The Ramifications of Colonial Past: Challenges to Sustainable Development in Contemporary Africa

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The Ramifications of Colonial Past: Challenges to Sustainable Development in Contemporary Africa

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Abstract

The path of African nations toward attaining sustainable development is complicated and full of controversy. At the core of this study are three countries with dissimilar colonial pasts and different pathways toward current sustainable development, Ghana, Angola, and Rwanda. Through the examination of their historical pasts and current political and social structures I intend to analyze the possible ways that would influence these countries’ capacities to eliminate poverty, limit political corruption, and ameliorate civil unrest. The main focus on my presentation will be on development strategies to prevent “brain drain” - emigration of African professionals - that should help these three African countries - as well as others - transition unto a pathway that can lead towards more effective sustainable development.

Findings

Certain African nations have experienced and enjoyed high economic growth but this has not led to immense poverty reduction, as several others suffer from corruption, war and civil turbulence, military dictatorship, economic plights, and poor governance. Poverty accounts for the bulk of negative conditions in most parts of Africa:

- Rigging of elections
- Rebellion, terrorism or militancy
- Lack of basic necessities of life
- Corruption
- Cultural, social, and political conflicts

Poverty is also resulting from Africa’s excessive reliance on foreign aid.

Ghana:
Using aid relatively effectively when compared to other African nations, but the nation needs to strive for further sustainable self-development in order to progressively reduce dependence on foreign aid.

Angola:
An economic power house but with the lack of adequate nationwide education and other institutional obstacles such as political corruption, there is a large amount of constraints on the rural and urban poor population

Rwanda:
One of the fastest growing economies in Central Africa. Although it is still poor and mostly agricultural, the nation has made significant progress of stabilizing and rehabilitating its economy in the recent years. Rwanda is now relatively stable but still depends on a substantial amount of aid.

The Repercussions of Colonialism

- The creation of artificial national borders
- The partitioning of tribes and tribal rivalry within the same nation
- The creation of detrimental social and economic structures
- Propagating the notion of the ‘national cake’
- The maltreatment of the native populations
- The unfair and unjust extraction and distribution of wealth
- The practice of favoring one ethnic, religious, or culture over others helped promote rivalries
- African nations were at a lower general development stage at the time of their independence
- Poverty: European nations extracted rich natural resources and human labor from Africa for centuries

The Brain Drain

The “Brain drain” is the exodus of skilled workers from their home countries.

The consequences of brain drain: The development of a country depends on three factors: natural resources, human resources and financial resource and the ‘brain drain’ is the loss of these factors.

The human resource factor is the most important because it allows countries to develop independently while using natural resources, and therefore generate the capital needed to support its development without depending on foreign consulting.

Reasons Behind the “Brain Drain”:
Social: Educational systems. A lack of information and misguidance. Health care challenges and infrastructure - health care crisis such as HIV.
Economic: Weak economies, lack of employment, corruption, and low salaries.
Political: In response to political instability, civil war, military coups, poor human rights practices, and cruel regimes.

Difficulties due to ethnic, cultural, regional affiliation or being a member of opposition to political groupings.

Solutions to reverse the Brain Drain:
- Pushing the return of migrants to their home country and promoting their involvement in their country’s development even while they are abroad.
- Good governance at the national level.
- Recruiting skilled migrants and assigning them positions in their home country.
- Provide recruitment incentives such relocation expenses, loans for housing and for starting businesses, salary supplement for the first few years.
- Offering higher wages according to their qualifications
- Offering good quality higher education and expanding a better educational infrastructure.
- Each country should create a comprehensive database on the impact of the brain drain.

Conclusion

Complex Past: The issues in Africa have complex histories, which are deep-rooted in their colonial legacies.
Unique: Each nation in Africa is unique and they each have specific issues. It is detrimental to generalize the whole continent and aim to fix these issues based on that generalization.
Political Leadership: The first step to achieving development is good leadership and governance – eliminating the concept of the national cake, neopatrimonialism, and centralized power.

The African Union needs to strengthen its common goals and create stronger relationships with other economic organizations such as SADC, ECOWAS etc.
Financial aid can be disadvantageous: Money alone cannot solve development problems.

The Detrimental Effect of Tribalism: African nations need to move beyond divisions based on ethnic and tribal lines.

The Brain Drain: The consequences of the brain drain are not only human resources, but it is also political, economic, and financial loss. We need to minimize the impact of the brain drain because African entrepreneurs are the key to solving Africa’s development problems.

Time: African nations need to be given a chance and the time to meaningfully integrate into the global finance environment.

Selected References