Reclaiming Africa's development narrative

Caroline Kioko and Jite Phido (eds)

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Acknowledgements

This book began as a conversation among five of us: Caroline Kioko, Jite Phido, Irene Wakarindi, Makmid Kamara, and Mohammed-Anwar Sadat Adam. We connected through an Incubation Lab of the Atlantic Fellows for Social and Economic Equity (AFSEE) to define a decolonised approach to development funding in Africa. As Africans working in the development sector, we were drawn together by a shared concern: the persistent absence of African voices in the global discourse on decolonisation, especially in development contexts.

What started as a spark of frustration developed into a series of discussions and webinars, inviting others to join us in moving beyond problematising colonialism in development to exploring, with radical openness, African perspectives and alternatives. This was the origin of our book, the outcome of more than two years of collaboration, partnership, and trust that have ultimately shaped this work.

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Working on this book has been both humbling and meaningful, and at times, it has been challenging. We are grateful for the opportunity to share, learn, listen, and amplify these voices. We hope this book contributes to a wider, more honest discussion about decolonisation, and, in some way, cultivates authentic, African-led thinking and action within the development sector.

Caroline Kioko & Jite Phido

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List of abbreviations

ACORD	Association for Cooperative Operations Research and Development
AfCFTA	African Continental Free Trade Area
AWID	Association for Women's Rights in Development
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa
CSOs	civil society organisations
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
EVA	Education as a Vaccine
FLHE	Family Life and HIV Education
GBV	gender-based violence
GNI	gross national income
GVC	global value chain
HREN	Human Rights Funders Network Act
HRFN	Human Rights Funders Network
IBEAC	Imperial British East Africa Company
IBRD	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
IFIs	international financial institutions
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INGOs	international non-governmental organisations
LGBTQI+	lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex
MHPSS	Mental Health and Psycho-social Support
NCE	National Council on Education
NERDC	Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council
NGOs	non-governmental organisations
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
SAPs	structural adjustment programmes
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
STER	Stand to End Rape Initiative
SSMPA	Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Act
UBE	Universal Basic Education
UN	United Nations
UNECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
USA	United States of America

1. Introduction

Caroline Kioko

Africa has been held hostage for decades by a development funding system rooted in colonial legacies. This system imposes priorities from outside the continent, reproduces dependency, and undermines local agency. Well-intentioned international efforts to address poverty and promote development are hamstrung by the current funding structure, which embeds power imbalances. A few donor-controlled financial institutions and philanthropic organisations exert control over resources, priorities, and decisions. Beyond the inherent injustice and often limited impact, this dependency creates profound systemic vulnerability. The outcome is a contradiction, whereby Africa, one of the richest continents in terms of natural and human capital, continues to rely financially on foreign actors. This leaves critical development systems perilously vulnerable to sudden shifts in external priorities, where a single decision, like a major bilateral donor divesting its portfolio, can send distabilising shockwaves through national plans and programmes.

This book is an answer to that paradox. It is a timely call for a radical rethinking of development financing, philanthropy, and economic agency in Africa. It aims to uplift the voices of the global majority, the people closest to the harms created by funding systems embedded in colonial architectures. These voices have very little representation in discussions about development funding and have recently been omitted from conversations about decolonising funding. These conversations have been dominated by wealthier countries, with minimal representation from those who suffer the most from these funding models.

Through these essays, a range of practitioners, scholars, and activists grapple with the contradictions, failures, and opportunities inherent to the current landscape of development funding. These essays present a roadmap for dismantling colonial vestiges of funding systems and examining viable solutions that are African-led and focus on autonomy, equity, and sustainability.

The endurance of colonial legacies in development funding

Central to the book is the recognition that modern aid and development funding did not emerge in a vacuum. Caroline Kioko's essay on the colonial roots of development funding explains the role of policies like the 1929 Colonial Development Act and the post-independence structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) in keeping Africa economically subjugated. Kioko argues that political independence has been realised, but economic sovereignty has remained elusive due to financial structures that enforce a debt-first, public sector investment-last priority, privatisation of key industries, and the treatment of all African states as client states of outside lenders.

In his essay, 'Re-conceptualising development funding for the next generation on the continent', Adekunle Victor Owoyomi goes further by critically interrogating the role of international financial institutions (IFIs), including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), in development funding. According to Owoyomi, these institutions still use loan conditionalities to determine the continent's economic trajectory, one that prioritises Western interests over African self-determination. Further exacerbating this problem is the 'white saviour' mentality that is baked into a great deal of the funding landscape. Decisions about African development are made by people working in European and North American boardrooms, often with little input from the individuals who are actually living and working on the continent.

Mohammed-Anwar Sadat Adam's critical essay on decolonial development funding in Africa further interrogates the power imbalances embedded in the current funding system. He notes the differences between reformist approaches that advocate for incremental changes within existing aid structures and transformative approaches that call for a complete redefinition of African development funding. Adam champions a process where funding is participatory, based on mutual relationships, and decision making power is shifted to African institutions and communities. He advocates for a radical shift in the aid sector.

This shift should be co-created and sustained by African bodies and stakeholders to build an independent international aid funding systems that can support decolonial praxis.

Another key theme emerging from the book is the 'NGO-isation' of development, which has positioned non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as intermediaries between donors and local communities. Jite Phido's essay on ancestral wisdom for decolonising development funding critiques the extent to which NGOs, often financed by donors from the Global North, have usurped core service delivery roles from African states. Although their work is important, Phido contends that their funding structures and accountability systems predominantly align with donor priorities instead of considering the needs of African communities. This has created a 'projectised' and bureaucratic ecosystem of development that, ultimately, is detached from the long-term aspirations of the people it claims to serve.

Reclaiming African philanthropy and funding models

Two essays in this volume examine how traditional African economic models, which are founded on collective ownership and reciprocal giving, provide a potent conceptualisation of development funding decolonisation.

In her essay about reclaiming African philanthropy, Aminah Jasho outlines models of indigenous fundraising, such as *Harambee* in Kenya, *Osusu* in West Africa, and *Stokvels* in South Africa. These systems, rooted in models of mutual aid, shared responsibility, and local trust, stand in stark contrast to the rigid bureaucracies of international funding institutions. Jasho argues that if African communities can self-organise to fund places of worship and social safety nets, they can do the same in financing education, healthcare, and infrastructure, free of external aid dictating the terms.

In her chapter on feminist and pro-sexual minority rights approaches to philanthropy in Africa, Emitomo Oluwatobiloba introduces feminist funding models as a radical alternative to traditional top-down philanthropy. She highlights how feminist grant-makers focus on participatory decision making, are responsive to the fluidity of movements, and engage in non-prescriptive grant making as a way of resisting the power asymmetries inherent in mainstream development funding. Feminist funders do not prescribe strict frameworks, allowing the movements and grassroots organisations to determine how money should be used, thereby shifting the power to the people closest to the issues.

A vision for decolonised development funding

To regain economic independence, Africa must move beyond donor dependence and establish sustainable financing that prioritises local agency. Mazin Abdallah's essay on colonial legacies in Sudanese development funding outlines how the influences of former colonial powers persist in Sudan's financial landscape through structures of debt and trade agreements. Abdallah advocates for a shift towards domestic resource mobilisation within the continent, which includes improved taxation systems, investments from the diaspora, and innovative financing mechanisms, such as sovereign wealth funds and impact investing.

Moreover, when done correctly and not used as a validation tool, participatory grant making represents a model that places decision making authority back in the hands of people in the communities being funded. In contrast to traditional donor-recipient relationships, where priorities are dictated from Northern boardrooms, participatory approaches enable those most directly affected by development challenges to shape the solutions. Jasho's essay also sheds light on the need for reparative and justice-based funding, which acknowledges the historical injustices underpinning Africa's economic landscape. To decolonise funding, she contends that this work must adopt a reparative approach, wherein previous colonial powers recognise their historical role in extracting wealth from the continent and commit to funding mechanisms that can restore rather than perpetuate harm.

A living, evolving movement for change

The intention of this book is not to indict the development funding system, but to name the parts of it that are broken and propose alternatives grounded in African realities. The essays do not claim to offer definitive solutions; they invite funders, policymakers, activists, and communities to interrogate the structures that have shaped Africa's development trajectory. What is needed is not minor reform but a shift in power, from a funding architecture designed and controlled elsewhere to one shaped by the priorities and aspirations of Africans themselves.

Based on the essays in this book, decolonising development funding does not mean rejecting international partnerships altogether; rather, it focuses on reshaping the balance of power. It is also about ensuring that funding benefits the people whose needs it is intended to address, rather than those who control it. Furthermore, it involves recognising that Africa has never lacked ideas, solutions, or agency; it has only lacked the sovereignty to implement those ideas on its own terms.

This book is part of an emerging movement where decolonised funding is not just an idea or a buzzword, but something that examines and changes the structures of funding, its distribution and access.

2. Aid, power and neocolonialism: A tragedy in three parts

*Caroline Kioko**

Abstract

Development funding in Africa continues to be shaped by colonial-era structures that hinder genuine progress. These colonial legacies manifest in exclusionary practices that marginalise local communities, reinforce paternalistic attitudes, and maintain donor-driven conditionalities and systemic inequalities (Gulai, 2018; Elongue and VanDyck, 2021). The power imbalance between donors and recipients often limits aid effectiveness, further entrenching dependency and underdevelopment (Consultative Report, 2023). It is critical to address and dismantle these colonial influences to move toward a more equitable future. This essay calls for a critical interrogation of colonial legacies embedded in development funding, re-evaluating the asymmetrical power dynamics and placing local communities at the heart of decision making processes.

Keywords: development funding, decolonisation, development, underdevelopment, power, colonial legacies, language

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Introduction

Power and knowledge are intrinsically linked; discourse shapes how power is exercised and legitimised (Williams, 2023; Foucault, 1995). Language becomes a tool through which systems of power and knowledge are reproduced. It categorises the world into binaries, such as 'developed' and 'underdeveloped', binaries that determine who benefits, who is excluded, and how hierarchies are maintained. During colonial rule, these language and knowledge systems framed Africans as inferior, enabling the colonial project to be justified first as a civilising mission and later as a development mission. Policies such as Britain's Colonial Development Act of 1929 and the Colonial Welfare and Development Act of 1940, along with the influence of the US-led Marshall Plan, formalised development funding and embedded colonial authority within early funding structures.

In the post-colonial era, the discourse shifted, but the hierarchy did not. Development funding positioned Western institutions as donors and African countries as recipients, reinforcing power dynamics grounded in colonial-era classifications. These discourses continue to shape whose knowledge counts, how priorities are set, and how development is defined.

Despite decades of international assistance, Africa has yet to meet the criteria commonly used to measure development (Mkandawire & Soludo, 2003: 1). This cannot be understood outside the colonial hyper-structures that continue to shape contemporary funding systems. These structures manifest in exclusionary practices that marginalise community perspectives, paternalistic attitudes, systemic racism, donor-driven conditionalities, and neocolonial policies (Gulai, 2018: 3; Elongue & VanDyck, 2021: 2-3). Development funding still reflects unequal donor-recipient relationships (Munyaka & Umoru-David, 2023), where the priorities of local communities are frequently absent from project design and implementation (Consultative Report, 2023: 3).

Conditionalities such as Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) (Mkandawire & Soludo, 2003: 3), which demanded privatisation, deregulation, and austerity in health and education, illustrate the persistence of colonial logics. These programmes prioritised donor interests and produced profound social and economic harm, including increased poverty due to raising cost of living, reduced state capacity in providing social services, and dependency in foreign funding and loans (Huniati, 2023; Adisa, 2013).

While the discourse on decolonising development funding has gained traction, it often fails to interrogate the depth of colonial legacies embedded in current funding mechanisms. The complexities of these legacies, and the ways different forms of foreign funding interact to shape Africa's development agenda, are frequently overlooked. Without this grounding, decolonisation risks becoming symbolic rather than transformative.

Meaningful decolonisation requires re-educating ourselves about how development funding operates (Mkandawire & Yi, 2014: 1), centring local communities through participatory approaches such as free, prior, and informed consent (Munyaka & Umoru-David, 2023), and critically re-evaluating the asymmetric power relations that structure donor-recipient interactions. This includes sharing power, contextualising how power operates, dismantling harmful dynamics, and establishing feedback loops (Anderson, 2021: 68-73).

This essay contributes to the discourse on decolonising development funding in Africa by tracing the origins of development funding to the colonial period, examining the structural logics that shaped it, and analysing the language through which these logics were normalised. This historical grounding is essential; without it, decolonisation risks becoming an empty slogan, invoked widely but lacking the context, analysis, and political commitment required to drive meaningful change.

The essay is organised into four sections. Following this introduction, the second section examines the colonial foundations of development funding, showing how the institutional and policy frameworks established during colonial rule laid the groundwork for contemporary aid architectures. Understanding these origins clarifies how today's systems reproduce the inequalities and dependencies embedded in earlier eras.

The third section explores how these colonial legacies continue to shape present-day development funding. It discusses the persistence of external agendas, policy prescriptions, and conditionalities, such as Structural Adjustment Programmes, that disregard local priorities and often produce harmful social and political consequences. It also highlights the paradox in which development assistance meant to address such harms frequently reproduces the power asymmetries and dependencies it seeks to remedy. The analysis extends to the structural neocolonialism visible in development aid spaces, including the racist attitudes and hierarchical partnerships that routinely marginalise local actors.

The fourth section considers what it would take to move towards a genuinely decolonial development funding paradigm. It argues that achieving this requires more than operational fixes such as multiyear or unrestricted funding. Instead, it calls for deeper introspection, a willingness to interrogate the colonial legacies that underpin current systems, and a readiness to pursue radical changes capable of dismantling those legacies in practice.

The colonial antecedents of development funding

Legacies of colonialism and capitalist accumulation have not only contributed to underdevelopment in Africa but have also influenced the dynamics of development funding. Colonial policies and laws established infrastructure primarily for resource extraction, serving the interests of colonial powers rather than the development of African societies. Additionally, the language and knowledge systems introduced during colonial rule reinforced dichotomies that framed Africa as a region in need of civilisation and external intervention. Ideologies stemming from these dichotomies have influenced contemporary policies and laws regarding development funding and have contributed to power asymmetries characterising funding dynamics. This section examines the colonial underpinnings of development funding by historicising various development policies from the colonial and post-colonial eras to the contemporary period.

On language: Development and underdevelopment

In their natural forms, languages inherently carry their philosophical implications (Wiredu, 2002: 56). The terms 'developed', 'underdeveloped', and 'developing', commonly used to classify and describe countries, inherently suggest a global dichotomy. On one hand, we have 'developed' nations – industrialised countries predominantly in the North. On the other hand, the 'underdeveloped' countries broadly include African countries, presenting a contrasting narrative. These descriptors not only categorise but also implicitly rank countries, thus raising pertinent questions such as what exactly constitutes development. Who sets the parameters for development? And why are certain countries deemed more developed than others?

The stratification inherent in this linguistic framework resembles imperialist practices, dividing the world into distinct compartments, as noted by Fanon (1963). The colonial world was sharply divided along lines such as primitive versus civilised, settler versus native, metropole versus colony, and centre versus periphery (Beusekom & Hodgson, 2000; Fanon, 1963; Mamdani, 1996; Amin, 1974). These dichotomies have evolved, and some, as noted by Beusekom and Hodgson (2000), persist today in the transformed categories of 'developed' and 'underdeveloped'. Mbembe (2001) comments on portraying the African experience in global discourse as inherently negative. This viewpoint embodies a broader narrative that often defines African countries and other southern countries through deficiency rather than potential.

The labelling of these countries as 'underdeveloped' has been criticised for perpetuating a diminished view of human potential, prompting scholars like Mahler, Holla, and Serajuddin (Mahler, Holla and Serajuddin, 2024) to advocate for the abandonment of such terminologies.

This linguistic struggle is part of a broader battle for decolonisation, which Fanon (1963) described as the clash of two opposing forces – one trying to impose a definition, the other resisting it. Fanon (2008) aptly summarises this interaction: 'After all is said and done, it will be understood that the first impulse of man is to say no to those who attempt to build a definition of him.' (Fanon, 2008)

Rodney (1973) defines development as a multifaceted process that encompasses increased skill, capacity, freedom, creativity, and overall well-being at the individual level. Similarly, Sen (1999) views development as the expansion of the freedoms individuals enjoy, emphasising the importance of enhancing human capabilities and eradicating exploitative practices such as child labour and famine to secure these freedoms. At a societal level, Rodney (1973) posits that development involves the effective management of both internal and external relationships while preserving the community's autonomy. Economically, he defines development as the ability of humans to understand the laws of nature and apply this understanding through the creation of tools (Rodney, 1973). These broad definitions of development imply that every society, regardless of geographical or cultural context, possesses the inherent capacity for development. Given its vast resources, how did Africa lag in development?

If development truly depends on such universally accessible capacities, why does a resource-rich country like the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), with all its mineral wealth, vast rainforests, and substantial population, remain mired in poverty? Nearly three-quarters (74.6%) of its populace live on less than $2.15 a day, despite the country's rich deposits of copper, cobalt, and other valuable resources (World Bank, 2024). This striking disparity begs further investigation into the conditions that perpetuate such underdevelopment. Who truly benefits from the extraction of these resources? These reflections challenge us to consider the deeper systemic issues at play, issues that continue to echo the legacies of colonial exploitation and control.

The homogenisation of underdevelopment across Africa and elsewhere has its roots in the histories of colonial pasts, where capitalist interests largely overshadowed humanitarian or civilising missions, as the colonies would claim. According to Marx and Engels (1970), the European bourgeoisie aimed to shape the world in its image through relentless territorial expansion and capital accumulation. This historical pattern was manifested in European merchant companies such as the British East India Company which were formed primarily in the 16th century for trade but later realised they could extend its influence and establish colonial rule as a result of colonial expansion (Williston, 1888; Dalrymple, 2019).

According to Frank (Persaud, 1987; Frank, 1972), underdevelopment is a by-product of capitalism and capitalist accumulation by the metropolis from the periphery. Amin (1974) employed the core-periphery model to refine this approach; his hypothesis suggested that capitalism inherently creates a dominant metropolitan centre versus a marginalised periphery. This relationship involves extracting resources from the periphery and transferring surplus to the metropolitan core, which perpetuates the process of underdevelopment (Persaud, 1987; Amin, 1974).

Building on this context, the current use of terms such as 'development', 'underdevelopment', and 'developing' categorises countries according to their levels of economic, social, and technological advancement. As the United Nations (2024) notes, these terms are crucial in framing development funding, usually an endeavour from Western countries that is to be understood as a generous move to mobilise the economic potential of African countries post-independence. However, Moyo (2009) critiques this perspective, highlighting a prevailing culture where the financially privileged feel compelled to give alms to the 'less fortunate'. This sentiment reflects deeper neocolonial attitudes, as echoed by former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair at the 2001 Labour Conference, describing Africa's state as 'a scar on the conscience of the world' and advocating for increased Western aid.

Development funding predominantly flows from 'developed nations' and international financial institutions (IFIs) such as the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to their developing counterparts. For instance, the United States African Development Foundation (2024) provides grants, capacity-building assistance, and convening opportunities for African entrepreneurs, while the WB provides concessional loans to designated 'poor countries' (World Bank, 2012). These funding arrangements are complex, many of which have not entered the limelight without controversy. Moyo (2009) argues that such aid often does more harm than good, potentially stalling growth rather than stimulating it. Moreover, the current system of development funding holds some colonial tones, meaning there is an irony of support coming from northern countries (Moyo, 2009; Ngugi et al., 1992; Okoloise, 2021).

The legacy and evolution of colonial funding (1884-1945)

The colonial era was characterised by the direct political domination, economic exploitation, and cultural imperialism of African communities by European states (Oncheni & Nwanko, 2012). This period, which lasted from the late 19th century to the mid-20th century, began with the administration of Africa by chartered companies such as the Imperial British East Africa Company (IBEAC) on behalf of European governments. During the drafting of the General Act following the Berlin Conference of 1884, European states pledged to ensure the effective development of trade and civilisation of African colonies (Uzoigwe, 1985: 15).

In 1895, Joseph Chamberlain, then British Secretary of State for the Colonies, outlined the colonial policy in a speech delivered on 22 August 1895. He described the colonies as being in a state of underdevelopment that could be alleviated by imperial assistance. Chamberlain proposed using British funds to develop the colonies, laying the groundwork for the 1929 Act, which aimed to promote the development of both the colonies and the United Kingdom (Abbot, 1971). The first Colonial Development Act, enacted in Britain in 1929, sought to develop agriculture and industry in the colonies while promoting commerce and industry in the United Kingdom (Abbot, 1971).

This Act established the Colonial Development Fund to provide development funds to the colonies and created the Colonial Development

Advisory Committee to recommend funding allocations. Categories included agricultural development, mineral resources, scientific research, public health, fisheries, and forestry. An analysis of the Advisory Committee's reports reveals that local industries such as agriculture, fisheries, and forestry received minimal funding (Abbot, 1971). This demonstrates that the development funding neglected local community interests. As George Abbot observed:

> *In fact, there is ample evidence of the very marginal role which colonial development (or conversely of the overwhelming importance that domestic economic considerations) played in the operation and administration of the Act.*

Aside from disregarding the interests of local communities, the colonial legacy of development funding shows that it was not meant to promote the development of African countries. Notably, only after World War II did the development of colonies become a policy priority for colonial powers. This is illustrated by the following assertion by Beusekom and Hodgson (2000):

> *The post-World War II period has typically been seen as the beginning of the 'development era'. As global power relations shifted and nationalist and international pressure to liberalise and end colonial rule mounted, the colonial powers sought to revise their rationales for the legitimacy of the colonial endeavor. Longstanding dichotomies such as metropole/colony and civilised/primitive were reworked into the categories of developed/underdeveloped.*

Rodney (1973) further supported this by observing that 'for the first three decades of colonialism, hardly anything was done that could be termed as service to the African people; it was only after the Second World War that social services were built as a matter of policy.' The enactment of development policies, such as the 1929 Act, primarily aimed to promote the economic development of colonial powers.

The 1929 Act had a dual purpose: to aid the development of agriculture and industry in the colonies and to promote commerce or industry in the United Kingdom. However, this mutuality of interests was a façade, as the 1929 Act was primarily meant to reduce unemployment in Britain and boost its exports (Abbot, 1971). The 1929 Act followed the multiplier concept (Abbot, 1971), meaning that providing funding for colonial development would stimulate demand for British machinery and equipment, thereby providing employment in the export sector and having secondary impacts on other sectors. Additionally, the Colonial Development Advisory Committee's first interim report mandated that all orders for imported materials and machinery be of British origin (Abbot, 1971). These examples show that colonial development funding primarily served European interests, with African interests being secondary.

The 1929 Act had several shortcomings, including its overly restrictive scope and its failure to effectively contribute to other aspects of development, such as education, while increasing the debt of the colonies (Abbot, 1971). The 1940 Act was enacted to address these shortcomings, replacing the 1929 Act. The 1940 Act established principles of grant-and-loan-aided development (Riley, 2015) and authorised the remission of approximately 11 million pounds in debt that the colonies owed to the British Government. This remission aimed to reduce the colonies' indebtedness (Abbot, 1971).

Post-1945 developments

The post-war period saw an increase in the intensity of development schemes and a greater reliance on scientific methods and bureaucracies to manage projects (Beusekom & Hodgson, 2000). In 1945, the Colonial Development and Welfare Act replaced the 1940 Act. In 1946, the Colonial Secretary of State in the United Kingdom, Arthur Creech, established the Colonial Economic and Development Council to advise on the framing and reviewing of economic and social development plans for the colonial empire (Riley, 2015). After World War II, the emergence of the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the United States led to significant geopolitical shifts. The United States of America (USA) adopted the Marshall Plan, a reconstruction programme aimed at restoring economies devastated by the war. However, critics viewed it as a tactic to counter the spread of communism, illustrating that development funding often carried imperial interests (Riley, 2015).

The post-war period also saw increased cooperation among European nations in development efforts, exemplified by the Marshall Plan. Britain collaborated with other European powers to share the 'burden of development', organising conferences such as the Brazzaville Conference and the Lorenzo Marques Conference to study and manage development issues (Riley, 2015). These agreements obligated European countries to work together on resource development, production, and efficient use in domestic and overseas territories (Riley, 2015).

Criticisms of post-war development programmes highlight that imperialism fundamentally shaped these efforts rather than viewing development as a human right. Britain and other European powers utilised development funding to evade addressing the structural and political issues that necessitated aid, treating them instead as technical problems solvable by large-scale government planning and state-directed welfare schemes. Riley (2015) stated that:

> *By focusing on 'substandard living standards and inadequate government services' as reasons for colonial discontent, the British could avoid dealing with these issues as 'structural or political questions', treating them instead as 'technical problems' that were remediable by large-scale government planning and state-directed welfare schemes.*

Moreover, the European development cooperation networks of the post-war period often excluded the voices of local communities. Discussions about the lives of colonial communities occurred without their involvement, as evidenced by the numerous conferences and meetings held to discuss European cooperation in development. Interestingly, this coincided with the conceptualisation of the right to development by Keba Mbaye and Doudou Thiam in 1967 (Gathii, 2020). Mbaye argued that the failure of development assistance to bridge the gap between developed and underdeveloped countries would haunt Africa (Gathii, 2020). Therefore, as long as colonial hyperstructures influence development funding, genuine development remains a distant dream for Africa.

The Cold War significantly influenced Africa's development policies. Africa became a battleground for ideological conflicts between the

USA and the Soviet Union, despite the emergence of the Non-Aligned Movement, which sought to present Africa as a third bloc countering both capitalist and communist influences (Markovitz, 2014; Dower et al., 2021). International pressure and shifting public opinion in Europe after 1945 played crucial roles in ending colonial rule, with many European countries allied with the USA championing capitalism.

The opposition from the Soviet Union, alongside the rise of the Pan-African Movement and national liberation movements, significantly contributed to the end of colonial rule on the continent. After attaining independence, African leaders embarked on economic recovery and development plans to mitigate the years of exploitation under colonial rule and to grow their economies to compete globally. Mkandawire (2014) distinguished between recovery, which involves utilising existing capacities, and development, which involves creating new capacities (Dower et al., 2021).

During the Cold War, African countries were influenced by the ideological divides of the East and West. Many African nationalists, like Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, introduced African socialism through policies like Ujamaa, which aimed to return to traditional, socialist ways of life as the best model for development. Similarly, Kenneth Kaunda's African humanism in Zambia promoted equality based on African cultural values (Ikechukwu, 2016). Conversely, some leaders embraced Western ideas, such as the free market economic theory applied by Félix Houphouët-Boigny in Ivory Coast, which leaned on capitalist principles of free trade and private ownership (Ikechukwu, 2016). These contrasting strategies illustrate the diverse approaches to post-independence development, influenced by both Afrocentric and Western ideologies.

Theorising the persistence of colonial legacies in modern development funding

Colonial policies designed to benefit imperial powers have persisted into modern times, continuing to shape African communities' economic and social landscapes. During colonialism, social policies such as the promotion of Western medicine and education were introduced, often to the detriment of indigenous practices and knowledge systems (Shriwise, 2022). The Colonial Development Fund was utilised to spread Western education, with European literature and science forming the basis of the curriculum, and European languages serving as the medium of instruction (Carboni, 2024). Frank's metropolis-periphery model provides a framework for understanding how these colonial policies are perpetuated today (Persaud, 1987; Frank, 1969). Frank posited that underdevelopment results from capitalism, where the metropolis (colonial powers) expropriates economic surplus from the satellites (colonised regions).

The 1929 Act, which mandated that all orders for imported materials and machinery be of British origin, exemplifies this dynamic by promoting British economic interests over those of the colonies. In post-colonial Africa, this relationship manifests through the emergence of the lumpen bourgeoisie, a local bourgeoisie closely aligned with metropolitan interests (Persaud, 1987; Frank, 1972). This class shapes socio-economic policies that allow for the foreign expropriation of natural resources, including policies that grant foreign control over the commercialisation of raw materials and promote foreign ownership of the principal means of production (Persaud, 1987; Frank, 1972).

In her 30 August 1995 speech, Wangari Maathai illustrated how colonial structures and legacies continued post-independence (Maathai, 1995). She explained how Western education indoctrinated young Africans with European values, which influenced the African leaders who succeeded colonial governments in perpetuating neocolonial systems. These leaders often benefited from their associations with Europeans while neglecting the interests of their African constituents, resulting in detrimental economic and social outcomes. Ndirangu Mwaura described the post-independence leaders as 'colonial ambassadors' who carried on the legacy of colonialism (Ndirangu, 2005). These leaders maintained economic structures that continued to channel wealth from Africa to the West through practices such as exporting raw materials at low prices and importing expensive finished products. Decades after achieving self-rule, these policies persist, adversely affecting African economies (Alemazung, 2010; Ndirangu, 2005; Greiner, 2021).

Wa Thiong'o (1992) emphasises that perspectives on development are shaped by one's stance on imperialism. He argues that understanding imperialism's impact requires a critical examination of what it has done to our self-perception and worldview. The language of development and underdevelopment, influenced by colonial and neocolonial factors, continues to categorise many African countries as 'least developed' (UNCTAD, 2021). Theories such as dependency theory attempt to explain Africa's underdevelopment by attributing it to European colonialism and capital accumulation. The dependency theory posits that social assistance breeds laziness among recipients (Shephard et al., 2011). Mangwanya (2022) supports this view, suggesting that long-term reliance on foreign aid has hindered Sub-Saharan African countries from developing self-reliant economic policies. Similarly, Moyo (2009) argues that aid recipients in Africa are often worse off due to poor policy implementation and corruption, which waste resources and reinforce imperialism.

However, scholars like Onyeani (2000) advocate for Africans to take responsibility for their development rather than blaming external factors. Onyeani's perspective challenges the dependency theory, urging a departure from blaming Europeans and promoting self-reliance. On the surface, calling for Africans to take responsibility for their underdevelopment seems like an attempt to decentre imperialism from African development, but based on the history provided in this chapter, the two are closely related, if not linked.

These views highlight the links between the origins of colonial development funding and its enduring legacies in contemporary forms. By carefully analysing the historical frameworks that shape current aid and development approaches, it becomes clear that remnants of colonial exploitation still affect the economic situations of African countries. This examination demonstrates why development funding has often not worked to the advantage of Africans and why it continues to fall short. It is indeed contradictory to expect that policies and practices based on colonial legacies can serve as effective means for decolonising development funding. Consequently, there is a pressing need to completely reassess development strategies and funding policies to ensure they truly benefit African people.

Colonial legacies and their impact on modern development funding

Building on the exploration of colonial antecedents, this section delves into the profound and ongoing influence of colonial legacies on contemporary development funding and international aid. These historical frameworks have shaped and continue to shape modern aid structures and practices, perpetuating inequalities and reinforcing dependency. International aid, as defined by the official development assistance (2024), involves transferring money and resources from countries categorised as 'developed' to 'developing' to combat poverty and support economic development. Moyo (2009) categorises aid into three types: humanitarian or emergency aid, charity-based aid, and official development assistance, which can be bilateral or multilateral. Humanitarian aid is provided in response to natural and man-made disasters. While traditionally associated with NGOs and faith-based institutions (Riddell, 2009), a substantial portion now comes from bilateral donors and multilateral organisations, particularly for ongoing crises. Charity-based aid, which has evolved into what is now known as philanthropic funding, is provided by charitable organisations to support various causes and initiatives (Moyo, 2009). Official development assistance (ODA), provided in non-emergency situations, can take the form of either bilateral aid, directly from one government to another, or multilateral aid, which is channelled through international institutions like the World Bank (Riddell, 2009).

Nonetheless, the idea of aid carries its own controversies and intricacies; it is significantly influenced by historical colonial legacies and implications (CivSource Africa, 2023). The presence of aid highlights fundamental inequalities, as initiatives aimed at reducing poverty frequently adopt Eurocentric approaches that focus on the most disadvantaged, particularly in nations designated as least developed (CivSource Africa, 2023). Colonial legacies in development funding extend beyond theory; they manifest as real world exclusionary decision making and conditional funding (Munyaka & Umoru-David, 2023). Several scholars have criticised the concept of aid. Skinner (1996) contends that excessive aid can hinder the development of self-sufficiency, thereby promoting dependency. Moyo (2009) argues that development aid frequently harms the very communities it intends to support, reinforcing Eurocentric, racial, and colonial notions that suggest Africans require external assistance for progress.

A report by CivSource Africa (2023) highlights several manifestations of colonial tendencies in development funding. These include restrictive funding, Eurocentric development agendas that diverge from community needs, racial and paternalistic disparities in compensation, mistrust of local organisations, and inappropriate, non-contextual aid for marginalised communities. The blurred lines between colonialism, post-colonialism, and neocolonialism often lead donors to justify their actions as altruistic, masking the colonial underpinnings of their aid efforts (Smalik & Putnam, 2022). This perceived altruism is frequently accompanied by donor fatigue, where donors become apathetic due to the slow pace of change despite significant investments, resulting in poorly conceived projects (Elongue & VanDyck, 2021). Conversely, recipient fatigue arises when communities in the southern hemisphere feel disadvantaged by aid initiatives that do not centre their cultural perspectives, involve them sufficiently, or address administrative burdens (Elongue & VanDyck, 2021).

Despite numerous development programmes, Africa continues to suffer from endemic poverty and underdevelopment. This ongoing issue can be attributed to various factors, with colonial influences in development funding and programmes at the core. Assessing the impact of colonial legacies on modern development funding requires analysing bilateral and multilateral funding from international financial institutions (IFIs) and individual states, whether directly or through their development agencies. Grasping this foundation is crucial, as it shapes the funding dynamics observed in philanthropies and private and political foundations participating in contemporary development efforts.

A key characteristic of development funding is the continued imposition of external policies and conditionalities, such as structural adjustment programmes (Mkandawire & Soludo, 2003). These programmes, imposed as prerequisites for receiving development funding – either as loans or grants – from IFIs, often fail to consider local contexts and priorities, resulting in deteriorating infrastructure, heightened poverty, and weakened institutional development (Mkandawire & Soludo, 2003). SAPs frequently encompass austerity measures like reducing public expenditure, deregulating markets, and privatising state-owned enterprises. While these policies aim to stabilise economies and promote growth, they often lead to adverse social and political effects. Reduced public spending frequently diminishes access to essential services such as healthcare, education, and social welfare, worsening poverty and inequality, and disproportionately impacting the most vulnerable populations (Mkandawire & Soludo, 2003). Furthermore, the stringent economic policies undermine the ability of African governments to govern effectively, resulting in increased political instability and social unrest (Mkandawire & Soludo, 2003).

The Lesotho-South Africa Water Project serves as a prime example of how development funding from IFIs can have detrimental effects on local communities. Funded by the World Bank (WB) and other international institutions, this project involved the construction of two large dams, Katse and Mohale, between 1987 and 2007 to supply water to South Africa and electricity to Lesotho (Gulai, 2018). While intended to reduce environmental degradation and boost local economies, the project displaced local communities, disrupting their livelihoods and socio-cultural practices. The WB's resettlement guidelines emphasised compensation payments over securing sustainable livelihoods for the affected communities. Additionally, the WB argued that only consultation, not consent, was necessary, undermining the communities' autonomy and rights (Gulai, 2018).

Structural adjustment programmes and other conditionalities illustrate the disconnect between funding intentions and local realities. They also demonstrate the power dynamics inherent in development funding; Mkandawire and Soludo (2003) note that these programmes relegate the views of African scholars and policymakers, perpetuating a paternalistic approach where Africans are deemed incapable of self-governance and, in the long run, undermining the long-term sovereignty and self-sufficiency of the affected countries.

In response to the adverse effects of these conditionalities, international aid often becomes a systematic response and by-product. International organisations and donor countries provide aid to alleviate the immediate suffering caused by these economic reforms. This aid has the potential to create dependencies and perpetuate power imbalances, as it is not designed for systemic change, and recipient countries rely heavily on external assistance to address the gaps left by reduced public spending.

One significant impact of international aid is the structural changes it generates within societies (Newby, 2010). These changes include shifts in hierarchy and power structures and the emergence of new social groups and categories. Given the profound impact foreign funding can have on communities, aid projects must be well-suited to the community's needs and contexts. This necessitates considering the appropriateness of aid and how it is administered and disbursed (Newby, 2010). NGOs are one of the primary avenues through which aid is distributed in Africa (Huniati, 2023). Despite their potential for socio-economic development, NGOs have often faced criticism for their personalistic approaches, transforming their roles from 'missionaries of empire' to 'missionaries of development' (New African, 2018).

Munyaka and Umoru-David (2023) note that the funding models relied upon by international NGOs are often rooted in colonial vestiges that breed an overreliance on external funding, primarily from Western donors. Additionally, funding from external donors, such as development funding to states, is often conditional, specifying the issues that local NGOs should focus on. This results in a clash of values as local communities are forced to choose between addressing immediate needs dictated by the funding or adhering to their principles and tackling their most pertinent issues (Munyaka & Umoru-David, 2023). The power imbalance between donors and local communities often leads to the prioritisation of donor interests over local needs. Furthermore, reliance on external funding can undermine community self-sufficiency, leading to disempowerment and dependency (Huniati, 2023).

This dynamic also alters the role of the state in development, as NGOs take over functions traditionally managed by the government, influenced by neo-economic and neo-liberal agendas (Adisa, 2013). This shift can enable corrupt governments to misuse resources, resulting in increased conflicts, political instability, and debt (Izobo, 2007). In some countries, aid dependency has led to heightened corruption, political instability, and conflict over control of aid resources (Izobo, 2007). In contrast, some countries, like Botswana, have effectively leveraged aid for development through coordinated efforts between the government and donors, rejecting aid that does not align with national priorities (Izobo, 2007).

Neocolonialism persists within development aid spaces. A report by Peace Direct (2021) identifies structural neocolonialism manifesting in several ways. First, it appears through racist attitudes, where funders either assume the inherent neutrality of their work or believe that local communities lack the capacity and skills, thus requiring external training, or that local communities cannot be trusted to manage funds. Structural neocolonialism also manifests through biased recruitment practices in which Western-educated or white-identifying staff are favoured for management positions over non-Western-educated staff, who are often recruited only to comply with labour law quotas or to fill hands-on roles (Peace Direct, 2021). As identified by Kioko in her research on the impact of development on gender equality (Kioko, 2023), neocolonialism festers in partnerships with local actors. Funders often seek out local organisations not as equal partners but as dispensable implementers. Funders position themselves as contractors outsourcing critical community work, which starkly demonstrates power imbalances and often results in ineffective partnerships.

Similarly, organisational structures remain another site of colonial relics. Coupled with staffing dynamics that reinforce the 'north-south' divide, funders choose to work with select organisations in recipient countries. Some of these 'local' offices are branches of the head offices, further perpetuating the idea that local communities or locally-led organisations cannot manage funds (Peace Direct, 2021). This also translates to the networks that funders opt to maintain, which privilege people from the North. This may be observed in the location choices for strategy meetings and stakeholder sessions, which often occur in Europe or the Americas (Peace Direct, 2021).

Lastly, the nuances of language reflect the colonial relics that still exist in development aid spaces. Often, references are made to local actors as 'beneficiaries' and 'downstream partners', terms used to exclude and signify the superiority of the funding organisations over local actors and communities (Kioko, 2023). Such terminology perpetuates a hierarchical relationship, positioning funders as saviours and local communities as passive aid recipients. This language reinforces the notion that local actors lack agency and capacity, justifying external donors' continued control and oversight. Furthermore, terms like 'capacity building' have been used to imply that local communities inherently lack the skills and knowledge necessary for development, ignoring the existing expertise and resilience within these communities. This linguistic framing undermines the self-sufficiency and dignity of local actors, which are hallmarks of colonial attitudes.

Towards a decolonial funding paradigm

Recently, the topics of decoloniality and decolonising funding have sparked significant interest and dialogue. However, truly decolonising funding requires a deep understanding of its colonial roots. Many discussions still overlook how development funding has sustained colonial frameworks and the connections among various types of foreign funding and the overall development agenda. It is crucial for international aid to integrate with broader discussions at international, regional, and national levels regarding development; without this connection, aid efforts risk becoming surface-level and unsustainable. Current discussions on decolonisation have put forth several recommendations, such as promoting trust-based partnerships with local organisations, empowering through localisation, and advocating for multi-year and unrestricted funding, along with various operational recommendations.

This essay has illustrated that development funding is rife with colonial legacies, including epistemic divides and paternalistic attitudes from foreign donors, as well as colonial-like policies and a deficiency of community-centred strategies. Consequently, it becomes clear that the recommendations offered cannot succeed without authentic dialogue about colonial legacies in development; mere operational changes cannot eliminate the ingrained colonial influences that persist. Moreover, the discussion around decolonisation cannot be led by the same entities that are accused of maintaining colonial undertones in international aid – a phenomenon that exemplifies neocolonialism. While the operational recommendations are constructive, they cannot independently achieve decolonial development. We must engage in deeper reflection and analysis of the nature of colonial legacies in development and be prepared to implement transformative changes that genuinely contribute to dismantling these legacies. This section presents further solutions that could aid in addressing these colonial influences in development funding.

Dismantling colonial relics

The language and knowledge systems related to development frequently create a segmented world marked by dichotomies (Beusekom & Hodgson, 2000; Fanon, 1963; Mamdani, 1996; Amin, 1974). To dismantle these divisions, African scholars and intellectuals focusing on African development must adopt a critical stance, embody Afrocentric values, and embrace Pan-Africanism in their efforts to deconstruct such frameworks (Shivji, 2007). African NGOs and civil society organisations (CSOs), which serve as connectors between foreign donors and local communities, need to critically assess their development partners by utilising anti-imperialist and Pan-African intellectual perspectives (Shivji, 2007). In the same vein, if an international organisation claims to advocate for the interests of Africans, it should apply Afrocentric and Pan-African theories and methodologies rather than Eurocentric ones. Shivji emphasises that African NGOs should leverage Pan-African insights established by Pan-African thinkers:

> *Just as the African people have struggled and opposed structural adjustment in the streets, African intellectuals have critically scrutinised its neo-liberal underpinnings and exposed globalisation as a new form of imperialism. African NGOs must creatively appropriate these intellectual insights. They must learn from the actually existing struggles of the people before evangelising on donor-fads of the day:*

gender, human rights, female genital mutilation, good governance, etc. The educators must first be educated (Shivji, 2007; 45).

Likewise, Mkandawire and Ilcheong Yi (2014: 1) highlight the significance of education and learning from others in formulating effective development policies. They promote a non-linear perspective on history and development, emphasising the value of learning from diverse sources to unearth new opportunities. Consequently, nations aspiring for development, along with those facilitating any form of progress, must remain receptive to fresh ideas and innovative adaptations.

The remnants of colonialism in development funding are evident today in various formats, such as imposed agendas and SAPs that overlook African viewpoints (Mkandawire & Soludo, 2003) and diminish local community voices (Elongue & VanDyck, 2021; Gulai, 2018). Paternalistic attitudes and practices, exemplified by complex administrative processes typical of micromanagement, further sustain these remnants (Elongue & VanDyck, 2021). A thorough assessment and re-examination of new development approaches will empower African governments, policymakers, NGOs, and civil society organisations to identify colonial remnants in development funding and discern funding objectives rooted in colonial legacies.

Centring local communities in decision making

Development funding programmes frequently neglect the perspectives and needs of local communities (Gulai, 2018). Truly prioritising local communities goes beyond just expressing good intentions or engaging with them superficially; it involves genuine consultation and securing their free, prior informed consent before project implementation. Elongue and VanDyck (2021) draw upon Wilcox's model of varying participation levels to demonstrate how participatory methods can alleviate recipient fatigue via community involvement. This model is based on several key pillars: information, consultation, deciding together, acting together, and supporting independent communities. 'Information' means notifying the community about proposed projects; ‘consultation’ includes offering options and attentively considering feedback; ‘deciding together’ focuses on aligning interests and collectively deciding the best course of action; ‘acting together’ entails forming partnerships to implement projects; and supporting independent community ‘initiatives’ implies providing financial support and guidance to enable communities to execute their projects. This model is valuable for funders committed to prioritising local communities and helps avert the imposition of agendas and superficial engagement with communities.

Centring local communities can be achieved by enabling them to exercise agency through local organising (Munyaka & Umoru David, 2023). This local approach allows community members to tackle social injustices by crafting their own solutions. For example, in North-Central Nigeria, the Vaccine Network for Disease Control engages female small-scale business owners in adopting and overseeing a primary healthcare centre (Munyaka & Umoru David, 2023). While fostering community-driven interventions, funding efforts must actively seek to avoid negative consequences for these communities. Hunaiti (2023) recommends several strategies that funding organisations and NGOs can implement to reduce their adverse effects on communities. These strategies include diversifying funding sources to avoid transient or ineffective initiatives, ensuring that burdens do not fall on the communities, forming partnerships with local businesses and governments, and exploring community-beneficial, income-generating activities.

Additionally, funding organisations and NGOs should emphasise long-term planning and evaluations led by locals, ensuring that their interventions are tailored to the specific context and adaptable to evolving situations. Lastly, they must prioritise transparency and communication regarding financial transactions and resource distribution. It is unreasonable for funding initiatives to expect communities to engage and make decisions if they lack control over resources or influence in the allocation of those resources.

Re-evaluating power dynamics

Aphorisms like 'he who pays the piper calls the tune' illustrate the fickle nature of power, which can be utilised for various purposes. Power dynamics are inherent in development funding (Emerson, 2020). According to Emerson (2020), power is described as the ability of social actors to affect decisions (Brugnach & Dewulf, 2017), the potential to control or sway individuals, groups, or institutions (Ran & Qi, 2019), or the capacity of one actor to persuade another to take actions they would not normally undertake (Dahl, 1957).

Development funding power dynamics are imbalanced, with donors often holding greater influence over recipients (Consultative Report, 2023). Donors utilise various forms of power, including formal or structural power, which involves decision making authority and agenda control (Emerson, 2020). Instrumental power relates to resource allocation, while discursive legitimacy provides the right to speak credibly and authoritatively on specific matters (Emerson, 2020). Discursive legitimacy acts as a subtle power, influencing through the prevailing discourse (Emerson, 2020). This influence can lead to false consciousness, where those who are oppressed adopt their oppressors' perspectives and compliantly align with them (Fay, 1987; Emerson, 2020).

Foreign funders leverage their influence to control and urge individuals and communities towards specific actions. In this context, development funding acts as a carrot-and-stick approach, rewarding certain behaviours while punishing others. For instance, aid conditionalities are frequently imposed on African nations to enforce democratisation, with funding being rescinded if conditions are not met. Moreover, SAPs highlight how donor funding corresponds with the previously mentioned definitions of power.

Donors exercise formal authority by establishing the agenda, defining, and determining the scope and conditions for various development initiatives. This authority may be wielded negatively if communities are excluded or when their free, prior informed consent is disregarded (Gulai, 2018). Donors also apply instrumental power by providing funds and personnel to carry out development projects in developing nations. They claim discursive legitimacy by addressing perceived issues impacting local communities and directing funds towards those areas. This approach can have adverse effects when donors overlook the genuine needs of a local community and instead impose projects aligned with their agenda. Elongue and VanDyck (2021) illustrate this with an example where the District Commissioner for Mulanje District in Malawi remarked that numerous CSOs did not meet the community's needs. For example, even though a considerable sum was designated for HIV/AIDS initiatives, the community communicated a priority for water and sanitation, yet the CSO did not adjust its focus.

In the context of ongoing decolonial discourse, power dynamics can often appear abstract. Many donors fail to recognise their influence on development funding and practical strategies for addressing imbalances. Successfully addressing a power imbalance necessitates a clear understanding of how power operates or presents itself. Brisbois and Loe (2016: 22) noted that shifting or sharing power requires us to consider who sets collaborative agendas, the financial, technical, and institutional capacities of the involved actors and their utilisation, the knowledge and perspectives that are prioritised, and the prevailing societal values within the relevant context.

Moreover, reassessing power dynamics involves five critical actions: identifying and analysing power, evaluating power within context, taking steps to dismantle power dynamics, and creating feedback loops. Identifying and analysing power means recognising how these dynamics manifest (Anderson, 2021). Evaluating power in context involves pinpointing the influence, power, and resources available to communities and organisations to challenge existing power structures (Anderson, 2021). Taking steps to dismantle power dynamics requires actively confronting existing norms and biases (Anderson, 2021). Creating feedback loops entails creating systems to monitor and assess power dynamics while establishing metrics to challenge current power structures (Anderson, 2021).

To address the power imbalance in development funding, Emerson (2020) suggests power-sharing, which entails 'sharing responsibility for decision making and actions among stakeholders in collaboration'. In implementing this approach, Emerson and Ran & Qi (2018) highlight several essential factors: building trust in local institutional systems through contracts and assurances that minimise uncertainty; committing to long-term projects to encourage stakeholders to devote time and effort to power-sharing; and facilitating collaboration among stakeholders with previous successful partnerships. The effectiveness of power-sharing is further enhanced when stakeholders possess skills in negotiation, strategy development, visioning, and professional expertise. Furthermore, power-sharing tends to be more effective in voluntary networks rather than mandatory ones, as participants are generally more inclined to engage in power-sharing when the perceived benefits surpass the costs.

Conclusion

The history of development funding can be traced back to a colonial framework that shaped the dynamics of power. This essay illustrates how different knowledge systems contributed to power imbalances. By applying development theory to explore the core-periphery relationship, it also examines the emergence of the terms 'developed' and 'underdeveloped' alongside the impact of colonial legacies on development funding. This exploration uncovers that development policies often did not prioritise the actual advancement of African nations. For instance, critiques regarding the 1929 Act and the 1940 Act highlighted that these regulations overlooked local community perspectives and were not specifically designed to advance the growth of African colonies (Abbot, 1971).

Likewise, the strategic use of policies to evade accountability for colonialism (Riley, 2015) and the establishment of the IMF and WB, which continue to uphold the colonial legacies in development funding through aid conditions, further illustrate that development funding remains entangled with colonialism. These colonial legacies are evident in several ways, such as the exclusion of communities from decision making, the prioritisation of funder interests through the imposition of development projects without considering local needs, and condescending attitudes displayed by donors towards recipients, highlighted by the expert-beneficiary categorisation. As discussed in the essay, power imbalances persist in development funding, as donors frequently exercise various forms of power, including formal, legitimate, and discursive (Emerson, 2020).

This essay has examined the colonial legacies influencing contemporary development funding and international aid in Africa, emphasising how these historical structures continue to affect and hinder the development sector. To engage in a meaningful discourse on a decolonial funding paradigm, it is essential to address and dismantle these colonial remnants. Additionally, the essay presents actionable steps to alleviate power imbalances and dismantle colonial histories, such as recognising different forms of power and their application in development funding, advocating for power-sharing, involving communities in decision making processes, and empowering them to have control over development initiatives (Anderson, 2021; Emerson, 2020; Ran & Qi, 2018; Elongue & VanDyck, 2021).

Decolonising development funding and international aid requires a profound shift in how we understand and implement aid, rather than just minor adjustments to operations. To establish a development model that reflects Africa's unique contexts and is devoid of colonial implications, it is crucial to acknowledge and address the colonial roots of existing funding practices. This is the only pathway to advance the discourse on decolonising development.

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3. Decolonial development funding in Africa reimagined

*Mohammed-Anwar Sadat Adam**

Abstract

This essay discusses the need for a transformative shift from traditional, Western-centric funding models towards a more equitable, inclusive approach informed and influenced by perspectives and experiences from Africa. Drawing from the author's experience as a development practitioner, together with a review of existing works on the topic, this essay takes a reflective and transformative lens by examining the contestations between the reformist and the transformative approaches adopted by the different actors in the aid chain. It examines the convergence of thoughts, ideas, and actions on decolonising the African development funding landscape. The final part of the essay provides alternatives to what an equitable and decolonised African development funding model could look like. It concludes by advocating for a revolutionary movement in the aid sector, urging organisations and donors to actively participate in re-defining, re-designing, co-creating, and supporting the emerging, self-sustaining decolonial funding model in Africa.

Keywords: decolonisation, decolonial, Africa, funding model, development

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Introduction

The objective of this essay is to provoke a rethinking of funding models, moving away from the dominant models controlled by Northern powers. The essay contextualises decolonial African funding through available literature, papers, and blogs, combined with the author's perspectives and lived experience as a development practitioner. While embracing the structural, administrative, and ideological dimensions of the constraints faced by African and Southern organisations, this essay underscores the importance of understanding how these intersect with historical, social, and cultural contexts within the decolonial funding discourse. Furthermore, this essay acknowledges the centrality of how power, money, and accountability are manifested in the current funding landscape, as well as the legacies of coloniality in international development. Here, I view power as dynamic, contextual, historical, and relational. It concludes by presenting a bold reimagining of what decolonial funding could and should look like.

Before delving further into the discussions, it is important to briefly reflect on the topic's background and provide conceptual clarification on some of the key terms used in the essay.

Introduction: Understanding decolonial African funding

Literature on decolonising aid shows that the issues raised in this essay are not altogether new (Pailey, 2020; Patel, 2020; Bond, 2021a; Bheeroo et al., 2021; House of Commons International Development Committee, 2022; Partos, 2022; Paige et al., 2021). However, the growing recognition of the need to shift the power imbalances that characterise the funding systems and practices presents an opportunity to re-echo the issues for discussion (Bond, 2021; House of Commons International Development Committee, 2022; Hodgson, 2018). The ambition is to stimulate a discourse that leads to collaborative efforts to drive transformative change in the funding landscape in Africa and beyond.

In the literature, there is consensus that attempts to decolonise development funding are a reaction to an increasing outcry against unjust funding models favouring large Northern-based international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), which have left local and Southern organisations under-resourced (Centre for Humanitarian Leadership and RINGO, 2022; Kumi et al., 2023; Partos, 2022; Oxfam, 2020; Emmens and Clayton, 2017).

As much as decolonising development funding is a political and evolving concept that does not lend itself to a single definition, this essay broadly conceives of 'decolonised funding' as one strand within the current broader debate on the decolonisation and localisation of development. For this essay, decolonised funding centres on the growing acknowledgement of the entrenched historical injustices of colonialism in development systems, policies, and practices, alongside demands for a shift in power and resources (including funding) towards local communities. At the same time, it emphasises the importance of valuing and using local knowledge systems and perspectives on development appropriately, thereby fostering ownership and self-determination driven by local needs and resources. It focuses on a more equitable distribution of power, decision making, resources, and recognition of the agency of local actors in providing authentic development solutions.

One of the most striking aspects of the discourse is the diversity in the conceptualisation of decolonising funding. Different actors in the aid chain possess unique perspectives that reflect the multi-faceted nature of the concept. While the spirit and key principles are shared, there is no one-size-fits-all description. One that particularly resonates with me is 'the process of intentionally de-constructing, disrupting, and re-constructing the colonial systems, structures, processes and culture as part of the international aid, development, and humanitarian sector' (van Wessel et al. 2023). It also entails 'the de-construction of colonial ideologies regarding the superiority and privilege of Western thought and approaches' (Peace Direct, 2021). Additionally, it involves recognising that the old way of doing development funding is not working, is unethical, disrespectful, and causing more harm than good (Oxfam 2020; Peace Direct, 2021).

A decolonial African funding model is one that recognises, values, and centres African knowledge systems and practices. It is one where Western-centric funding actors cede the space for decision making on how funds flow in the aid chain while standing in solidarity with, and taking complementary actions towards, the self-determination and autonomy of African civil society. By self-determination and autonomy, I mean having the agency to design, implement, and evaluate what matters to communities, not to donors or their intermediary INGOs or what is termed as 'funder-mediaries' or 'delegated donors'. This means deconstructing the colonial way of doing development funding and reconstructing it using new, decolonised systems and values.

This essay explicitly draws on the term decolonial as the praxis and analytical frame. By decolonial, I mean a broader set of theoretical and practical approaches that challenge the underlying assumptions, values, and epistemologies of colonialism and how these have shaped our understanding of development financing. In this light, I adopt the term 'decolonial funding' within the context of this essay, rather than the more familiar term, 'decolonised funding'.

To help us problematise the notion and encourage critical thinking about the concept of 'decolonial funding', the following paragraphs introduce the main issues that actors from within the development sector – again, broadly understood – have identified as themes and normative goals that should be pursued in transforming and decolonising funding.

Decolonial funding models help unearth the true history, wisdom, and richness of local communities, promoting not only self-determination but also cultural preservation. Before colonial incursion and the formalised 19th-century institutionalised gifting, grant making, official aid, and private funders-elements that gave rise to NGOism, gifting on the African continent was rooted in the practice of reciprocity within social relations and the normative concept of *ubuntu* [I am a person through other persons] (Broodryk, 2008: 41, in Dolamo 2013) and emphasised autonomy and self-determination. African philanthropy was not grounded in Western-centric theories of change or modernisation theories. It was centred around personal and collective trust, highlighting the inherent dignity and capabilities of people, rather than compliance with written agreements and accountability mechanisms, which are derived from public management and a market-based set of relationships characterised by low trust and high command and control.

Ubuntu is fundamental to the African way of being and is underpinned by the values of compassion, solidarity, survival, and dignity. It is a philosophy that emphasises human dignity, social harmony, coexistence, and community. It is deeply rooted in the idea of mutuality – mutual respect and community-based mutual aid and support – in sharp contrast to Western-centric, one-size-fits-all individual progress. It is instructive to note that the recent discourse about people-centred approaches to development, which have become fashionable, is not new to the African way of being. African humanism, built on the values of *Ubuntu*, is not new. Broadly speaking, this is driven by mutual, respectful, and dignifying partnerships and relationships.

For example, *Ubuntu* (collective giving) is an age-old practice among many West African communities. The practice of *Nnoboa* among the Akan-speaking groups in Ghana exemplifies collective giving, cooperation, and communal support deeply embedded in the values of reciprocity and interdependence. *Nnoboa* means 'I help you; you help me'. This involves farmers coming together to support one another during the farming season. Community members gather to discuss their needs and plan how to assist each other. They form groups to clear fields, plant, harvest, and transport crops. Similar practices abound in many different areas of Ghana and West Africa. They vary across regions, but the core principles and values remain the same – mutual support and collective efforts. This exemplifies our interconnected existence.

Donors and international CSOs are increasingly under scrutiny to demonstrate that their development interventions embody decolonisation and localisation in both form and substance. While it is in the interest of these organisations to generate evidence of their work's value, current practices in decolonising development funding present challenges.

These challenges arise because these terms influence everything from establishing systems to setting standards within the sector. This situation is particularly concerning as funders and international organisations based in the North have predominantly led discussions around these issues, while national organisations in Africa and the South, in general, have mainly responded to superficial donor reforms, which convey only part of the narrative. Based on my observations in the sector, I have categorised the problem into the following four dimensions:

i. The emphasis on monetary flows from funders and international organisations rather than considering the entirety of resources, including indigenous knowledge and the social capital that contributes to designing and implementing development interventions. This focus on money assigns power and authority to donors, allowing them to explicitly or tacitly determine what is prioritised and how. Consequently, the power imbalance that characterises many areas of international development practice fails to acknowledge the value of non-monetary investments from local actors, such as indigenous knowledge, which informs the development of suitable approaches and strategies. Social capital in the form of networks and relationships, which are leveraged to access and influence decision making processes and other non-monetary contributions from local communities, is overlooked in the decolonising funding discourse.

ii. Perspectives and approaches to development funding do not centre on the lived experiences of the involved communities; rather, they are based on Western-centric ideological, administrative, and structural paradigms of development.

iii. The tendency to adopt an undifferentiated approach to decolonial funding is based on the assumption that what constitutes decolonised funding remains constant across space and time, race, class, gender, wealth, and position, regardless of context, history, and relational factors.

iv. The tendency of INGOs to shift offices instead of shifting power is notable. By shape-shifting, I refer to relocating head offices to the South and/or replicating the colonial structures of aid by transforming the country offices of INGOs into national or affiliated entities rather than ceding space and resources to African or southern organisations. In the last decade, INGOs that have moved their headquarters to the Global South include Action Aid, the Association for Cooperative Operations Research and Development (ACORD), and Oxford Committee for Famine Relief (Oxfam). This act of creating national entities and affiliated organisations by INGOs explicitly or tacitly reinforces the power imbalance that characterises many areas of international development practice. In this way, the national entities and affiliates inadvertently occupy space and deny authentic African and southern organisations access to critical donor funds, ultimately closing the space for domestic civil society.

Building on the four dimensions described above, I now focus on highlighting the risks that the current discourse aimed at achieving decolonial funding models in Africa is likely to encounter, namely, inaccuracies and incompleteness. I examine the rhetoric surrounding the reform of existing colonial funding models by reimagining these systems. Drawing on the literature and my observations as a practitioner in the field, I reorganise the remaining sections of this essay, for analytical purposes, into the following key dimensions:

Beyond the rhetoric of good intentions

Despite the promise of decolonising funding models, they have been reduced to superficial gestures that fail to implement meaningful and transformative structural, ideological, and administrative change. The agenda has been distilled into a quick, tick-box exercise that obscures the essential, deeper, and transformative structural and administrative adjustments required in the development sector. The watered-down actions have allowed international actors (INGOs and institutional donors) in the aid chain to maintain control while disguising their dominance with fancy 'decolonisation' and 'localisation' language. It is sometimes misunderstood as a symbolic act without any real shift of decision making power and resources.

Despite several experiments, the sad reality is the regular reinforcement of colonial command and control and paternalistic approaches to funding on the African continent and elsewhere in the South. For example, although many INGOs and funders make money directly available to African and southern organisations, they have not truly addressed the challenges that hinder in-country partners from accessing critical funding streams. They still expect African and southern organisations to mirror what is considered 'international' norms and effective and efficient working methods based on western-centric public management and market-based relationships, which are low on trust and high on monitoring and control.

In the quest to decolonise development and funding models, we are confronted with stark truths. Studies show that well-intentioned efforts have largely fallen short and sometimes perpetuate colonial power dynamics in funding relations and models. For instance, Farah Mihlar (2024) offers a critical analysis of localisation efforts, showing that despite noble intentions, these efforts often fail to dismantle colonial power structures. Mihlar argues that, without addressing underlying coloniality, localisation can become a superficial exercise that perpetuates the status quo. According to her, 'localisation, in its current form, is often a veneer that masks deep-seated inequalities.' Eventually, 'real power dynamics remain unchanged, and the local actors are left navigating an inherently unequal system.' This analysis challenges actors in the international development and aid chain to rethink their localisation approaches and focus on deeper structural changes.

The recent #ShiftThePower Movement's report (2024) further highlights the systemic biases that disadvantage and deprive southern organisations of funding. Despite the rhetoric of capacity strengthening and empowerment, southern organisations frequently find themselves excluded from significant funding opportunities, which reinforces a cycle of dependency and marginalisation. The report states, among others, that 'southern organisations are often deemed too risky or lacking capacity, a narrative that perpetuates their exclusion from critical funding streams.'

Another poignant quote from the report reads, '[T]he current funding mechanisms are designed in a way that inherently favours established, northern-based organisations, thereby maintaining a colonial status quo.' This report serves as a clear reminder that true decolonial funding requires not just policy changes but also a fundamental rethinking of how resources are allocated.

Building on the stark reality of limited progress so far, as highlighted, I now turn my attention to a third publication that presents some hopeful innovations and practical solutions to these challenges. These encompass emergent disruptive innovations and initiatives that could support future progress toward transforming the funding landscape into a decolonial one. Together, these reports offer actionable recommendations for the sector, emphasising the urgent need for a radical shift in how actors in the international development chain approach their work.

As argued above, the decolonisation agenda has been reduced to an incremental exercise that obscures the essential and deeper structural and administrative adjustments required in the development sector. Despite the bleak picture, a report by the International Civil Society Centre (2024) postulates that innovation has the power to shape the future. It emphasises that meaningful change comes from bold, transformative actions rather than incremental improvements, that '[i]nnovation is not about making small changes to existing models; it's about reimagining the models themselves.' It also highlights that 'transformative actions are required to break free from the colonial legacies that still underpin many of our systems and processes.' The report challenges development theorists and practitioners to rethink their strategies and be bold in pursuing decolonisation and localisation.

The central argument of this essay is that failing to root decolonial funding practices in African perspectives of humanism and to invest in radical and transformative changes will continue to perpetuate top-down and unequal relations. However, if driven locally and informed by African perspectives of humanism, efforts to comprehensively demonstrate the value of decolonial funding for development interventions can strengthen local ownership and accountability to communities while harnessing learning to improve international development funding practices.

The essay proposes a multi-pronged approach to making decolonial funding models more appropriate for the African context. Here, I highlight four critical dimensions that global development actors must address to catalyse transformative change in favour of decolonial funding.

Toward decolonial funding systems, policies, and practices

Challenging colonial funding systems, policies, and practices is a crucial lever for achieving meaningful and transformative change in how funding is conducted now and in the future. While acknowledging that donor systems, policies, and practices have shifted over the past decade, there remain burdensome compliance regimes coupled with administrative rigidities and a culture of risk aversion that have persisted since the colonial era. I use 'administrative rigidities' to describe a continuous operation or series of administrative norms through which the collaboration between donors and African or southern organisations is defined and enacted.

These rigidities stem from the underlying fear that is implicit in how risk is perceived, defined, and managed. This is reinforced by the narrative that '[s]outhern organisations are too risky or lacking capacity to manage critical funding streams' (Shift the Power Movement, 2024). Even when policies and practices appear to have shifted in favour of directly providing funds to African and southern organisations, they are expected to conform to northern-centric norms of effective and efficient methods of working and accounting for development outcomes.

To address these challenges and genuinely decolonise funding systems, policies, and practices requires a shift to placing local stakeholders at the centre of identifying, defining, reviewing, and proposing changes to the policies and practices of funders and international organisations. Once we flip the coin of decision making and allow authentic participation of stakeholders at the individual, community, group, national, and international levels in determining the most appropriate changes to funding policies and practices through the lens of decoloniality, we are likely to achieve decolonial funding policies and practices. This means ceding power and space while collaborating with African and southern organisations to reimagine, redefine, and co-create decolonial funding policies and practices. This will require a mind-set shift for local actors to take leadership in developing and proposing new frameworks or decolonial funding policies and practices. It equally necessitates a mind-set shift on the part of donors and INGOs – a shift from a risk-averse culture to strategic risk-taking, which enables innovation and impactful solutions that address the unique challenges faced by them as well as by African and southern organisations.

Decolonial accountability built on trust

It is important to embed decolonial trust-based accountability mechanisms within funding models. Situating accountability through decolonial lenses means acknowledging that no system or mechanism for accountability is neutral. It encompasses the understanding of how power manifests and exists across systems of accountability in international development practice. While existing approaches, principles, mechanisms, and processes of accountability utilise transparency, information sharing, feedback, and participation as benchmarks; commitments must include redefining, redesigning, and co-creating self-sustaining accountability frameworks for decolonial funding models in Africa and the Global South. Accountability within a decolonial funding model must be informed by the principles of trust-based philanthropy, where accountability and decision making are shared among all stakeholders, including aid recipients.

Decolonial power and ceding control

Another critical question raised when I discuss decolonial funding relates to the politics of representation and power. Situating power within the discourse of decolonial funding means acknowledging that the current funding system is not neutral. It entails understanding how power manifests and exists across the aid system. Power imbalances appear in various forms, including resource dependency, top-down decision making, and vertical accountability mechanisms. Since a significant portion of international development funding originates from northern philanthropies, these organisations exert substantial influence on the practices and institutional frameworks for deploying funding (Centre for Strategic Philanthropy, 2021).

Some discussions highlight the intermediary role of INGOs and the challenges this poses. It is imperative to acknowledge that this role is unlikely to change anytime soon, given the risk-averse culture among major institutional donors and the reluctance of INGOs to relinquish this position. However, local actors need to have a seat at the table where decisions are made. The absence of local voices in funding decision making processes perpetuates the same power imbalances that the decolonising aid movement seeks to address. It is important to stress the need to prioritise tracking, monitoring, and holding donors accountable for their commitments to change. Ensuring transparency and accountability is critical to turning rhetoric into reality and making tangible progress in decolonising funding.

One of the emergent disruptive innovations from Africa and southern organisations is participatory grant making. Through participatory grant making, they challenge the 'colonisation of resources' through which international funding mainly goes to INGOs as 'intermediaries' or what is termed 'delegated donors', rather than to organisations of people in the South. This funding approach shifts decision making power from the grant making organisation to the people and places that will benefit from the money.

Decolonial theories of change

To entrench decolonial theories of change, colonial power and ideology embedded in funding systems, policies, practices, and mind-sets must be challenged. Donor priorities, results frameworks, and theories of change are not neutral. Donors control resources, make decisions on funding priorities, and dispense funding through various national and international intermediaries to implement interventions founded on Western-centric notions of how change occurs, while communities remain at the downstream end of the chain, receiving priorities, decisions, and practices imposed by actors upstream.

Among the key decisions and practices that have become problematic is the demand for theories of change as a condition of funding from some donors. Theories of change are interventions designed based on a set of assumptions and largely view results as a linear causal chain (input-output-outcome-impact). Common elements of a theory of change include articulating how change occurs in a particular context, clarifying an organisation's role in contributing to change, and defining and testing critical assumptions (O'Flynn and Moberly, 2017). This can be identified both vertically and horizontally: vertically through the levels at which change may manifest, and horizontally through the stages of the change process as outlined by the theory of change.

Northern-centric, one-size-fits-all theories of change have become one of the superficial 'tick box' requirements demanded by donors, presenting a significant administrative challenge for African and southern organisations. This issue arises from the power dynamics surrounding whose knowledge is considered valuable and how we account for development results or change. If theories of change are not rooted in local perspectives of how change occurs, we will continue to perpetuate top-down donor practices. However, when driven locally, the effort to thoroughly demonstrate how change occurs through development interventions can strengthen local ownership and accountability to communities and facilitate learning to enhance practice.

Conclusion

This essay has sought to provoke a re-evaluation and reimagining of funding models, shifting from a primarily Western-centric approach to viewing funding as a decolonial-driven process that enables learning and evidence generation to inform development practice. It has highlighted critical insights that good intentions alone are insufficient; rather, a paradigm shift and a change in mind-sets are necessary.

In this journey, I have interrogated the structural, administrative, and ideological dimensions of the constraints faced by African and southern organisations and underscored the importance of understanding how these constraints intersect with historical, social, and cultural contexts within the decolonial funding discourse. The essay has also acknowledged the centrality of how power, money, and accountability manifest in the current funding landscape and the legacies of coloniality in international development.

The essay highlights the risk that the current experiments aimed at achieving decolonial funding models in Africa and beyond are likely to be inaccurate and, at best, incomplete. Despite the challenges, complexities, and constraints, if driven by African perspectives, decolonial funding offers a foundation for applying more meaningful approaches to better link interventions and the social value they generate. This essay highlights some key issues of focus and presents constructs and lenses for reimagining how decolonial funding can become more meaningful for African and southern organisations. Undoubtedly, there are unanswered questions, and these will need to be addressed as they arise.

This essay proposes a revolutionary movement in international aid, development, and the humanitarian sector, urging development organisations and donors to actively participate in redefining, redesigning, co-creating, and supporting emerging innovations for a self-sustaining decolonial funding model in Africa.

The essay argued that the growing interest and discourse surrounding the decolonisation of development presents a promising opportunity – significant prospect for transforming global development into a more equitable, respectful, and sustainable enterprise. When clearly understood and consciously applied, these principles can dismantle colonial legacies and place African and southern actors in the driver's seat of development initiatives.

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4. Beyond colonial legacies: Reimagining development funding for Africa's future

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Abstract

Development funding within the context of colonial legacies in Africa has been characterised by a long history of mistrust, exploitation, unfair policies, power imbalances, and hidden processes; yet it remains underexplored in the existing empirical and theoretical discourse on development. This essay provides a nuanced understanding of the historical and current dynamics of African development funding, examines the long-term impacts of colonial legacies on Africa's development funding landscape, and assesses the role of colonial institutions and policies in exacerbating inequalities and power imbalances within development funding systems. The essay is anchored in world-systems theory, and a scoping review was undertaken to inspire new scholarship. The essay concludes that African states should delink their development funding mechanisms from traditional Western-led hegemony and prioritise local ownership, transparency, and inclusivity to achieve sustainable economic prosperity.

Keywords: decolonising, development funding, sustainable economic prosperity, Africa.

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Introduction

Despite the prolonged struggle for the decolonisation of development funding systems in Africa, its accompanying adverse impacts on sustainable economic prosperity have been underexplored in the existing development literature (Khumalo, 2022). For instance, Auriacombe and Cloete (2019) argue that while the persistent colonial legacies continue to impose outdated and unfair policies on their former colonies in Africa, the economic consequences of these legacies have not received adequate scholarly and policy reform attention (Michalopoulos and Papaioannou, 2020).

Although many African countries achieved independence through collective struggles against their colonial masters after the Second World War in the early and late twentieth century, it became clear that the colonial masters granted political independence without economic independence (Rahaman et al., 2017). Consequently, Africa began to struggle to grow capital, invent technologies, train experts, and manage the emerging states (Rahaman et al., 2017). Based on this gap, the agents of former imperialist nations such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and international financial institutions (IFIs) seized the opportunity to bind many African states in the neocolonial iron curtain (Kalu and Falola, 2018). Hence, the World Bank and the IMF began lending loans with harsh terms and conditions to African states (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015).

Therefore, many African countries were inhibited from exercising their fundamental right to make decisions about their future, including charting an autonomous path of development (Adedeji, 2002). This partly explains the struggle for decolonisation of Western-dominated legacies in Africa, which in turn refers to the process of being free from financial institutions such as the World Bank and IMF, and their spheres of activity or practices (including dependency on foreign funding systems), as well as the cultural, psychological, and socio-economic effects of colonisation in Africa (Albans, 2008; Mason et al., 2018).

More specifically, a recent study by Peace Direct (2021) found that many current practices and attitudes dominating development funding in Africa mirror and stem from the colonial era. A typical example is the 'white saviour' ideology in the funding systems, which most Western organisations have refused to acknowledge. Furthermore, it was noted that the development funding flowing between the former colonial blocs and the former African colonies still reflects the previously established power imbalances. As a result, the decision making power concentrated largely in the Global North. Lastly, the study acknowledges some structural barriers in the Western-led African development funding systems, including structural racism and a funding landscape deeply rooted in Western values and knowledge hegemony systems (Peace Direct, 2021).

The former Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), Adebayo Adedeji, identified what he described as

> *[T]he operation of the development merchant system (DMS) in which foreign crafted economic reform policies have been converted into a sort of special goods that are extensively and promptly financed by the DMS operators, irrespective of the negative consequences of such policies on the African states' economies and politics (Adedeji, 2002).*

Evidence suggests that the majority of Africa's contemporary development issues and contradictions are traceable to colonialism and its legacies (Fasakin, 2021; Parashar and Schulz, 2021; Odukoya, 2018; Khumalo, 2022). Contrary to the assumption that colonialism has completely vanished from international affairs, Africa remains caught in a web of a 'post-colonial neocolonised world' where decolonisation is perceived merely as a scholarship mirage, and the colonial structures as well as relations of (external) power remain unbroken, as they were during the colonial era (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013).

According to Fasakin (2021), it is the preponderance analysis of the coloniality of power itself that demonstrates that colonialism persists in forms and shapes that deprive African people of autonomous control over their development affairs, including unfettered access to and management of development funding systems (Odukoya, 2018). Buba (2019) argued that what is surprising is that some African nations remain among the world's poorest despite having received development funding from abroad since gaining their independence. Ideally, the foreign interventions intended to address this situation are, instead, exacerbating political fragility, inhibiting economic growth, worsening inequalities, and decreasing the accountability of African states to their people (Buba, 2019).

Against this backdrop, this essay argues that decolonising development funding in Africa requires a critical examination of historical legacies, current dynamics, and power imbalances, and proposes a paradigm shift towards more equitable, sustainable, and locally driven funding mechanisms. In doing so, the next section critically examines the roles of IFIs using world system theory. The third section historicises colonial legacies, current dynamics, and power imbalances in development funding mechanisms in Africa. Lastly, the essay inspires new scholarly insights and offers evidence-based policy reform recommendations for the sustainable economic prosperity of African states.

Theoretical underpinning

To further inspire a new scholarship discourse, this section presents world-system theory to critically assess the role of colonial institutions and policies in exacerbating inequalities and power imbalances within the development funding systems in Africa.

World system theory

The world-systems theory was propounded by American sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein in 1974 (Wallerstein, 1976). Fundamentally, this theory was developed as a political approach to explain Africa's structural economic development crisis (Wallerstein, 2011). It analyses elements of colonialism in Western modernisation in relation to the appropriation of natural resources, exploitation of labour, legal control of 'undesirables', imposition of interests, and world perspectives inherent in the capitalist economy, as well as the denial of the full humanity of the disempowered and impoverished (Mignolo, 2013).

According to Wallerstein (1995), the world is a single capitalist system characterised by the division of labour and global economic interdependence. Hence, world system theory demonstrates a core-periphery structure – a hierarchical structure within the world system, where core nations (developed nations) dominate and exploit peripheral nations (underdeveloped African states) for labour and resources (Wallerstein, 2011).

The resulting power imbalances have led to what Wallerstein calls dependency and exploitation. In his view, the African states (peripheral nations), through the instrumentalities of colonial legacies such as IFIs, are dependent on Euro-American states (core nations) for technology, investment, development funding, and markets, leading to the ongoing exploitation and underdevelopment of many African states (peripheral region) (Wallerstein, 1995; Signe, 2018). The next subsection critically highlights the roles of IFIs in shaping the development funding landscape in Africa.

The role of IFIs in shaping the African development funding landscape

This section discusses the five major paradoxical roles of IFIs in exacerbating inequalities in Africa as part of the long-term impact of colonial legacies on the African funding landscape. To further emphasise these points, world system theory is adopted to enhance understanding and inspire future scholarship.

Several studies have underscored that while the IFIs, such as the IMF and World Bank, along with other Western donors, have the potential to influence development in Africa, their policies and practices have negatively impacted African economies. This includes the imposition of structural adjustment programmes (SAPs), advocacy for privatisation and deregulation, increased debt burden, limited investment in social development, conditionalities, and policy impositions (Droesse, 2022; Kring and Gallagher, 2019; Signe, 2018; Wallerstein, 2011).

Although the stated aim of SAPs is to promote economic stability and growth in Africa, they often introduce specific conditions from Western donors that prioritise the interests of Western economies over the primary needs of indigenous African states and their populations (Dembele, 2020). For instance, SAPs usually require African leaders to reduce public spending on social services, including health and education, resulting in unequal access for many marginalised communities (Sanders, 2022).

Additionally, the imposition of SAPs by IFIs further exemplifies Wallerstein's core-periphery structure, in which core nations dominate and exploit peripheral nations through economic policies that primarily benefit the core (Wallerstein, 2011). Nonetheless, while IFIs have been criticised for exacerbating inequalities, scholars such as Kararach et al. (2017) and Oppong (2013) argue that the adoption of such policies has led to improved fiscal management and economic stability in certain African countries, especially where they have been implemented alongside pro-poor policies (Archibong et al., 2020). However, the overall impact remains contentious in the extant development literature (Chagunda, 2022).

Suleiman and Waterbury (2019) note that while IFIs often advocate for privatisation and deregulation as mechanisms to promote economic growth and efficiency, such policies further widen socio-economic inequalities in Africa by disproportionately benefiting wealthy elites and multinational organisations to the detriment of poor and marginalised Africans (Haque, 2001; Bond and Malikane, 2019). It is important to recognise that the privatisation of essential services such as electricity and water would result in price hikes and limit equal access for low-income communities, further exacerbating the gap between the rich and the poor (Suleiman and Waterbury, 2019; Bhorat et al., 2017).

Evidence also suggests that many African countries are trapped in an unsustainable debt crisis, with a significant portion of their debt owed to IFIs (Danso, 1990). Regrettably, the repayment plans for these debts often divert resources away from essential social investment programmes and infrastructure development, perpetuating a vicious cycle of poverty and inequality in Africa (Okeke, 2001). Nigerian development scholar Ikejiaku (2008) added that most terms and conditions of these debts are unfavourable, dragging African states into long-term repayment plans with exorbitant interest rates, which further worsen their financial challenges (Okeke, 2001). In the case study of Nigeria's debt, Ikejiaku (2008) argued that the IMF, World Bank, and other Western donors should be held accountable for supporting corrupt leaders who have plunged Nigeria into a severe debt crisis to create economic and political dependency.

A recent case study conducted in four African countries – Ethiopia, Nigeria, Senegal, and Uganda – on the effects of the Washington Consensus policy reforms has shown that IFIs often prioritise macroeconomic stability and market-oriented reforms over investments in social development programmes in Africa (Archibong et al., 2020). Meanwhile, it was concluded that the ability to implement pro-poor policies alongside market-oriented reforms is conducive to effective policy reform performance in Africa (Archibong et al., 2020).

Scholars have argued that a narrow focus on market-oriented policies has the potential to neglect the basic needs and necessities of vulnerable groups in Africa, including women, children, youth, and persons with disabilities (Due and Gladwin, 1991; Okeke, 2001). Consequently, disparities in access to healthcare, education, skill acquisition, and empowerment programmes, along with other essential services, continue to perpetuate multi-dimensional and inter-generational cycles of poverty and inequality in Africa (Nafukho, 2013).

IFIs often attach specific conditions, including policy reforms, to their development funding in Africa ostensibly to promote good governance and accountability. However, these impositions and conditions may persistently undermine national sovereignty and democratic decision making (Due and Gladwin, 1991). Additionally, the imposition of one-size-fits-all policies has repeatedly failed to account for the uniqueness of the socio-cultural and socio-economic, as well as the environmental contexts of many African nations, thus further worsening inequalities in Africa (Kanbur, 2000).

The Washington Consensus policy reforms refers to a set of ten recommendations suggested by economist, John Williamson in 1989 which include: fiscal discipline, redirecting public expenditure, tax reform, financial liberalisation, adoption of a single, competitive exchange rate, trade liberalisation, elimination of barriers to foreign direct investment, privatisation of state-owned enterprises, deregulation of market entry and competition and secure property rights. He termed it 'consensus' because the list was based on ideas shared at the time by power circles in Washington, including the US Congress and Administration on one end and the international institutions such as the Washington-based IMF and the World Bank on the other, supported by a wide range of think tanks and influential economists (Lopes, 2012).

It has been argued that some of the policies traded off in favour of Washington Consensus policy reforms had rational and development-driven justifications within African development funding landscapes. A typical example is when some African states adopt low interest rates to boost investment and capital accumulation (Archibong et al., 2020).

The Washington Consensus policy reforms have been blamed for many ills. For instance, rural farmers are disproportionately affected by the reforms, particularly women involved in the cultivation of food crops (Mkandawire and Olukoshi, 1995). Paradoxically, advanced economies – including the United States and other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) nations – heavily subsidise agricultural production, making it impossible for African farmers to compete, even as IFIs advocate for the elimination of agricultural subsidies in Africa (Mehra, 1991).

Beyond conditionalities, the overwhelming focus of Washington Consensus policy reforms on macroeconomic stability, without adequate provision of social safety nets, has also contributed to weakening governments and even downplaying the reform agenda in many African states (Archibong et al., 2022). Hence, some scholars note that while Asian and African states were at the same levels of development when policies such as those under review were introduced in the 80s and 90s, the Asian states have surpassed their African counterparts in development (Chang and Grabel, 2004). While many Asian states generally maintain state involvement and the control of various sectors, they also embrace industrial policies and infant industry protection; heavily subsidising sectors of their economies, among other measures, which, in turn, have yielded positive results compared to many African states that adopted Western policies completely (Chang and Grabel, 2004). Nonetheless, the successful performance of Washington Consensus policy reforms has been observed where states have the ability to implement pro-poor policies alongside market-oriented reforms in some African countries (Archibong et al., 2020). This highlights the importance of state ownership of development funding mechanisms in Africa.

Historical and current dynamics of African development funding

This section discusses the historical context of African development funding. It examines the dynamics shaping these funding mechanisms within the existing literature to promote scholarly insights and inform evidence-based policy reforms among African states in their quest for nation-building and sustainable economic prosperity.

Historical context of African development funding

For decades, African development funding has garnered the attention of scholars and policy actors as an important subject worthy of both empirical and theoretical scrutiny (Michalopoulos and Papaioannou, 2020; Akyeampong et al., 2014). For instance, evidence suggests that most African states are historically characterised by the adverse spillover effects of colonisation and its legacies of exploitation, including structural inequalities. Consequently, this has consistently shaped their socio-economic fabrics and often led to poorly implemented development funding mechanisms (Jerven, 2014; Khumalo, 2022).

Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015) noted that, based on both empirical and historical evidence and the decolonial theory, the emergence of Western-centric modernity in the fifteenth century created a unique world system sustained by racism as an organising principle and capitalism as the global economic system. Consequently, colonialism in Africa was not only deployed as a weapon to plunder the continent's resources but also left behind a legacy of underdevelopment and economic dependency (Jerven, 2014).

Inequality represents one of the colonial legacies in Africa (Leigh and Tirthankar, 2020). Colonialism established patterns of division based on various ethnicities, regions, occupations, caste systems, class and racial differences, and other dimensions that often favoured European officials and settlers to the detriment of indigenous majorities (De Juan and Pierskalla, 2017).

Additionally, African development funding has been shaped by Western modernity. According to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015), this led to the production of two scripts, as analogically articulated by Scott (1990). The first script is known as the 'public script', which emphasises modernity's ability to eliminate all barriers to human progress and pledges freedom, civilisation, and development (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015). The second script, known as the 'hidden script', was revealed through the decoloniality struggle (Scott, 1990). Thus, Western modernity has enabled the racial classification of human populations, the enslavement of non-European people, primitive accumulation, imperialism, colonialism, apartheid, and neocolonialism, all of which have shaped development funding in Africa (Scott, 1990).

Eurocentrism is part of the hidden scripts that have shaped development funding since it was portrayed as a component of the civilising mission, emancipation, and development (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015). In reality, according to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015), Eurocentrism laid the groundwork for the politics of alterity that gradually transformed into what Chinweizu Ibekwe (1975) deciphered as: 'the West and the rest of us'. Similarly, Amin (1988) argues from a radical perspective that Eurocentrism should be understood as polarising and functioning as a global ideological project that promotes and reinforces imperialism and systemic inequalities through the legitimation of a global system based on the exploitation of the Global South (Michalopoulos and Papaioannou, 2020; Lewis, 2018).

Additionally, the international economy, constituted by capitalism, has been said to exploitatively shape development funding in Africa by ensuring that Europe is the location of ideas, design, planning, and innovations, while Africa is the source of captive Africans for enslavement; the Caribbean and America serve as production sites, and Europe, once again, consumes goods produced by the enslaved Africans (Akyeampong et al., 2014; Nimako and Willemsen, 2011). Another legacy worthy of note is the emergence of the European world order, the international political-economic system of the 16th and 20th centuries, which enabled the international legal frameworks and systems that the Western nations continue to dominate (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015).

Following the perceived theoretical end of colonialism came neocolonialism, which Kwame Nkrumah first described as the last phase and the worst kind of imperialism that encourages exploitation without recourse for those who experience it, and power without responsibility for those who practice it (Northrop, 2012). In this regard, Michalopoulos and Papaioannou (2020) argued that most development funding in Africa strengthens colonial legacies and promotes structural inequalities and power imbalances (Mawdsley et al., 2014).

In contrast to the expectations of many African states, the 20th century development funding model was primarily introduced to perpetuate dependency rather than reinforce sustainable development in Africa (Lewis, 2018; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). Specifically, the SAPs imposed by the IMF in the 1980s and 1990s demanded austerity measures, privatisation, and deregulation, often worsening poverty and widening inequalities. Additionally, most conditions attached to development funding in Africa undermine sovereignty and prevent sustainable economic prosperity (Lewis, 2018).

Current dynamics of Africa development funding

Development funding in Africa has recently witnessed a paradigm shift, moving gradually from traditional Euro-America-centric funding systems to more robust, locally inclined, and sustainable mechanisms (Mawdsley et al., 2014).

The current shifts in Africa's funding landscapes are notably shaped by a complex interplay of factors, including the Euro-American economic crisis of the early 20th century, which precipitated a decline in external financial inflows to African economies. Additional influences include political corruption, structural racial tensions, and the rising prominence of China. More recently, these dynamics have been further shaped by the emergence of multi-polar globalisation, exemplified by the Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) nations and initiatives such as the African Union's Agenda 2063 (Pieterse, 2017; Comaroff & Comaroff, 2015; Deych, 2015).

Additionally, studies have shown that chief among the emerging donors in Africa is China, which has invested significantly through infrastructure projects and altered the traditional model of Western value hegemony in development funding on the continent (Isaksson and Kotsadam, 2020). For example, in 2022, China announced $300 billion in financing for Africa through the Belt and Road Initiative, showcasing its growing influence in the continent's development funding landscape (Raza and Khan, 2024).

Despite China's contribution to infrastructural development in Africa, some critics note that its involvement has equally raised numerous concerns about debt sustainability, negative environmental impacts, and governance principles (Mawdsley et al., 2014; Black, 2018). Specifically, Isaksson and Kotsadam (2020) critically observe that, unlike the OECD donors, the Chinese Government has failed to consistently publish information on its foreign aid to Africa, and this lack of transparency has made it virtually impossible to publicly evaluate its potential unintended impact. Thus, there is much speculation, and it appears highly suspicious (Chaponnière, 2009; Tan-Mullins, 2010).

Unlike traditional donors, some critics note that Chinese development funding in Africa is a mixture of good and bad, as it has stimulated local corruption, discouraged trade union investment, decreased support for existing local politicians in power, and supported ethnic identities (Mawdsley et al., 2014; Niu, 2016). Notably, on one hand, this highlights the significance of donor heterogeneities, including the need for African states to evaluate and understand not only the extent to which development funding achieves its explicit objectives but also, on the other hand, its potential unintended consequences or externalities (Isaksson and Kotsadam, 2020). Acknowledging such explicit objectives and the potential unintended impacts of donor funding should serve as the basis for dialogue and cooperation between African states and their donors to mitigate these adverse impacts (Chaponnière, 2009; Niu, 2016).

Another recent dynamic worth noting is the increase in philanthropic organisations and social impact investors, which has introduced new actors into the African development funding landscape, like the Tony Elumelu Foundation and Impact Investing Ghana, which leverages pension funds for social impact investing. Initiatives such as the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) aim to promote intra-African trade and economic integration, marking a significant step towards self-reliance and regional cooperation (EAC, 2024; Gumede, 2020). Apart from boosting intra-African trade, the massive markets provided by the AfCFTA have the potential to stimulate investments, productivity, gross value addition, better job opportunities, and robust welfare benefits, further expanding the market (Apiko et al., 2020).

While AfCFTA is promising for the African development funding landscape, Kodero (2023) notes a persistent gap between African states' rhetoric and actions, as many African leaders have used political regimes to promote their individual states' interests rather than seeking the collective integration of the entire continent. As such, the success of initiatives like AfCFTA will largely depend on cooperation and coordination among a range of public and private stakeholders from local to continental levels (Kodero, 2023).

Recognising this persistent lacuna, Olayiwola (2020) further notes that as of 2019, many African states' leaders have pledged commitment to the effective implementation of the AfCFTA agreement. Consequently, proper implementation would increase competitiveness by incentivising value addition to African raw materials and promoting regional value chains that would serve as forerunners for African countries' entry into the global value chain (GVC) (UNECA, 2016; UNCTAD, 2018).

Additionally, the Covid-19 pandemic has affirmed the significance of resilience and innovation in African development funding mechanisms. The crisis highlighted the urgent need for increased investment in healthcare, digital infrastructure, and social welfare/protection systems to effectively respond to and mitigate such future shocks (Rinke de Wit et al., 2020; Dzinamarira et al., 2024; Gebremeskel et al., 2021).

Conclusion

This essay has presented the historical and current dynamics, discursive debates, and theoretical and ideological nuances of the decolonisation of development funding in Africa. It has underscored the role of IFIs in using their hidden scripts agenda to exacerbate inequalities in Africa. The essay has demonstrated that the African development funding landscape reflects a complex interplay of geo-political interests, economic imperatives, and social dynamics.

Since past approaches to development funding in Africa, especially Western ones, have been criticised for their limitations and inequities, there is potential for positive change and innovation on the African funding horizon. Therefore, to achieve sustainable and equitable development funding mechanisms, Africa and other Global South countries must boldly step forward to completely delink their development funding systems from traditional Western hegemonies while being acutely aware of the subversive global funding imperial designs, which are rife with mistrust, corruption, and donor impositions, showing zero respect for mutual benefits.

Overall, the essay recommends that African states delink their development funding mechanisms and unlock their potential through digital economies to achieve sustainable economic prosperity by embracing a holistic development funding approach that recognises and prioritises local ownership, transparency, social justice, innovation, accountability, sustainability, and inclusivity. To achieve this, African states should strengthen regional financial institutions like the African Development Bank, develop innovative funding models such as diaspora bonds or green bonds, and prioritise domestic resource mobilisation through improved tax systems and reduced illicit financial flows.

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5. Colonial legacies in African development funding: The case of Sudan, 1952-56

*Mazin Abdallah**

Abstract

This essay examines the colonial legacies affecting development finance in Sudan, setting a broader context for understanding similar challenges across the African continent. Anchoring its analysis in the historical backdrop of the Anglo-Egyptian condominium and Sudan's subsequent attempts to navigate the global financial system – particularly through its efforts to rejoin the Sterling Area and join the International Monetary Fund and International Bank for Reconstruction post-independence – the study draws upon primary sources from the British National Archives alongside secondary literature. It argues that colonial economic frameworks influenced Sudan's early development strategies and established a pattern of financial dependency that continues to affect the country. By positioning Sudan's experiences within the broader African context, the essay emphasises the imperative for a decolonised approach to development finance that rectifies historical injustices and fosters economic independence.

Keywords: colonial legacies, development finance, decolonisation, International Monetary Fund (IMF)

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Introduction

This essay aims to uncover the impact of colonial legacies on the development financing landscape of Sudan, setting the stage for a broader exploration of similar challenges faced across the African continent. The historical narrative begins with the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium. This era significantly shaped Sudan's economic policies and its integration into the global financial system, notably through its association with the Sterling Area and later the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) (Taha, 1970; Daly, 1986). This historical backdrop is essential for understanding the complexities of Sudan's quest for economic development, particularly its efforts to rejoin the Sterling Area to access London capital markets for funding during the colonial period and later joining the IMF and the IBRD as a last resort in the post-colonial era.

The Sterling Area was defined in the Britain Exchange Control Act of 1947 as scheduled territories where trade and payments were unrestricted. It became known as the Sterling Area. This group partially originated from the interwar Sterling Bloc, a loosely organised coalition of European, Latin American, Middle Eastern, and African countries that pegged their currencies to the sterling. The Sterling Area functioned as a legal entity for over 25 years after the war, despite significant changes in the international monetary system and the dissolution of the British Empire (Schenk, 2013). However, on 30 June 1947, Egypt and Britain signed an agreement under which Egypt would exit the Sterling Area with a negotiated settlement of Egypt's sterling reserves (Mikesell, 1948). Consequently, Sudan was also excluded from the Sterling Area.

This essay provides a detailed account of Sudan's relationship with foreign financial institutions. It analyses primary sources from the British National Archives, specifically the Foreign Office documents from 1947, when Egypt and Sudan departed the Sterling Area, to 1957, a year after independence. These primary sources, along with a review of secondary literature regarding subsequent developments, offer nuanced insights into the interplay between colonial economic policies and their lasting influence on Sudan's development finance strategies.

This essay explores Sudan's economic history and its effects on contemporary development, contributing to the important discussion about decolonising development finance. It aims to clarify the path toward a fairer and more sustainable financial framework for Africa. By examining Sudan's development journey, this essay highlights the challenges and opportunities for reshaping development finance to respect the continent's diverse histories and aspirations for economic self-sufficiency.

The essay is organised into three sections. The first section is the introduction. The second section situates Sudan's economic development within its colonial and historical context, paying close attention to the motivations, challenges, and outcomes of its attempts to reintegrate into the Sterling Area. This exploration provides a historical and critical lens through which to view the persistent colonial influences on contemporary development finance mechanisms in Africa. The subsequent section transitions to a discussion of how these historical endeavours have shaped Sudan's current financial entanglements, highlighting the significant role of international financial institutions in perpetuating economic dependencies. The concluding section expands the discussion beyond Sudan, examining the implications of its experiences for the broader African context and advocating for a decolonised approach to development finance that truly addresses the historical injustices and financial imbalances ingrained in the current system.

Sudan's development funding within a colonial and historical context

The Anglo-Egyptian Condominium agreements established the Anglo-Egyptian Government, which governed Sudan from 1899 to 1956. The Khedive of Egypt appointed the Governor-General of Sudan, while British officers held key roles in both the civil and military administration of the region. Arguably, the Condominium structure ensured British control over Sudan (Daly, 1986). However, Sudan was economically integrated into the Egyptian economy. Sudan's official currency remained the Egyptian pound until 1957, when it introduced a new Sudanese currency one year after gaining independence. According to the British Treasury order of 28 September 1939, Egypt (and therefore Sudan) became part of the Sterling Bloc (Taha, 1970).

The British military expenditures in Egypt soared after Dunkirk, as North Africa became their primary theatre of war. In 1943, military spending peaked and then steadily decreased until the war ended. Consequently, Egypt's, and, hence, Sudan's, sterling balances at the Bank of England amounted to more than £400 million (de Paiva Abreu, 2017). After the war, Egypt became the second-largest holder of sterling balances, behind India.

Therefore, under the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium, Sudan's economy was intricately tied to both British and Egyptian interests. First, reliance on cotton as the primary export integrated Sudan into the global financial system in a way that primarily served British economic interests. This relationship was facilitated by its inclusion in the Sterling Area, which provided trade and development advantages. Specifically, being part of the Sterling Area meant easier access to London's capital markets and other financial resources, essential for funding the country's early development projects. The benefits included preferential trade terms and a stable exchange rate, which were particularly valuable for a nation dependent on agricultural exports like cotton. While Sudan could access international markets, foreign currency revenues were held at the Bank of England.

Conversely, integration into the Egyptian economy meant that all development funding had to be negotiated and approved by the Egyptian government. The conflict between the Egyptian and British governments over Egypt's sterling balances hastened the departure of both Sudan and Egypt (Abdallah, 2022: 6-27). Most importantly, it left Sudan in a complicated situation, necessitating negotiations over its sterling balances with Egypt and Britain while navigating the challenges of financing development's pressing priorities.

Sudan's quest to rejoin the Sterling Area (1952-1956)

From 1952 to 1956, Sudan embarked on a critical journey that would significantly influence its economic independence and development trajectory. This era, marked by the quest to rejoin the Sterling Area, reveals the complex interplay between colonial legacies, development aspirations, and the evolving global financial landscape.

The colonial experience under the Anglo-Egyptian condominium laid the groundwork for Sudan's economic policies post-independence. During the colonial period, Sudan's economy relied heavily on cotton production, a strategy that integrated it into the global financial systems and established a pattern of economic dependence. This persisted into the post-colonial era (Taha, 1970; Abdel-Rahim, 1986; Mollan, 2008). This economic structure influenced Sudan's early post-independence economic strategies and set expectations for development finance strategies that leaned heavily on external support.

Following Egypt's departure from the Sterling Area, the decision to exclude Sudan from the Sterling Area in 1947 marked a pivotal moment that revealed the fragility of Sudan's economic independence. This exclusion left Sudan in a tug of war between inherited colonial economic structures and aspirations for a self-sustaining post-colonial economy (de Paiva Abreu, 2017; Young, 2018). The period from 1952 to 1956 was characterised by Sudan's intense negotiations and efforts to rejoin the Sterling Area, driven by an urgent need for development funding, a desire to escape the shadow of colonial economic policies, and the aspiration to forge a more autonomous position in the international economic order.

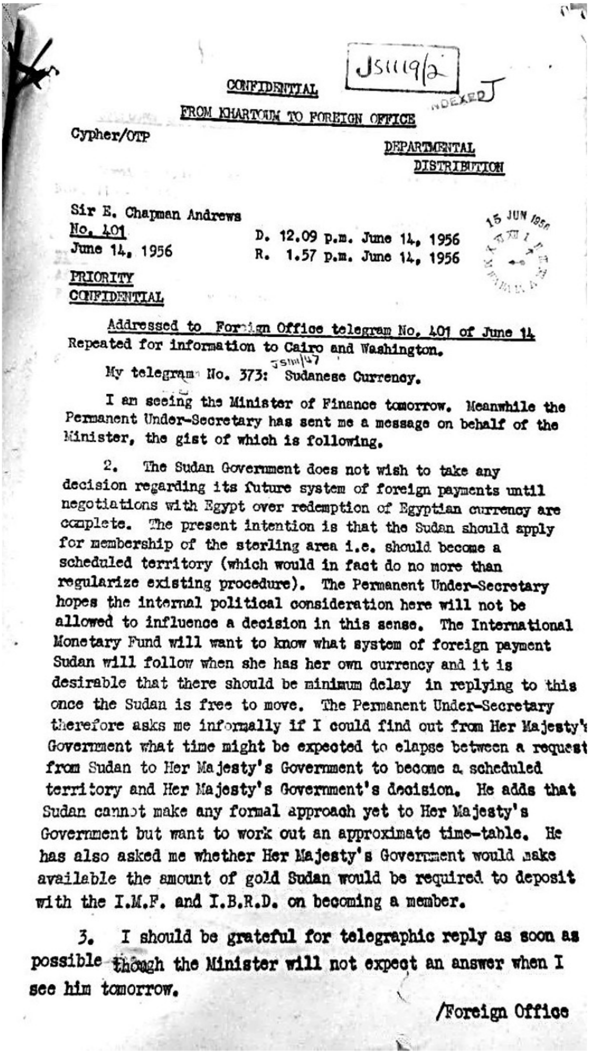
By 1952, British officials, recognising the potential benefits of Sudan's booming cotton sales and growing foreign reserves, supported the idea of Sudan's reintegration into the Sterling Area (Minute by G.L. Glutton. 'The state of the Condominium', 1949; Cabinet memorandum by Lord Swinton on membership of the Commonwealth for the Sudan, 1952; Antony Eden to R.G. Howe, 'Outlining the future of HMG's policy towards the Sudan', 1953). However, as discussions progressed and the self-government launched its development plans after 1954, this support waned, influenced by a reassessment of Britain's strategic interests and the economic viability of Sudan. (Foreign Office and Treasury Minute Number 6, 'Financial Policy for Sudan: Economic assistance, currency and the sterling area', 1953, 6; C.E. Loombe to D.R. Serpell, 1954; Serpell to J. Carmichael, 1954; E.B. Boothby to Serpell, 1954; W.H. Luce from Governor-General Office to Boothby, 1954). The evolving global economic landscape, which saw the rise of Washington Consensus institutions as alternative development funding sources, further complicated Sudan's quest.

The drive towards self-governance and the establishment of a national currency were seen as critical steps towards Sudan's economic independence. However, these moves were complicated by Sudan's ongoing economic reliance on cotton exports, a legacy of colonial economic policies prioritising monoculture agriculture (A.K. Potter to Bromley, 'Letter of 10 May enclosing a copy of Mr. Carmichael's letter of 17 April', 1955; C.G. Davis to J.W. Ridd, 'Sudan U.S. dollar and other hard currency requirements in 1955', 1955; Young, 2013). The fluctuating global demand for cotton and competitive pressure from other cotton-producing nations underscored the vulnerabilities of Sudan's economy and the limitations of its colonial-era economic foundations.

Internally, Sudan's self-government launched development plans relying on reserves from early 1950s revenue. Despite not being part of the Colonial Development Act of 1947, the Sudanese Government allocated significant funds to development, emphasising that progress could not be delayed (Luce to Bromley, 'V.K. Nehru and J.P. Jeejeebhoy Memorandum on Sudan's External Payments Agreements, including Carmichael's notes on the memorandum', 1955; 'P.G.D. Adams to T.E. Bromley', 1955; 'Luce to Bromley, 'Sudan Financial Affairs', 1955; Young, 2013). However, rapid development plans and the policy of Sudanisation convinced British officials that Sudan would not be a net dollar earner in the future but a liability. This further distanced Sudan's aspirations to join the Sterling Area.

Externally, negotiations with British and Egyptian authorities over Sudan's status in the Sterling Area were fraught with geopolitical considerations. The Suez Crisis of 1956 highlighted the interplay between colonial legacies, national aspirations, and global power dynamics (Abushouk, 2010; Peden, 2012; Young, 2012). Despite multiple requests from Sudan's self-government to formalise its relationship with the Sterling Area, British officials grew increasingly reluctant to proceed, influenced by changes in Britain's priorities and Sudan's political circumstances (Potter to Carmicheal, 1955; Luce to Bromley, 'General Review of Financial and Economic Problems in The Sudan by J. Carmichael', 1955; 'J. Carmichael 'Notes on a Separate Currency, Membership of the Sterling Area and Funds for Development', 1955; M.E. Jonston to J.H. A. Watson, 1956; W. Armstrong to Watson, 'Egypt Sterling Balances: Proposed Releases to the Sudan', 1957).

An example of these efforts is captured in a telegram from Sudan's Finance Minister to British officials, demonstrating the Sudanese government's desperation for financial assistance to pursue its development agenda. The newly independent government decided to join the IMF and the IBRD if Her Majesty's Government was not willing to bring Sudan back into the Sterling Area. (see picture (1)). The failure to secure a place in the Sterling Area had profound implications for Sudan's economic and political trajectory. It symbolised the broader challenges faced by post-colonial states in navigating the legacies of colonial economic structures and the complexities of the emerging international economic order (Woodward, 1979; Hinds, 2001; Krozewski, 2001). For Sudan, this meant grappling with the realities of underdevelopment and searching for alternative funding sources for pressing development priorities (Marzouk, 1958: 5; Robertson, 1974).



JS1119/2

CONFIDENTIAL

FROM KHARTOUM TO FOREIGN OFFICE

INDEXED J

Cypher/OTP

DEPARTMENTAL DISTRIBUTION

Sir E. Chapman Andrews
No. 401
June 14, 1956

D. 12.09 p.m. June 14, 1956
R. 1.57 p.m. June 14, 1956

15 JUN 1956

PRIORITY
CONFIDENTIAL

Addressed to Foreign Office telegram No. 401 of June 14
Repeated for information to Cairo and Washington.

JS1119/47

My telegram No. 373: Sudanese Currency.

I am seeing the Minister of Finance tomorrow. Meanwhile the Permanent Under-Secretary has sent me a message on behalf of the Minister, the gist of which is following.

2. The Sudan Government does not wish to take any decision regarding its future system of foreign payments until negotiations with Egypt over redemption of Egyptian currency are complete. The present intention is that the Sudan should apply for membership of the sterling area i.e. should become a scheduled territory (which would in fact do no more than regularize existing procedure). The Permanent Under-Secretary hopes the internal political consideration here will not be allowed to influence a decision in this sense. The International Monetary Fund will want to know what system of foreign payment Sudan will follow when she has her own currency and it is desirable that there should be minimum delay in replying to this once the Sudan is free to move. The Permanent Under-Secretary therefore asks me informally if I could find out from Her Majesty's Government what time might be expected to elapse between a request from Sudan to Her Majesty's Government to become a scheduled territory and Her Majesty's Government's decision. He adds that Sudan cannot make any formal approach yet to Her Majesty's Government but want to work out an approximate time-table. He has also asked me whether Her Majesty's Government would make available the amount of gold Sudan would be required to deposit with the I.M.F. and I.B.R.D. on becoming a member.

3. I should be grateful for telegraphic reply as soon as possible though the Minister will not expect an answer when I see him tomorrow.

/Foreign Office

Picture (1): *Letter by the Sudan Finance Minister addressed to Foreign Office telegram No 401 of June 14 1956*

Source: *British National Archives, FO 371/119648, author's picture*

The period marked a pivotal shift in Sudan's development finance strategy, laying the groundwork for its subsequent engagement with international financial institutions like the IMF and IBRD.

The quest to rejoin the Sterling Area between 1952 and 1956 illuminates Sudan's decolonisation process, the challenges of economic independence, and the shift towards alternative development funding sources. This period is crucial for understanding Sudan's post-colonial economic development challenges and the role of development finance in shaping its development trajectory.

From colonial chains to debt constraints (1956-1985)

From 1956 to 1985, Sudan embarked on a journey through the complex landscape of post-colonial development finance, shaped by both the legacy of colonial economic structures and the dynamics of the global financial system. This era encapsulates Sudan's challenges in asserting financial autonomy and achieving sustainable development amidst shifting global economic policies and finance paradigms.

Inheriting a colonial economic framework heavily reliant on cotton production, Sudan's fortunes were closely tied to fluctuations in global commodity markets. This dependency was a colonial remnant reflected in early post-colonial government efforts to leverage agriculture for economic development. The emphasis on cotton, prioritised by strategies in the late 1950s and early 1960s, marked a continuity of colonial economic preferences, sidelining sectors with significant economic potential, such as untapped livestock (Ali and Elbadawi, 2004; Young, 2017). As a result, Sudan relied on external borrowing to bridge investment and foreign exchange gaps, entrenching the country in a cycle of debt, exacerbating financial dependency and structural economic challenges (El-Shibly and Thirlwall, 1981). Subsequently, Sudan became the first African country to borrow from the IBRD. Nevertheless, the debt was not an issue as the country was still considered promising in Sub-Saharan Africa by international financial institutions (World Bank, 1958).

By the 1970s, the allure of rapid development and the limitations of Sudan's economic structure continued to fuel substantial external borrowing. Although intended as a pathway to transformative economic projects, Sudan's debt was increasing, exacerbated by global market volatility (Wynn, 1971: 10; Thomas, 2017). The adoption of structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) under the IMF's guidance in the late 1970s marked a critical yet contentious phase. These programmes intensified socio-economic disparities, underscoring the weaknesses of IMF-led post-colonial economic restructuring interventions (Ali, 1990; Mahran, 1994: 23). Eventually, instead of addressing Sudan's urgent development priorities, the Government gradually became entangled in the agendas of donors and borrowers.

The post-1956 period of engaging with development finance reveals the broader challenges that post-colonial states face in balancing national development aspirations with global financial dependencies and colonial legacies. This period reflects Sudan's contested economic governance landscape, where internal policy decisions and international financial pressures converge, shaping the nation's development trajectory. Wynn's analysis of 'Sudan's 10-Year Plan of Economic Development, 1961/62-1970/71' provides insight into Sudan's ambitious development plan (Wynn, 1971). However, it also reveals how the Government was constrained by existing infrastructure, resources, and international development doctrines, which were closely tied to financing conditions (Young, 2017).

Notably, despite their economic potential, the selective focus on cotton over other sectors, such as livestock, underscores a deeper bias within Sudan's economic planning. This bias highlights a continuation of colonial economic preferences and reflects the inclinations of financial and economic policy institutions that prioritised certain sectors over others, contributing to regional disparities and neglect (Suliman, 2019). The mixed outcomes of this plan demonstrate the difficulties of achieving growth targets and the impact of these challenges on Sudan's economic path.

The narrative of Sudan's quest for development funding between 1956 and 1985 is a microcosm of the broader challenges African post-colonial states face in navigating the global economic order. It underscores the complex interplay between national aspirations for development and autonomy and the realities of a global financial system shaped by historical inequalities and power dynamics (Riddell, 1992; Ndulu, 2007; Ndikumana, 2015). Sudan's experience during this period highlights the enduring impact of colonial legacies on development trajectories and the contentious role of international financial institutions in shaping the economic policies of post-colonial African states.

Decolonising development finance: Linking past to present

Decolonising development finance requires a critical re-examination of the foundations and practices that have shaped funding mechanisms in colonial and post-colonial eras, emphasising the need to dismantle the remnants of colonial financial structures. This approach necessitates acknowledging and addressing how these legacies continue to influence development strategies that disadvantage African countries (Collier, 1991; Schmitt, 2020). The contemporary financial paradigm, particularly embodied by the Wall Street Consensus, has been critiqued for sustaining a model of racial capitalism, where financial policies and practices reinforce global divisions and economic exploitation patterns that echo those of the colonial past (Gabor, 2021; Alami and Guermond, 2023; Alami et al., 2023). Such an analysis underscores the need to shift towards a development finance model that prioritises equity and rectifies historical injustices, challenging the Eurocentric logic that has traditionally marginalised African countries.

Sudan's journey through the complexities of attempting to rejoin the Sterling Area and its reliance on global financial institutions exemplifies the broader challenges and systemic issues that African nations face today in securing development funding. This narrative highlights the enduring impact of colonial economic strategies, such as the overreliance on cotton production, which set the stage for a prolonged struggle with financial dependency and underdevelopment. Thus, the web of financial dependency, characterised by restrictive debt structures and the conditionalities of international financial institutions, reflects a broader pattern of economic control deeply rooted in colonial legacies.

By drawing connections between Sudan's historical financial struggles and the current developmental financing issues confronting the African continent, a more nuanced understanding of the systemic barriers to development emerges. These challenges, far from isolated incidents, indicate a larger global financial system that continues to perpetuate neocolonial dependencies (Amin, 2017, 2018; Bhambra, 2021). The narrative of Sudan, with its strategic economic goals hindered by external pressures, mirrors a common struggle across Africa: the quest for genuine economic independence within a financial architecture that still favours the interests of the Global North.

Advocating for a decolonised approach to development finance involves more than merely addressing the financial needs of African nations; it calls for a fundamental reimagining of development financing mechanisms. This reimagining should be rooted in principles of justice, equity, and recognition of African countries' unique histories and aspirations (Ndlovu, 2018). In addition to proposing alternatives such as sovereign debt relief and reparations, this essay also advocates for a transformative reconfiguration of financial practices. Such a shift aims to address the symptoms of financial inequity and tackle the underlying colonial legacies that continue to impede the economic empowerment and sustainable development of the continent, paving the way for a global financial system that is equitable and conducive to the economic independence of all nations.

In conclusion, it is evident that the legacy of colonialism significantly impacts Sudan's development financing, with implications for the wider African narrative. This analysis emphasises the historical connections and urges a reassessment of development finance to address these entrenched disparities. Looking ahead, it is crucial to develop financing models that truly reflect and cater to the distinctive histories and present needs of African nations. This change involves more than just shifting financial flows; it requires a fundamental rethinking of development finance frameworks to ensure sustainable and equitable growth throughout the continent. The ongoing challenge for policymakers, researchers, and development practitioners is to leverage this understanding to promote and enact financial mechanisms that go beyond the remnants of colonialism, advancing a fairer and more equitable economic landscape in Africa.

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6. Ancestral wisdom for decolonising development assistance: A roadmap through Nigerian proverbs

*Jite Phido**

Abstract

Starting from the premise that the current development funding paradigm is failing, this essay explores emerging opportunities for decolonising development funding in Africa using Nigerian proverbs from various ethnic groups as a cultural metaphor. The essay first problematises the dominant development funding model on the continent and then uses proverbs as a framework for sense-making and envisioning strategies and principles for a decolonisation process. It further explores three proposed pillars for decolonising development funding: decolonising funding policies and strategies, decolonising contextual knowledge and understanding of people and places, and lastly, decolonising the NGO-isation of development resources. The essay concludes with insights on the practicalities of engaging in this work, including who should be involved and how we might measure success.

Keywords: cultural knowledge, development funding, decolonisation, Nigerian proverbs, power structures

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Introduction

Current large-scale development funding paradigms in Africa are failing. Despite decades of investment in 'projectising' the work of building equitable, just, and thriving societies across Africa through local and international development assistance, the resource-rich continent still remains the poorest (Al-Agouza and Ahmed-Sabry, 2021) and the most dependent on international funding agendas in the world (Fakoya, Omitola and Akintayo, 2022). This dependency of Africa's sustainable development agenda on international development assistance is deeply problematic since, as Boakye and Liu (2016) put it, failure is prevalent within international development projects. If international development projects and programmes are failing, and they are significant mechanisms for achieving sustainable development within countries, then it means that African development agendas are also failing.

The reasons for the failure of international development assistance are myriad. In my experience working in both local and global civil society in Africa and Europe, there has often been a significant focus on mitigating the project implementation challenges that may hinder the achievement of the goals, objectives, and strategies planned at the outset of the programme. Some of these challenges include aspects such as 'the uncertainty and risk in handling projects, directionless processes, inability… to describe the project, poor project design and poor leadership, (inadequate infrastructure), professionals and inappropriate sta! skills, unrealistic time scales and cost estimation, poor procurement methods, failure to plan (adequately), and lack of pre-project planning' (Boakye and Liu, 2016). While it is easy to reflect on why development assistance is failing and identify project management and implementation challenges or even corruption and fungibility (a form of diversion of aid from an intended purpose to some other purpose) as the culprits, there is an increasing call to examine the very models, structures, and processes of international development as potential reasons for its failure and Africa's ongoing 'development crisis'.

The current development aid industrial complex exhibits what could be described as a form of 'imperial amnesia', as though the attainment of independence and the subsequent transition to a post-colonial Africa erases the histories and ongoing legacies of cultural, social, epistemic, and material extraction, expropriation, and exploitation that the continent faces (Kapoor, 2023). This amnesia manifests in the bewilderment I have observed when Western-conceived project ideas fail to work in local contexts, when there is misalignment between Western and African development agendas, when Africans do not behave or react as Westerners do, when local activists, communities, and organisations 'do not seem grateful enough', and when development funding shows limited dividends.

The movement to decolonise development studies and practice stems from the recognition that our conceptualisation of what development is, how it works, and what sorts of societies it should cultivate is deeply rooted in coloniality, or what Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013: 8) defines as the 'continuities of colonial mentalities, psychologies and worldviews in the so-called post colonial era', characterised by a 'social hierarchical relationship of exploitation and domination between Westerners and Africans'. The underlying discourse is that even as an African, the ways I perceive myself and the cultural practices and traditions of my people, my perspective on the terms 'sustainable' and 'development', my understanding of what knowledge is valid and counts as evidence, the methodologies for research, learning, project management, and accountability, as well as the bureaucracy of development, reflect Western artefacts that are considered the normal order of things and indeed the correct way to operate. This discourse is perpetuated through education, which in most African countries is deeply colonial rather than contextual, and reinforced in the mechanics of what types of agencies and projects receive resources within the continent.

As a Nigerian woman from the Niger Delta region of the country, yet born and raised in the bustling metropolis of Lagos, Africa's most populous city, I have spent much of my career navigating these tensions. The world of development assistance and funding is 'built on a Victorian paternalistic model of gracious benefactor and grateful beneficiary, and against the historical context of empire-building, slavery and colonialism, which embedded ideas about "race within philanthropy" (Irfan, 2021).

To be frank, there is a significant amount of Western/White saviourism and a need to 'civilise the natives' that precludes equal partnerships because it starts with the assumption that people receiving assistance lack equal capabilities and capacities to be equal thought and implementation partners in building thriving societies.

Much like the colonial project over a century ago, current development agendas often seem to want to make local people and institutions adapt to Western norms, ideas and ways of being, as those with value. Even decolonial concepts like 'community-led', 'locally-led', 'women-led' development have frequently been co-opted, bureaucratising communities so that they become mini-satellites of international organisations, able to manage projects and support monitoring and evaluation in a way that makes sense to foreign benefactors, even if it has limited value within their community itself (Scott, 2024). What is worse is that these models have become the standard operating practice for resourcing and implementing development programmes. Even local foundations and organisations often model these practices.

'Give me a little push on my back' no mean say make you give me hunchback.
– A common Pidgin proverb used across Nigeria.

Loosely translated, the above common Nigerian Pidgin proverb means that just because a person seeks assistance from you, it does not mean you should oppress them or cause them harm. The current formats of development funding are often oppressive and rooted in colonial practices, causing harm despite any intentions to do good. They have disempowered communities, colonised civil society spaces, and 'legitimised a capitalist world order' while promising development (Biekert et al., 2024), resulting in a world where there is a numerical price on human dignity that determines whether communities are worth investing in or not.

Nevertheless, despite the criticisms directed at the current development aid industrial complex and the necessity of exploring a decolonising process to address some of the harms of colonial legacies on

Africa's development, it is likely that, at least in the short to medium term, development assistance will continue to play a role in community, national, and regional development efforts. Therefore, establishing a methodology for decolonising development funding in Africa that provides alternative funding models and strategies for resourcing our own development is essential.

This essay is premised on the idea that the methodology for decolonising development funding in Africa must be based on African principles and ideologies. Proverbs are an essential part of Nigerian, and arguably most African, cultures. As a primary form of oral tradition and local wisdom in nearly all Nigerian cultures, they can be used to 'express morals and ethics… (and to) maintain conformity to cultural values and accepted patterns of behaviour' (Abdulkarim and Abdullahi, 2015), 'to explore the cultural and historical experiences' of a people (Udisi, 2024), as a learning resource to 'provide a symbolic explanation of the environment' (Aboluwodi, 2014), as well as to settle disputes and support reconciliation during traditional justice proceedings (Oboko, 2020 and Udi, 2016). In essence, proverbs are simultaneously a record of 'the history, experience, the trauma, and the tension of a society at every stage in its evolution' and a guide for recommended action, summarising the cultural viewpoint of a place (Nwachukwu-Agbada, 1994).

Ochi enkpo ge ya ipu no
– Idoma proverb

Grounded in providing actionable solutions, this essay recognises that as the Idoma people from the middle belt of Nigeria say, 'a tree cannot make a forest'. In other words, there is an interdependency in the world that demands respect; thus, a decolonising project involves not just African communities as re-established self-determining 'wielders' of power and knowledge, but also external actors from the development aid industrial complex as the 'yielders' of control over resources, how they are utilised, and what agendas are prioritised (Tawake et al., 2021). Through the use of Nigerian proverbs, this essay intends to provide ideas for decolonising development funding, drawing on traditional and emerging innovative funding mechanisms.

A note on methodology

My initial motivation for this approach was to find a way to include the culture and viewpoints of my people in this project of envisioning alternative development resourcing modalities for Africa. Due to my standpoint as a Nigerian woman from the Niger Delta, born and raised in Lagos, nurtured by Western epistemologies, and my career spent working in local and international NGOs, I wanted to critique my own mental models around this work in this essay, decolonising my ideas with Nigerian cultural references. As described above, beyond being literary devices, proverbs are cultural metaphors, 'concepts we live by… (beyond just) language, (representing) thoughts and actions as well' (Lakoff and Johnson, 2008).

The reimagining of a decolonised development funding approach in Africa cannot occur without considering our own worldview. A limitation to this approach could be the idea that proverbs are often seen as historical rather than contemporary and thus not reflective of current day challenges. Nevertheless, I would argue that although proverbs are records of ancestral knowledge, they are not static; they evolve and remain relevant even in contemporary society.

What is ancestral is not necessarily the proverb itself but the practice of using communal aphorisms to make sense of context, history, and experience. Nwachukwu-Agbada (2012) discusses an 'ongoing folkloric agenda' where although 'ordinarily, the proverb is associated with ancientness, with established custom and tradition', in the post-colonial context, 'new, vibrant and audacious renditions' that reflect the impact of colonisation and record lessons learned from recent history continue to be minted and used in daily life.

Thus, the use of proverbs is a relevant framework to engage in this essay. I was further encouraged in this approach by the way proverbs as cultural metaphors have been used to develop culturally competent strategies and processes that leverage cultural understanding (Bernard and Fernandez, 2012).

Asọkarịa eze anya e kpuru nkata n’ iru were gwa ya okwu.
– Igbo Proverb

Another reason for selecting this approach was the opportunity to find an alternative way to speak to power, especially as a current practitioner working within the international development system and identifying as an insider-outsider. The Igbo people from the South East of Nigeria have a saying that ‘when a king has been tolerated for a long time, his followers mask their faces to challenge him’, reflecting the role of strategic and creative communication and diplomacy that is often required in advocacy. Indeed, Oboko (2020) asserts that ‘proverbs can be used to… soften words and situations, deepen the meaning of what is said, add aesthetics to discourse, interpret what is said, drive home one’s points, admonish, draw inspiration and make an impact’.

This is the ambition of this essay: to use Nigerian wisdom and cultural references to articulate African viewpoints on aid and a methodology for dreaming and envisioning alternative ways of resourcing development in Africa, while proposing a roadmap that outlines a way forward for decolonising funding.

Three proverbs for decolonising African funding

In approaching this essay, I sought insights from family and friends about proverbs that could speak to the current funding crisis in Africa. I scoured dozens of websites and academic articles in search of wisdom from the varied and diverse linguistic heritage of my country. Throughout this essay, I have tried to attribute an ethnic origin to each proverb where possible. Nevertheless, I also found that many proverbs exist across cultures and cannot necessarily be attributed to one over the other.

Proverb 1: On decolonising funding policies and strategic objectives

Fine words do not produce food.
- A common proverb used across Nigeria.

Development funding is embedded in a series of spoken and unspoken deeply colonial and racialised practices premised on the idea of a limited capacity of local people and an inherent untrustworthiness to know what they want or need, as well as to manage resources allocated to them judiciously. These practices can appear in policies and strategies for development management, or what Scott (2024) describes as 'a set of technologies, processes and disciplines used throughout the aid system for the organisation and control of people, resources and values'. They regulate how strategic priorities and policies manifest in project and programme design, the criteria for the selection of partners and beneficiaries, the operations of downstream partners and recipients of funds, and what success and accountability look like. They privilege management and metrics over people and participation.

Often embedded within these development funding and management structures are policies on equity and localisation, participatory, locally-led development, inclusive decision making, or other documentation that amplifies these institutions' commitments to development that includes 'those closest to the issues'. In practice, these policies often serve to gaslight those in contexts who must conform to predetermined funder strategic priorities that are often politically, economically, or socially motivated and bound by rigid top-down structures to enforce compliance.

A common proverb across Nigeria says 'fine words do not produce food.' Similarly, policies, toolkits, guidelines, frameworks, and strategy documents that address localisation, participation, equity, and inclusion, no matter how well-written and well-intentioned, do not constitute actions. They can serve as a starting point, and I have worked on some myself. However, they hold no value if they are not contextualised and utilised, iterated upon through collaboration with communities that can genuinely prioritise, lead, and devise solutions to contextual challenges. The discourse surrounding equity, inclusion, participation, localisation, and consultations becomes meaningless if it remains anchored in the belief that development management is the only rational way to operate, and lacks the flexibility and openness necessary to genuinely yield control, power, money, respect, agency, and ideas to communities, allowing them to wield these resources without pre-determining the outcome or the appropriate method. Policies and strategies that claim to shift power without corresponding actions will never yield results.

Therefore, the first imperative for effectively resourcing development in Africa is fidelity to the philosophies that underpin equity, inclusion, localisation, and power-shifting policies and strategies. If a localisation policy exists and is not pushing towards a genuinely community-led future where the funder and those in the development aid value chain have worked themselves out of a job in the system, then it is disingenuous to include it. Development funding should aim for eventual divestment – not at some arbitrarily determined three or five-year period, but because it has resulted in thriving communities where people have their basic needs met and can therefore allocate the resources, bandwidth, and safety net to co-develop their communities sustainably. There needs to be openness to the fact that the pathway to this goal cannot be predetermined by technical experts and those located in offices in major capital cities, even within their own countries.

In a decolonising project, resourcing development in a way that aligns with localisation policies can no longer mean asking communities what they want but only acknowledging certain responses that align with a predetermined agenda. We must move beyond tokenistic inclusion and 'tick-box participation' to true substantive intersectional community leadership. This requires a significant transformation in orientation within funding institutions and among all those in the development aid industrial complex, a substantive decolonisation of those institutions, and the willingness to deprioritise funder imperatives (which may be political, economic, social, or reputational) for those of the communities.

It sounds like an impossible task based on the current system. Yet last year, a decade after shifting from resourcing projects to resourcing systems in an attempt to decolonise their funding practice, UK philanthropy, Lankelly Chase, recognising that ongoing philanthropy is a 'function of colonial capitalism' committed to abolishing themselves and giving away £130 million to align with their charitable mission to tackle racism, injustice, and inequality (which they recognised as being in conflict with their) position as a major investor in (the) global capital markets (they) consider to be rooted in racial and colonial exploitation. The goal of development funding should be a world where funding institutions are eventually abolished because communities are thriving self-determining hubs of their own development and no longer in need of external support.

Proverb 2: On decolonising contextual knowledge

Amr'emu keke, ada guon'urhukpe-e
– Urhobo Proverb

Within the discourse of decolonising African development, much has been written about rethinking development studies (Biekart, et al., 2024; Kapoor, 2023), research ethics (Cascant Sempere, Aliyu, and Bollaert, 2022), and knowledge production (Crawford, Mai-Bornu, and Landström, 2023; Cummings, Munthali Shapland, 2022; Taela, 2023). Even within the development aid industrial complex, there has been an emerging recognition for some time that Southern voices, activists, and communities should be included in development research for programme design and implementation (Taylor and Tremblay, 2022).

Nevertheless, in practice, the prevalent form of participatory research involves an unequal power dynamic in which Northern institutions, bolstered by the validation of the cultural and social capital favoured by funders, dictate the research agenda and co-opt communities as uncompensated or minimally compensated research assistants.

Indeed, funding decisions and research agendas are often established before communities are engaged. Even when Southern institutions participate, it is well understood that they often serve as co-leads in name only rather than in practice (Cascant Sempere, Aliyu, and Bollaert, 2022). In exchange for their cooperation, the expectation is that Southern institutional capacity will be strengthened, they will receive the benefits of Western approbation, and their profile will be elevated as they are invited to present ‘their research’ at global conferences and events. The very communities that hold the knowledge needed by this extractive process are mostly treated as research subjects, good enough to provide the data but not good enough to dictate objectives. I say all this not with judgment, but with the recognition of being complicit in this cycle of replicating knowledge that does not lead to effective, meaningful solutions for those who need them.

An Urhobo proverb says, ‘one does not see something clearly and then also ask for a lamp to search for it’ (Udi, 2016), referring to the fact that there is no need for in-depth investigations into clearly known facts. Yet, often, communities are asked to engage in research to expand their knowledge about basic contextual artefacts that community members inherently understand. Community members are rarely (if ever) asked what, if anything, they would need or want to know about their own context in order to solve local challenges. Research is framed without truly respecting the fact that communities are capable of ‘facilitating political and economic development and social transformation’ (Kaunda, 2015) and can be commissioners and directors of a research agenda that is meaningful to them.

The project of decolonising the knowledge used for decision-making about resourcing development in Africa goes beyond rethinking North-South or even South-South learning cooperation. A truly meaningful decolonising practice for valuable knowledge production needs to be intersectional in terms of who is involved in setting the agenda, whose knowledge is trusted, and which ways of knowing and addressing contextual problems are resourced (Contractor and Dasgupta, 2022). In essence, when community members without the credentials that validate knowledge in a colonial system express what they want and need, it is essential to respect what they are saying without interpreting them through Western paradigms and priorities. This requires respecting contextual knowledge in a way that goes beyond rhetoric and into actual practice.

This proposition is not impossible. There is room to learn from the Indigenous Data Sovereignty movement, which ‘explicitly outlines the right of Indigenous Peoples to govern the creation, collection, ownership and application of their data’ (Tynan, 2024). This approach could be adopted as standard development practice, shifting power to communities and centring them as custodians of their data, the knowledge created about them, and how it is used for decision making regarding their development.

Herring et al. (2020) describe how the Somali First Initiative approached decolonising development by leveraging a ‘long term partnership grounded in a shared purpose and complementary capacities (by) maximis(ing) funding for and control of funding by Somali entities; decentring English and centring Somali linguistic diversity; promoting a locally-led approach; and employing co-production’. With language and methodology currently being key barriers to communities leading the production of knowledge for programme design and evaluation, there is a need to rethink the language and methodology used in generating data for funding decision making.

Community-based participatory research is another methodology that has been explored for decolonising research and knowledge production, which shows promise for integrating community worldviews into development learning, implementation, and decision making (Igwe, Madichie and Rugara, 2022). Nevertheless, even with this approach, it is essential that an intersectionally inclusive array of community members serve as co-primary investigators and that the research agenda is relevant to them and their aspirations for the progress of their community, rather than to their development partners.

Lastly, participatory grant-making presents an approach to leveraging community contextual knowledge that has great promise for decolonising funding decision-making and shifting power. This form of development funding aligns with traditional ways of resourcing development across Nigeria and other parts of Africa, where various community and religious groups have always made collective decisions about what projects were needed for the progress of the community, irrespective of whether the funds were raised collectively or donated by an individual. In current development practice, this methodology is exemplified by the Start Network's Start Fund (Start Network, 2024). The Start Fund provides rapid humanitarian assistance through regional and national hubs formed by both small and large non-governmental organisations (NGOs) across the country or region that notify the central country or regional hub about emerging crises and rapidly and collaboratively make informed decisions on funding based on their contextual knowledge.

Proverb 3: On decolonising NGOs

Wealth which enslaves the owner is no longer wealth; it is poison.
– Yoruba Proverb

This essay has already critiqued the colonisation of development in Africa through intrusive and expensive development management processes (Scott, 2024), projectisation (Boakye and Liu, 2016), and policies, strategies, and conceptual starting points that are not rooted in the daily realities of the people they are meant to serve. However, the colonialism of development in Africa is also perpetuated through an NGO-isation project, whereby development funders contract highly efficient, skilled professional organisations that can operate in a manner pleasing to global requirements, often showcasing skills and qualifications that align with those in Western contexts.

For development funders, these NGOs may often be local actors with contextual knowledge, able to manage large funding pools. The issue is that what counts as 'local' can be discursive in the absence of reflexivity, intersectionality, and positionality. While we may all be 'local,' there are significant contextual, power, and identitarian differences in the local experiences within a country. For instance, there are notable differences between working for an international non-governmental organisation (INGO), a national NGO, and a community-based organisation, as well as significant distinctions between operating in a large capital city versus a small village, within one region compared to another, or having a specific ethnic, religious, or gender identity in any of those spaces.

Cullen, McCorriston, and Thompson (2021) discuss the post-Second World War expansion of indigenous, faith-based, and international NGOs as a mechanism for advancing empire and implementing human development projects, particularly in areas overlooked by colonial governments. They assert that in this first wave of NGO-isation, 'it was through grass-roots community-based NGOs that many Africans actually encountered development, funders channelled their resources through them, and, indeed, developed a dependency upon them'; this dependency only became more entrenched in the second wave with the rise of structural adjustment programmes, which de-emphasised national governments as key development agencies and elevated NGOs as facilitators of development and recipients of development funding (Cullen, McCorriston, and Thompson, 2021).

The main criticism of the NGO-isation of development is that it reinforces hierarchies of power, 'reproduc(ing) rather than challenge dominant practices and power relations, and serv(ing) elite economic and political interests instead of constituencies which these organisations claim to represent' (Choudry, 2010). Moreover, it allows for a world where development funders privilege NGOs and organisations that have capacities most similar to theirs, creating a hierarchy with so-called capacity-strengthened 'donor darlings' that repeatedly receive resources and priority at the top and communities at the bottom.

There's a Yoruba proverb that says, 'the wealth which enslaves the owner isn't wealth, it is poison'. Many mission-driven organisations with good intentions, in their pursuit of resources for their work, have been hamstrung by compliance rules, finding themselves in a catch-22 situation where they may have to make significant compromises to support the communities they serve. Certainly, some large local NGOs have emerged as contractors to serve the development aid industrial complex. Nevertheless, in my experience, I have found that many professional NGOs genuinely have good intentions and prefer to engage communities in their own development meaningfully. Unfortunately, to continue enjoying the privileges of being recognised as local experts and, through that validation, securing resources for their work, there is an increasing expectation of professionalisation, bureaucracy, and the replication of development management mechanisms created in the Global North, which may not make sense in Southern contexts.

Even for NGOs that want to resist this co-optation, there is a fungibility of the funding they receive; that is, there are rules and compliance structures in place that dictate the specific purposes for which the funding can be used, rather than allowing for alternative uses that communities may prioritise. To some extent, NGOs may be able to push back and advocate for these alternative uses, but often funds are tied to programmatic or strategic objectives. The best-case scenarios involve small shifts rather than significant wins – you will rarely see funds intended for building school infrastructure redirected to support a community feeding programme.

The very idea of fungibility (or interchangeability of funding) is an anathema in development, carrying connotations of misappropriation, misuse, and corruption. As Rana and Koch (2019) write, 'it (is) striking how often it (is) implicitly assumed that fungibility, which could also be framed as an act of agency by the (funding) recipient(s), (is seen as) something that need(s) to be rooted out'. Yet under a decolonising paradigm, funding should be flexible and trust-based. When it is used as a mechanism for covert or overt control over the mechanisms and ways of working of local organisations, it becomes toxic, a poison to their mission, and harmful to their credibility with the very communities they want to serve and their long-term mission in those areas.

While local agencies bear some responsibility for recognising that not all money is good, with rising inflation and ever-decreasing purchasing power, the shrinking of civic spaces by increasingly authoritarian-leaning governments and limited public investment in human development and social safety net programmes, local organisations play increasing roles in delivering programmes to marginalised communities. The scope of need means that some organisations and groups may feel they do not have the luxury to reject funding and may therefore make compromises to sustain their work.

Solutions to these challenges may include flexible, trust-based resourcing that supports mission-driven work rather than specific projects, trusting communities, activists, and local organisations to know how best to prioritise the work and implement it sustainably as collaborators. Funders like the Skoll Foundation and the African Visionary Fund are already providing this type of funding and are moving toward more power-shifting relationships with their grantees, even though they may face compliance eligibility barriers that often pose issues for community groups and non-registered organisations. Nevertheless, the model shows promise in placing the onus on local actors to lead their development and resourcing them to do so. For a decolonising impact on the sector, more of the large funders need to cede power and control of resources to genuine local actors, many of whom may not meet their funding criteria, something that also requires decolonising.

Funding coalitions rather than individual NGOs presents another model for decolonising local organisations. By supporting collaboration and resourcing shared capacity rather than driving competition, coalitions made up of diverse local and national organisations and self-help groups can leverage each others unique skills and capabilities and co-develop systems-impacting, multisectoral solutions that address various parts of a development challenge. This approach differs from the common method of funding consortia of 3-5 professional NGOs. Coalitions typically involve multiple groups with varying capacities and roles coming together around a shared vision, without a definitive predetermined programme concept. Instead, they focus on a commitment to collectively decide how best to collaborate in delivering impact for their communities. In the current development sector, this model is being explored by The Share Trust and Warande Advisory Centre's Local Coalition Accelerator initiative.

Impact investing, which 'aims to achieve measurable social or environmental impacts in addition to financial returns' (Schlütter et al., 2024), has presented another flexible model for approaching this work. Nevertheless, it has been criticised (Reisman, Olazabal, and Hoffman, 2018; and Schlütter et al., 2024) for at times privileging capitalist impact priorities such as financial return and numerical reach as a proxy for genuine social impact that is meaningful to communities. Crowdfunding offers a similar opportunity for direct fundraising from the public, bypassing the bureaucratic heavy-handedness of many development funding processes.

Conclusion

Hannu daya baya daukan jinka
– Hausa Proverb

Throughout this essay, I have used Nigerian proverbs to problematise the current deeply colonial funding paradigm that governs the dominant system of resource allocation for development in Africa and to present principles rooted in indigenous wisdom with which a decolonising funding practice should align. There is a Hausa proverb that says, 'one hand cannot lift a hut' (Abdulkarim and Abdullahi, 2015), and indeed, the work of dismantling the current dominant system and replacing it with a new, more equitable system requires a collaborative effort in power-shifting, replacing mental models, and acknowledging that current systems are deeply problematic and will not achieve sustainable development objectives.

Some have proposed that global partners should have little to no role in a decolonising development funding practice in Africa because their involvement mythologises them as saviours and positions their role as a civilising project for underdeveloped, disempowered continents and people who require external assistance (Rutazibwa, 2018). However, if a practice of decolonising development funding draws from Escobar's (2018) idea of a pluriverse in which development itself as a concept is decolonised, contextualised, allowed to mean different things to different people, and understood to be achievable in various ways outside of a single world order in a form of 'ontological diversity', then alternatives to the current paradigm will emerge (Querejazu, 2016). Essentially, there is a role for a variety of actors in a decolonising project, provided they approach the work with a pluriversal mindset that privileges contextual worldviews.

A farmer does not boast that he has had a good harvest until his stock of yams lasts till the following harvest season.
– A common Nigerian proverb

Throughout the process of writing this essay and proposing approaches to decolonising development funding in Africa, the end goal has consistently been in my thoughts. It is undoubtedly crucial to decolonise development practice and centre it in equitable partnerships that are not merely glocal, imported from one location and inserted into another a-contextually, but rather are rooted in 'trans-nationality, relationality and mutuality' (Chapman et al., 2021). Yet, decolonisation is not an end in itself. We also cannot romanticise the realities of human suffering and inequality as purely a colonial artefact. Precolonial African society was not a utopia devoid of inequalities and power imbalances (Kaunda 2015: Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013: 6). We know this because our oral narratives are filled with recollections of models of community resourcing that existed to drive progress for the common good, irrespective of the differences in wealth that existed between individuals or families. If anything, wealth conferred a responsibility of redistribution through community initiatives for those with fewer resources.

As reflected in this essay, the current model of resource development is failing. The aid industrial complex is quick to point to quantitative metrics like programme reach and short-term beneficiary surveys, amplifying success in programme reports, international journal articles, and conferences. A common Nigerian proverb says, 'a farmer does not boast that he has had a good harvest until his stock of yams lasts till the following harvest season'. An alternative way we say this is 'a performing masquerade who tries too hard to outclass his colleagues may expose his anus'.

The current way we think about impact in development is largely meaningless to communities, only serving to amplify the actual failure of development programming when surface-level quantitative metrics do not match the lived experience of underserved communities. In light of this misalignment, the goal of development funding in Africa should no longer be to implement programmes that serve the purposes and goals of development funders' programmes and strategies (Masvaure and Motlanthe, 2022). Rather, within a decolonising practice, the goal should be the demand-led offering of resources to those who are direct stakeholders in building thriving communities. As Masvaure and Motlanthe (2022) suggest, these 'beneficiaries should not be passive subjects who have no say in the design of the programmes that are aimed at bringing social change into their lives; instead, they should lead in the design and their imprint should be on the evaluation'.

The same sun that melts wax is capable of hardening clay.
– A common proverb across the world.

As the adage goes, 'the same sun that melts wax can harden clay', and the problematic partnerships and hierarchies that reinforce inequalities can be transformed through systems innovation and 'hospicing' the current broken system to one that serves the people it should. Development funding is not imperative to delivering thriving societies. Nevertheless, if development partners want to participate in the process, they must engage with reflexivity and respect, completely rethinking the current global order while respecting a decolonising ontology that centres community truths.

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7. Toward feminist and pro-sexual minority rights approaches to philanthropy in Africa: A case for feminist funding models

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Abstract

The global humanitarian landscape is urgently evolving to address the need for strengthened social and human rights justice. This calls for intentionally streamlined resources to tackle rising fundamentalism, shrinking civic space, security threats to women's rights activists, and declining funding for women's rights organisations. This essay examines the limitations of traditional funding models – particularly bilateral and multilateral aid – in supporting the feminist movement in Nigeria. It highlights how feminist grant-makers are transforming the funding landscape by pooling and disbursing funds to feminist and women's rights organisations through models aimed at decolonising aid and addressing uneven donor-beneficiary dynamics.

Keywords: decolonising aid, feminist funding, women's rights, sexual minority rights, philanthropy, power dynamics

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Introduction

The modern political economy depends on three key sectors: the state, the private sector, and civil society (Sy and Hathie, 2009). Since the 1900s, civil society has played a critical role in the socio-economic growth and decolonisation of African countries (WACSI, 2023). Civil society includes non-profit organisations, community-based networks, and organised groups that promote citizens' interests, will, and rights, functioning independently of the government (Mafeje, 1998). These organisations and groups challenge harmful social beliefs, transform systems, and reduce inequality to the point of shouldering the State's responsibility to provide basic public needs, protect and defend citizens' rights, and hold governments accountable to democratic and human rights standards (Ngeh, 2013). They do this by promoting civic engagement and community development, providing humanitarian and technical assistance, and influencing policy and decision making by national institutions.

Nigeria is home to 191,278 registered non-profit organisations (Yetunde, 2024) that work in key development areas such as social inclusion, poverty alleviation, improving access to quality healthcare and education, economic sustainability, environmental protection, gender issues, peace, and conflict (Study Smarter, n.d.). These organisations have conducted grassroots mobilisation and stakeholder engagements, among other actions, resulting in the formulation of policies such as the Child's Rights Act 2003, Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act 2004, Violence against Persons (Prohibition) Act 2015, Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act 2018, and National Mental Health Act 2021, which have positively impacted the country's social, health, and overall development outcomes since its independence. These policies crystallise the Government's response to societal issues, including illiteracy, poor health outcomes, human rights violations, and discrimination, and demonstrate their commitment to public welfare, social justice, and democracy. In addressing sexual assault and other forms of human rights violations, these policies mandate appropriate parastatals to provide public sensitisation, emergency response services, and mental health and psycho-social support (MHPSS) for survivors.

Fundraising is vital for the sustenance of these organisations, as they must cover operational costs to implement projects. Non-profit organisations receive technical and financial support from various channels of philanthropy. To assist with its development initiatives, the Nigerian Government receives direct funding from some of these sources, especially when state funds are insufficient or during an economic crisis. This essay examines two classifications of social justice philanthropy: traditional and feminist.

Traditional philanthropy encompasses development assistance provided by private foundations, religious institutions, and foreign governments and institutions through bilateral and multilateral aid. In discussing traditional philanthropy, this essay primarily focuses on multilateral and bilateral aid. When a donor country's government disburses funds directly to a recipient country, it is referred to as bilateral aid. In contrast, multilateral aid is delivered by international organisations, such as the World Bank and United Nations (UN) agencies, to recipient countries.

The majority of foreign funding allocated for the socio-economic development of Africa and other nations identified by the World Bank as least developed, low-income, upper-middle-income, and lower-middle-income comes from developed countries. This funding is referred to as Official Development Assistance (ODA) and includes debt relief, grants from bilateral donors and multilateral organisations, and lower-rate concessional loans for economic development from commercial banks such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Most development aid is received bilaterally, and about 30% is provided multilaterally (OECD, 2016). Seventy-five per cent of ODA in 2022 came from the Group of Seven (G7) donors; the United States contributed more than 25% of the total ODA with 0.23% of its gross national income (GNI) (OECD, 2023). Luxembourg, Sweden, Norway, and Germany committed more than 0.7% of their GNI to meet sustainable development goal (SDG) 17.2 as developed countries (United Nations Nigeria, n.d.).

The modes of fund acquisition, disbursement, and practices of these governments, agencies, and charitable organisations vary, but the traditional ones share certain attributes in how they provide aid. Some of these characteristics hinder the localisation of the change process they are resourcing in recipient African countries. They include a disproportionate amount of control and decision making over development and the economy, as well as the politicisation of aid and the dominance of donor priorities over national priorities in these countries (Biscaye, n.d.).

The Human Rights Funders Network (HRFN) noted a ‘trust gap’ – a significant discrepancy in the regional flow of human rights funding – in its report on the examination of foundation grants for human rights activists, organisations, and institutions. A total of 99% of the funds and awards are granted in Northern countries, with 88% remaining in that region and 12% allocated to organisations in Southern and Eastern countries. Only 63% of grant funds intended for Sub-Saharan Africa reach the region, compared to nearly 100% of grants intended for North America that are awarded to local organisations (Thomas and Miller, 2023: 4). As a result of this unequal distribution of funds, local activists and organisations have limited resources for sustained work.

Nigeria has been on the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) recipient countries list since the committee established the ‘golden standard’ of aid reporting in 1969. The country’s net ODA was 1% of its GNI in 2022 (World Bank, n.d.), and it received the highest ODA in Sub-Saharan Africa in 2022, totalling 4,443,259.77 USD (Statista, 2024). Although net ODA flows to DAC recipient nations increased by 15.3% to USD 204.0 billion in 2022, net ODA to Africa fell by 7.8% during the same year (Harcourt, 2023), along with financing for women’s and gender equality concerns. Bilateral aid that included gender equality as a policy objective was at 45% in 2019 and 2020; however, between 2021 and 2022, this percentage dropped to 43% (OECD, n.d.). Gender equality was the primary goal of only 4% of the initiatives that received this funding. Funding for women’s rights organisations, a key Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) gender indicator for DAC countries reporting on their ODA, was reduced from USD 891 million in 2019-2020 to USD 631 million in 2021-2022.

Not only is net finance to developing countries decreasing, but these countries are also repaying their external debts to developed nations, which results in negative net finance flows (Harcourt, et al., 2024). While the inflow of capital from multilateral organisations like the World Bank and IMF has strengthened the institutional capacity of the Nigerian Government, the monetary and fiscal policies needed to secure these soft loans or reduce interest rates on existing ones worsen the inequitable socio-economic realities faced by women and girls in Nigeria (Onykpere, 2024).

Over the years, Nigeria has implemented macroeconomic policies as austerity measures to mitigate the effects of negative net finance flows. By cutting public expenditure on healthcare, fuel, and electricity subsidies, these measures deepen gender inequalities, exacerbate gender-based violence (GBV), and weaken the quality of State response mechanisms to GBV (Abed and Kelleher, 2022). Women's rights organisations and networks that provide social services to support women and other vulnerable groups whose economic and social rights are disproportionately affected by these policies receive less than 1% of the net ODA (Dolker, 2021).

The asymmetrical power dynamics and decision making processes associated with the traditional top-down method of resource allocation significantly impact lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBQTI+) activists, small women-led organisations, and feminist non-profits. This prevents them from receiving support from these donors or working effectively towards desired change. The challenges they face in accessing and utilising these funds for development initiatives include: rigid project timelines that are impractical for the volume of work required to achieve the desired change, a lack of flexibility in responding to backlash from challenging government institutions for transformative reforms and human rights violations perpetrated by state and non-state actors against marginalised groups, project management, monitoring, evaluation mechanisms, and success metrics that leave no room for failure and learning, as they are activity and output-driven rather than outcome-driven and are designed without the input of the recipients. Other challenges include: tedious application processes, restriction of public information on how to acquire aid, eligibility and application requirements and standards that many young feminist groups and movements cannot meet, as most are unregistered and have informal structures, unhealthy competition among recipients, which undermines collaboration and movement solidarity, racism and the white-saviour complex.

In 2023, 72% of people worldwide were living under authoritarian governments, with 30.6% residing in nations with a restricted civic space (Civicus, 2024). The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation found that threats and harassment against women's and LGBTQI+ rights activists sharply increased, impacting 75% of the organisations that participated in the survey conducted by the Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation for its 'State of women human rights defenders 2023 report' – a 15% rise from the previous year's survey (Pruth, 2023). Approximately 51% of activists in Sub-Saharan Africa and their families were targeted. According to this report on the security situation for women human rights defenders worldwide, the three most dangerous issues to work on in 2023 were LGBTQI+ rights, fighting against anti-gender rhetoric and discriminatory traditional values, and combating corruption. Thirty-one African countries have laws that criminalise consensual same-sex sexual activity, despite these laws violating both African and international human rights standards, according to Amnesty International's report, 'Africa: Barrage of discriminatory laws stoking hate against LGBTQI+ persons' (Amnesty International, 2024).

Nigeria is not exempt from these fundamentalist policies and decision making. Although the country's Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Act (SSMPA), 2014, limits their freedom and makes LGBTQI+ individuals more susceptible to violence, the Nigerian House of Representatives proposed a law in 2022 that would outlaw cross-dressing; however, the bill was eventually shelved. In November of that same year, during the 66th Ministerial Session of the National Council on Education (NCE), Adamu Adamu, the then Minister for Education, ordered the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) to remove sex education from the Family Life and HIV Education (FLHE) curriculum. This action would harm the sexual and reproductive health of young

Nigerians, who ought to have access to this comprehensive knowledge for self-efficacy and thwart the efforts of women's rights organisations in institutionalising holistic sexual and reproductive rights information for young people.

Anti-gender actors who collude with authoritarian decision-makers to spread fundamentalist ideologies and influence policies that undermine the fundamental human rights of women and LGBTQI+ persons are well-financed (Mcewen and Narayanaswamy, 2023) (VeneKlasen, 2024). However, feminist and women's rights organisations in Sub-Saharan Africa, including Nigeria, are financially incapacitated in their efforts to combat the growing backlash against feminists, the government's and anti-gender groups' crackdown on these groups' rights, and the increasing restrictions civil society faces. More than 91% of the young feminists who participated in a survey conducted by the Young Feminist Fund (FRIDA) and the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) in 2016 identified lack of financial resources as their top challenge.

The decrease in foreign aid funding for feminist and women's rights organisations, along with the decline in ODA in African countries, has sparked discussions about the efficacy of traditional funding models in promoting grassroots social justice in Africa. This has led to the conception of alternative funding models that commit funds directly to locally-led interventions by deliberately allocating aid to women's rights organisations and feminist groups.

Along with a literature review and the author's own experiences, this contribution draws on limited interviews with Oluwaseun Ayodeji Osowobi, the founder of Stand to End Rape Initiative (STER), *Omowumi Ogunrotimi, the Executive Director of Gender Mobile, Blessing Igwe, the Fundraising Officer at Education as a Vaccine (EVA)*, and Olufunke Baruwa, a gender and development expert.

The feminist funding model

Feminist funding is an alternative funding model that serves as the resource mobilisation arm of the feminist movement, uniquely positioned to support the growth and resilience of feminist collectives, networks, and institutions (Chugh and Gaind, 2023), while also detecting patterns that contribute to the precarity of feminist organisations (Mukalazi, 2024). Feminist funding recognises that funding is political and shifts power to diverse communities and movements, enabling them to design and own their approaches to addressing inequalities and creating structural change. Funding underpinned by feminist principles reflects this philosophy not only in its recognition of political contexts but also in practice, through its relationships and partnerships, its allocation of resources to grant partners, and its measurement and evaluation of impact.

Participatory decision making

To provide all applicants equal opportunities, avoid replicating power dynamics that foster authoritarianism and underdevelopment, and empower community members to make decisions, some feminist and LGBTQI+ grant making organisations have adopted open and democratic decision making processes. They do this because they believe that marginalised communities are best equipped to lead grassroots change initiatives.

For instance, local activist grant making panels in each country make decisions regarding grants for feminist funders like Initiative Sankofa d’Afrique de l’Ouest (ISDAO), which is headquartered in *Africa*. Utilising their knowledge of the communities of the rights-holders to be supported and their contextual expertise, these independent, anonymous groups of volunteers review grant applications to provide objective funding recommendations.

Autonomy and power transformation

Feminist grant making is an equitable partnership between funders and sub-recipients that radically reinforces the autonomy of grant partners and social movements through power-sharing – encouraging the sharing of power with, instead of enforcing power over. This is achieved through mutual respect, dignified processes, and relationships, which allow grant partners to take full ownership of the conception and implementation of advocacy and activism activities, as well as the measurement of change or outcomes.

Gender Mobile and Education as a Vaccine (EVA), which are non-profit organisations that promote sexual reproductive health and rights and gender equality in Nigeria, receive funding from the Ford Foundation and Mama Cash, respectively. According to Omowumi Ogunrotimi, the Executive Director of Gender Mobile, the Ford Foundation applies feminist principles to grant-making, which include strengthening the organisation's adaptive capacity for system change by providing dedicated funding for institutional support. Mama Cash provides accompaniment support for their grant partners to improve staff skills and knowledge and acquire the tools and equipment needed to carry out their missions.

Flexibility

Contrary to the tedious application processes that require extensive technical expertise – where organisations must register, set up their portfolio, and overcome internet connectivity challenges during submission – some feminist grant applications are as easy as filling out a one-page form. Blessing Igwe, the Fundraising Officer at EVA, explained the ease of this process; '[f]unders like Amplified Change do not require you to write too much; just hit the nail on the head. You don't have to write all the English in the world.' Similarly, Omowumi Ogunrotimi explained that the application form for requesting the grant her organisation currently has from the African Visionary Fund was so simple that she submitted it on her phone.

Safety and care

Comic Relief and the Ford Foundation provide STER support for emergency responses to cases of sexual and gender-based violence and the holistic security of feminist activists without the need to navigate a lengthy approval process. According to Osowobi, the founder of STER, feminist grant-makers offer handholding and support throughout the grant period. Urgent Fund Africa, a feminist grant making organisation that supports EVA, provides rapid response grants for crises threatening the safety of activists and feminists, available within 72 hours, 24/7, and comes with minimal requirements.

Communication and learning

Communication between feminist grant-makers and their sub-recipients is mutual. From the design to the implementation stage, the Ford Foundation listens to its grant partners in Nigeria and maintains close communication with them as they develop their five-year strategic plans. When the staff managing EVA changes, the organisation must re-establish its relationship with the funder to sustain it and secure additional funding. EVA's experience with feminist organisations such as Fos Feminista and Urgent Fund Africa has been reciprocal, as these organisations intentionally nurture their relationships with grant partners and introduce new grant managers themselves.

Sustainability

Feminist organisations provide flexible, unrestricted long-term funding for the social justice movement. Mama Cash offers a multi-year grant of up to 45,000 euros for 8 to 10 years, which may be used to purchase land, property, or equipment. Long-term funding enables feminist organisations to acquire assets that reduce out-of-pocket expenses on key operational costs such as office space rental, energy, and communications. This funding also allows them to strategically plan and implement systems and norm-shifting strategies, which typically take time.

Trust and accountability

The feminist funding model is mutually respectful, dignifying, and trust-based. This is evident in the monitoring, evaluation, and reporting phases of the funded projects. The Ford Foundation and African Visionary Fund require only one outcome-focused report per year. According to Ogunrotimi, funders such as the Global Fund for Women understand the time and value that organisations contribute to the movement and the strategic meetings they attend; consequently, they do not ask for customised reports, which helps the organisation save both costs and time.

Intersectionality

Feminist funders acknowledge and recognise that individuals possess multiple social identities that interact in ways that compound the injustices they face. Consequently, they support organisations that work with marginalised people who have multiple identities that heighten their vulnerability to human rights violations. Such marginalised groups include sex workers who use drugs and LGBTQI+ individuals.

Conclusion

Feminist funders continue to mobilise and advocate for resources for social justice and feminist movements, reinforcing the importance of financing women's rights organisations and young feminists at a time when they are significantly under-resourced and at risk of backlash and human rights violations due to their activism.

To advance social justice and reduce inequality at the grassroots level, traditional funders must decentralise their grant making processes and learn intentionally from the streamlined systems and institutional support provided by progressive feminist philanthropy organisations discussed in this essay. These funders must cultivate a greater appetite for risk to increase the funding available for positive change, particularly for women with diverse identities and other marginalised groups.

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8. On reclaiming African philanthropy: The use of African traditional practices to decolonise funding

*Aminah Jasho**

Abstract

This essay explores the crucial goal of decolonising philanthropy in Africa by integrating various traditional African fundraising practices. It argues that decolonising philanthropy goes beyond merely changing funding methods; it requires a complete transformation of the entire aid and development framework to promote greater justice, equity, and respect for African perspectives and experiences. The essay starts by situating traditional philanthropy in Africa and examining its limitations, emphasising the need for more inclusive and equitable models. The literature review analyses traditional philanthropy frameworks and their critiques, particularly focusing on imbalances of power. Finally, the discussion reviews existing literature on decolonising strategies, highlighting the urgent need for comprehensive reform.

Keywords: aid, African philanthropy, African fundraising, decolonisation, development, philanthropy, power

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Introduction

In the landscape of international aid and philanthropy, prevailing models often reflect a legacy of colonial influences that shape both the outcomes and priorities in African development. However, within African societies lies an inherent, community-driven potential that has historically mobilised significant resources for communal projects, such as constructing places of worship. This research delves into a pivotal question central to decolonising philanthropy in Africa. If African communities can unite to fundraise for building a church, why can't similar models be applied to construct a hospital or establish other long-term development projects that are self-funded by the communities they serve?

This essay scrutinises African traditional fundraising methods to redefine the boundaries of aid and highlight a reservoir of indigenous knowledge and capability that could lead to more equitable and sustainable development strategies. The core thesis posits that decolonising philanthropy necessitates more than just altering funding mechanisms; it demands a holistic approach that transforms the entire ecosystem of aid and development, promoting models that are fundamentally just, equitable, and respectful of African voices and realities.

Understanding the historical landscape of philanthropy in Africa is crucial for contextualising this exploration. African societies have long demonstrated their capability for mutual aid and community support. Practices such as *Harambee* in East Africa and *Osusu* in West Africa, along with other localised forms of community fundraising, have supported social and economic initiatives long before the introduction of Western philanthropic models. This essay explores how these indigenous practices have sustained religious and social structures and how they could be re-envisioned to support more complex infrastructural developments, such as healthcare facilities.

While traditional practices remain deeply embedded in the cultural ethos of African communities, the potential for applying them to contemporary development challenges is often overlooked. This essay aims to uncover the factors that have historically directed community efforts towards specific types of projects and to explore how these energies could be redirected to address more critical infrastructural needs.

Modern African philanthropy, primarily driven by external interventions and funding partnerships, shows traces of colonial remnants. These remnants continue to perpetuate hierarchical dynamics that call for the decolonisation of this sector. The introduction of Western philanthropic models during the colonial period significantly influenced local traditions. These colonial philanthropic activities were often intertwined with missionary efforts and operated as tools for cultural assimilation and control rather than addressing local needs. This top-down approach has had a lasting effect on the structure and perception of philanthropy in Africa (Vershinina et al., 2017). The ongoing influence of international donors in shaping the course of Africa's development serves as a notable example. Many foreign-led philanthropic endeavours align with Western agendas, frequently failing to adequately address specific local needs and priorities.

The emergence of new philanthropy models, such as community-based giving and social entrepreneurship, signals a continent attempting to break free from this constricting framework. These traditional African fundraising methodologies embody the essence of *Ubuntu* – 'I am because you are' – fostering collective action, empathetic giving, and community-based development. Conversely, the non-profit fundraising landscape in Africa is characterised by economic disparities, overreliance on external support, and an ever-fluctuating political environment. Consequently, these conditions have resulted in organisational and operational inefficiencies, occasionally deviating from primary mission objectives. Proper exploration of the reimagining of African philanthropy necessitates a critique of the processes and the underlying structures and systems. The current funding system, a relic of colonial structures, moulds Africa into a continent heavily dependent on external funding and aid. This undermines Africa's potential for autonomous growth and progress, positioning it as a perpetual recipient rather than a driver of development.

Within African societies, age-old practices of giving and communal support are often overlooked in external efforts to aid Africa. Various traditional fundraising methods are deeply rooted in communal values and practices. For example, *Harambee*, a Kenyan practice that translates to 'all pull together', is a community-based fundraising approach that promotes collective action and resource mobilisation. The *Harambee* movement, grounded in Kenyan culture, significantly contributes to entrepreneurial activities by encouraging cooperation and resource mobilisation. It demonstrates how traditional communal efforts can be effectively harnessed to create economic opportunities and support self-reliance, aligning with the broader goal of decolonising funding mechanisms (Vershinina et al., 2017). Similarly, the South African practice of *Stokvels* serves as an informal savings group and social safety net, providing financial support for members in times of need. In West Africa, particularly in Ghana and Nigeria, *Susu* or *Osusu* is prevalent, serving as a form of microfinance and community support.

These traditional fundraising methods have several advantages over Western models. For instance, they are deeply rooted in African cultural traditions and the values of solidarity, reciprocity, and community support. In today's context, traditional African philanthropy practices continue to thrive, albeit with adaptations to modern challenges and opportunities. One prominent contemporary initiative reminiscent of traditional methods is the *Chama* system in Kenya. *Chamas* are informal savings and investment groups where members pool their resources to support each other financially. These groups often emphasise savings, investments, and entrepreneurship, empowering members economically and fostering community solidarity. Community-based initiatives like *Stokvels* in South Africa exemplify the continuation of traditional fundraising methods in modern times. *Stokvels* operate similarly to *Osusu*, with members contributing to a collective fund that is subsequently distributed among participants according to predetermined rules.

These initiatives provide financial support and serve as social networks, promoting mutual aid and cooperation. They reflect the ethos of *Ubuntu*, which emphasises interconnectedness and collective responsibility (Moyo & Ramsamy, 2014). These methods are accessible and inclusive, catering to people of all income levels, including those who may not have access to formal financial institutions. Lastly, these methods promote financial independence and empowerment, allowing individuals to save and invest in their own communities without relying on external aid or loans. They are deeply rooted in African cultural traditions, reflecting values of solidarity, reciprocity, and community support. Moreover, they are accessible and inclusive, catering to people of all income levels and promoting financial independence and empowerment. However, the marginalisation of indigenous giving practices creates a substantial gap between vision and outcome in aid and philanthropy efforts, often disconnecting from the realities on the ground.

Despite the challenges of relying on foreign aid, several African communities successfully pursue development strategies supported by home-grown fundraising methods. For instance, diaspora investments, local organising, and planned giving serve as sustainable alternatives to external aid. However, these local successes are rarely scaled up due to financial and institutional constraints, which limits their broader impact.

Therefore, there is an urgent need for a paradigm shift emphasising the capabilities of African societies. Shedding narratives of dependency and deficiency is imperative. This presents an opportunity for profound progress by integrating traditional methods with modern philanthropic practices and disrupting current power dynamics. This approach fosters self-reliance and resilience while ensuring efforts that are more culturally sensitive, relevant, and effective.

Literature review

In this stage, we explore a variety of scholarly articles and publications that have significantly influenced the direction of this research. Renowned authors and researchers contributing to the discourse on decolonising philanthropy and heritage fundraising methods in Africa provide context for identifying gaps in knowledge and avenues for further investigation. This synthesis of divergent perspectives strengthens the foundation of my research.

The phrase 'decolonising philanthropy' refers to an approach that challenges and transforms the fundamental structures and narratives of giving toward equity and respect. Addressing power dynamics between donors and recipients, often rooted in colonial history, is crucial for mitigating inequalities and fostering development. 'African traditional philanthropy' is grounded in various indigenous practices of giving and reciprocal exchange prevalent across many African societies. This form of philanthropy often involves communal contributions to help individuals or families during challenging times or to fund community-based initiatives. One distinctly African principle that underscores traditional philanthropy is *Ubuntu*, a philosophy that emphasises the interconnectedness of all people and places a high value on compassion, sharing, and mutual aid.

Indigenous approaches and social accountability

Incorporating indigenous African approaches to in-kind giving in the philanthropy sector can significantly enhance community well-being and solidarity by closely aligning with local needs and fostering collaborations. By blending traditional methods with modern elements, a unique philanthropic movement emerges, catalysing transformative change within communities. Indigenous African knowledge systems offer valuable insights into community collaboration and can guide the development of inclusive philanthropic practices. These approaches emphasise the importance of respecting local traditions, values, and community structures, thereby promoting sustainable and culturally sensitive philanthropic initiatives.

Moreover, integrating indigenous knowledge into philanthropic endeavours can contribute to a deeper understanding of community needs and foster meaningful engagement with local populations (Adeleye et al., 2019). Embracing African worldviews and incorporating local perspectives makes philanthropic efforts more effective and responsive to the diverse needs of communities. Furthermore, the shift towards African-led approaches in various sectors, including health research and capacity-building, highlights the importance of empowering local communities and institutions in driving development initiatives. This shift not only promotes self-determination but also ensures that resources are utilised in ways that are culturally appropriate and sustainable.

The architectural endeavours of Diébédo Francis Kéré, a prominent architect from Burkina Faso, exemplify the effective integration of indigenous methodologies in modern development projects. Kéré's innovative approach to school construction utilises traditional building techniques alongside modern design principles, significantly empowering local communities and promoting sustainable development. His participatory design process actively involves community members at every stage – from planning to construction – thereby ensuring that the projects are culturally relevant and collectively owned (Stohr & Collins, 2014).

Similarly, in Mali, Kéré has pioneered community-driven school construction projects that emphasise local participation and sustainability. These projects empower communities to take ownership of their built environment and invest in their children's education, which is crucial for long-term community development (Kere, 2017).

Kéré's work illustrates the profound potential of indigenous knowledge and community participation in addressing developmental challenges, underlining the importance of culturally sensitive and context-specific approaches to philanthropy. His projects not only serve as critical infrastructural enhancements but also as beacons of community empowerment and architectural innovation.

Cultural sensitivity in local contexts

A growing body of literature emphasises the importance of understanding local contexts for effective giving. Tailoring messages, building trust, identifying barriers, and preserving impact over time are key elements that have much to gain from greater cultural sensitivity. The effectiveness of tailored messages is believed to be due, in part, to the increased scrutiny that recipients give these messages, thereby increasing the likelihood of subsequent behaviour change (Williams et al., 2009). There has been a recent surge in the recognition of indigenous giving practices' significant role in philanthropy and social accountability. These practices, steeped in local culture and customs, provide a vibrant resource for strengthening community resilience and advancing development objectives and, as such, call for more deliberate integration into contemporary philanthropy.

The presence of identity-based giving systems such as *Tanda* lending circles, *Susus*, and *Equb* in various communities plays a crucial role in facilitating change and addressing systemic issues that often elude external aid efforts. These informal financial practices are deeply rooted in cultural traditions and foster community solidarity, enabling individuals to pool resources and support one another in times of need. For instance, *Tanda* lending circles exemplify how cultural and social parameters can mitigate risks associated with lending. By restricting membership to trusted individuals, often family or kin, *Tandas* leverage familial capital to enhance trust and accountability among participants.

This structure not only reduces the likelihood of dishonesty but also ensures that the collective goals of the group are met more effectively (Quiñones & Grier-Reed, 2023). Such systems are particularly relevant in contexts where formal financial institutions may be inaccessible or untrustworthy, thus providing a viable alternative for community members to secure funds for personal or communal projects.

Similarly, the concept of *Susus* and *Equb* operates on the same principles of mutual aid and collective responsibility. These systems allow participants to contribute a fixed amount regularly, which is then pooled and distributed among members, often on a rotational basis. This practice not only provides immediate financial relief but also fosters a sense of community and shared purpose. Research indicates that these informal financial arrangements can significantly enhance financial inclusion, particularly for marginalised groups who may lack access to traditional banking services (Akana, 2019). By facilitating access to capital, these systems empower individuals to invest in their businesses, education, or healthcare, thereby addressing systemic issues related to poverty and inequality. These indigenous giving practices foster an environment of mutual respect and understanding and validate and strengthen local solutions to local problems. Understanding the local context is crucial as it illuminates intrinsic cultural factors that should be considered in philanthropic work. By internalising the specificities of each environment, greater respect for local norms, values, and resources can be fostered, paving the way for more meaningful development initiatives (Abebe et al., 2021).

The literature emphasises the importance of tailoring messages, building trust, identifying barriers, and maintaining impact over time in philanthropic endeavours. By incorporating cultural sensitivity and understanding local contexts, philanthropic organisations can enhance the effectiveness of their initiatives and ensure they align with the needs and values of the communities they aim to serve. This approach not only promotes mutual respect but also validates and strengthens local solutions, ultimately leading to more effective and sustainable development outcomes in African communities.

International funding and power dynamics

In the discourse surrounding international funding and power dynamics, there is a growing recognition of the imperative to address power imbalances. Scholars advocate for redefining relationships between donors and recipients, promoting a shift from a transactional perspective to one that emphasises reciprocal, dignified, and enduring partnerships. This perspective aligns well with the ethos of research focusing on integrating native methods into contemporary philanthropy, enhancing the focus on incorporating indigenous practices in a respectful and mutually beneficial manner (Hunter & Murray, 2019; Zalik, 2004).

To effectively incorporate indigenous practices in philanthropic work, it is essential to address power dynamics and promote equitable partnerships. This can be achieved through collaborative efforts with local leaders, government authorities, and other philanthropic organisations to create an environment conducive to indigenous practices. One approach that aligns well with this ethos is participatory grant making, which involves engaging community members in the decision making process of grant allocation (Schnurbein et al., 2021). Participatory grant making serves as a transformative model that empowers communities by involving them directly in the funding decisions that affect their lives. This method not only democratises the grant making process but also ensures that the voices of marginalised groups are heard and valued.

Research indicates that participatory approaches can lead to more effective and relevant outcomes, as they are grounded in the actual needs and aspirations of the community (Schnurbein et al., 2021). By fostering a sense of ownership among community members, participatory grant making can mitigate the power imbalances often present in traditional philanthropic practices, where decisions are made by external actors who may lack a nuanced understanding of local contexts (Lee, 2023). Women and feminist funds such as Mama Cash, Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights, and Women's Fund Asia, among many others, exemplify how participatory grant making and feminist participatory action research can be used to support women's rights initiatives and empower women activists globally. These funds can create more inclusive and effective development outcomes by involving women in decision making processes and prioritising their voices and experiences. This approach empowers local communities, promotes inclusivity, and ensures that funding decisions are made in a collaborative and transparent manner.

By leaning on local structures and leaders for guidance and support, foreign aid organisations can tailor their approaches to honour and integrate indigenous practices effectively, thereby fostering mutual respect and understanding. Advocacy strategies are crucial in creating a supportive ecosystem for indigenous giving practices, advocating for policies that protect and promote these practices while avoiding stifling or criminalising them (Hunter & Murray, 2019; Zalik, 2004).

By prioritising reciprocal, dignified, and enduring partnerships, philanthropic organisations can navigate power imbalances while fostering respectful, equitable, and mutually beneficial relationships. This approach enhances the effectiveness and sustainability of philanthropic initiatives and contributes to the empowerment and well-being of indigenous communities, ultimately leading to more meaningful and effective development outcomes in Africa and beyond.

The fusion of tradition and modernity

Finally, the research examines the fusion of tradition and modernity in development efforts, particularly in the context of integrating indigenous approaches, which can catalyse transformative change within communities. It investigates the dynamic intersection of tradition and modernity in development efforts, especially through the lens of merging indigenous approaches with contemporary digital tools, acting as catalysts for transformative change within communities. By combining traditional practices with modern methodologies, significant opportunities emerge to stimulate positive change while honouring African voices and perspectives in development initiatives.

Fernández-Llamazares and Cabeza (2017) discuss the utilisation of indigenous storytelling for conservation, highlighting the critical role of community involvement in decision making processes (Fernández-Llamazares and Cabeza, 2017). Similarly, Croce (2017) examines how indigenous entrepreneurship serves as a potent mechanism for economic development and a means to overcome externally imposed economic strategies (Croce, 2017).

Recent developments in Kenya, particularly during the 2024 protests against proposed tax hikes, illustrate a significant shift in how digital activism and community-driven fundraising are utilised in times of national crisis. The protests prompted a surge in online mobilisation, where Kenyans leveraged social media platforms to raise funds and support for those injured and the families of the deceased. This phenomenon reflects a modern evolution of traditional philanthropic practices, which have historically been rooted in community solidarity and mutual aid. The role of digital platforms in facilitating this form of activism cannot be overstated.

Online fundraising has become an essential tool for grassroots movements, enabling rapid dissemination of information and mobilisation of resources. For instance, crowdfunding has emerged as a powerful mechanism for community-driven fundraising, allowing individuals to contribute to causes they believe in without the constraints of traditional fundraising methods. This shift is supported by research indicating that donation-based crowdfunding simplifies the fundraising process by integrating information collection, transaction facilitation, and interactive communication into a cohesive platform (Zhao & Shneor, 2020). Such platforms not only enhance transparency but also foster trust among donors, which is crucial during crises (Jalali, 2024).

The Kenyan context highlights the importance of community engagement in philanthropic efforts. Grassroots leaders have been pivotal in mobilising resources and support, drawing on local networks and social capital to amplify their impact (Mati, 2020). This aligns with findings that emphasise the significance of social ties and community involvement in driving donations and fundraising success (Filo et al., 2020). The integration of digital tools into these traditional practices has allowed for a more extensive reach and engagement, enabling communities to respond swiftly to urgent needs. Such initiatives underscore the importance of keeping the majority of aid ‘at home’, reducing dependency on foreign aid and fostering a robust local economy.

This approach is gaining recognition for its value in enhancing the sustainability and self-sufficiency of African non-governmental organisations (NGOs), equipping them with the tools needed to navigate historical challenges while securing long-term financial stability. Decision making in this evolved context of philanthropy should ideally be a concerted effort involving governments, local leaders, and philanthropic organisations. Such collaboration promotes ownership and fosters an environment that supports indigenous practices, thereby emphasising respect and equality (Adeyeye, 2019).

The ethical considerations surrounding digital fundraising are critical. As fundraising practices evolve, there is a growing need to address the ethical implications of online campaigns. Stakeholder management approaches in charitable fundraising emphasise the importance of aligning the interests of donors and beneficiaries, ensuring that fundraising efforts are conducted with integrity and respect for all parties involved (Hansen, 2021). This ethical framework is particularly relevant in the context of crisis-driven fundraising, where the urgency of the situation can sometimes lead to compromised practices.

Engaging in respectful and reciprocal research practices honours indigenous paradigms of relevance, reciprocity, respect, and responsibility. In essence, integrating knowledge-sharing and educational initiatives is crucial for incorporating these traditional methodologies, ensuring they become a mainstream approach to sustainable development (Adeyeye, 2019). By embracing the digital evolution of traditional practices, as demonstrated in the Kenya case, indigenous methodologies can be effectively adapted to meet contemporary challenges, enhancing their relevance and impact in today's interconnected world. This involves co-designing knowledge-sharing strategies with communities at the project's outset, emphasising relationship-building, and integrating these strategies into the research methodology (Campion, 2023).

Additionally, recognising Indigenous knowledge as distinct and safeguarding it from misrepresentation and appropriation is crucial for promoting ethical practices and reciprocal relationships. This approach allows for unpacking complexities and exploring opportunities when different methodologies are unified, ultimately centering African voices and perspectives in the development process.

Methodology

This study utilised a desktop research design, emphasising the thorough review and synthesis of existing literature and data relevant to the decolonisation of philanthropy in Africa. The research aimed to collect, analyse, and interpret data from a wide range of sources to understand how African traditional practices can be leveraged to reform modern philanthropic practices.

The literature for this study was meticulously selected based on its direct relevance to the topics of African philanthropy, the decolonisation of aid, and traditional African fundraising practices. Priority was given to sources that not only possessed credibility, primarily peer-reviewed journal articles and publications authored by recognised experts in the field, but also to those published within the last twenty years to ensure data relevance, with the exception of works that offered a necessary historical perspective. Furthermore, the scope of the research was geographically focused primarily on literature related to Sub-Saharan Africa, which was essential for maintaining the contextual integrity of the findings and ensuring that the study accurately reflected the region's unique philanthropic landscape and cultural practices.

The collected data was analysed through qualitative content analysis methods. The analysis aimed to identify common themes, patterns, and divergences in the literature. Additionally, a comparative analysis was conducted to contrast traditional African practices with Western philanthropic models, highlighting the unique aspects and benefits of indigenous methods. As this research involved secondary data analysis, there were no direct ethical implications related to human subjects. However, all sources were cited comprehensively to acknowledge intellectual property rights, and care was taken to present the information objectively and accurately.

Findings

This essay finds that traditional African philanthropy is community-driven, emphasising solidarity and mutual support through practices like *Harambee* and *Osusu*. These approaches respond to local needs and cultural norms, contrasting sharply with Western philanthropy, which often prioritises individualism, autonomy, and donor preferences, fostering dependency and power imbalances.

The essay also finds that decolonising African philanthropy faces challenges, including power dynamics favouring elite-driven models, professionalisation that overlooks local contexts, and neoliberal approaches that prioritise measurable outcomes over community needs. Additionally, corruption and inadequate infrastructure hinder trust and effectiveness, limiting the potential of indigenous practices. Overcoming these barriers requires fostering trust, integrating traditional methods, and addressing systemic inequities.

Comparing traditional African practices with Western philanthropic models

Traditional African philanthropy practices contrast sharply with Western philanthropic models, highlighting the benefits of a decolonised approach. African indigenous philanthropy emphasises solidarity, mutual respect, and community uplifting, deeply rooted in cultural values and societal fabric. Practices like *Harambee* in Kenya and *Osusu* in West Africa exemplify collective giving and mutual support, promoting collective well-being and a sense of unity (Brown, 2017).

In contrast, Western philanthropy often prioritises individualism and autonomy, reflecting different cultural and ethical frameworks. Western models adopt top-down approaches, in which benefactors retain significant control over fund allocation. This can lead to dependency and perpetuate power imbalances, inhibiting community agency and self-determination.

Moreover, Western philanthropy may prioritise certain issues or interventions based on donor preferences or global agendas, often overlooking local priorities and contexts. In contrast, African indigenous philanthropy is inherently community-driven, responsive to local needs, and guided by cultural norms and traditions.

Challenges to decolonising philanthropy in Africa

Despite the potential benefits of decolonising philanthropy, several challenges hinder its realisation in Africa. One of the primary obstacles is the prevailing power dynamics that often marginalise indigenous practices in favour of more formalised, elite-driven philanthropic models. The rise of entrepreneurial philanthropy has led to a concentration of power and resources in the hands of a few wealthy individuals and corporations. This trend promotes individualism and entrepreneurialism at the expense of community-oriented approaches, thereby undermining traditional practices that rely on collective action and mutual support (Harvey et al., 2020). The dominance of elite philanthropy can create a disconnect between the needs of local communities and the priorities set by external funders, making it difficult for indigenous practices to thrive.

This shift distorts the priorities of philanthropic initiatives and creates a disconnect between the needs of local communities and the agendas set by external funders, making it harder for indigenous practices to thrive.

The professionalisation of philanthropy further complicates this landscape. Grassroots philanthropic leaders frequently navigate a terrain dominated by large non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that may not fully appreciate or integrate local customs and practices into their operational frameworks. This professionalisation often leads to a one-size-fits-all approach that overlooks the unique cultural contexts of African communities, thereby stifling the development of indigenous philanthropic initiatives.

The lack of understanding and respect for local customs can result in initiatives that are misaligned with community needs, ultimately undermining their effectiveness. Grassroots philanthropic leaders often find themselves navigating a landscape dominated by large NGOs that may not fully appreciate or integrate local customs and practices into their frameworks (Appe, 2020). This can lead to a situation where traditional practices are either co-opted or sidelined, as funding and resources are directed toward initiatives that align more closely with the agendas of these larger entities rather than the authentic needs of the community.

The neoliberalisation of philanthropy also poses a significant challenge. As philanthropic efforts increasingly adopt market-driven approaches, there is a risk that the focus shifts from addressing systemic issues to generating measurable returns on investment. This shift can marginalise the very communities that traditional practices aim to support, as funding becomes contingent upon meeting specific performance metrics rather than fostering genuine community engagement (Haydon et al., 2021). Such an environment can stifle the organic development of indigenous philanthropic practices, which often operate outside the confines of conventional economic frameworks.

Moreover, the lack of coordination and support for local philanthropic initiatives further complicates the landscape. Many African countries face challenges related to regulatory frameworks, capacity development, and data availability, which hinder the growth of indigenous philanthropic practices (Danladi, 2018). Without a supportive infrastructure, traditional forms of giving may struggle to effectively address pressing social issues (Hwang & Paarlberg, 2019).

Corruption further complicates the philanthropic landscape in Africa, posing a significant threat to initiatives aimed at fostering development. It erodes trust in philanthropic efforts, discouraging both local and international giving. The detrimental effects of corruption are particularly pronounced in the context of development projects, where it can undermine the effectiveness of philanthropic efforts and lead to a cycle of scepticism among potential donors (Paarlberg & Yoshioka, 2015). Corruption creates an environment where funds may be misappropriated or wasted, leading to disillusionment among donors who may question the integrity of philanthropic organisations and their ability to deliver on promises.

Research has shown that corruption profoundly impacts socio-economic development in Africa. A study highlighted that corruption is a major impediment to progress, as it diverts resources away from essential services and development initiatives (Muhammad, 2023). This diversion not only hampers economic growth but also exacerbates poverty and inequality, making it increasingly difficult for philanthropic initiatives to achieve their intended outcomes. Moreover, the perception of widespread corruption can deter potential donors from engaging with grassroots and indigenous philanthropic initiatives, further limiting the resources available for addressing critical social issues (Hope, 2022). The interplay between corruption and philanthropic effectiveness is complex. Corruption can lead to a breakdown of social trust, which is essential for successful philanthropic endeavours. When communities perceive philanthropic organisations as corrupt or ineffective, they are less likely to engage with them or support their initiatives (Tesfagebreal et al., 2023). This erosion of trust can create a vicious cycle, where the lack of community support further diminishes the effectiveness of philanthropic efforts, leading to even greater scepticism among potential donors.

Addressing the gaps: Lessons from abroad

While the challenges of decolonising philanthropy in Africa are formidable, several initiatives and strategies provide insights into potential solutions. One key lesson from abroad is the importance of fostering collaborative partnerships and networks among diverse stakeholders. By engaging local communities, civil society organisations (CSOs), governments, and donors in dialogue and decision-making processes, more inclusive and effective approaches to philanthropy can emerge (Domingo, 2016). Moreover, investing in capacity building and leadership development at the grassroots level is essential for empowering communities to drive their own development agendas. Training programmes, mentorship initiatives, and resource mobilisation efforts can enhance the skills and resilience of local change agents, enabling them to navigate complex social and political landscapes.

Furthermore, advocating for policy reforms and institutional changes that promote transparency, accountability, and equity is critical for creating an enabling environment for decolonising philanthropy. CSOs and advocacy groups play a vital role in shaping public discourse and influencing policy decisions, amplifying the voices of marginalised communities and holding power holders to account (Laws et al., 2017).

Sustainability and government partnerships: Towards sustainable philanthropy in Africa

To achieve sustainable philanthropy in Africa, a multi-faceted approach is required that addresses the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of development. Building on the strengths of traditional African philanthropy practices and leveraging innovative financing mechanisms can enhance the resilience and impact of philanthropic initiatives. Fostering collaboration between local leaders, government authorities, and philanthropic organisations can significantly influence the endorsement of indigenous practices. It is through these active partnerships, where shared visions become reality, that truly transformative initiatives take root. Engaging with governments and policymakers is essential for scaling up philanthropic initiatives and ensuring their sustainability.

By aligning philanthropic goals with national development priorities and policies, philanthropic organisations can leverage government resources and expertise to achieve greater impact and systemic change. For instance, partnerships between philanthropic organisations and government agencies can facilitate the co-design and implementation of development projects, pooling resources and expertise to address complex social challenges. Moreover, advocating for policy reforms that promote philanthropy and social innovation can create an enabling environment for philanthropic initiatives to thrive.

Ultimately, blending traditional African philanthropy practices with modern innovations offers a pathway to sustainable development. By harnessing the collective wisdom and resources of local communities and combining them with external expertise, philanthropic initiatives can achieve greater impact and longevity. For example, initiatives like the M-Pesa Foundation in Kenya leverage mobile technology to facilitate community-driven development projects, ranging from education to healthcare. By providing digital platforms for fundraising, resource mobilisation, and impact assessment, these initiatives empower communities to take ownership of their development processes and promote accountability and transparency (Kibaara & Marangu, 2016).

Conclusion

The journey toward decolonising philanthropy in Africa, while rich with opportunity, is underscored by the critical need for deeper research and a thorough evaluation of sustainability within the funding structures. This essay has illuminated the vast potential of traditional African philanthropic practices, such as the *Harambee* model, which empowers communities to take charge of their development through collective action and mutual support. However, the exploration also reveals significant gaps – particularly in ensuring the sustainability and effectiveness of these practices when scaled up and integrated into the broader philanthropic ecosystem. A deeper exploration of how indigenous knowledge systems can be integrated into modern philanthropic practices is essential to address these challenges. This integration can create more effective and culturally relevant interventions that resonate with the local populace and harness their intrinsic strengths. Case studies, such as the fundraising for protestors in Kenya in 2024, where traditional and modern philanthropic practices have successfully merged, can illustrate potential pathways for overcoming these challenges, serving as blueprints for replicating successful strategies in similar contexts.

Advocating for the decentralisation of philanthropic power can ensure a more democratic and equitable distribution of resources. This approach can help shift the control of philanthropic endeavours from international donors to local communities, promoting sustainability and self-reliance. Encouraging local philanthropy through incentives and recognition can empower communities, reduce reliance on international aid, and foster a sustainable philanthropic ecosystem rooted in local values and practices. To address these gaps, robust partnerships with governmental bodies are essential. Such collaborations can enhance the structural integrity of philanthropic initiatives, ensuring they are not only culturally resonant but also aligned with national development goals and policies. By working in concert with governments, the proposed funding models can be rigorously tested and refined, ensuring they meet the dual demands of accountability and sustainability.

Moreover, enhancing accountability in the funding structure is crucial. When communities control their financial resources, as seen in the *Harambee* approach, the level of accountability naturally increases. Community members, having a direct stake in the outcomes, are more likely to scrutinise and evaluate the impact of their investments, leading to more responsible and transparent handling of funds. This intrinsic accountability must be mirrored in how projects are managed and assessed, ensuring that every dollar spent is tracked and its impact is clearly documented and communicated, thereby reducing corruption and increasing trust in philanthropic activities.

Implementing rigorous monitoring and reporting mechanisms can ensure that funds are used effectively and that donors and stakeholders are held accountable. Corruption poses a significant threat to philanthropic initiatives, eroding trust and discouraging both local and international giving. This detrimental effect is particularly pronounced in the context of development projects in Africa, where corruption can undermine the effectiveness of philanthropic efforts and lead to a cycle of scepticism among potential donors.

Moving forward, the call for a tighter, more sustainable funding structure is evident. We must develop models that not only respect and utilise the communal and inclusive nature of traditional practices but also integrate modern financial management and evaluation techniques. This fusion of old and new can create a resilient framework where philanthropy is not just a means of aid but a powerful catalyst for self-sustaining development.

The proposed trial of this enhanced funding model represents a transformative step forward in how African philanthropy is conceptualised and implemented. By prioritising indigenous knowledge, community leadership, and strategic government partnerships, we can pave the way for a philanthropic environment that respects the past while boldly embracing the future. This approach ensures that African communities are not merely recipients of aid, but active participants in a philanthropic process that is transparent, accountable, and, most importantly, effective in meeting their unique needs and aspirations.

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For too long, development funding in Africa has been shaped by systems and ideas rooted in colonial histories, often reinforcing the very inequalities they claim to address. This collection brings together African thinkers, practitioners, and leaders who interrogate these legacies and offer thoughtful, grounded alternatives.

Across essays that explore feminist and indigenous funding models, critically examine traditional aid and philanthropy, and reimagine what funding justice could look like, African authors call for radical shifts in how development is financed and who gets to decide. They speak not just to the gaps in the system, but to the rich possibilities of African-led and community-rooted approaches.

Reclaiming Africa's development narrative is an urgent invitation to development professionals, policymakers, philanthropists, and anyone invested in Africa's future to critically reflect on how to centre African agency at every stage of the funding ecosystem, and to explore ways that funding can support more inclusive, equitable, and locally-led progress across the continent.

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