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Critical Analysis of Causes of African Underdevelopment in History Perspectives

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Abstract

The primary objective of this study was to investigate the roles of both internal and external factors in the historical context of African underdevelopment. Specifically, the study aimed to evaluate the specific role of internal factors in African underdevelopment and identify the external factors that contribute to it. The study relied solely on secondary sources to analyze the relationship between these variables.

As result, it found that internal factors such as diseases, wars, corruption, and embezzlement have played a significant role in African underdevelopment. Furthermore, external factors like globalization, slave trade, and colonialism were found to be contributing factors to African underdevelopment. For example, slave trade resulted in the decline in African population, while colonialism exploited African resources.

Therefore, it was found that external causes outweighed internal factors in Africa's underdevelopment. Finally, the study suggests that African nations should promote regional integration to facilitate trade, prioritize peace and security, and implement new policies to tackle corruption and embezzlement, as these factors hinder sustainable development.

Keywords: Slave Trade, Colonialism, Underdevelopment, Globalization

Introduction

The causes of underdevelopment in Africa have been a topic of debate. UNEP states that Africa possesses a vast array of resources that had the potential to drive its growth. These resources include gold, diamonds, timbers, rivers, lakes, and other essential resources that could have alleviated poverty and stimulated economic progress. Despite this potential, the continent has been plagued by violence, poverty, and hunger.

In the future, Africa is projected to contribute 30% of global natural resources and 80% of global gas extraction. Additionally, Africa holds 40% of easily accessible gold and 90% of platinum and chromium, which are in high demand worldwide. Moreover, Africa has a significant amount of arable land, making up 65% of the world's total, and possesses 10% of freshwater resources.

However, poverty and conflict have hindered progress, leading to a decline in living conditions and obstructing the economic ambitions of many African governments. Africa is home to some of the world's poorest nations, characterized by low GDP per capita, which perpetuates low living standards for its population. Scholars like Ayyitteh and Landes argue that this can be attributed to the mismanagement of resources, inadequate infrastructure for trade and growth, weak policies to protect and foster sustainable development on the continent, as well as governance issues.

Besenyo contends that the current competition for Africa is more severe than ever before. Emerging powers such as China, Russia, India, and the United States have contributed to Africa's economic challenges. This scramble for resources has led to indirect control and influence over Africa's economy by these new imperialist powers, jeopardizing African economic initiatives.

Gathara argues that African states have failed to drive development initiatives, turning the continent into a battleground for resource wars and a hunting ground for Western powers. Consequently, Africa has become the poorest continent in the world.

Gathara further contends that African governments' independence from Western powers was merely a facade, as neocolonialism introduced new forms of control that perpetuated underdevelopment. As a result, the African economy has relied heavily on the dominant countries for development and production. The slave trade and colonialism are recognized as major factors contributing to African underdevelopment, as emphasized by African leaders during the 2012 World Summit for Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. Scholars like Nathan Nun assert that without the historical injustices of slavery and colonialism, Africa would not have experienced underdevelopment to the extent seen today.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the internal and external factors that have contributed to African underdevelopment. By doing so, it hopes to expand the body of knowledge in the field of development studies and political science.

Problem Statement

As cited by Soyinka and Adeninji Africa's chronic underdevelopment has been attributed to early European actions such as slave trade, colonialism, and neocolonialism. They argue that these global activities have significantly hindered African economies and undermined the development policies we observe today, leading to the destruction of Africa's political, environmental, and social fabric.simillarily ,According to Shafiqur et al, it is emphasized that although western imperialists physically departed Africa, their influence and control continued to exist.

Ehrlich and Lui emphasize the strong correlation between public-sector corruption and underdevelopment in Africa. Their study reveals that even a 1% increase in corruption can reduce economic growth by 0.72%. Furthermore, corruption and embezzlement not only decrease GDP per capita, but also hinder the government's ability to effectively serve its citizens and allocate resources to combat corruption.

The primary objective of this study is to analyze the impact of both external and internal factors on Africa's underdevelopment. It also offers recommendations to address the challenges facing African development and promote sustainable growth.

Research Objectives.

1. To assess the role of internal factors to the African underdevelopment
2. To ascertain the role of the external factors to the African underdevelopment

Definitions of Concepts

Development

Numerous definitions of development have been put forth by various researchers. Some scholars argue that development should be defined in terms of individuals and their geographical contexts. Therefore, there is a consensus that traditionally, development indicated the increase in per capita income among the inhabitants of a particular region over time.

However, in the 1970s, new components of development emerged that were not previously acknowledged. These components encompassed meeting essential needs, generating employment opportunities, and reducing disparities. Sen posits that development should go beyond personal consumption and the accumulation of capital. According to him, development should encompass the enhancement of people's freedom and their potential for growth [1].

Underdevelopment

As stated by the UNDP Underdevelopment refers to a situation where a country has low income per person, a high level of poverty, a low level of education, and inadequate industrialization and use of resources. It further explains that underdeveloped countries are marked by the government's inability to meet the needs of its people and support their well-being.

Underdeveloped countries are defined by Walter et al, as states that have economies with limited growth, inadequate governance systems, pervasive extreme poverty, substandard health conditions, and limited progress in education.

Empirical Review

Gallup and Sachs conducted a study on the relationship between underdevelopment in Africa and the prevalence of malaria infections. Their research indicated a strong connection between Africa's underdevelopment and the frequency of illnesses such as malaria and typhoid. The study emphasized that malaria has significantly increased mortality rates in Africa, hindering the development of many nations' populations.

The governments' expenditures on treating illnesses like malaria have resulted in an inability to meet other population needs, leading to economic collapse. Consequently, these illnesses have discouraged individuals from saving money, being productive, and investing in their own growth. Finally, the study found that the absence of diseases like malaria in Africa could have led to a twofold increase in GDP per capita across the continent.

Gemery and Hogendory analyzed the impact of the slave trade on Africa's present-day underdevelopment. Their findings demonstrated that the slave trade hindered African growth in various ways. For instance, the slave trade led to depopulation in certain areas of Africa where individuals were captured by slave traders.

This decreased the labor force, slowed population growth, and impeded progress. The slave trade specifically affected agricultural and industrial productivity in African societies. Only strong, young individuals of working age were taken, benefiting the recipients but causing a loss for Africa. This resulted in economic backwardness and fewer economic efforts that could have promoted African growth.

Achuo et al. investigated the main drivers of African growth in 2021. Using the Instrumental Variable Two Stage Least Squares (IV-2SLS) method with a panel of 38 nations, the research highlighted the strong correlation between African underdevelopment and a lack of financial and human capital development. Additionally, the findings emphasized the close connection between increased foreign aid inflows and African underdevelopment. Initially, Africa loses skilled individuals with the necessary capabilities for industrial processes.

Moreover, Africans lack the necessary funds to engage in higher-value industrial activities and compete with Western companies. Meanwhile, foreign aid has made Africa the most indebted continent globally, putting pressure on the government's ability to provide for its citizens and foster growth. Finally, the study found that focusing on natural resource exploration, promoting

good governance, and facilitating industrialization could stimulate growth and reduce underdevelopment.
According to Houston the education gap among African countries has significantly contributed to Africa's underdevelopment. His research indicates that the African education system is heavily influenced by Western perspectives and lacks attention to the African context. Furthermore, government investment in education and human resource development has been insufficient and low, leading to underdevelopment.

Consequently, unemployment rates have risen, productivity has decreased, and human resources are underutilized. According to Nyanga et al, the increased brain drain among educated African youth has further aggravated underdevelopment and presented a significant obstacle in Africa's development this century. Brain drain has resulted in a diminished labor force, lower agricultural productivity, limited industrialization, and reduced government revenue.

According to Auty, Africa's underdevelopment can also be attributed to its reliance on primary commodities as the main source of income, as opposed to embracing modern trade and the exchange of goods and services that promote the use of technology and research and development. The global market is driven by modern production methods as the primary catalyst for trade development. Auty further emphasizes that for Africa to benefit from international trade, it must adopt modern technological methods, promote the use of ICT and research, and prioritize good governance, human rights, and human development. Tchamyou argues that the growth of ICT and human development should be accompanied by the promotion of environmentally friendly policies.

Tanzi and Davoodi examined the effects of corruption and misappropriation of public funds on African underdevelopment. Empirical findings revealed that corruption and embezzlement of public funds have caused numerous governments to fail in serving their citizens, unevenly distribute resources, reduce government revenues, limit public expenditure, and discourage citizen participation in development initiatives. Furthermore, the study found that corruption leads to increased government spending on public facilities while diminishing the national productivity of state institutions.

Theories of Underdevelopment

Dependency Theory

Dependency theory can be traced back to Raul Prebish's work as the director of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America in 1950. According to this perspective, countries can be divided into core nations and peripheral nations. The core nations are members of the OECD and have highly advanced industries, technology, and production systems.

On the other hand, peripheral nations are less developed and rely on foreign assistance for their development. These nations are predominantly found in Africa, Latin America, and Asia. According to Ferraro (1996), their economies heavily rely on the export of a few commodities and experience a deficit in their balance of payments. Additionally, the growth of core countries largely depends on the development and expansion of peripheral nations.

The exchanges between core and peripheral nations are highly unequal, partly due to the colonial history of extracting raw resources, minerals, and labour from Africa through exploitative and similar practices. Dependence, as defined by Santos and Ferraro, is a historical condition where the growth of one economy is determined by the development and expansion of other nations.

The core's dependency on the periphery has hindered the growth of many developing nations due to unequal exchanges of labour, technology, resources, raw materials, and manufactured goods. According to Palmer and Parsons, African governments and other developing countries worldwide face impoverishment due to established capitalism, which has resulted in uneven trading and exploitation of Africa's natural resources.

Around 1950, two schools of thought emerged concerning dependence theories. The first school included post-Marxist writers such as Paul Baran and Andre Gunder. They believed that the unequal exchange between core and peripheral nations hindered development in impoverished nations, emphasizing the movement of resources from the periphery to the core. These resources include labor, manufactured goods, and other commodities necessary for industrial growth.

Authors from the second school, including Prebish, Furtado, and others who served on the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, believed that internal issues impeding growth in underdeveloped nations had a greater impact on economic development than external forces. Venego also supports the idea of dependent states being feasible and achievable. Several emerging nations experienced steady development between 1960 and 1980, but the debt crisis of 1980 slowed down this progress, leading many nations worldwide to revaluate the relationship be-

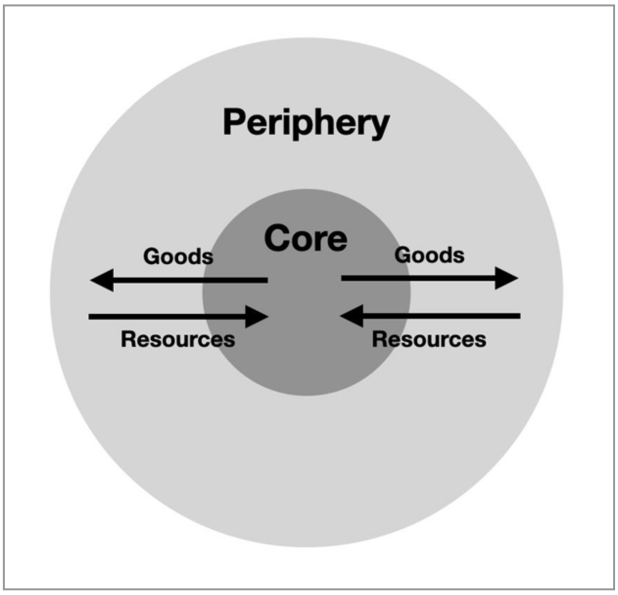

Figure 1: dependency theory

Source: Ranson (2020)

Criticism of Dependency Theories

There have been critics of dependence theories, especially those who support free market competition for economic growth. Notable detractors include Peter Bauer and Martin Wolf. The criticisms are as follows:

Dependency beliefs can result in inefficiency within local industries due to protectionism, leading to reduced competition and inferior manufacturing of goods. Additionally, industries heavily reliant on government subsidies and protection may struggle to survive in the long run as they lack creativity and innovation. Lastly, these scholars highlight that imposing high tariffs on imported products and services limits consumer choices and lowers people's living standards (William, 2014).

World System Theory

Emmanuel Wallstein coined the theory of the world system and viewed it as the division of labor among countries, where they produce goods and services and subsequently exchange them in an imbalanced manner. Additionally, this division of labor has led to the reliance of peripheral sectors on the center, resulting in a disproportionate distribution of power and resources.

Based on Godlfrank's perspective, one sector is characterized by labor-intensive, while the other sector is capital-intensive. The semi-periphery nations act as intermediaries between the periphery and the core states. Furthermore, the semi-peripheries encompass elements of both periphery and core structures. Skocpol argues that the current international system exhibits unequal power and resource distribution among these three sectors, leading to the exploitation and underdevelopment of nations outside the system.

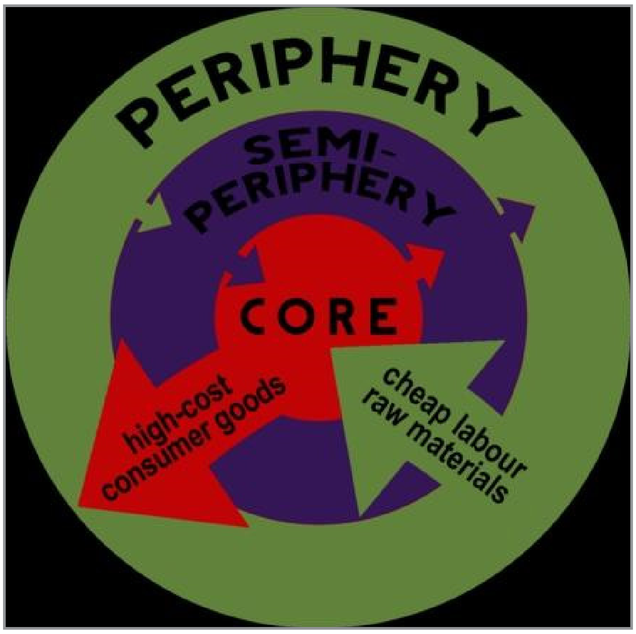

Figure 2: relationship between peripheries, core and semi peripheries

Source: history magazine (2023)

The provided figure demonstrates an asymmetrical connection between the core and other components. The core region obtains inexpensive labor and raw materials primarily from peripheral areas. It then processes these raw materials and sells the finished products to both semi-peripheral and peripheral states at elevated prices. This practice ultimately contributes to the underdevelopment of these regions.

According to Goldfrank, the world system can be likened to a biological organism, possessing laws, structures, groups, leaders, limitations, political legitimacy, and coherent activity. He suggests that it also possesses the resilience to withstand and repair itself when damaged. Wallstein contends that the global system follows a similar life cycle as other organisms. It can grow, become diseased, and receive treatment. Consequently, the core and semi-periphery regions experience primary development, while the peripheries remain impoverished and dependent on the activities of the core. Additionally, Wallstein points out that the world system can also be referred to as the world economy, with economic considerations serving as the primary drivers of integration rather than other factors. The exchange of fuel, minerals, industrial products, peripheral state protection by core states, and weaponry occurs among the center, peripheries, and semi-peripheries.

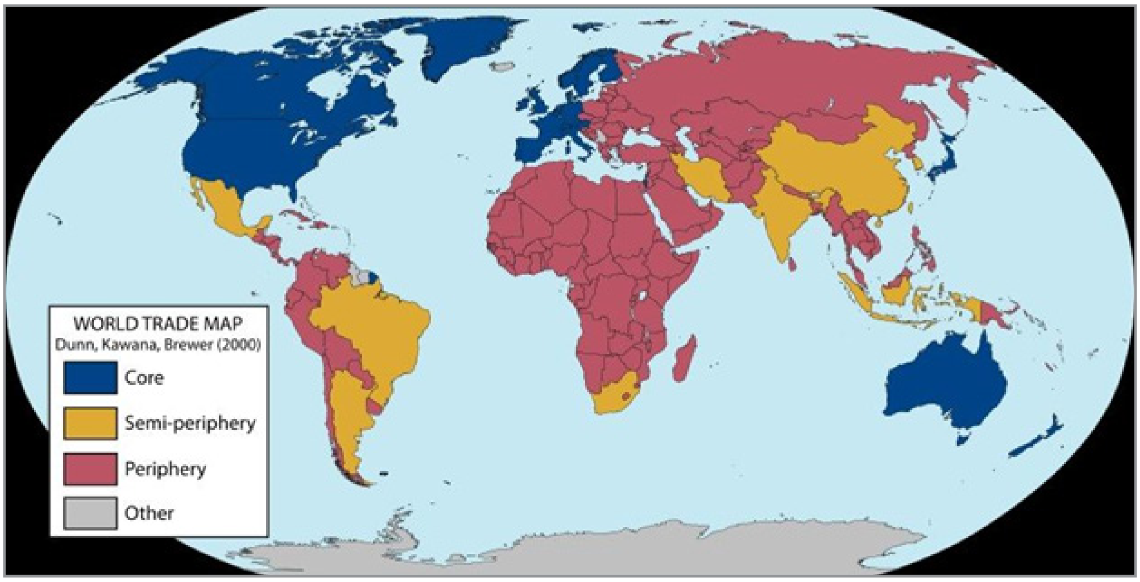

Figure 3: World System Theory

Source: Chaliand and Rageau (1995)

The world is partitioned into three sections called the core, semi-periphery, and periphery, as demonstrated in the figure. The core consists of developed nations such as the USA and Britain. The semi-periphery is composed of countries like Australia, Brazil, and India. The periphery is predominantly made up of low-income countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa.

Various scholars in the field of development studies argue that technological advancement is essential for a country to be positioned either at the center or the periphery. Countries in the core are distinguished by their advanced technology and production of sophisticated goods, while countries in the periphery have lower levels of technology and their products are unable to compete in the global market against those from developed economies. This situation has been perpetuated by the continuous dependence of periphery nations on the core, leading to the growth of underdevelopment in less developed countries [2].

Wallstein asserts that the distribution of power plays a crucial role in determining who governs, makes decisions, and exploits resources. As a result, periphery nations remain powerless while central governments benefit from their labor, resources, and wealth. This dynamic perpetuates underdevelopment. Furthermore, Wallstein illuminates how states lacking power tend to act in the interests of central states due to their reliance on them and the resulting political influence exerted by core nations. In fact, the rise of dominant governments worldwide can be attributed to power struggles and increased influence exerted by powerful nations over weaker states. Wallstein concludes that the current world order is characterized by consistent change, which he dubs the epoch of modern history.

Methodology

This research used only secondary data to investigate the internal and external variables that contribute to Africa's underdevelopment. Secondary data were gathered via reading books, online published papers, contacting libraries, and reading other scientific publications. The researcher analyzed the acquired data to determine the link between external and internal causes and Africa's underdevelopment. The independent variables include external and internal influences, while the dependent variable is African underdevelopment.

Findings and Results

External Factors for African Underdevelopments Slave Trade.

Africa's underdevelopment can be attributed to external historical events, particularly the slave trade, as highlighted by Gemery and Hogendorn. The authors argue that Africa's participation in the slave trade caused significant loss of labor, depopulation of the continent, lack of division of labor, and sluggish economic growth that we witness today.

Additionally, the slave trade hindered Africa's ability to produce goods and services, thereby stunting industrial progress and contributing to underdevelopment. Scholars in history and development studies have estimated that approximately 17 million individuals were forcefully transported to Western nations as part of the slave trade. These individuals were predominantly young and physically strong, resulting in a detrimental impact on productivity. Consequently, Africa's inability to establish security and develop its industrial capabilities was further exacerbated.

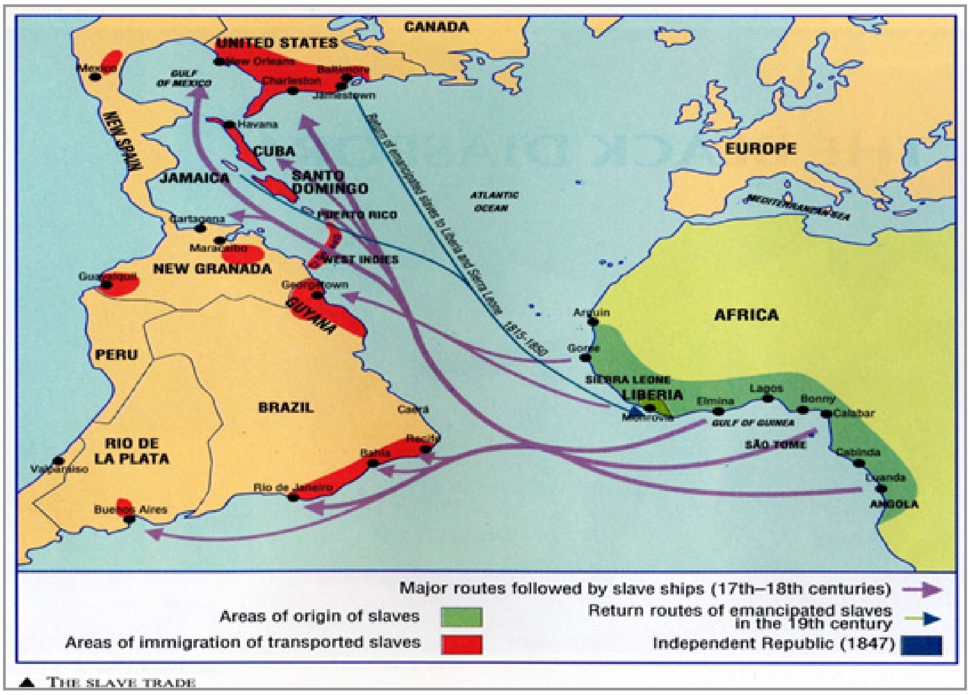

Figure 4: transaharan slave trade

Source: Princeton University (2023)

The diagram depicted above illustrates that individuals who were enslaved were extracted from African nations and subsequently transported to American colonies, where they engaged in various colonial undertakings such as agriculture. The commodities cultivated by the colonizers in America were then transported back to Europe with the intention of conducting commercial trade.

Impacts of Colonialists (Colonization)

The relationship between African underdevelopment and colonialism was investigated by Sach and Warner. Their research revealed that colonialism had a detrimental impact on African development due to the excessive exploitation of natural resources and the direct and indirect influence of African development policies on the needs of Western countries.

A clear example of this can be seen in Ghana, which was colonized by Britain, leading to the loss of valuable resources such as gold, diamonds, lumber, and bauxite. Instead of using these resources to strengthen African economies, colonial leaders employed them for the benefit of their own kingdoms. Additionally, the resources were exploited to such an extent that certain areas are now depleted and no longer as rich in minerals as they were before colonization. Consequently, there is currently a scarcity of miners available to utilize as raw materials for industrial growth and trade in goods and services.

Some Colonialist's Policies that Contributed to the African to be Underdeveloped

Irrelevant Education

Colonial education in Africa was deemed unsuitable for the African context and consequently failed to contribute significantly to African development. It heavily emphasized Western ideologies and experiences while disregarding African culture and lifestyles. Moreover, education primarily revolved around theoretical concepts, lacking technology and practical applications. Consequently, this caused a clash with existing African ways of life, adversely impacting African culture, creating discord, and obstructing Africa's attempts to foster development (Nwankwo, 2012).

Poor Technology

The lack of technological development in Africa can be attributed to the colonial rulers who introduced less advanced technology in order to fulfill the needs of the Western world. The education system under colonial rule focused on training individuals for the benefit of the colonizers, such as priests, artists, interpreters, and others. Consequently, this limited African education and technology, playing a significant role in Africa's underdevelopment [3].

Exploitative Economy

The West benefitted from exploitative economic policies imposed by the colonialists. For instance, they brought industrial plants to Africa for cultivation, and the produced goods were mainly used as raw materials for European companies. African farmers were only allowed to cultivate crops like pyrethrum, while coffee and tea met the needs of the European industry.

These items were purchased at a lower cost, depriving low-income African farmers of a chance to make profits. Additionally, raw materials were transported to Europe, where they were processed into finished products and then sold back to Africa at higher prices, thus exploiting the situation. As a consequence, African economies suffered a decline while underdevelopment spread [4].

Integration of Africa in World Economy

The African economy was not sufficiently advanced to be integrated into the global economy. Instead of giving it time to grow and become part of the international market, colonial powers assimilated it into competitive global capitalism. This had a detrimental impact on African industries and other sectors of the economy (Nwankwo, 2012).

Creation of Classes That Led to Class Struggle

The issue of class struggle in Africa was introduced by the colonial rulers, who established their dominance through class distinctions in both political and cultural spheres. They categorized the African economy into four groups: comprador bourgeoisie, pet bourgeoisie, proletariat, and peasants. By making use of the comprador bourgeoisie, European superpowers were able to exploit African resources and strengthen their control. This bourgeoisie class acted as a medium between the colonialists and the general population, apparently working in favor of Western interests. Even after African countries gained independence, the bourgeoisie continued to hold power and acted as a bridge between the governments and the people. The neocolonialists are expected to continue exploiting African economies [5].

Effects of World War 1 and World War 2

The World Wars and the 1929 economic depression exacerbated African poverty, with disastrous consequences for African development. Initially, the world wars devastated the European economies. Following World War II, the European economy suffered greatly, with property destroyed and the biggest number of people killed.

As a result, Western nations shifted their emphasis back to Africa as a source of economic growth. African minerals and other resources were mined at a greater depth than previously to improve their economy, which had been destroyed by conflicts. Meanwhile, the abundant human resources were moved to Europe during and after the conflicts. This damaged African economies by transporting energetic and young people to Europe while opposing their colonial overlords. Furthermore, overexploitation of resources contributed to Africa's economic backwardness (SAHO, 2011).

Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs)

According to the FAO, many African countries' economy was damaged in 1980 due to inflation, weak trade conditions, and insufficient fiscal income. To address this challenge, the Bretton Woods institutions launched efforts for structural adjustment programs to overcome such difficulties and encourage growth. Apparently, the structural adjustment programs attempted to boost African growth by encouraging economic stability and assisting governments in addressing developmental issues [6].

However, the policies did not solve the concerns. In certain African countries, employees closed the office. Bryceson et al. reveal that they also contributed to the economic crisis in some developing countries. He adds that in certain nations, dismissed people have relocated to the informal industry to continue their careers. Similarly, governments in African countries developed rural development policies. Agriculture was empowered throughout that era to boost agricultural productivity, but nations did not gain from it because of weak governance, poverty, corruption, and misuse of public funds [7-10].

Globalization and its Effects

Globalization emerged as an alternative initiative pursued by Western countries after World War II in order to promote prosperity. However, it is important to note that globalization does not equally benefit all nations, as it strengthens barriers of interaction (such as political, social, and economic barriers). According to dependence theory and post-Marxist theories, the relationship between developed and developing nations is asymmetrical, with African countries being the losers in international trade while emerging countries benefit [11-15].

The world has transformed into a global village, with distances between countries shrinking and technology aiding the flow of goods and services. Despite the integration of African economies into global markets, as stated by Ohiorhennan and NISER , the outcomes have been limited and unsatisfactory. Additionally, globalization has had a detrimental impact on African culture and ways of life, which have been influenced by Western civilization. This has hindered the development of local knowledge and unity among African cultures through cultural exchanges [16-20].

Internal Causes of African Underdevelopment

Civil wars in Africa

After gaining independence, Africa witnessed a period marked by devastating wars and conflicts, leading to significant population losses and the destruction of the continent. Over the course of 50 years following independence, 48 out of the 54 African countries were entangled in dreadful conflicts, resulting in substantial casualties and widespread devastation [21-25].

The majority of these conflicts occurred within the boundaries of states rather than between them. As stated by Toner and Sarjin in 2002, Africa was responsible for half of all conflicts that occurred between 2004 and 2009. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Africa stands as the world's most conflict-ridden continent. Nevertheless, the motives and objectives behind these conflicts remain unclear. Scholars in development studies and peace studies propose that these wars are fueled by resource disputes and poverty [26-30].

Corruption and Embezzlement

Africa's progress has been hindered by corruption and the misuse of public funds. The funds and resources meant for the advancement of the nations were unlawfully taken by individuals. Based on the African Development Report on Corruption in 2004, approximately 50% of tax income, amounting to $30 billion, ended up in the pockets of individuals [31-35].

In all honesty, many governments in Sub-Saharan Africa have profited greatly from their natural resources, such as petroleum and minerals, but their contributions to their respective countries have been minimal. This has paved the way for poverty and has played a significant role in the underdevelopment of Africa. This information is cited from the AU and UNECA report of 2014 [33-40].

Impacts of Infections and Diseases

Various diseases and infections have devastated African economies, leading to a significant loss of life and increased government expenditure in their efforts to combat these illnesses. Among the diseases inflicting the continent are malaria, Ebola, Tsé tse flies, HIV/AIDS, meningitis, and others. As reported by the World Health Organization in 2003, chronic illnesses like malaria, HIV, AIDS, and cardiovascular diseases accounted for more than 50% of all deaths in 2002, with Africa experiencing the greatest impact [41-45].

Conclusion and Recommendations

To summarize, it is a tragedy that extreme poverty, hunger, lack of sanitation, famine, and brutal conflicts persist in the modern era. On the whole, this study examined the factors, both internal and external, contributing to Africa's lack of development. The study discovered that African underdevelopment can be attributed to both internal and external factors. Internally, issues such as corruption, internal warfare, and illnesses play a role [46].

Externally, the slave trade, globalization, world wars, and structural adjustment programs (SAPs) have had an impact.in particular, it was found that external causes outweighed internal factors in Africa's underdevelopment. For instance, the slave trade caused a decline in Africa's population, colonization depleted its resources, and globalization exposed its economy to foreign shocks. Consequently, I believe that foreign factors are the primary drivers of African underdevelopment. Finally, I suggest the following measures: African governments should encourage African integration, ensure peace and security within the continent, establish and revise policies to combat corruption and misuse of public funds, and ultimately promote good governance [47].

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