

# GLOBALIZATION AND THE FUTURE OF AFRICAN CONTINENT

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## **ABSTRACT**

*The advent of globalization has altered the entire structure of the world. It has completely broken down national boundaries. The whole world has become global village in the sense that, satellite communication has shortened distances through micro-chips. The paper discussed the characteristics of globalization and the future of African continent considering her technological backwardness. It opined that, for the continent to become a key actor or player in the global village, it must harness all her abundant human and natural resources through cooperative ventures.*

**Keywords:** *globalization, Africa, liberalization, international linkages*

## INTRODUCTION

Globalization as the name implies, refers to the liberalization and intensification of international linkages in trade, finance, markets, production, research, transportation, energy, medicine, education, politics and culture that is accelerated by discoveries in micro-electronics, information, processing, communications and biotechnology (Beck, 2000). Africa's position in the process of globalization can be appreciated better from the historical perspective, especially from the colonial era. The continent went through an agonizing period of colonialism. Economy was the core factor in the subjugation of the continent by Europe. The primary role of colonialism was to create conditions for capitalist accumulation and ensure steady and cheap sources of raw materials and expanding markets for finished products.

As traditional industries gave way to European ones, the economies of Africa were disintegrated, restructured and integrated vertically into the European economic system. By so doing, Africa experienced a sharp dramatic break with its past history as the dynamics and direction of its development were altered and distorted. Thus, African economies served external interest and became conditioned by the development and expansion of the European economy and needs. The economies of Africa suffered severe disarticulation and stagnation as a result of this historical process. A critical assessment of the contemporary economic history of Africa reveals that what is today known as globalization is neither a new motion nor a novelty. From this perspective, colonialism and imperialism would constitute forms of globalization. It is pertinent to note that, in all these, nations survived by their capacity for adaptation to the vagaries of economic and political changes.

In 1964, Basil Davidson concluded his book *Which Way Africa?* The search for a new society when he said:

*Meanwhile, the battle is everywhere engaged. The 1950s presided over the struggle for political emancipation. The 1960s and may be the 1970s, will preside over an even greater struggle for fruits of political emancipation for the new and unified society without which the people of Africa cannot independently survive or prosper (Adejo, 2002).*

Africa's role in globalization could thus be perceived as seeking new ways of maximizing Africa's comparative economic advantage for profitable international trade. The relationship between Africa and the rest of the world should be live and lets live and not live and let us die. The inherent exploitative linkages that bind Africa to the global system and the internal crisis bedeviling the continent such as its debts, corruption, authoritarian rules, civil wars, ethnic and religious disharmony among other reasons, kept the continent at the bottom of global hierarchy. Today, the continent is beset by overwhelming political, economic and social maladies in this period of accelerated globalization.

## THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF GLOBALISATION

**Technology:** The revolution in technology more than anything else, has intensified the process of globalization. Technology has brought about remarkable improvement in speed, precision and high delivery capacity in virtually every sector of our societies. It is the principal driving force behind the globalization process, especially with its communication revolution which has challenged the sovereignty of nation-states. Technology has created new transnational networks worldwide, by passing the state and rendering it less capable of enforcing regulatory barriers to entry.

**Trade:** The global system has been experiencing the intensification of linkages in trade across national frontiers. Trade barriers are fast being eroded to allow for accelerated free trade. More than \$4 trillion worth of trade cross international borders each year. Trade has brought about greater interaction and mutual interdependence among states and has therefore accelerated the process of globalization.

**Finance:** In the area of finance, the international system has been experiencing rapid flow of capital in diverse ways across national frontiers. Capital is no respecter of national boundaries as it flows quicker and faster in and out of nation states more unhindered than ever before. In 1995 alone, flows of foreign direct investment stood at \$315 billion. This is six times more than the level for 1981 - 1985.

**Environment:** Increasing concerns over the environment has assumed a global dimension. More than ever before, nations are collectively worried about global warming and the depletion of the Ozone layer. Global warming involves a long term rise in the average world temperature of between 2 and 9 degrees Fahrenheit. It is caused by the emission of gasses from burning fossils, fuels-oil, coal and natural gas used in factories, cars, electrical generating plants, tractors, etc. They altogether create the green house gases-carbon dioxide, methane gas, chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) and nitrous oxide. It is expected that, the green house effect would lead to increase in world wide temperature of between 1.5 - 4.5o by the year 2050. Both global warming and green house effects have become major source of concern for the global community as this can destroy vegetation, reduce agricultural yields and disrupt the eco-system.

**Health:** Diseases such as HIV/AIDS has attracted intense discourse both in the electronic/print media within the international system. AIDS has become a global epidemic in which the inability of one state to control the spread of HIV makes it more likely that people in other states will eventually become infected as well. No doubts, Aids provides a graphic illustration on the transnational linkages that have featured international borders and rendered than very porous.

**Information and Communication Technology:** Discoveries in Micro-electronics, information processing and communication technology have no doubt revolutionized the global system. There is so much more information moving around the world than ever before. The convergence of computer and communication technologies is promoting the development of computer - mediated networks. These networks are formed by systems of computers and communication hardware and software which allow users to communicate and transmit data and other types of information across national boundaries. With the cablenikzat5ion of the globe, there is now a global TV audience which experience distant events more fully and a global response is easily elicited.

**Tourism:** It has become an industry of globalization. International tourists cross national borders several times in a year. Friends are made every minute

across national frontiers. Differences in customs, traditions and culture are increasingly becoming more tolerable than some years back. These have brought about a gradual synthesis of cultures thus, leading to emergence of global culture.

**Sports:** This has brought people from the nooks and crannies of the world together in a shared activity. Prominent among these are the Olympics and world cup football competitions. These activities are increasingly homogenizing the global communities. In fact, the number of Africans, especially Nigerians playing football for clubs in Europe is amazing and increasing by the day.

**Advances in weaponry:** Especially in nuclear technology and its delivery capability have also rendered porous, the boundaries of nation states. States have become increasingly vulnerable, especially as the inter-continental Ballistic Missile respects no national borders. The missile travels at a speed of 15,000 miles per hour and has a powerful explosive force.

**Economic Integration:** This is an important response to globalization by nation states. Virtually every region of the world is integrating. Examples are: The European Union (EU), The Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), The Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), The North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), African Union (AU), and many others. They are all striving towards the pulling down of all physical, technical and fiscal barriers among them as a response to globalization.

**Democracy:** Democracy is fast becoming the dominant political values within the international community today. The global trend is that, government must be based on the consent of the people, with the majority having its way while the minority's right to have a say is guaranteed. Essentially, democracy must respond to local peculiarities of countries without losing the core principles and values of choice, the rule of law, legitimacy, authority and accountability (Ake, 1996). However, it is out of place to state that the differential in productivity and competitiveness between developed and developing countries would only enhance the polarization of trade; and that globalization accompanied, if not preceded by liberalization in order to be effective would be a complete signal for the emasculation of the weak and

the promotion of greater strength for the strong. The erosion of cherished cultures and values as the dinosaur in globalization has a diabolical programme and fostered a favourable setting for fragmentation and other divisive tendencies as nation-states have become more vulnerable.

## **THE FUTURE OF AFRICAN CONTINENT IN CATEGORIES**

### **Category One:**

States in Africa should encourage intensive and extensive investment in Research and Technology for Development. Thus, they should fund basic research facilities and help to disseminate commercially viable technologies. Many countries in Africa do not find it necessary to invest in research and development. Instead, they prefer the so-called strategy of transfer of technology and Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI) from the North. Often, this strategy has failed to bring about the needed advanced technology into the continent. This great challenge cannot just be left for government alone. Private sector participation by African states is a must. In choosing technology, we must cautiously assess them and their relevance to our society. We must be ready to develop industrially in the context of an essentially African tradition. Africa requires a type of technology that will improve food production and self-sufficiency as it addresses the problem of hunger and malnutrition on the continent in the make of globalization.

African countries must provide infrastructural development which is an absolute necessity in globalization. Many African countries have poor telecommunication services, inefficient transport system and poor road network. These affect free flow of goods and services within the continent. They also discourage the much needed foreign capital investment in the continent. African states could cooperate in civil aviation and maritime shipping and in many other areas to strengthen them in the process of globalization. African countries should inculcate the culture of good governance and democracy. Democracy emphasizes government based on the consent of the people. Personalization of state power, abuse of human rights, violation of the rule of law, failure to exhibit accountability and transparency and the inability to meet the welfare and basic needs of people

are undemocratic and elements of bad governance. There is the need for African states to diversify their economies as this will enable them compete advantageously in the process of globalization. Nigeria up till today depends so much on the oil sector to the total neglect of other areas and this has caused us numerous problems.

### **Category Two:**

The immediate economic and eventual political integration will effectively re-organize Africa and exploit its human and physical resources for Africa's development. The continent should undertake collective efforts, aimed at genuine integration based on comparative advantage and specialization. It should be noted that, no African country has the capacity for the kind of technology needed to give the necessary push for massive industrialization. Therefore, regional integration should be the only weapon to be used by Africa in the globalization process (Castells, 1996).

The efforts by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC) have demonstrated the will to succeed in spite of all teething problems. The transformation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) into African Union (AU) is a good development and will provide a source of solace as nations group together to take collective actions on challenges that are transnational.

The European Union, the North American Free Trade Agreement and the Association of South East Asian Nation, are example of current attempts by nations to respond to the challenges of globalization. The African Economic Research Consortium which was launched in 1988, provides a forum for 35-50 researchers of about 15 countries should broaden its membership of researchers and countries. This will help in discussing and evaluating researches on energy, biodiversity, biomass or biotechnology and genetic engineering which Africa needs in this world of advanced technology.

In the area of finance, African countries need to intensify cooperation and linkages. This will help capital flows within the continent such as would improve growth prospects. Currency convertibility and capital mobility is imperative for Africa if it must cope with the challenges posed by

globalization. There is also the need to strengthen the African Development Bank (ADB) to make it more functional and relevant for optimal results.

The prevention, management and resolution of conflicts in Africa are another area for cooperation. Africa's peculiar history has made it a conflict prone-region. Many countries in Africa have been grappling with the challenges of political development, good governance and democracy. These have resulted in conflicts of varying proportions. Apart from ECONOMOG, there is no mechanism for managing domestic conflicts as were experienced in Rwanda and Burundi. African countries should establish a frame work for their own regional peace-keeping and peace enforcement.

The several decades of economic delusions have revealed to Africa the futility of do-it-alone economics and the indispensability of a solid manufacturing base for Africa's economic progress. In the context of an integrated regional economy, the dominant role of states such as Nigeria and South Africa will enable a rapid and sure economic development. The problems posed by unequal industrial advantage will be solved by working out a system and passing laws to implement an effective mechanism will enable all citizens of all countries concerned to have reasonable access and relative benefits from comparative advantage of all their respective countries.

### **Category Three:**

United Nation's Commission on globalization to monitor and make periodic reports to the General Assembly of the United Nations is set up. This is necessary since one of the basic problems of globalization is that, it empowers the advanced and industrialized nations and multinational corporations which have control over the technology of communication. There should be regulations and institutions to ensure that their excesses are checked.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENTATIONS**

Globalization is not a myth but a reality. It is an ongoing process. Africans must prepare to deal with it. It provides an opportunity for the continent to show case what it has in this era of international competition. The consequences of globalization on the continent of Africa is that, its people

are expected to exhibit similar attitude, beliefs or perspectives on global issues and developing similar consumptive tastes globally. In addition, capital is expected to flow around the globe irrespective of boundaries. The continent of Africa has become a prisoner of war.

From the analysis, it has been revealed that Africa is not adequately prepared for the aggressive competition of the 21st century. However, it must not fold its hands because doing that, would mean that, it will be excised from the comity of nations and used as dumping grounds for the by products of other people's technology. It is a challenge and the only way to over come it is through investment in research by the governments, individuals and corporate bodies and corporation.

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