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POLICY BRIEF - DRAFT

SUB-THEME 3

“Building the Future: Healing and Reparations towards Socio-Economic Justice for Africans and People of African Descent.”



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction and Background	1
1.1 The example of Haiti.....	2
2. Building the Future	3
2.1 International Decade for People of African Descent.....	4
3. Connecting reparatory justice with the reform of the international development and finance architecture	4
3.1 Representation.....	4
3.2 Strengthening Domestic Resource Mobilization.....	5
3.3 Debt.....	7
3.4 Trade.....	8
3.5 Climate Finance.....	9
4. CONCLUSIONS AND THE WAY FORWARD	9
5. ENDNOTES	13

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1. Introduction and Background

Building a just and resilient future for Africans and people of African descent requires a shift from conventional aid toward a reparative development model. This means mobilising sustained, targeted resources to address historical injustices and enable long-term, inclusive growth. Priority sectors include public education, healthcare, food systems, digital infrastructure, and locally driven climate change monitoring and adaptation. Central to this process is also healing, both individual and collective. Healing requires spaces for truth-telling, cultural restoration, and psychological recovery. It is not a passive outcome but an active, sustained effort that must be embedded in policy and community-led initiatives.

Additionally, on 23 December 2013, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 2015-2024 as the International Decade for People of African Descent (IDPAD).¹ The decade created a framework for global action, emphasizing recognition, justice, and development for people of African descent. It provided a historic opportunity to tackle systemic racism, xenophobia, Afrophobia, and other forms of intolerance that continue to affect millions of people of African descent worldwide.

The IDPAD helped to shed light on the en-

during legacies of slavery, colonialism, and systemic racism that continue to marginalize people of African descent. It saw some progress in national policy development in some countries² and the establishment of important global mechanisms, such as the Permanent Forum on People of African Descent.³

The CARICOM Ten Point Plan for Reparations, which was developed in 2014 as a conceptual and actionable framework for negotiating a comprehensive reparations settlement from Europe, articulates the approach to the reparations claim in a development framework and positions reparations as inextricably linked to socio-economic and cultural development.

The Ten Point Plan⁴ recognises that a comprehensive multisectoral reparations programme is essential to repair the continuing harms Africans and people of African descent endure, arising from centuries of chattel enslavement and colonialism. The areas of focus (as summarized in Box 1) include the development of cultural institutions, cultural reconnection, and the return of cultural property; remedying the public health crisis; the right to return and resettlement; increasing access and improving quality and relevance of education; psychological rehabilitation; technology development; debt cancellation and monetary compensation.

Box 1: THE CARICOM 10 POINT PLAN FOR REPARATORY JUSTICE

1. **Full Formal Apology:** Coloniser governments must offer a sincere formal apology for their role in slavery and genocide
2. **Indigenous Peoples Development Program:** Implement programs to support the development and rights of indigenous communities
3. **Funding for Repatriation to Africa:** Support the resettlement of descendants of enslaved Africans back to their homeland where appropriate
4. **The Establishment of Cultural Institutions and the Return of Cultural Heritage:** Establish cultural institutions to preserve and promote the history and culture of African descendants
5. **Assistance in Remedying the Public Health Crisis:** Address the public health issues that disproportionately affect African descendant communities

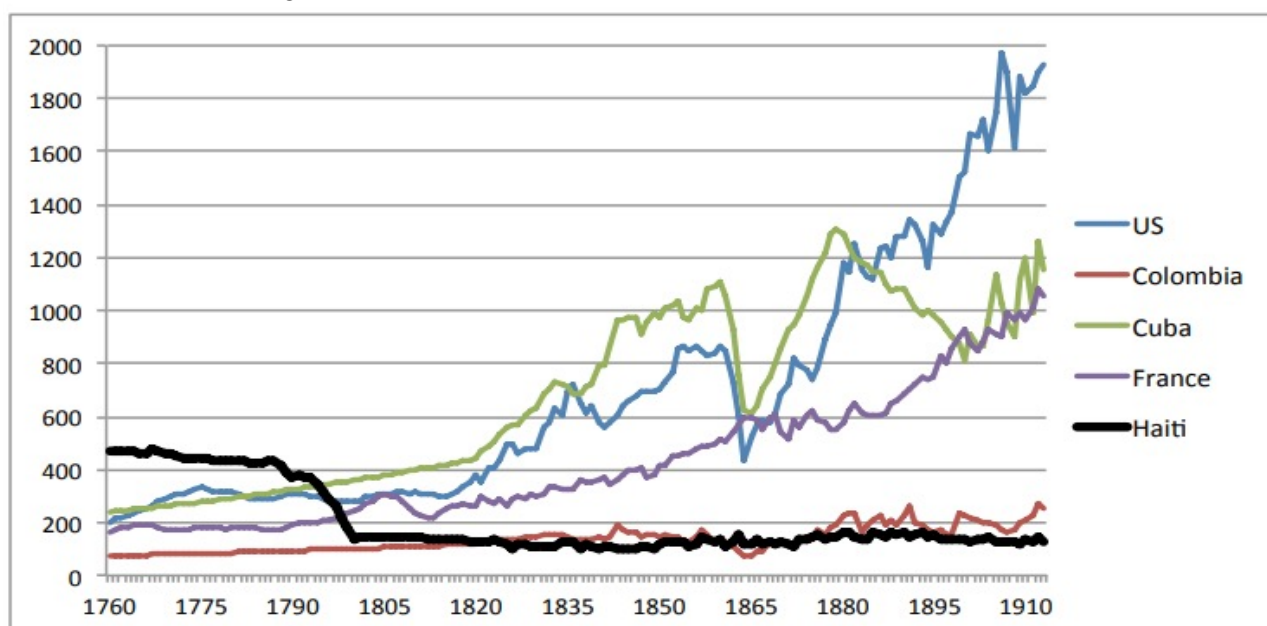
6. **Education Programme:** Implement relevant educational programs to empower African descendant communities
7. **The Enhancement of Historical and Culture Knowledge Exchanges:** Develop programs to teach African history and culture in schools and facilitate cultural reconnection programmes
8. **Psychological Rehabilitation as a Result of the Transmission of Trauma:** Provide psychological support to heal the trauma caused by enslavement and colonialism
9. **The Right to Development Through the Use of Technology:** Facilitate the development of African descendant communities through technology
10. **Debt Cancellation and Monetary Compensation:** Cancel the debts of Caribbean nations to alleviate the economic burden caused by colonialism and pay monetary compensation to repair the damage.

1.1 The example of Haiti

Haiti, recognised for its historical significance as the first Black Republic in the modern world, is at the centre of the global movement for reparatory justice. It is a country representative of the injustices imposed through colonialism, with impacts which affect its economic structure and institutions to the present day, as captured in figure 1 with the decline in GDP. On the bicentenary of the independence ransom of 150 million gold francs imposed by France on Haiti on 17 April 1825, as a precondition for recognising the island's independence, there is heightened global attention to the crippling

injustice of the independence debt and trade blockade imposed for decades, which are at the root of the political, security and humanitarian crisis that Haiti continues to endure today. As a consequence of the 150 million fee, the Government of Haiti further borrowed on several occasions from the former colonial government in 1825, 1875 (twice), 1896 and 1910 to meet its obligations, while its ability to repay was further hampered by the collapse in prices of its major exports—coffee, sugar, timber—in the aftermath of the independence war⁵, further cementing the extractive nature of the economic relationship with the former colonising power.

Figure 1: The decline in GDP per capita in Haiti 1760-1915 in comparison to France and other economies of the region.⁶



2. Building the Future

To build social and economic justice for Africans and people of African descent it is imperative that the global community recognize that Africans and people of African Descent continue to endure intersecting axes of discrimination, structures of inequality, racism and underdevelopment, born out of a history of enslavement, apartheid, racial segregation, historical and contemporary colonialism. Restitution, compensation and satisfaction through a comprehensive reparations' settlement is necessary to realise true justice.

CARICOM positions Reparatory justice as an indispensable human rights movement for social justice, the dismantling of structural racism and redress for systemic underdevelopment. The United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda⁷, which promises to "leave no one behind"⁸ and to "reach the furthest behind first," is deemed unattainable without global engagement to address systemic structures of inequality.

Colonialism and neo-colonialism in Africa and the Caribbean have left a legacy of dependent economies with highly integrated industries and financial markets with those of former colonising nations; inadequate services in health and education; high levels of youth unemployment; a high debt burden, and inequality leading to high levels of crime.

This is compounded by climate vulnerability and independence agreements that failed to provide the requisite resources to ensure the development of industries, institutions and the people in countries in Africa and the Caribbean. The Bridgetown Initiative, introduced by Barbados in 2022⁹, calls for urgent and decisive action to reform the international financial architecture, which was established at a time when the majority of Member States of these institutions were not yet independent, and climate vulnerability and social and

gender inequalities were not regarded as urgent development challenges.

The African Union (AU) has adopted the theme of Justice for Africans and people of African descent including through reparations, as a means to further develop the conversation on reparatory justice as an integral facet of sustainable development¹⁰, with respect to reparations for colonialism, the trans-Atlantic trade in enslaved Africans, chattel slavery in the Americas and a strident call for the restitution of cultural property. There is recognition that the plunder of Africa and the trafficking of over 15 million¹¹ Africans to the Americas for over 300 years stymied population growth, disrupted social, economic and political systems, and set in motion the underdevelopment of many countries on the continent.

In this regard, milestone convenings in the AU include the Continental Experts Workshop on Restitution of Cultural Property and Heritage held in November 2021 in Senegal¹²; the Africa-Diaspora Summit on Reparations held in Ghana in August 2022¹³; the high level AU Study Tour to the Caribbean, which focused on developing stronger AU-CARICOM cooperation on reparations and racial healing, held in Barbados in July 2023; and the Accra Reparations Conference (ARC) hosted by the Republic of Ghana in November 2023.¹⁴

The Accra Proclamation issued by the ARC¹⁵ affirmed reparations to Africans was a moral and legal imperative rooted in the principles of justice, human rights and human dignity, and that "the claim for reparations represents a concrete step towards remedying historical wrongs and fostering healing among the people of Africa and people of African descent." The AU Assembly held on 17-18 February 2024 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia¹⁶, endorsed the recommendations of the Accra Reparations Conference; designated reparations for enslavement, colonialism and apartheid, as a flagship project of

the AU and further decided that the theme of the Year 2025 would be “Justice for Africans and People of African Descent Through Reparations.” More recently, the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (ARFSD-11), which convened in Kampala, Uganda¹⁷ re-echoed the 38th AU Summit position on Justice for Africans and people of African descent through reparations.

2.1 International Decade for People of African Descent

The International Decade for People of African Descent also marked significant strides in the call for global reparations. These efforts have strengthened the advocacy for reparatory justice, catalyzed cooperation between African states and the diaspora, and strengthened international civil society organizations calls for comprehensive measures that address socio-economic disparities faced by people of African descent.

However, while it succeeded in raising awareness, amplifying and organizing the global conversation on these issues, the first Decade ultimately lacked sufficient political will, suffered from inadequate funding, and limited implementation at all levels.¹⁸ Former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, at the midterm review of the IDPAD highlighted that no state had yet taken comprehensive measures to address the historical and ongoing impact of these injustices.¹⁹

The Second IDPAD (2025-2034)²⁰, aligned with the AU’s 2025 theme focused on Justice for Africans and People of African Descent, Through Reparations²¹ presents a renewed opportunity for advancing reparatory justice. With the Decade’s and the AU’s emphasis on justice, development, human rights and dignity, there is an opportunity for stronger, sustained action. The lessons learned from the first Decade provide a roadmap for ensuring that the work of the new Decade leads

to tangible, transformative change. Indeed, with key actions including; prioritizing the inclusion of women and youth of African descent in the movement, increasing political and financial commitments, and strengthening regional and diaspora collaboration, the global community can move closer to addressing the historical injustices faced by people of African descent. These efforts, together with the continued work on the UN Declaration on the Respect, Protection, and Fulfilment of the Human Rights of People of African Descent²², can offer a critical pathway toward healing and the realization of justice and dignity for future generations.

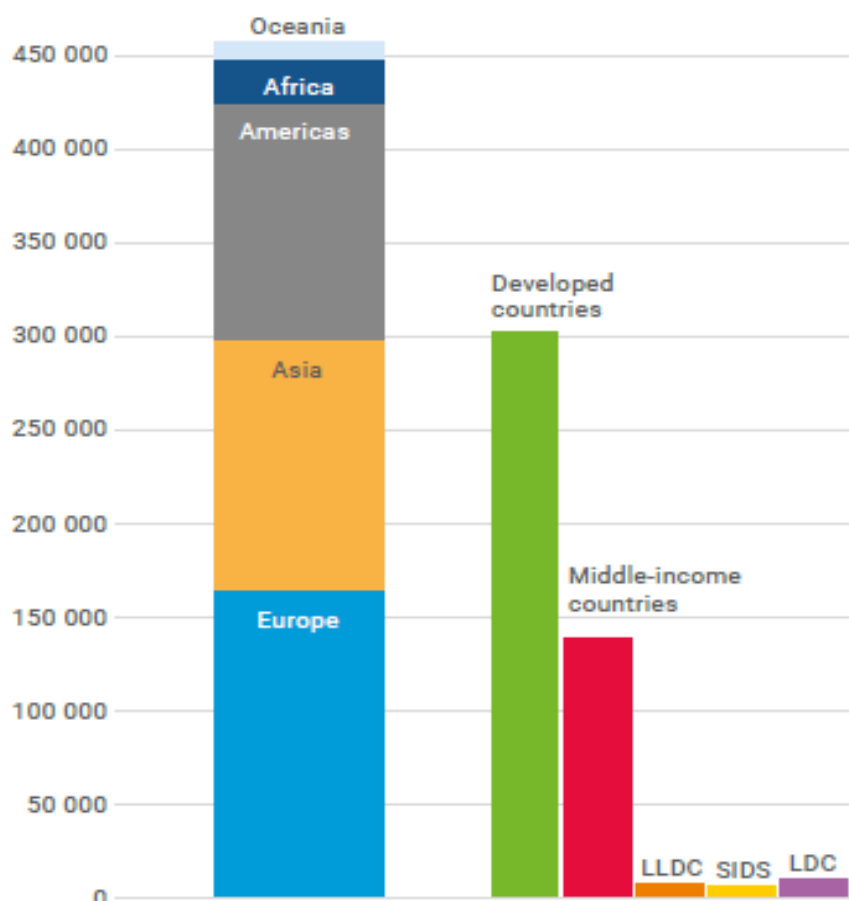


3. Connecting reparatory justice with the reform of the international development and finance architecture

3.1 Representation

One of the enduring challenges stemming from historical legacies against Africa is the lack of adequate representation/participation in the global development and financial governance architecture. This has limited Africa’s ability to right wrongs which inhibit its access to affordable financial resources akin to that from northern countries. As indicated in figure 2, the issuance of Special Drawing Rights by the IMF to tackle moments of global urgency such as the COVID-19 pandemic results in the bulk of resources being allocated to nations who have the least need for them. Meanwhile, African countries, LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS do not have the ability to make use of these emergency funds at the moment they are most needed.

Figure 2: Size of 2021 SDR Allocation by region and country group



Source: Adapted from United Nations. 2023. (Underlying calculations by DESA based on IMF data).²³

The challenge of representation and voice is also situated in the context of means of mobilizing resources through taxation. In recent history international tax cooperation has been led by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), with a membership of 38 countries, formed before 29 African countries had even achieved independence. However, despite this lack of global representation, its work on taxation governance affects all 193 countries of the UN. In December 2023, the UN adopted resolution A/RES/78/230²⁴ on the promotion of inclusive and effective international tax cooperation to improve the fairness of global tax systems, prioritising the needs of development. In that context, these ongoing efforts to deliver effective resource mobilization for countries affected by colonialism and slavery is to recognise the historical damage of extractive economic models, en-

sure that information is made available freely and transparently to allow African countries to have effective control over their economic and financial flows. This means addressing the continuous impact of transfer pricing, trade mispricing and profit shifting to stem the negative impact of Illicit Financial Flows.

3.2 Strengthening Domestic Resource Mobilization

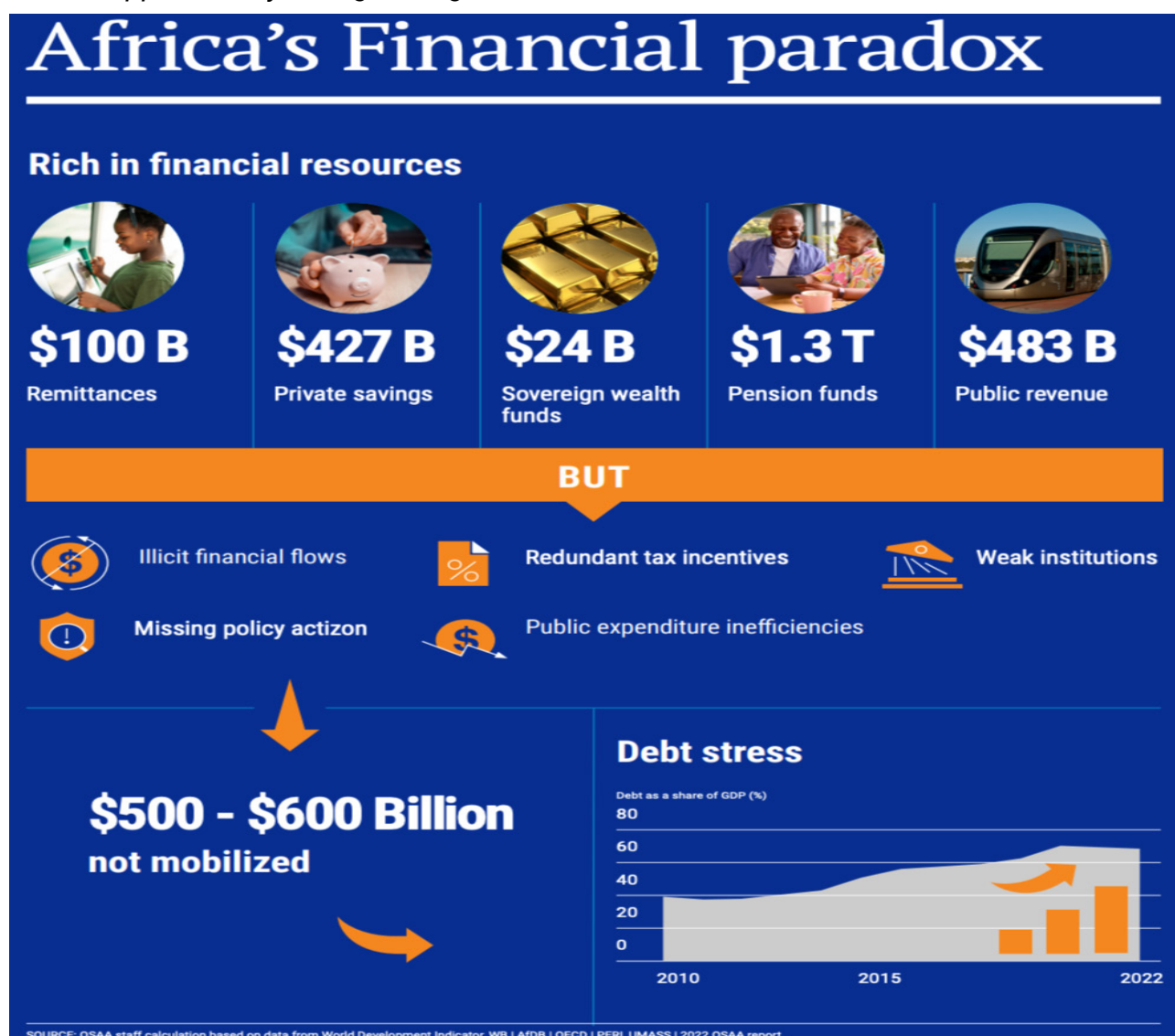
As already discussed in the context of Haiti, the institutional frameworks of countries under colonization and slavery were focused on the extraction of resources prioritizing the needs of the metropole. The majority of resources potentially to be mobilized by African countries and those which have emerged from colonization would come from better control of the resources from

which economic wealth is derived and from the establishment of national and regional value chains. The improved control over economic and financial flows can allow for deepening of national and regional pools of finance which improve the predictability and variety of options for financing.

determined through ineffective institutions, redundant tax incentives, missing policy action and inefficient expenditure.

Africa's finance paradox is illustrated in figure 3, underlining that between 500 to 600 billion USD is potentially available in unmobilized pools of finance.²⁵ These financing opportunities are insufficiently tapped into partly due to the persistence of Illicit Financial Flows representing 88.6 billion USD of outflows annually²⁶, as well as further un-

Figure 3: Africa's Financial Paradox sees 500-600 billion USD of unmobilized resources that can be tapped into by strengthening Domestic Resource Mobilization

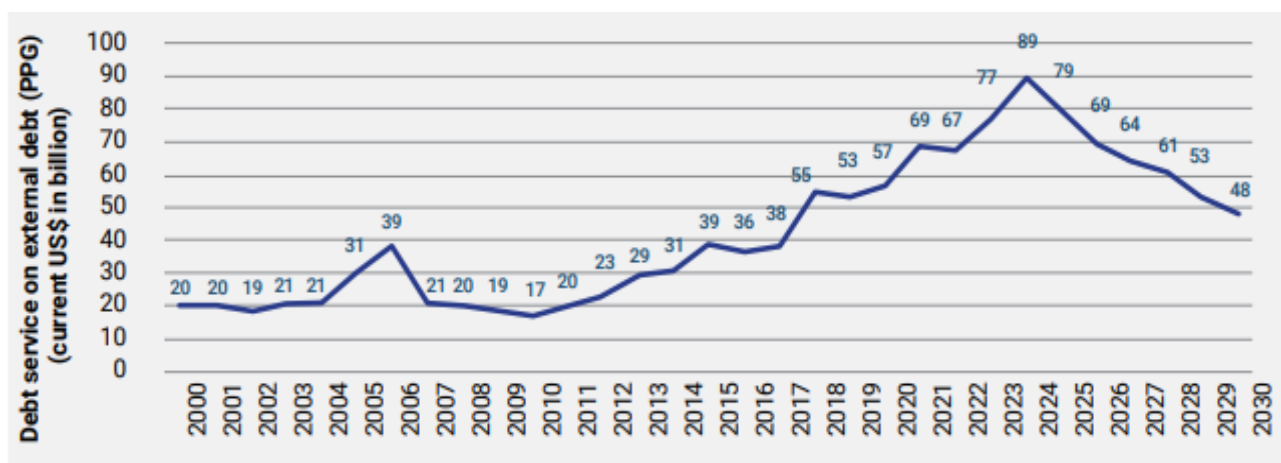


3.3 Debt

The weak institutional capacity for resource mobilization and unpredictable access to affordable credit leads to a continuous cycle of borrowing to meet development imperatives. Since debt repayment capacity is tightly linked to the performance of commodity and natural resource exports, Africa is then highly exposed to global volatility caused by external shocks. The debt-service burden on Africa's sustainable development trajectory has risen exponentially in the context of the polycrises of COVID-19, Russia-Ukraine war and climate change. As shown in figure 4, debt

servicing costs have increased substantially, consuming a large share of government revenues and crowding out spending on public services and development priorities. Recent rises in debt cost are further driven by currency volatility and are diverting resources away from investments in key SDGs on health and education.²⁷ At the same time flows of Official Development Assistance are falling, and the 67 billion USD of ODA²⁸ in 2024 pales in comparison to debt service costs (almost 90 billion USD in 2024) and illicit financial flows (88.6 billion USD per annum).

Figure 4: Africa's external debt service reached historic heights in 2024²⁹ at almost 90 billion USD, almost 25 billion more than was provided as ODA³⁰



Source: World Bank International Debt Statistics, and World Development Indicators.

Many of these challenges are linked to the ineffectiveness of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) in the 1980s prioritising privatisation, exchange rate liberalisation without addressing the root of the problem of the structure of African economies, leading to significant trade deficits and current account imbalances, liquidity crises and therefore accumulation of debt to crisis levels persistent to the present day.³¹ These programs disregarded the African Alternative Framework to structural adjustment programmes for socio-economic recovery and transformation (AAF-SAP).³² Though forsaking the SAPs in the 1990s marked the beginning of the recovery of positive economic

growth, the ongoing under-investment in value addition means that the rate of growth is unable to cater to the job creation and inclusion needs associated with achieving Agenda 2063 and the SDGs.

The debt challenge is aggravated by a systemic weakness in the global debt governance where lenders condition their terms on the outcomes of Credit Rating Agencies (CRAs) whose procedures have long been criticized to be unrealistic, prejudiced and unfair to African and global South,³³ countries. Criticism of CRAs in Africa centers around their perceived biases, lack of understanding of African economies, and reliance

on outdated methodologies.³⁴

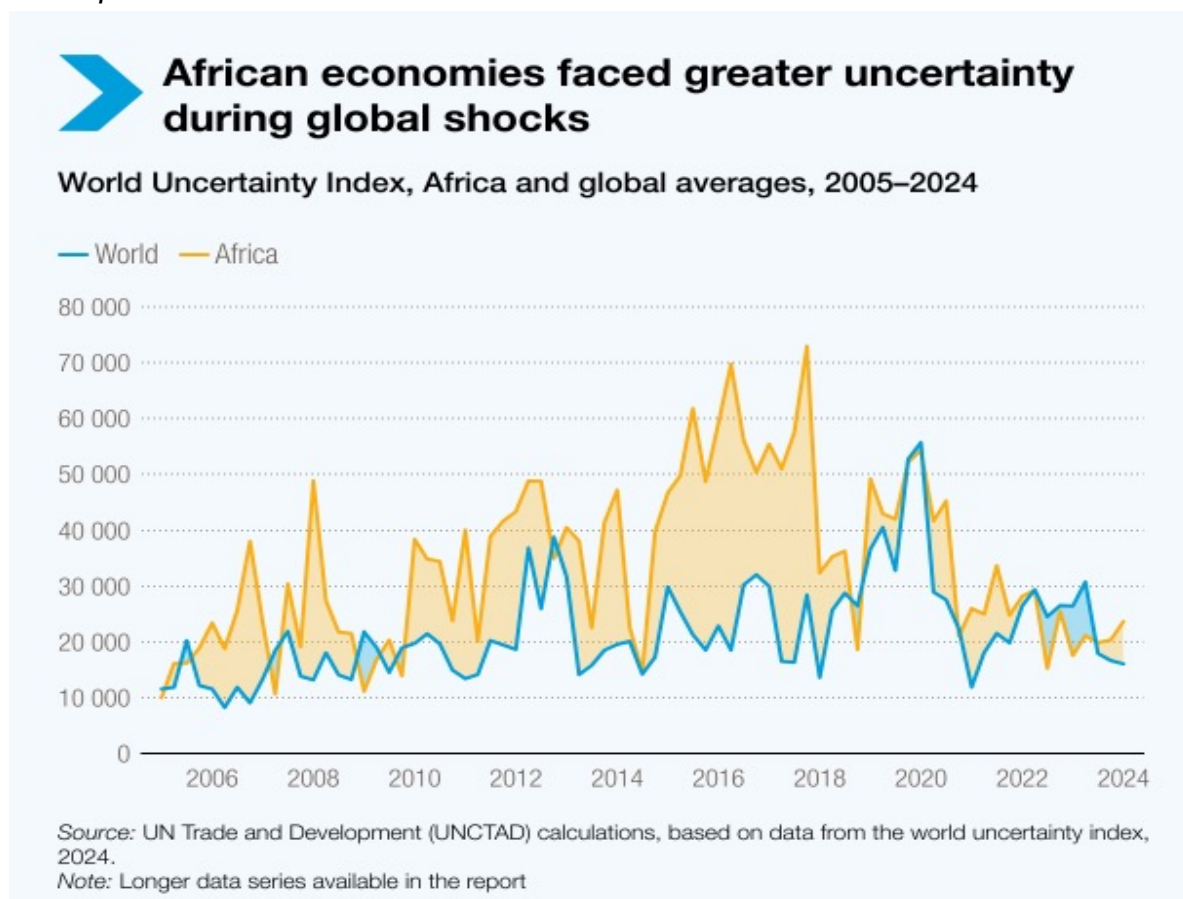
It will be reparative to set up a system of inclusive global debt governance architecture that brings together all lenders to sovereigns, sets universal standards for lending and a basis for restructuring that equally prioritises ensuring fiscal space for continued implementation of sustainable development in borrowing countries. The credit rating agencies should reform their methodologies to correctly reflect African and Caribbean countries' potential to repay and diminish risk, and therefore attract lower costs of debt, to ameliorate the shrinking fiscal space for financing the sustainable development of African and Caribbean countries.

3.4 Trade

Africa's trade relations often remain tied to colonial structures, hampering efforts to develop national and regional value chains. Only 16 per cent of trade is intra-African, and only 16 African countries are able to source more than 0.5 per cent of intermediate goods regionally, limiting opportunities for more value added and manufacturing.³⁵

This situation also further amplifies Africa's vulnerability to external shocks and susceptibility to price volatility both in terms of revenues of exports as well as prices for consumers. Recent analysis by UN Trade and Development has shown the greater uncertainty faced by African countries due to the nature of their trading relationships and as illustrated in figure 5.³⁶

Figure 5: African countries face greater uncertainties due to the nature of their trading relationships and structure of their economies.



Reparatory justice in the context of trade requires the establishment of equitable and predictable trading regimes that allow for the development of value addition through national and regional value chains. This also means supporting and accelerating the means to fully realize the ambition of the African Continental Free Trade Area.

3.5 Climate Finance

Africa and the Caribbean suffer the most from climate change while also needing more support in terms of climate finance for adaptation and mitigation. Africa's and Caribbean regions' contribution to global warming is minimal, accounting for a very small percentage of global greenhouse gas emissions - only 2–3 per cent of the world's carbon dioxide emissions from energy and industrial sources.³⁷ However, these regions are highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, despite their low emissions. African and Caribbean nations recognise the immense challenges posed by climate change to their development agenda and have put in place several policy and strategic initiatives. Within countries, internal challenges include: limited technical and institutional capacity to access climate funds and negotiate beneficial deals with development partners, limited data to inform decision-making, poor and uncoordinated climate planning, lack of climate finance tracking, the lack of a conducive policy environment to attract climate investment, gaps in awareness surrounding climate-related risks and opportunities, and limited access to technology that could enable climate action, among others.³⁸ These challenges can broadly be classified into three categories of barriers: institutional capacity, policy, planning and budget; and data and research.

In the context of reparatory justice, common but differentiated responsibility relating to the causes of climate change must be reinforced. In addition, this requires fully delivering on the principle that the 'polluter pays'

and therefore the burden of contributions to address the historic impact of climate change must be borne primarily by those who contributed to the current consequences. The operationalisation of the "Loss and Damage" Fund, must also take into account the heightened vulnerabilities of African countries to climate change due to the lack of economic resilience associated with the legacy of colonialism.

4. Conclusions and the Way Forward

To build a just, resilient, and inclusive future, Africa and its diaspora must advance a bold reparative development agenda that addresses the systemic legacies of slavery, colonialism, and economic exclusion.

This means addressing Africa's development and financing paradox and delivering control over its economic and financial flows.

Moving beyond rhetoric requires coordinated, sustained action by governments, multi-lateral institutions, civil society, and communities of African descent in particular youth and women-led movements. Central to this process is healing, both personal and collective, which must be woven into policy, planning, and implementation.

Healing and reparatory justice do not need to be framed in an adversarial way between former colonisers and independent African nations. On the contrary, it can allow for win-win partnerships that allow healing for the wrongs of the past through investment in shared prosperity. Ultimately, Africa's demographic dividend can potentially provide the economic impetus for a new era of global economic growth. Reparatory justice requires acknowledgement of injustices by past colonisers, and commitments towards future co-investment which addresses the ongoing impacts of these unjust acts, and the root causes of inequality.

Priority actions to deliver on reparatory justice include:

- **Acknowledgement of past injustices** and how these injustices contribute to current obstacles to attain sustainable development.
- **Reform of Development and Financing institutions** to address the needs of those most vulnerable and overcome the obstacles associated with the extractive nature of African economies which is a legacy of colonialism and slavery. This includes addressing the issue of fair representation, ensuring that effective cooperation on taxation is delivered, addressing the unfairness of international credit ratings, which unfairly penalise African investments and also ensuring that resources are available predictably and according to need. Development finance institutions (DFIs), multilateral development banks (MDBs), and climate funds must increase their risk tolerance to allocate more resources to lower-rated African countries.³⁹ Climate resilience should be integrated across all development financing.
- **Strengthening institutions, particularly through Domestic Resource Mobilisation**, to provide for effective control over economic and financial flows. This must also address the ability to stem illicit financial flows, while also investing in digital technologies to improve the efficiency and effectiveness and reduce the cost of resource mobilization.
- **Education** must be central to healing and redress. Affirmative enrollment policies are essential for Afro-descendant communities, particularly in underserved and post-conflict regions like the Sahel and Great Lakes. Curricula should reflect African history, the legacy of colonialism, and diaspora experiences to foster awareness and belonging. Promoting Afrocentric pedagogy, expanding access to rural education, and increasing scholarships and fellowships will help elevate African voices in global academic spaces. South–South academic partnerships can strengthen African-led knowledge systems.
- **Delivering effective food systems:** Investment in food systems as called for by the recent adoption of the Kampala CAADP 10 year plan on food systems⁴⁰, should promote food sovereignty by empowering local farmers with land rights, education, and control over food systems. Trade policies must be reformed to protect African producers. Indigenous farming practices, school meal programs, and community gardens can improve nutrition and support local economies. Efforts should also focus on engaging young people in sustainable agriculture and promoting youth-led agricultural innovation.
- **Delivering affordable access to energy:** Investment in energy access must be prioritised as a catalyst for sustainable industrialisation and economic empowerment. This must include de-risking for private sector investment in Africa’s energy sector, while also addressing reliable and affordable access to clean power for all African citizens.
- **Healthcare systems** need investment in infrastructure and services to expand access to affordable, quality care. Indigenous medical knowledge should be formally integrated into national healthcare systems. Community-based trauma healing and culturally sensitive mental health services are essential to address the psychological impact of historical injustices. Increased investment in health research relevant to African and diasporic populations is also needed.
- **Cultural and spiritual healing** is necessary through a process of psychological healing, cultural and spiritual reconnection of Africans in the diaspora to the continent, having been forcefully separated from Africa hundreds of years ago. Addressing the traumatic loss of language, land, community and traditions

of governance, disruption and denigration of aspects of culture and spirituality, as well as the psychological impact of racism, is an important part of healing and repair. The restitution of cultural artefacts to their places of origin in Africa and the Caribbean is another priority for future action, recognising that these are not merely objects for display but powerful symbols of African spirituality and culture that facilitate cultural reconnection and engagement of current and future generations with historical roots.

- **Digital transformation** must be leveraged to support socio-economic justice. Affordable internet, digital literacy, including for women and girls, and inclusive digital public infrastructure are foundational. African-led innovation should be supported through science, technology, and AI hubs aligned with development goals. Strengthening regional data governance will ensure data sovereignty and support evidence-based policy. Digital platforms can serve as tools for justice, preserving heritage, building solidarity, and organising reparatory movements. Particular attention should be paid to fostering digital literacy and skills development among youth to enable their full and meaningful participation in the digital economy and advocacy efforts.
- **Infrastructure investment** should prioritize historically underserved regions and sectors like transport, energy, and water. Communities must be actively engaged in planning and decision-making. Cultural infrastructure such as museums and heritage centers can support collective memory and identity. Environmental justice should be embedded in infrastructure projects to ensure climate resilience and redress disproportionate burdens faced by African and Afro-descendant communities. Infrastructure development should also create opportunities for youth employment and skills training.
- **Leveraging Trade** as a means to develop national and regional value chains, allow-

ing African countries to achieve the beneficiation of their own natural resources. This means strengthening domestic productive capacity through technology transfer and capacity building. It also requires a stable international trading regime and support for the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area.

In terms of cross-cutting policy **reform**, systemic racism must be addressed through concrete measures in education, employment, healthcare, and criminal justice systems. The African Union and CARICOM should jointly advocate for the inclusion of race and ethnicity disaggregated indicators within the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), allowing countries to monitor progress and hold themselves accountable. Policy reforms should specifically address the ways in which systemic racism impacts youth and create pathways for their empowerment and leadership.

Women and girls of African descent face compounded injustices⁴¹ and must be at the center of reparatory justice policies. This includes equal participation in governance, access to quality education and quality health, including sexual and reproductive health, economic opportunities, and the elimination of gender-based violence and harmful practices. Their leadership is crucial to the success of any justice initiative. Recognizing the specific vulnerabilities and potential of young women and girls of African descent, targeted programs and policies should be implemented to support their empowerment and leadership within the reparatory justice movement.

Looking ahead, unleashing Africa's potential is essential for global success. African leaders must seek to project a vision of '**Global Africa**'- a vision for the continent and its diaspora acting in unity to address historic injustice and effect systemic change. CARICOM Heads of Government have called for

the UN to convene a High-Level Political Forum on Reparatory Justice and for CARICOM and the African Union to co-sponsor a UN resolution. A joint committee of reparations experts has also been proposed to strengthen collaboration and advocacy, including the legal case for reparations. Efforts should be made to actively involve young people in these advocacy efforts and within the proposed joint committee to ensure their perspectives are included.

Finally, **regional and diaspora cooperation** must be a pillar of the next phase. South-South cooperation⁴², shared advocacy, and joint cultural and economic initiatives can build momentum for a global reparations movement. These initiatives should prioritize meaningful youth engagement and create platforms for intergenerational dialogue and collaboration. Reparatory justice is not only about redress; it is about transformation, restoring dignity, reclaiming agency, and building a future rooted in equity and shared prosperity.

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The United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on Africa (OSAA) is an entity of the UN Secretariat established to enhance international support for Africa's development and security, assist the Secretary-General in coordinating the UN's support to Africa, facilitate inter-governmental deliberations on Africa at the global level and establish a monitoring mechanism for commitments on Africa's development.

OSAA also convenes and chairs the Interdepartmental Task Force on African Affairs (IDT-FAA) while providing global advocacy support for the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

The work of the Office is clustered around the six thematic areas of:



Financing for Development



Sustainable Development to Promote Sustainable Peace



Governance, Resilience and Human Capital



Science, Technology, and Innovation



Industrialization, Demographic Dividend, and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)



Energy and Climate Action



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