts pit communities against one another, and thus disrupt any serious attempt to build a true sense of national identity that could wrap people around ideals and vision that would help them develop their respective countries. As such, communities that are at war with each other for decades in the name of religious differences, simply do not trust each other. And when there is no trust among different communities that comprise a nation, there will be no national cohesion. And when there is no national cohesion, no national strategy could take hold and bear fruit regardless of the economic development efforts espoused by that nation's government and its population. As Samuel Ikhuiwu, a Nigerian National cited above noted: "As

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<sup>22</sup> See WIN/Gallup International Survey available at <http://www.wingia.com/web/files/news/290/file/290.pdf>.

*regards to Nigeria, the Christian Nigerians do not believe what the Muslim Nigerians are doing is right. And likewise, the Muslim Nigerians think that the Christian Nigerians are in the wrong. And the religiously Traditionalist Nigerians believe that since the advent of both Christianity and Islam to Nigeria, the traditional way of ruling has gradually been losing force. Mr. Ikhuwu also said that “this distrust among the religious communities is what is truly killing Nigeria. And consequently, without a national cohesion among the two largest communities, no national development projects will do any good for the country as a whole.”* Further, this is in addition to century-old tribal tensions and conflicts that have afflicted many African countries for decades. So, Religion then in our humble viewpoint, has become another silent killer of Africa’s development, and African leaders and people therefore should seriously come to grips with this reality. Examples abound on how Religion is at the root cause of wars and conflicts within many African countries even though those conflicts and wars are presented as political struggles with economic motives. As cases in point, Nigeria, Chad, the Central African Republic, Sudan, Kenya, Ivory Coast, and many other African countries where religious communities distrust and suspect each other, they all have fallen victims of either open wars, conflicts, or constant tensions due to different religious beliefs.<sup>23</sup> And thus, religious tensions and conflicts and wars have therefore become a devastating disrupter of Africa’s economic development and progress especially when unscrupulous leaders stoke religious differences whenever they want to advance their selfish political interests.

#### 4. *Democracy*

After the end of the Cold War in 1991 and the adoption of multiparty system and political plurality in Africa, though gingerly accepted and initially opposed by many Regimes in place, the democratic wave that swept

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<sup>23</sup> See Religion and Conflict by Luc Reychler at [http://www.gmu.edu/programs/icar/ijps/vol2\\_1/Reyschler.htm](http://www.gmu.edu/programs/icar/ijps/vol2_1/Reyschler.htm) and 5 Devastating Religious Conflicts in Africa That Will Make You Question All You Thought About Religion by ATLANTA BLACK STARS available at <http://atlantablackstar.com/2014/05/31>.

the Continent has not brought all the political and economic dividends and gains that the International Community and the advocates of Democracy sold to Africans.<sup>24</sup> On the contrary, political instability within a score of African countries and regional conflicts, economic inequality and despair, along with a massive migration of Africa's youth to Europe and elsewhere (due to the lack of economic opportunity and social mobility at home) have all exacerbated under the so-called democratic governments. Though it is true that some semblance of political stability is projected onto the world stage from Africa and its benefactors, the truth is that the daily survival of an average African has not significantly improved since the advent of Political Democracy on the Continent.<sup>25</sup> As a matter of fact, the touted robust economic growths of many African countries have not clearly reflected in the lives of millions of common men and women in the streets (see Table 6). In fact, the advent of the type of Western Political Democracy has even divided Africans further from one another and pulled them away from the nationalistic fervor of the early fathers of the Independence who were engaged in true nations building projects aimed at helping Africa rather than enriching a tiny group of local political elites and powerful economic families. Even though many African countries have shown impressive economic growths in the last two decades or so, this is mainly due to a decade long of high prices of oil in this new Century, and the new blossoming trade and economic relations between Africa and China and many other emerging economies<sup>26</sup> (see Table 3). And in aggregate, the African countries whose economies have exponentially grown are all oil resources and mineral exporting countries.<sup>27</sup> Hence, Democracy or no Democracy, socio-economic

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<sup>24</sup> See Le Président Denis Sassou Nguesso, le Pouvoir et la Vie at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QfaMF3BbxCI>.

<sup>25</sup> For an excellent analysis of the situation, see Africa's Growth and Development Strategies: A Critical Review by Musibau Adetunji Babatunde in *Africa Development*, Vol. XXXVII, No. 4, 2012, pp. 141 – 178.

<sup>26</sup> See Understanding Turkey-Africa Relations: Rationale and Challenges by Mahamat K. Dodo in *Journal of Alternative Perspectives in the Social Sciences* (2016) Volume 7 No 4, 612-642.

<sup>27</sup> See the Securitization of China's Engagement with Africa: EU Energy Security Strategy by Mahamat K. Dodo in *Journal of Alternative Perspectives in the Social Sciences* (2014) Volume 5 No 4, 766-774.

development has not improved as expected in the last 25 years in Africa. In contrast however, competition among political parties and power aspirants has become more intense and fiercer than when single party politics was running the majority of African countries. Hence, the majority of African politicians today are more in tune with their own political ambitions and prestige than with the national development objectives, even though many of them love to pay lip service before and during the legislative and presidential political campaigns. Unfortunately, this political hypocrisy does no good to an African voter that cast his or her hope on irresponsible Politicians that have been running Africa to the ground with false promises of Democracy and its illusions. And as Samuel Ikhuwu mentioned above recalled, *“He has not seen anything good under Democracy in Nigeria. He thinks that African leaders do not even make African citizens feel like they are living under democratic rules.”* With that said, what Africa needs is simply the provision of basic social and economic infrastructures that allow Democracy or whatever form of governing and governance that Africans themselves choose to take root from local and national experiences just like Democracy and different forms of governing have evolved throughout history in different countries of Europe, the US, and other democratic countries of today.<sup>28</sup> In essence, this is what the former President of Tanzania Benjamin Mkapa what alluding to when he said in an address to the Ugandan Parliament that, *“After all those years of colonial rule and the five decades or so of self-rule, with its mistakes of all colours and shades, the time has now come for Africa to go back to the drawing board and try to engender a new democracy for Africa with African characteristics”*, and he went on to say that *“As I prepare to leave office, and as I look back over our recent history, I am convinced that Africa needs a home-grown new democracy.”*

## 5. Globalization & Consumerism

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<sup>28</sup> See Continent needs “home-grown” democracy-Mkapa available at <http://www.irinnews.org/report/56018/africa-continent-needs-home-grown-democracy-mkapa>.

The advent of the current form of globalization in the late '90s has had adverse economic, social, and cultural effects on Africa, just as it has had positive and negative effects everywhere on this planet. That is, economic globalization per se as a concept means one thing to some people and another thing to others. But economic globalization which is our subject of analysis here is an economic ideology that has its proponents and detractors. However, analyzing the pros and cons of globalization in its entire facets is beyond the objectives of this paper. What is of interests to us in here is to highlight the negative effects and impacts that financial and economic globalization has had on Africa since the '90s. That is, how it has stripped the States of their economic planning capacity and sovereign powers to legislate and make political and economic decisions that directly affect the lives of their own citizens. This erosion of States sovereignty in social and economic planning and policies has been so since the adoption of the widespread economic liberalization and privatization models advised and pushed by the IMF and the World Bank in the '90s. And as such, by looking critically at the socio-economic results of Africa in the last quarter of a century, Africa has become one of the clear losers of globalization alongside other less-developed regions of the world. And as a result of this new economic and political paradigm, Africa as a whole, and SSA in particular, has lost considerable bargaining power in the race for economic and human development to other regions.<sup>29</sup> In addition, the never-ending political instability and non-democratic regimes that have characterized many African countries in the last 4 decades, and the impacts of globalization, have considerably weakened the ability of Africa to surmount its internal societal challenges and successfully mitigate their negative impacts and thus protect its vulnerable citizens. In fact, trade and economic barriers or trade policies such as defensive economic protectionism were all undone without guaranteeing reciprocal sources of income for poor African countries in the name of economic liberalization and privatization policies. As a result,

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<sup>29</sup> For further analysis on Globalization and Africa, see the Impact of Globalization on Africa in the International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Vol. 3 No. 15: August 2013 by Alhaji Ahmadu Ibrahim, Department of Sociology Yobe State University, Nigeria.

African governments have since found themselves holding the bags and swamped with millions of social and economic challenges that they are unable to overcome. And frankly, with meagre resources to begin with, no amount of good policies could bring positive results that would stir economic growths and development of Africa so long as the economic globalization is devised and pushed by the developed countries of the EU and the US in particular. Hence, the impacts or negative effects of globalization on Africa have become palpable in every day's life of millions of Africans. Below is a summary of negative impacts and effects of globalization on Africa:

A) Weakening of the State Powers: States are no longer the primary economic and financial actors; B) massive youth unemployment and migration due to the lack of employment opportunities and privatization of many para-statal enterprises; C) economic liberalization and privatization models and policies imposed by the IMF, World Bank, WTO, OECD, and other international organizations have decimated nascent Africa's industrialization programs and rendered African States powerless in their development plans; D) Globalization has not changed the international division of labor for Africa whereby African leaders are advised again by the IMF and the World Bank to focus on export-led strategy which has 'boxed' them into accepting perpetual dependency on foreign buyers that determine the prices of commodities and natural resources that their countries sell to the world; E) Globalization has been transforming African cultures at a rapid pace and making Africans lose their cultural identity without being able to marshal an autonomous or albeit indigenous response; F) Globalization has brought to open the use and trade in drugs, organized crimes, international narco-trafficking, widespread prostitution and the ever-growing use of pornography, and consequently, it has weakened family values that have sustained Africa for centuries; and G) Globalization has made it almost impossible for Africa to launch and sustain indigenous development of technology to compete with the likes of Asian countries where States are still playing a guiding role in education, science and technology, and economic planning alongside a thriving and robust private sector.

Furthermore, another phenomenon of the globalization that has made its way to Africa since the mid to late '90s is consumerism; i.e., material consumption at any cost of anything mainly made abroad or in general imported goods from overseas. In fact, almost all consumer products or a high percentage of them to be precise that are consumed en masse in Africa today have foreign labels on them. Whether one is speaking of food, electronics products, beauty products or transportation equipment products, they all are imported in great number into Africa. Consequently, Africa's indigenous productions of consumer goods have also been adversely, to say the least, affected negatively by the economic globalization imposed by the IMF, World Bank, International Organizations and Multinational Corporations (MNCs) that direct and impose globalization to the world.

## **Conclusions**

This paper is set to analyze the reasons why Africa has been lagging behind in its quest to economically develop and compete at par with the rest of the world. Succinct arguments ranging from family, religion, democracy, globalization and consumerism have all been analyzed and presented as additional obstacles to as why Africa has been under-performing economically and become inconsequential in the global economy. The paper concludes with policy recommendations for Africa's leadership and citizens in order to help Africa fully take her place in an international environment that has become extremely competitive and digitized. Though it is undeniably true that Africa is a very rich Continent, however, economic mismanagement and political instability, coupled with other social and cultural reasons and external forces such as globalization and odious debts, have been hampering Africa's economic development and progress. In addition, the paper also acknowledges that African leaders and their respective populations are also to blame for the dismal economic performances of a number of African countries in the last 4 decades. Even though international circumstances and conjectures per se have played a significant role in derailing the early 'hope' years of post-independence of Africa, however, these international circumstances that many Africans love

to cite in order to justify the dismal economic performances of the Continent have simply become a ready-made excuse for the incompetent African leaders. Fortunately, this ready-made excuse is no longer acceptable in the eyes of many Africans and the world at large. Therefore, African leaders and their citizens alike ought to simply look further into the internal forces that are disrupting Africa's social and economic development rather than dwelling excessively on external factors and completely blaming foreign actors. That is, by tackling the internal development disrupters with true national strategies, approaches and visions, Africa would be able to counter the detrimental external forces and policies that are always disrupting her national policy strategies and ambitions. In fact, it is worth recalling that in the era of globalization, no one country is immune from the disruptive external factors. With that premise assumed and accepted, therefore, what is needed are policies and visions and well-prepared leaders and informed citizens that can undertake reforms that would first and foremost put Africa's national interests ahead of any policy prescriptions advanced by the international organizations and the NGOs that have been miserably failing Africa for decades.

### **Policy Recommendations**

*1. Foreign aid is not development:* Understanding foreign aid and its true objectives should be an assignment for Africa's leaderships, national institutions and peoples all across the Continent. Africa's youth in particular shall be educated in understanding the proper role of foreign aid assistance and its unintended consequences for their respective countries and the Continent as a whole.

*2. International Community can only assist:* The concept of International Community and the role it plays in International Politics and Economic Relations shall also be fully understood by African leaders and their respective citizens. International Community is simply a euphemism for major powers, i.e., the US, EU, China, Russia, and other emerging countries that shape and direct the dynamics of the International Policies and



Economic Relations. In addition, it is worth recalling a bitter and sad fact that Africa's voice is not as significant in major powers decisions as Africans like to believe. In fact, Africa simply reacts to what the major powers decide in conjunction with their national and geopolitical interests. And as a result, major world events and international economic policies of the last four decades have shown that Africa is simply a passive by-stander in global political and economic decisions made thousands of miles away from its shores. And unfortunately, this fact has been so for decades if not centuries.

3. *Personal Responsibility is Part of Development:* Personal responsibility should be part of the new Africa's educational programs, just as it was during the years prior to the end of the Cold War. The Africa's youth and future generations should learn to re-value personal responsibility more than the material acquisitions that have become the obsession of millions of Africans in the last quarter of a century.

4. *Food Security and Food Transformation:* The African leaders have got to understand that food security and the industry of food transformation should be a priority for all Africa in this new Century. This is so because the real challenge of the humanity in this century will be to feed the soon to be 9 billion peoples on this earth. Though it is true that the African Union (AU) has since 2003 adopted food security policy as indispensable for the Continent, however, as of today, its importance is still not reflected in policy initiatives of many African governments.

5. *Religion Ought to be out of Public Sphere:* African leaders and peoples should understand once for all that religious tensions and conflicts can only hinder and hamper Africa's pursuit of economic development and social progress. Thus, national religious leaders of all denominations and political leaders and Africa's youth should all understand that Religion could be a silent disrupter of development if misunderstood and used for selfish political purposes.

6. *Promotion of National Industrialization Programs:* African leaders should re-learn to establish and progressively promote on a large scale the policies of natural resources transformation and light industrialization of the early African nationalist leaders. Doing so, will help Africa to voluntarily reduce its dependence on the foreign markets for the extractive resources and commodity-based export products. In addition, that will also help Africa control the prices of its export products. And as a result, foreign buyers will no longer be the ones fixing the prices of Africa’s products and the value added of those products will turn into economic gains, and the wealth created from that will stay home. As a result, employments will be added to the national economies, factories will be created, and economic multiplying effects will take hold. And hence, with the revenues generated by the new factories and the taxes paid to the respective governments, national infrastructures such as schools, hospitals, bridges, roads, etc. will be financed by the States and their taxpayers themselves. And thus, Africa will then no longer need to be asking assistance to the World and the NGOs to help her build her social and physical infrastructures as she has been doing in the last 40 years.

**Table 1. Africa’s share in world exports and imports**

	1980-1999 (Per Cent)			
	1980	1990	1995	1999
<i>Exports</i>				
Africa	4.6	2.3	1.6	1.6
North Africa	2.2	1.1	0.7	0.7
Sub-Saharan Africa	2.5	1.2	0.9	0.9
<i>Imports</i>				
Africa	3.6	2.4	1.8	1.9
North Africa	1.5	1.2	0.9	0.9
Sub-Saharan Africa	2.1	1.1	0.8	1.0

*Source:* UNCTAD Database

Table 2. Africa’s share in world exports of goods by technological categories  
\* 2000-2015 (%)

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Products	2000	2003	2006	2009	2012	2014	2015
Primary products	9.2	9.9	11.9	12.0	11.2	10.0	8.8
Manufactured products	1.1	1.1	1.2	1.3	1.5	1.4	1.2
Resources-based manufactures	6.3	5.7	5.6	5.6	5.7	5.7	5.2
Low technology manufactures	2.9	3.1	2.8	3.0	2.8	2.5	2.3
Medium technology manufactures	1.9	2.3	2.3	2.9	3.1	3.2	2.9
High-tech manufactures	0.4	0.4	0.5	0.5	0.7	0.7	0.6
Unclassified	1.8	1.0	1.2	1.2	2.7	2.1	1.9

\*Products classification according to S. Lall (Cf. S. Lall, *The Technological Structure and Performance of Developing Country Manufactured Exports, 1985-1998*, "Oxford Development Studies" 2000, Vol. 28, Issue 3, p. 7)

Source: Trends in the World Economy *Global Economy at the Crossroads elaboration based on UNCTADstat...*

**Table 3. Trade performance by region**

	Annual Growth 2003-2008	Annual Growth 2012-2014	Elasticities 2003-2008	Elasticities 2003-2008
Developed Countries	11.2%	0.7%	1.6	0.9
East Asia	15.4%	3.1%	1.6	0.6
Latin America	14.7%	1.0%	1.7	1.2
South Asia	20.4%	0.5%	1.6	0.7
Sub-Saharan Africa	17.9%	0.1%	1.6	0.8
Transition Economies	21.1%	-0.5%	1.0	0.6
West Asia/North Africa	18.9%	2.8%	1.4	0.8

*Source:* UNCTAD calculation based on UNCTADSTAT and COMTRADE data

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Table 4. Africa's share in world merchandise trade and trade openness in 2000-2014 (%)

Year	Share in global exports	Share in global imports	Trade openness index *
2000	2.3	2.0	43.7
2002	2.2	2.0	43.8
2004	2.6	2.2	48.4
2006	3.1	2.5	53.2
2008	3.5	2.9	59.8
2009	3.1	3.2	49.3
2010	3.4	3.1	52.0
2012	3.5	3.3	55.0
2014	2.9	3.4	49.5
2015	2.4	3.4	

\*The ratio of the sum of exports and imports of goods to GDP (expressed as a percentage).

Source: Trends in the World Economy, The Role of Africa in the Global Economy-trends and drivers of change

*Why is Africa Lagging Behind in Economic Development? A Critical Review*

**Table 5. Decline in Trade, 2015 vis-à-vis 2009**

	2009				2015			
	Decline (percentage) <i>As a percentage of decline in world trade</i>				Decline (percentage) <i>As a percentage of decline in world trade</i>			
	Import	Exports	Imports	Exports	Imports	Exports	Imports	Exports
Developed countries	-25	-22	64	54	-11	-11	51	50
East Asia	-17	-16	14	16	-12	-4	26	9
Latin America	-25	-25	6	6	-10	-15	5	8
South Asia	-16	-17	2	2	-13	-17	4	3
Sub-Saharan Africa	-10	-29	1	3	-11	-28	2	6
Transition Economies	-36	-41	5	7	-32	-31	8	10
West Asia/North Africa	-35	-43	8	13	-8	-22	4	13

Source: UNCTAD secretariat calculations.

**Table 6. National Poverty Rates and GDP Per Capita**

Country	Initial Year	Poverty Rate in Initial Year	Final Year	Poverty in Initial Year	Total Change in poverty rate	Percent Annual Change in poverty rate	Average Annual Per Capita GDP Growth Rate
Benin	2006	37.4	2010	35.2	-2.2	-0.55	1.09
Burkina Faso	1998	60.2	2003	40.7	-19.5	-3.90	3.03
Cameroon	1996	53.3	2007	39.9	-13.4	-1.22	1.73
Chad	1995	43.4	2003	55.0	11.6	1.45	2.03
Cote d'Ivoire	1998	36.4	2008	42.7	6.3	0.63	-1.17
Egypt	1996	19.4	2008	22.0	2.6	0.22	3.10
Ethiopia	1995	45.5	2005	38.9	-6.6	-0.66	2.89
Ghana	1999	39.5	2006	28.5	-11.0	-1.57	2.46

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Guinea	1994	63.9	2007	53.0	-10.9	-0.84	1.41
Kenya	1997	52.3	2005	45.9	-6.4	-0.80	0.14
Madagascar	1997	73.3	2005	68.7	-4.6	-0.57	0.20
Malawi	2004	52.4	2009	39.0	-13.4	-2.68	3.27
Mali	2001	55.6	2006	47.4	-8.2	-1.64	2.98
Morocco	1999	16.3	2007	9.0	-7.3	-0.91	2.97
Mozambique	1996	69.4	2008	54.7	-14.7	-1.23	5.19
Nigeria	1996	65.6	2004	57.8	-7.8	-0.98	2.08
Rwanda	2000	60.4	2011	44.9	-15.5	-1.41	4.39
Senegal	1995	61.4	2006	40.0	-21.4	-1.95	1.61
S. Africa	1995	31.0	2006	23.0	-8.0	-0.73	1.61
Tanzania	1992	38.6	2007	23.0	-8.0	-0.73	1.61
Tunisia	1995	6.2	2005	33.4	-2.4	-0.24	3.53
Uganda	1996	44.4	2009	24.5	-19.9	-1.53	3.75
Zambia	1996	68.1	2006	59.3	-8.8	-0.88	1.47
Zimbabwe	1995	42.0	2003	72.0	30.0	3.75	-2.43

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