

**AFRICA DIALOGUE SERIES**

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**POLICY BRIEF**

**SUB-THEME 1**

**“Learning from the Past: Transatlantic  
Slave Trade, Colonialism, Extractive Econ-  
omies and Institutions in Africa”**



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## 1. Introduction

The contemporary socio-economic landscape of Africa cannot be fully understood without examining the profound historical forces that have shaped it. The transoceanic slave trade and colonialism represent two of history's most extensive and systematic exploitations of human and natural resources, leaving legacies that continue to influence Africa's development trajectory and global position today<sup>1</sup>.

These historical processes did not merely extract wealth and disrupt social systems—they fundamentally reconfigured economies, governance structures, and cultural institutions across the continent in ways that persist long after formal independence was achieved.

Africa's current resource-extraction economic growth model emerged directly from colonial economic arrangements which were not designed to foster balanced development. Colonial powers deliberately established institutional frameworks, infrastructure networks, and trade patterns that facilitated the efficient extraction of natural resources while limiting industrial development and value addition within Africa. Upon independence, most African nations inherited these extractive economic structures along with artificial borders that complicated nation-building and regional integration efforts.

Against this historical backdrop, the African Union's proclamation of "Justice for Africans and People of African Descent Through Reparations" as the theme of the year for 2025 represents a crucial recognition that contemporary challenges facing the continent are not merely technical problems awaiting technical solutions, but the manifestations of historical injustices requiring comprehensive redress. This theme acknowledges that sustainable

development for Africa necessitates confronting and transforming the deep-seated structural inequalities rooted in slavery and colonialism.

This policy note examines modern Africa's socio-economic realities and institutional architecture from the lens of a historical context that necessitates reparatory justice, highlights progress and achievements in regional integration as paths toward self-determination, and outlines a way forward toward comprehensive justice for Africans and people of African descent worldwide.

The concept of reparatory justice is developed based on attaining a comprehensive repair of damaged economic, social, and cultural systems with an emphasis on empowerment of the African state as a development driver and its quest to deliver inclusive prosperity.

## 2. The historical context

### The Legacy of Slavery and the Slave Trade

The institution of slavery has plagued human societies throughout history, with various forms appearing across civilizations worldwide. However, the scale and impact of the slave trade affecting Africa between the 15th and 19th centuries was unprecedented. Driven by global economic dynamics, particularly the triangular trade system connecting Europe, Africa, and the Americas, there emerged an insatiable demand for forced and coerced labor.<sup>2</sup>

Africa became the primary target for this human exploitation. Between the fifteenth and nineteenth century, more than 15 million men, women and children were forcibly taken from Africa through various means: wars deliberately instigated to capture prisoners, kidnappings, deception, and the perversion of judicial processes.<sup>34</sup>

These captives were transported across multiple routes: the transatlantic passage to the Americas, the Indian Ocean routes to the Middle East and South Asia, the Red Sea corridors to the Arabian Peninsula, and the trans-Saharan paths to North Africa and the Mediterranean.<sup>5</sup>

The transatlantic slave trade is particularly well-documented due to the normalization of record-keeping at embarkation and disembarkation points, providing historians with considerable data on the movement patterns and volumes of enslaved Africans.<sup>6</sup> This extensive exploitation continued largely until formal abolition in the 19th century, though slavery persisted in different contexts well after legal prohibitions were enacted.<sup>7</sup>

### **The Colonial Era and the “Scramble for Africa”**

While European powers publicly justified their increasing involvement in Africa as enforcement of abolition edicts against the slave trade, the true driving force is argued to be a mix of economic opportunism, diplomatic competition, and sociological theories centering on evangelism and atavism.<sup>8</sup> The prospect of enhanced trade and access to natural resources led to intensified engagement with African markets, dominated by European commercial enterprises.<sup>9</sup> Though initially spearheaded by private companies operating with monarchical backing, these enterprises implemented monopolistic trading arrangements through coercion or outright force with numerous African states.<sup>10</sup>

The Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 formalized these exploitative relationships, as European powers convened to partition Africa among themselves, ostensibly to prevent competition and conflict.<sup>11</sup> The actual objective, however, was to monopolize trade relationships and profits while exploiting resources. Infrastructure devel-

opment in Africa during this period was designed primarily to facilitate extraction rather than to benefit local populations or economies.<sup>12</sup>

By 1914, approximately 90% of African territory had fallen under European colonial control, marking the completion of what historians’ term the “Scramble for Africa”.<sup>13</sup> These monopolized private trading entities<sup>14</sup> eventually evolved into fully-fledged colonial administrations, transforming economic exploitation into political domination.<sup>15</sup>

### **Post-Colonial Context and Continued Extraction**

Following World War II, newly emergent global powers pressured European states to relinquish their colonies. This external pressure, combined with indigenous independence movements across Africa, sparked a wave of decolonization and continuing through subsequent decades, with most African nations achieving formal independence by the early 1980s.<sup>16</sup>

However, political independence rarely translated into economic sovereignty. Most newly independent countries maintained their colonial-era economic ties and governance structures. This was for practical reasons of ensuring relative economic stability but had the effect of perpetuating economic dependency. From a governance perspective, the mirroring of the colonizers systems in newly independent states was ill adapted to address the realities of geography, ethnicity, language and traditions. A series of autocratic military coups plagued post-colonial African states, while economic policies continued to emphasize the extraction and export of natural resources through colonial-era business relationships.<sup>17 18</sup> The integration of African economies into global markets remained predominantly characterized by the supply of raw materials without value

addition, perpetuating dependence and vulnerability.<sup>19</sup>

### **Socio-Economic and Cultural Consequences**

The dual historical traumas of enslavement and colonization have left enduring impacts on Africa. The trade in enslaved people, often intertwined with weapons importation, created profound demographic disruption across the continent. Population simulations suggest that Africa likely experienced demographic decline during the period of the trade in enslaved people, with devastating consequences for historic economies.<sup>20</sup>

Gender imbalances were particularly significant, as the slave trade disproportionately targeted males, altering demographic compositions and contributing to the expansion of polygyny<sup>21</sup> and patriarchal institutions that persist in many African societies today. The proliferation of imported weapons facilitated political fragmentation<sup>22 23</sup> across the continent, as violence and enslavement became self-reinforcing cycles. Judicial systems were perverted, and social trust was severely damaged, leaving lasting institutional scars on African societies.<sup>24</sup>

Colonization, though differing in form from enslavement, proved similarly detrimental for most Africans. Some territories experienced large European settlements, while others faced exploitation without significant settler presence. In either case, traditional governance systems and other social structures were systematically undermined or destroyed.<sup>25 26</sup>

In regions with substantial European settlements the real incomes of indigenous African populations collapsed as settlers expropriated prime agricultural lands and valuable natural resources.<sup>27</sup> For example, in South Africa, Black wages stagnated or

declined throughout much of the colonial period while the extraction-based economy enriched the European minority.<sup>28</sup> In territories without large settler populations, monopsonistic trading companies—backed by imperial governments and employing violence and coercion—monopolized trade to the detriment of African entrepreneurs.<sup>29</sup>

These extractive colonial institutional arrangements, focused on labor coercion and resource exploitation, established governance patterns and economic structures that would persist long after formal independence.<sup>30</sup> Though most countries eventually gained independence, the institutional and governance arrangements shaped during colonial rule have proven remarkably persistent.<sup>31</sup>

The struggle for economic independence continues to this day, with former colonial powers maintaining preferential trading relationships with their former colonies. Governance structures established during the colonial era often proved insufficient for managing modern nation-states, contributing to political instability and coups.<sup>32</sup> Historical underinvestment in human capital development has limited economic diversification, while infrastructure networks designed primarily for resource extraction have proven inadequate for balanced economic development.<sup>33</sup>

### **Historical Foundations of Contemporary Challenges**

Africa's position in the global economic system today cannot be understood without reference to these historical processes. The extraction-oriented integration of African economies into global value chains during earlier waves of globalization established patterns that remain difficult to transcend.<sup>34</sup> Colonial powers deliberately limited industrial development in their African territories to preserve mar-

kets for their manufactured goods, leaving post-colonial states with narrow economic bases heavily dependent on commodity exports.<sup>35</sup>

The artificial borders drawn during the Berlin Conference, which disregarded ethnic, linguistic, and cultural realities on the ground, created political units that struggled with questions of national identity and internal cohesion.<sup>36 37</sup> Meanwhile, education systems designed primarily to produce administrative staff for colonial bureaucracies provided insufficient foundations for post-independence development.<sup>38</sup>

This historical context helps explain contemporary challenges facing Africa, from economic vulnerability to political instability. Understanding these historical foundations is essential for designing effective reparatory justice policies that address not only the symptoms but the structural causes of persistent inequality and development challenges.

### **3. Implications of the historical lessons for modern-day Africa's socio-economic realities**

#### **The Enduring Impact of the Slave Trade**

The transoceanic slave trade's forced displacement of millions of Africans continues to reverberate through modern African societies in profound and measurable ways. This mass deportation of people created demographic disruptions and social fractures whose consequences persist over a century later. Recent econometric research has established compelling correlations between historical "slave exports" and contemporary economic outcomes. African countries that experienced greater slave extraction show significantly lower GDP per capita today, even when controlling for other factors like geography

and colonial experience.<sup>39</sup>

The extraction of human capital through slavery triggered cascading effects across social institutions. Regions more heavily affected by slave raiding exhibit persistently lower levels of interpersonal trust today.<sup>40</sup> The research reveals that individuals from ethnic groups that experienced higher rates of enslavement display significantly lower trust toward neighbors, relatives, and local government institutions—a mistrust that stems from the historical reality that many enslaved people were captured through betrayal by community members or neighboring groups.

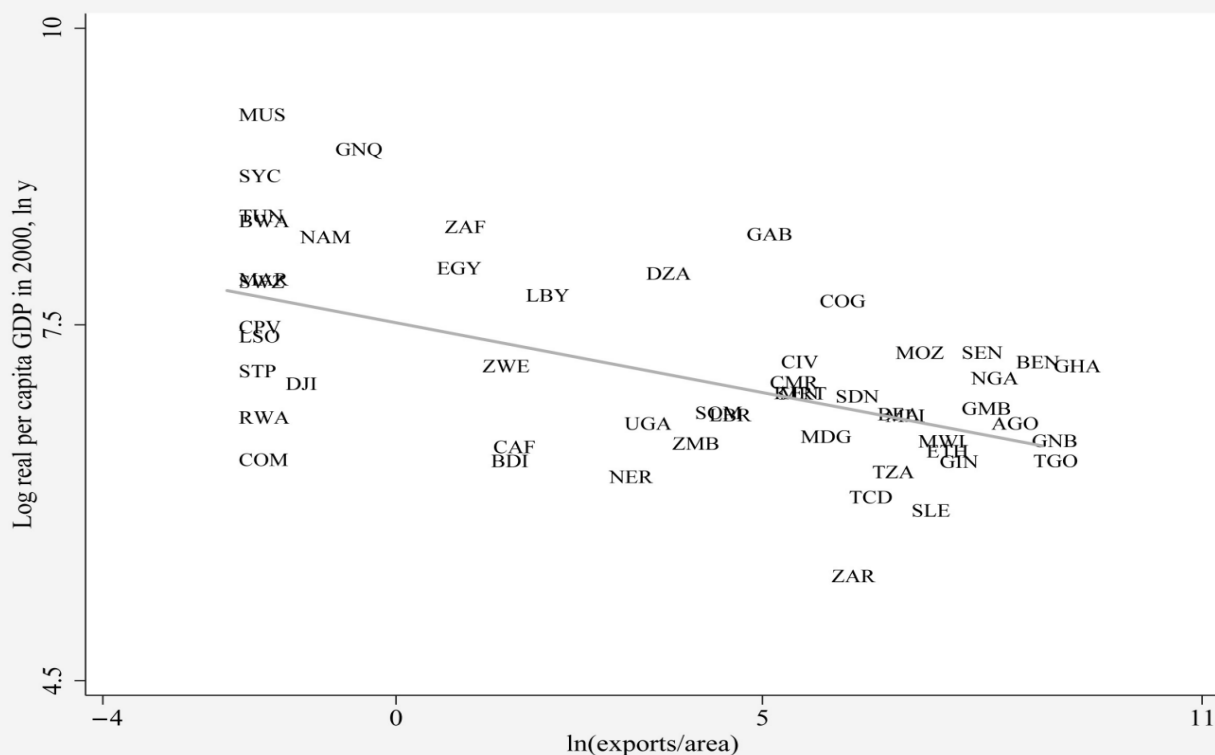
Gender relations and family structures were similarly transformed. Approximately two-thirds of enslaved Africans were male, creating significant gender imbalances in affected regions.<sup>41</sup> This demographic shock appears linked to the entrenchment of polygynous marriage practices and patriarchal social systems.<sup>42 43</sup> These institutionalized gender hierarchies continue to shape modern gender relations across much of the continent.

Connections between historical slave trade intensity and contemporary HIV infection rates, particularly among women has also been documented.<sup>44</sup> Regions more heavily impacted by the trade in enslaved peoples show higher rates of polygyny and sexual behaviors that increase HIV transmission risk, demonstrating how historical trauma continues to manifest in public health outcomes centuries later.

## Research Spotlight: Economic Impacts of the Slave Trade

Nathan Nunn's groundbreaking 2008 study published in *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* established a causal relationship between the intensity of slave exports from African regions and their contemporary economic development. Using shipping records and ethnicity data, Nunn found that countries that experienced greater slave extraction show significantly lower economic development today. Figure 1 below shows how the historical impacts of slavery have enduring economic consequences. The data confirms a negative relationship between the per capita income in 2000 and the exports of enslaved people in the Transatlantic, Indian Ocean, Trans-Saharan and Red Sea trade routes between 1400 and 1900, normalised by the land area.

Figure 1: Relationship between Log Slave Exports Normalized by Land Area ( $\ln(\text{exports}/\text{area})$ ) and Log Real Per Capita GDP in 2000 ( $\ln(y)$ )



Source: Nunn (2008), Figure III, p. 153.

The research demonstrates that the average African country's per capita GDP would have been approximately 72% higher had the slave trade not occurred. The most heavily affected regions suffered the greatest economic setbacks, with statistical significance persisting even when controlling for other variables like colonial experience, geography, and natural resources.

This empirical evidence provides crucial quantitative support for understanding slavery's lasting economic legacy and the mechanisms through which historical extraction continues to influence modern African economic realities.

Source: Nunn, N. (2008). *The long-term effects of Africa's slave trades*. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 123(1), 139-176.

Perhaps most perniciously, the transoceanic slave trade laid ideological foundations for racism and white supremacy that continue to affect Africans and people of African descent globally. The economic imperatives of the slave trade required dehumanizing justifications that eventually crystallized into pseudo-scientific theories of racial hierarchy.<sup>45</sup> These ideologies were later refined during the colonial period and persist in various forms of discrimination and structural inequality worldwide.

Significant gaps remain in our understanding of the full impact of enslavement, with much of the trans-Saharan, Red Sea, and Indian Ocean trade in enslaved people receiving less scholarly attention than the transatlantic system. This research imbalance means that the full scope of the effects of enslavement across eastern and northern Africa remains understudied, potentially obscuring important historical dynamics and contemporary connections.

### **Colonial Legacies in Economic and Political Systems**

Colonial exploitation fundamentally reshaped African economies and governance systems in ways that continue to constrain development possibilities. The extraction of natural resources and agricultural commodities enriched colonial powers while systematically under-developing African economies.<sup>46</sup> Colonial economic systems were deliberately structured to serve metropolitan interests rather than foster local development, establishing patterns of dependency that persist today.

The infrastructure developed during colonialism reflected these extractive priorities. A study of railway systems in Ghana and Kenya showed that colonial transportation networks were designed primarily to move resources from interior regions to coastal ports for export.<sup>47</sup> This infrastructure legacy continues to shape trade patterns, with

many African economies still better connected to former colonial powers than to neighboring countries, inhibiting regional integration and trade.

Colonial land appropriation policies—particularly in settler colonies—created profoundly unequal land distribution patterns that remain contentious issues today. These historical land alienations created lasting property rights regimes that favor particular groups and continue to generate conflict.<sup>48</sup> Colonial authorities appropriated the most fertile land and despite decades of post-independence land reforms, ownership patterns still reflect these historical expropriations.

The arbitrary borders drawn during the Berlin Conference (1884-1885) divided approximately 177 ethnic groups across multiple countries, creating governance challenges that continue to undermine political stability. These artificial divisions contribute to persistent ethnic conflict, particularly in regions where centralized political structures prior to colonization were disrupted.<sup>49</sup>

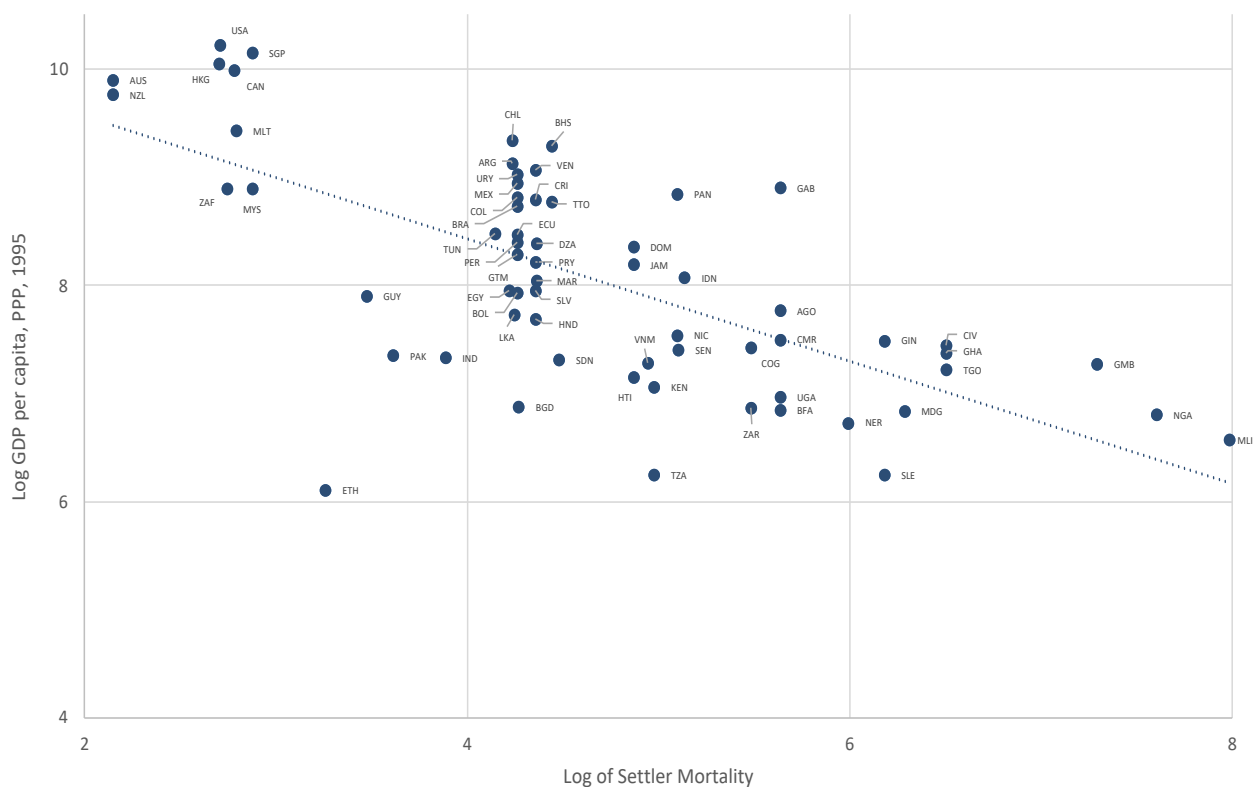
Perhaps most significantly, colonialism established extractive institutional frameworks designed to facilitate resource appropriation rather than inclusive development. Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson's seminal work (2001, 2002) demonstrates how these colonial institutions have persisted into the present, with their extractive characteristics continuing to shape governance patterns.<sup>50 51</sup> Their research reveals that regions where colonizers established more extractive institutions show consistently worse development outcomes today compared to regions where more inclusive institutions were established.

## Research Spotlight: Colonial Institutions and Development

The Nobel Prize-winning work of Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson, and James Robinson has transformed our understanding of how colonial institutions continue to influence contemporary development outcomes. Their 2001 paper “The Colonial Origins of Comparative Development” identified a strong relationship between the mortality rates of European settlers and the types of institutions they established.

As shown in Figure 2 below, in regions where European settlers faced high mortality risks (primarily tropical regions of Africa), they established extractive institutions focused on resource appropriation with minimal settlement. In contrast, in places where Europeans could settle more safely, they created more inclusive institutions with stronger property rights protections and checks on power.

Figure 2: Reduced-form Relationship between Income and Settler Mortality



Source: Reproduced from Acemoglu, D., Johnson, S., & Robinson, J. A. (2001)

Using settler mortality as an instrumental variable, their research establishes that these institutional differences explain approximately three-quarters of income differences between African and other formerly colonized regions today. This work provides compelling evidence that the institutional frameworks established during colonisation continue to fundamentally shape economic performance and development trajectories. It also underlines the specific and persistent challenges related to institution building in Africa, and the nature of their economies relative to their former colonizers.

Source: Acemoglu, D., Johnson, S., & Robinson, J. A. (2001). *The colonial origins of com-*

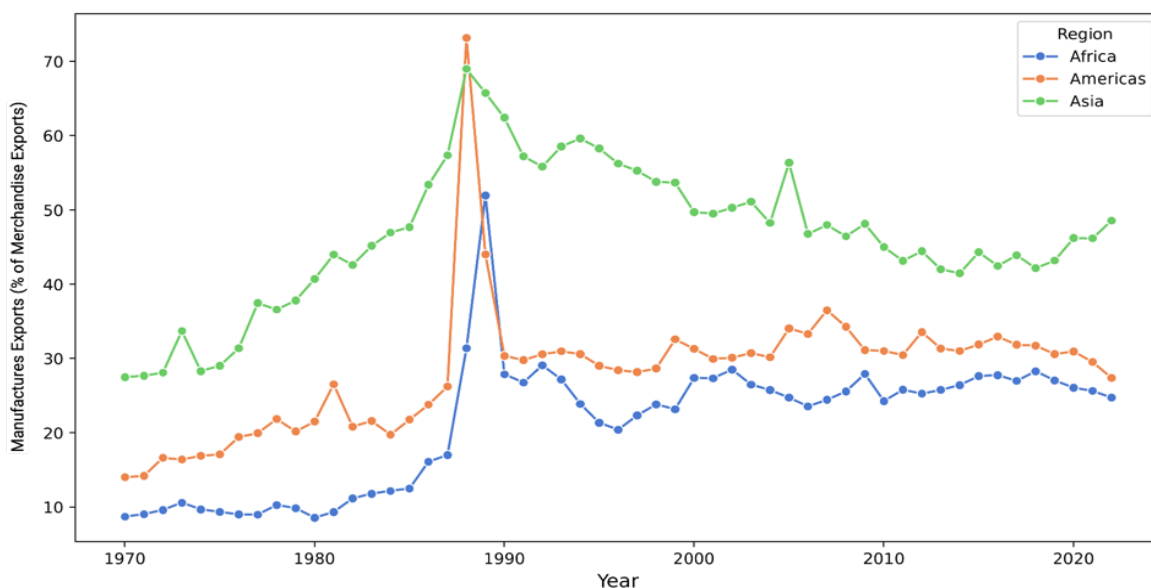
Colonial education systems further compounded these institutional challenges by providing limited educational opportunities primarily designed to train administrative personnel rather than foster critical thinking or technical innovation. As shown in comparative studies of British and French colonial education systems, these different approaches to education continue to influence literacy rates and educational outcomes in former colonies today.<sup>52</sup>

### Post-Colonial Extractive Economies and Institutions

Despite political independence, many African economies remain structured around resource extraction without sufficient value addition, perpetuating colonial patterns of dependency and limiting industrialization opportunities. Recent World Bank research indicates that Africa remains the region most dependent on primary commodity exports globally, with over 70% of merchandise exports from Sub-Saharan Africa consisting of unprocessed or minimally processed natural resources.<sup>53</sup>

This continued economic orientation toward extraction rather than processing or manufacturing reflects what some scholars have termed “neo-colonialism.” Foreign investment in many African countries has created economic enclaves around extractive industries with limited linkages to the broader national economy.<sup>54</sup> These enclave economies generate wealth that largely flows out of the continent while creating relatively few local employment opportunities and minimal technology transfer. While African countries have sought to diversify their economies, and while rapid improvements were achieved in the late 1980s and 1990s to build in more value addition, these efforts have failed to systematically address the lag of diversification and value addition compared to other regions (see figure 3 below).<sup>55</sup>

*Figure 3: Export Diversification Challenges: Africa Lags in Manufactured Exports Compared to Asia and Latin America*



Source: *World Development Indicators Database, World Bank*

The institutional structures governing these extractive economies frequently reflect colonial precedents. Many post-colonial African states inherited or reproduced extractive institutional frameworks that concentrate power and economic opportunity in the hands of elites.<sup>56</sup> These institutions typically feature weak constraints on executive power, limited accountability mechanisms, and blurred boundaries between public and private interests.

The persistence of these extractive institutions has significant implications for governance quality. According to the 2023 Ibrahim Index of African Governance, progress on governance quality has stalled or reversed in many African countries over the past decade, with particularly concerning trends in the areas of rule of law and transparency.<sup>57</sup> These governance challenges can be traced in part to institutional continuities with colonial administrative structures that were designed for control and extraction rather than citizen service and accountability.

The extractive orientation of many African economies also has profound implications for climate justice. While Africa contributes minimally to global carbon emissions (less than 4%), it remains among the most vulnerable regions to climate change impacts.<sup>58</sup> Paradoxically, many African countries face pressure to rapidly extract remaining fossil fuel resources before global energy transitions reduce their value, potentially creating stranded assets while increasing environmental vulnerability. At the same time, Africa's energy gap is one of the most significant barriers to addressing the extractive model of economic relations, which are a result of colonialism. Hence investment in access to energy in Africa continues to face a significant gap with 80 per cent of the global population without access to energy living on the African continent.<sup>59</sup>

Ecological damage from extractive industries represents another dimension of this injustice. Extensive environmental degradation associated with mining, oil extraction, and industrial agriculture across the continent, with affected communities often receiving minimal economic benefits while bearing substantial health and livelihood costs.<sup>60</sup> This pattern echoes colonial resource extraction, with profits flowing primarily to external shareholders and local elites while environmental and social costs are externalized onto local communities.

Climate vulnerability in Africa also reflects historical patterns of underinvestment in infrastructure and institutional capacity. As the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's Sixth Assessment Report (2022) highlights, regions with stronger institutional frameworks and more diversified economies show significantly greater climate resilience.<sup>61</sup> Africa's historical experience of extraction and institutional disruption has undermined precisely these protective factors, leaving many communities more vulnerable to climate impacts.

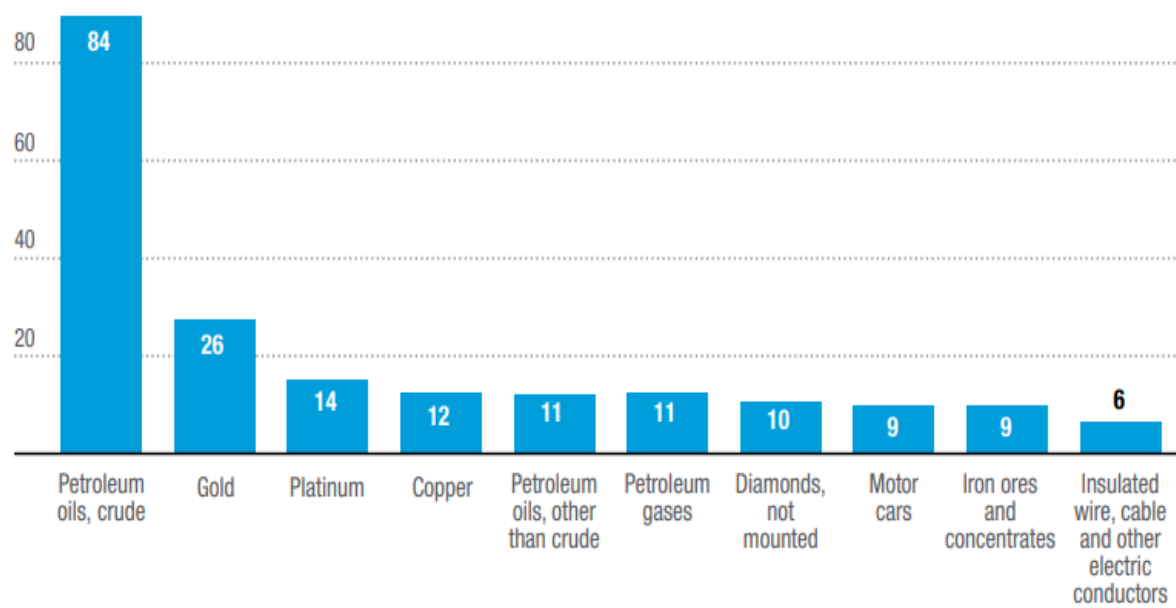
### **Connecting Historical Patterns to Contemporary Challenges**

These historical legacies manifest in contemporary development challenges that cannot be adequately addressed without acknowledging their structural and historical roots. The persistent wealth disparities between Africa and former colonial powers reflect not just current policy choices but accumulated advantages derived from centuries of resource and labor appropriation. According to World Bank data, the average GDP per capita in Sub-Saharan Africa remains approximately 5% of that in high-income former colonial powers, a gap that has narrowed only marginally since independence.<sup>62</sup>

Similarly, Africa's participation in global

value chains continues to be concentrated in low-value extractive activities rather than higher-value manufacturing or service sectors. African countries capture only about 20% of the total value added in their commodity exports, with the majority of value creation occurring after resources leave the continent.<sup>63</sup> The current structure of African exports, illustrated in Figure 4<sup>64</sup>, demonstrates a continued reliance on extractive industries, limiting the potential for diversification and decent job creation. At the same time, reliance on these exports of predominantly raw materials by countries with very limited revenue streams often further locks in extractive trading relationships.

Figure 4: Africa in Global Value Chains: Extractive Activities Outpace Manufacturing and Services (In billions of USD)



Source: UNCTAD, based on data from the United Nations Comtrade database

This pattern of unequal value capture represents a continuation of colonial economic relationships in contemporary form.

Understanding these historical connections is not merely an academic exercise but essential for developing effective policy responses. Development interventions that fail to address the structural and institutional legacies of slavery and colonialism risk reinforcing rather than transforming existing inequalities. Meaningful progress requires acknowledging how contemporary challenges are rooted in historical extraction and designing interventions that deliberately counter these established patterns.

This historical perspective also highlights

the importance of transformative approaches to reparative justice that address not only direct compensation for historical wrongs but also the restructuring of economic relationships and institutions that continue to reproduce patterns of extraction and inequality. The persistent impacts of slavery and colonialism on contemporary African realities underscore the moral and practical necessity of comprehensive approaches to justice and development that acknowledge and address these historical legacies.

## **4. Progress and resilience: Regional Integration and Milestone Achievements**

Despite the profound historical challenges that have shaped Africa's position in the global order, the continent has demonstrated remarkable resilience and determination to chart its own path forward. This resilience is perhaps most visibly embodied in the ambitious continental frameworks and integration initiatives that have emerged in recent decades.

### **Africa's Vision for Self-Determination**

The African Union's Agenda 2063, adopted in 2013, represents a transformative blueprint for the continent's development and serves as a powerful testament to Africa's forward-looking determination. This comprehensive strategic framework for inclusive growth and sustainable development preceded and influenced the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, demonstrating Africa's capacity for global leadership in development thinking.<sup>65</sup> With its aspirational vision of "an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the global arena," Agenda 2063 directly confronts the historical legacies of exploitation and external control.

The implementation of this vision through the Ten-Year Implementation Plans provides concrete mechanisms for translating aspirations into tangible outcomes. The first Ten-Year Implementation Plan (2014-2023) has already guided significant progress in areas such as infrastructure development, governance reforms, and continental integration.<sup>66</sup>

### **Flagship Achievements in Continental Integration**

The African Continental Free Trade Area

(AfCFTA), which became operational in January 2021, stands as perhaps the most ambitious economic integration project in the developing world. As the largest free trade area since the formation of the World Trade Organization, the AfCFTA encompasses 54 countries with a combined GDP of \$3.4 trillion and a market of 1.3 billion people.<sup>67</sup> This landmark agreement aims to increase intra-African trade by 52.3% by eliminating import duties and reducing non-tariff barriers.

The significance of the AfCFTA extends beyond economics—it represents a decisive step toward economic sovereignty and a deliberate shift away from the colonial-era pattern of Africa primarily trading raw materials with former colonial powers. By fostering value addition, industrialization, and intra-continental trade, the AfCFTA directly challenges the extractive economic relationships established during colonialism.

Other significant regional integration milestones include the Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, the Single African Air Transport Market, and the Program for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA), which collectively strengthen Africa's connectivity and reduce dependence on external markets.<sup>68</sup>

### **Overcoming Historical Injustices Through Regional Cooperation**

These continental initiatives reflect Africa's determination to overcome historical injustices through collective action and south-south cooperation. The establishment of the African Medicines Agency in 2019, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, addresses the historical neglect of African health priorities and aims to reduce dependence on pharmaceutical imports.<sup>69</sup> Similarly, the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) represents an innovative approach to governance that emphasizes African ownership and accountability.

ty. By voluntarily subjecting themselves to review by fellow African states, participating countries demonstrate commitment to governance standards developed within an African context rather than imposed from outside.<sup>70</sup>

### **Remaining Challenges on the Path to Justice**

Despite these achievements, significant challenges remain in the quest for socio-economic justice for Africans and people of African descent. Infrastructure deficits continue to hamper economic integration, with the African Development Bank estimating an annual infrastructure financing gap of \$68-108 billion.<sup>71</sup> This deficit reflects not only current resource constraints but the historical underinvestment in African infrastructure for balanced development.

Financial sovereignty remains elusive, with many African countries still dependent on external financing that often comes with restrictive conditions. The external debt burden continues to limit fiscal space for development priorities, echoing historical patterns of economic dependence.<sup>72</sup>

Additionally, while regional integration progresses at the policy level, implementation gaps persist due to capacity constraints, resource limitations, and sometimes political resistance to ceding authority to regional bodies. The full promise of initiatives like the AfCFTA can only be realized with stronger implementation mechanisms and greater political will.<sup>73</sup>

For people of African descent globally, meaningful connections to these African initiatives remain underdeveloped. Strengthening diaspora engagement in continental development efforts and building effective solidarity networks could amplify the collective voice of African peoples in demanding global economic reforms

and reparative justice.<sup>74</sup>

### **Looking Forward**

Africa's regional integration achievements demonstrate that, despite historical injustices, the continent possesses both the vision and capacity to forge more equitable development pathways. These initiatives constitute not merely economic arrangements but acts of historical reclamation—asserting Africa's right to determine its own economic relationships and development priorities. The continued strengthening of these regional frameworks, coupled with demands for global economic reform and meaningful reparations, represents the most promising path toward justice for Africans and people of African descent.

## **5. Conclusion and the way forward**

The historical injustices outlined in this policy note—from the trade in enslaved peoples through colonial exploitation to post-colonial extraction—have left enduring legacies that continue to shape contemporary realities for Africans and people of African descent. These legacies, though still under researched in many aspects, manifest in persistent socio-economic inequalities and structural injustices affecting communities of African origin both on the continent and throughout the diaspora.

Reparatory justice must be understood as a multidimensional framework encompassing acknowledgement, redress, and transformation. It demands more than rhetorical recognition of historical wrongs; it requires a deliberate and strategic policy agenda to confront, redress, and transform the legacies of centuries of systemic subjugation, including enslavement, colonialism, and apartheid. The objective is comprehensive repair of damaged economic, social, and cultural systems to enable genuine self-determination and prosperity.

Within the complementary frameworks of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 2030 and the African Union's Agenda 2063, advancing reparatory justice for Africans and people of African descent has become increasingly urgent. This agenda must inform the implementation of key continental initiatives like the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which holds the potential to restructure economic relationships that have been historically exploitative. Similarly, addressing climate justice concerns is essential, as Africa faces disproportionate impacts from climate change despite having contributed minimally to its causes.

Further research into the history and legacies of enslavement and colonialism on Africa and people of African descent remains crucial. Without a comprehensive understanding of how these historical processes continue to shape present conditions, policy interventions may fail to address root causes of contemporary challenges. This knowledge must then inform a broader agenda for reparatory justice that encompasses economic, cultural, and political dimensions.

We call upon all stakeholders—governments of former colonial powers, African governments, multilateral organizations, international financial institutions, civil society, the private sector, and communities of African descent worldwide—to collaborate in advancing a comprehensive agenda for reparatory justice. For former colonial powers, this means acknowledging historical responsibilities and committing to meaningful action. For countries where people of African descent constitute important communities, this requires addressing systemic inequalities, fostering cultural connections with Africa, and supporting diaspora engagement initiatives. For African governments, it means prioritizing pan-African cooperation and implementing the visionary frameworks already

developed. For multilateral institutions, it requires examining how existing structures may perpetuate historical inequities.

The path toward justice is both a moral imperative and a practical necessity for global stability and prosperity. By operationalizing the complementary visions of Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals through a reparatory justice lens, we can begin to address the deep historical roots of contemporary challenges while building more equitable systems for future generations. The time for rhetoric has passed; the time for transformative action is now.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 While the majority of research has focused on the 'Trans-Atlantic' slave trade, the Africa Dialogue Series will aim to address the legacy of enslavement in the context of its impact across the continent's geography.
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