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Africa and the world in 2004-2005

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Introduction

In 2005, the world focused on Africa through a number of developmental initiatives. Africa's economy also performed well particularly in macroeconomic and structural reforms. The United Nations World Economic Status and Prospects Report, 2006, alleged that Africa was also politically stable.ⁱ The operationalisation of the African Peer Review Mechanism in Rwanda, Ghana and South Africa was a step towards good governance. Peaceful elections signaled a deepening of democracy. And under the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative, fourteen countries

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were approved for debt cancellation. This article departs from Maxi Schoeman's words that, 'there are two ways of looking at Africa and the world. The one is to look back

and bemoan Africa's failures, challenges and weaknesses; the other is to list Africa's achievements and celebrate them'.ⁱⁱ This article celebrates Africa's achievements, however, within the context of many challenges facing the continent. Equally significant is the contextualisation of Africa's relation with the world within 'historical moments'. During the Cold War, for example, Africa was an important 'attraction' for the two superpowers. They wanted Africa for the spread of their ideologies: communism for the Soviet Union and democracy for the United States of America. Africa was therefore important in so far as it was a vehicle for the 'contestation of ideologies'.

Africa's marginalisation in the world should be understood from this historical perspective. The United Nations, for example, was established as an important platform for collective action on issues of international security and peace. For Africa, the U.N was a strategic place to advocate for African challenges with a single voice. But Africa is still marginalised, with no permanent representation in the powerful body; the Security Council. This is even more explicit in the operations of the World Bank, the

International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organisation. Recently, there has been new focus on Africa. Africa has in the past four years featured significantly in the G.8 and U.N summits. African countries have also taken advantage of the South-South relations, especially, through the G.77 plus China, Non Aligned Movement and India, Brazil, South Africa in addressing issues of trade, aid and development. Indeed Africa has also taken cognizance of China's emerging economic status. In the process, China-Africa relations have become more relevant as the 'shift occurs from American perspectives to Asian conceptions of democracy, development, human rights and the rule of law.'ⁱⁱⁱ

Africa and international politics

The end of the Cold War provides a reference point at which to begin the analysis of Africa's marginalisation in world politics. Jeffrey Herbst writes that this is partly due to the fact that great powers viewed Africa as an 'extension of their strategic economic interests'.^{iv} For Herbst, 'the U.S and the Soviet linked their support for Africa's political and economic development to their global competition'. But when the Cold War ended, so did the superpowers' interest in Africa.

Africa and the U.N

In post-colonial Africa, the UN is an important. Sola Akinrinade (1998) argues,

'Most African countries have used the UN to achieve their foreign policy objectives.'^v

The UN has assisted African states to pursue their interests. It has also given Africa an opportunity to lobby for collective agendas particularly in areas of shared interest, values and principles. Norman Mlambo (2004) notes that the UN and its agencies have been active in Africa for many years because of Africa's problems.^{vi} The UN has been active in peacekeeping, in the horn of Africa and Central Africa. The UN has also acted as the main multilateral platform in development, security and human rights. The Millennium Declaration's Millennium Development Goals are benchmarks that Africa uses to measure progress on development. The continent, however, remains marginalized in representation, decision-making and priority. The failure to reform the Security Council shows Africa's marginalisation.

The reform agenda dates back to 1945 even though much of the pressure was exerted in the 1960s when developing countries demanded representation in the various bodies of the U.N. This resulted in the expansion of the Security Council to fifteen and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) to 54.

Although there is a lot of information prior to 2005 on the U.N reform, I focus primarily on the recent debate that began with Kofi Annan's initiatives that include; the *Cardoso Panel*^{vii}, the *Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change*, the *Millennium Project* and Annan's *In Larger Freedom*.

The African Union contributed to the reform through the *Ezulwini Consensus*, a position that pronounced on the expansion of the Security Council, the strengthening of the General Assembly, the transformation of the Human Rights Commission; the establishment of a Peace Building Commission; the creation of a Democracy Fund; and improving the effectiveness of the Secretariat. This position fed into the UN Summit Outcome document that made a number of commitments. Some of them included development, terrorism, peace keeping and peace building, responsibility to protect, human rights, democracy and rule of law; management reform, environment, humanitarian assistance, international health and updating the UN Charter. On collective international responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, there was a concern that this could be exploited by great powers. Zimbabwe's President; Robert Mugabe, said,

A reformed United Nations should be one that plays a key role in coordinating developmental issues... should not be one filled with vague concepts that provide an opportunity for those states that seek to interfere in the internal affairs of other states. Concepts such as 'humanitarian intervention' and the 'responsibility to protect' need carefully scrutiny in order to test the motives of their proponents^{viii}

Other African presidents, in particular, President Thabo Mbeki criticized the Summit for failing to pronounce on non-proliferation, disarmament and the Security Council. He said,

...In truth we have not made the decisive progress we thought we would make with regard to the critical issue of the reform of the United Nations. We have therefore had no choice but to postpone to a later date the decisions we should have made...our approach to the challenge to commit and deploy the necessary resources for the realisation of the Millennium Development Goals has been half-hearted, timid and tepid.^{ix}

So while Africa took part in the debate on reforming the U.N, it was perhaps in the restructuring of the Security Council that her position still remained marginal. Although there was widespread agreement that the 'Council's composition should be more broadly representative of the international community as a whole, as well as of geo-political realities; Africa still did not get representation. The AU position read;

'Full representation of Africa in the Security Council means: (i) not less than two permanent seats with all the prerogatives and privileges of permanent membership including the right of veto; (ii) five non-permanent seats'.^x

In October 2005, the AU decided in an Extra-Ordinary Meeting of Heads of State and Government in Addis Ababa to test their position in a special vote in the United Nations General Assembly.^{xi} It should be noted that this position is a shift from the 1997 OAU Harare Declaration that was rotational.^{xii} This one is based on permanency and the veto, hence Amr Roshdy's assertion that ^{xiii}, it is 'nothing but Harare minus the rotation'.^{xiv}

In 2005, the AU position generated two views. The first argued that the position was of principle and appropriate for Africa to hard-line on the veto to address the continent's 60 years of oppression. This view argued that it was pragmatic for Africa not to accept a formula that would deny it the veto. Ikome and Samasuwo questioned the logic of compromising Africa's position before diplomatic negotiations began^{xv}. They quoted a Benin official saying, 'we have no apologies to make. We are seeking to remedy an injustice and you do not remedy it by compromising.' Ikome & Samasuwo were convinced that;

In reaching an early compromise...the continent was actually giving away more than it would have gained...making too many compromises at the early stages...would only have weakened the AU's bargaining position^{xvi}.

The second view argued the hard-line stance probably contributed to Africans 'shooting themselves in the foot'. Maloka and Moyo argued that the position was of principle but not practical as a strategy. They said;

Although Africa's common position is well intended...it is a strategic error, for it misses the only chance that would strengthen the persuasion of the UN to expand the Security Council... the decision reflects concerns and interests of a geopolitical nature than the strengths and interests of Africa.^{xvii}

And addressing delegates at the Institute for Global Dialogue conference on the United Nations at 60, Ambassador Kumalo echoed the second view. He said;

On the debate on the restructuring of the Security Council, Africa has decided to be the only continent to take a regional approach to this matter. The question then becomes whether Africa's strategic decision to bind

itself to a regional position is indeed in the best interests of the continent. Whilst it is true that Africa's quest for absolute equality in the Council is indeed a principled position, the question remains whether it is realistic as a strategy.^{xviii}

My view is that the two perspectives must be rationalized. Both views must address the fact that although it is important to uphold the principle of developing a common African approach to global issues, the preoccupation with the reform and expansion of UN Security Council needed not overshadow broader institutional and doctrinal reforms. Because of the nature of the Security Council enlargement proposal, the AU position should have been crafted in a way that enabled interested and capable African countries to adopt individual positions without having to be seen as 'breaking ranks'. Countries such as South Africa, Nigeria and Egypt were held captive by the AU even if they wanted to negotiate with the G.4. The AU's intransigent demand on the veto cost the world progress on the enlargement of the Security Council.

Africa and the Financial Institutions

The World Bank and the IMF's influences are felt more sharply in Africa than anywhere in the world. Ever since the 1980s, the two are seen to be complementing each other. And yet on establishment, their mandates were specific and different. It was only in the 1980s, that they expanded their scope of operations. In 1944, the bank would finance long-term investment in member countries while the IMF would provide short-term loans to overcome short-term balance of payments deficits.^{xix} Today the U.S determines the direction of the two institutions. Ismi argues that the 'two were controlled by one dollar-one vote rather than one country one vote'. The U.S' voting share is 17.16% in the IMF and 16.41% in the World Bank^{xx}.

The U.S also appoints the President of the Bank. The latest appointment is that of Paul Wolfowitz, a former defence specialist and an architect of the war in Iraq. As Ismi shows, the U.S is the only country that enjoys permanent status in the Bank's directors. This control has drawn the criticism that the U.S uses the two institutions for its foreign policy interests. When the U.S appointed Wolfowitz as the Bank's President in 2005, there were concerns that he was strategically placed to promote U.S interests in Africa and the Arab World ^{xxi}. Stein illustrates this power, by showing that in mid 1947, only two African countries were part of the 40 members of the Bank. And in the 1960s and 1970s, the number of African countries increased to 40, comprising 35% of the total membership. But their combined share of votes was only 8.6% compared to that of developed countries who controlled almost 2/3 of the voting power.^{xxii}

Today the two institutions play critical roles in Africa. They determine

how fast or slow African economies grow. In the 1980s, their engagement with Africa was positive at most. Mlambo (2004) argues that debt financing; exchange rate stabilisation and the provision of low interest loans to African governments were some of the positive aspects of this relationship. However due to the oil crisis of the 1970s and 1980s, African economies were severely undermined. Terms of trade deteriorated for Africa and the result was their failure to recover. The IMF provided assistance for countries to repay their debts and resuscitate their economies. Structural adjustment programmes were introduced as conditionalities. And in the early 1990s, 28 countries in Africa had standing agreements with the IMF.^{xxiii} Mlambo shows that (2004), by the year 2000, financial institutions had provided concessional loans to more than 24 Sub Saharan countries. He argues that the major instruments used to engage Africa included the International Development Agency, the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility, the Extended Fund Facility and the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative. However SAPs spoilt these positive engagements. SAPs associated the Fund and the World Bank with forced devaluation leading to the freefall of domestic currencies; forced privatisation of enterprises; lower purchasing power of the majority of the population; falling living standards; unemployment and retrenchments.

Ismi argues that the two 'have forced Third World countries to open up their economies to the western penetration and increase exports of primary goods to wealthy nations'. This has 'increased profits for western multinational companies and subjugated Africans to low levels of poverty and marginalisation'. In Ismi's words, the debt crisis of the 1980s gave Washington the opportunity to 'blast open' and fully subordinates Third World economies through SAPs.

Africa and the G.8

The G.8 has its origins in the first meeting of finance ministers and governors of France, Germany, Japan, U.K and U.S in the U. K in 1967.^{xxiv} Since then the Group has included Italy, Canada and Russia. More recently, the European Union also attends the meetings. The last G.8 meeting in Gleneagles was the 31st. African leaders have been invited to take part on some of these meetings, for example in Kananaskis, Evian, Sea Island and Gleneagles. The Kananaskis Summit adopted an Africa Plan of Action to support Nepad. The focus on Africa stemmed from other international initiatives such as the Millennium Declaration that had a section on Africa's special needs. The pinnacle was the 2005 G. 8 Summit where the world leaders committed themselves to working with Africa on a number of fronts. The Summit promised 100% debt cancellation to an initial group of 14 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. Fourteen countries satisfied the criteria laid down by IMF and the World Bank under HIPC initiative. Another nine countries will also have their debts cancelled. The Summit also committed

an extra \$25 billion annually for Africa by the year 2010^{xxv}. Most of these commitments reflect views in Tony Blair's Commission for Africa that emphasised governance, capacity and infrastructure development.

Africa and China^{xxvi}

China's presence in Africa has raised the question whether it is an asset or a threat. In its policy towards Africa, unveiled in January 2006, it looks like China is an asset. There is emphasis on multilateral cooperation, investments, trade, common development, solidarity and equality as some of China's interests in Africa. However, a critical look at China's relations with countries such as Sudan, Chad, Nigeria, Gabon, Algeria and Equatorial Guinea, shows that China's interest lies in raw materials such as oil and minerals. And with China fast becoming a leader in international economy, its expansion will depend on raw materials. For this reason Ian Taylor views 'Africa as a significant source of oil and minerals for China's industrial expansion'.^{xxvii}

Although China-Africa relations are traceable to colonial times^{xxviii} it is the contemporary global positions of Africa and China that raise the question whether the two are engaging in a mutually beneficial relationship. China and Africa use the China-Africa Cooperation Forum to reach agreements on diplomacy, trade and investment relations. And yet Africa is the least developed and her economy is lagging behind that of other continents. China, on the other hand, is the fastest growing economy in the world. The *Economist Magazine* estimates that in 2026, China will be the strongest economy, surpassing that of the U.S. What kind of a relation would exist between unequal forces? My view is that the relationship is that of a 'horse and a rider'.

Ernest Wilson supports this. He said,

'Not all African countries share a similar relationship with China. We are dealing with more than 50 African countries, each quite different from the others, and each with different relations with China; we are tracking and evaluating half a dozen critical foreign policy issues; from petroleum to foreign aid....^{xxix}

The reality is that China has developed ties with South Africa and Nigeria based on their strong economies. China has also cultivated relations with Sudan, Chad, Algeria, Angola, Gabon and Equatorial Guinea due to their oil reserves. And countries such as Zimbabwe have developed a 'looking East' policy in order to access aid that has no 'strings attached'. The different categories of countries that China is 'doing business' with reveal the 'self-serving'^{xxx} nature of China's presence in

Africa.

While it is true as Wilson argues that during the Cold War, African countries viewed China as 'one of their own' based on China's provision of medical doctors, China's hosting of African students and building of infrastructure, it is China's quest for energy and other raw materials that 'rings alarm bells'. Esthen Pan argues, for example that,

'As global demand for energy continues to rise, major players like the U.S, European Union, and Japan are facing a new competitor in the race to secure long term energy supplies: China'.^{xxxix}

Pan argues further that China's foreign policy is based on the need to get resources to sustain its economic development. Hence in the 'first ten months of 2005, China invested a total of \$175 million in African countries, particularly in oil exploration projects and infrastructure'.^{xxxix} China also bought 50% of Sudan's oil exports; accounting for 5% of China's oil needs.^{xxxix} There are allegations also that China has been providing military equipment to militia in countries such as Sudan in exchange for oil

This is also very much linked to Taylor's criticism that China's interest in Africa is based more on trade and investment, which however ignores 'the principles that underpin the relation between Africa and the West'. This is why China's insistence that its policy is based on 'non-interference in state sovereignty and freedom from hegemony appeals to most of African leaders'. Taylor is convinced that China is in Africa to expand its trade. He wrote;

'It seems doubtful whether a more accommodating Chinese trade policy could help Africa, given that for most African countries, the greatest barrier to trade is the fact that they just do not have much to sell to China, apart from raw materials, whereas China exports the full gamut of manufactured goods and is rapidly overtaking Africa's traditional European suppliers'.^{xxxix}

China has benefited in the relationship more than Africa. Pan shows that 'Sino-African trade grew by 700% during the 1990s. And from 2002 to 2003, trade between China and Africa doubled to \$18.5 billion. In 2005, it jumped to \$32.17 billion'.^{xxxix} This was due to increased oil from Sudan and other African nations, which China has signed trade agreements with. Wilson also shows that China's high demand for oil means that it imports 800 million barrels a year.^{xxxix} In 2004, China paid about \$10 billion for oil to oil-producing countries. China's interest also lies in minerals. Wilson argues that China is the world's largest user of copper and has invested \$170 million in Zambian copper and other minerals.^{xxxix}

While it is clear that in the area of trade and economic development,

China is the beneficiary in Sino-Africa relations; in the political arena, Africa stands to benefit from these relations especially when it comes to multilateral forums. China also benefits as a member of the Group of 77 and the Non-Aligned Movement especially in getting votes at the United Nations. Wilson is of the view that China provides unconditional aid in return for votes. For example China has cancelled debt worth \$10 billion since 2000 for African countries.^{xxxviii}

Indeed, like any other nation state, China is in Africa for its own interests. And there is a group of African countries that view China as their friend. These are in dire need of aid, which if given by the West would have strings such as practice of good governance, observance of the rule of law and building of democratic institutions attached. And because most of these countries have defied this, China is the alternative.

Africa and the global economy

In terms of global trade, Africa has lagged behind other regions since the end of the Cold War. Africa's share of global trade fell from 6% in the 1980s to only 2% in 2005^{xxxix}. There has been a decline since the 1960s of Africa's per capita incomes and growth rates. Agricultural growths have been poor since the 1970s. The debt burden has put pressure on the economy resulting in declining standards in the social sectors such as health, education and environment. Political conflicts continue in most parts. In 2006, for example, political tensions continued in Ivory Coast, Zimbabwe and Sudan.

Despite these concerns, economists predict that Africa's economic growth will remain between 4 and 5% in 2006. Economists predict also that the price of commodities, for example, coffee, sugar and minerals will remain healthy in 2006. The world oil prices will have different impacts. Those regions and countries that produce oil will benefit highly while oil importers will suffer accordingly.^{xl} The IMF predicted that high oil prices and rising crude oil production would boost economic growth in 2006.

The United Nations' 2006 World Economic Situation and Prospects report argues that the world economic growth slowed in 2005 from its strong expansion in 2004. In 2006, the world economic growth would grow moderately at the rate of 3%. Although the U.S remained the main engine of growth, China, India and other developing countries were on the rise. The report argues that economic growth is not expected to recover from its fall in 2005 especially in developed countries; in the U.S, growth is expected at 3.1% while in Japan it is to grow at the rate of 2.1%.^{xli} In developing countries, 'economic growth is generally above the world average. Economic growth in developing countries is expected at the rate of 5.6%. And African economies are expected to grow at the rate of 5%'.

The report states that Africa's real GDP was estimated to have grown

by 5.1% in 2005. And in Sub Saharan Africa, economic growth, excluding Nigeria and South Africa, averaged 5% in 2004 and 2005. In 2006, it is expected to remain at the same level. And most countries in the region will achieve GDP growth rates of between 3% and 7%.^{xlii} South Africa's economy grew by 5% in 2005 raising questions about the strength of the Rand. In February 2006, for example, Deputy President Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka cautioned that the Rand had appreciated to undesirable levels. According to WES report, Africa 'maintained its economic performance due to favourable conditions in agriculture, progress in macroeconomic and structural reform including the unification of foreign exchange markets and better public expenditure and financial management'.

However it is also a fact that some countries in Africa did not perform well in the past years. Classic examples are Zimbabwe and Seychelles.

Africa and trade

Trade, debt cancellation and access to markets have set the stage for Africa's engagement with the WTO, whose existence is to liberalise trade all over the world in order to discourage regional trade agreements. Regional trade agreements operate in a preferential treatment among partners at the exclusion of others.^{xliii} Although the WTO was only established in 1995 through the Marrakesh Agreement, its predecessor, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade provided a platform for Africa to negotiate on issues of trade. Formed in 1945, GATT 'regulated the manner in which national foreign trade policies were conducted to avoid a situation reminiscent of the 1930s where states tried to obtain economic advantage by restricting imports and dumping subsidised goods on other states' markets'.^{xliv}

Of all rounds, Doha created opportunities for Africa. Doha focused on fairer trade, agricultural reform, non-agricultural market access, and interpretation of WTO rules. These negotiations aimed at lowering barriers to trade globally with a special focus on developing countries, which have historically maintained that the multilateral trading system is unfair and unfavourable towards them. From Doha, these negotiations have been continually conducted on an annual basis. In 2003, trade ministers met in Cancun, Mexico to discuss agriculture, industrial goods, and trade in services and customs codes. The negotiations collapsed on the fourth day due to the failure to agree on farm subsidies and access to markets. Cancun presents the first time that developing countries resisted U.S, E.U and other developed nations' agenda. The G.20, in particular, India, China, Brazil and South Africa played leading roles in this process.

And at the Sixth WTO Ministerial Conference in Hong Kong in 2005, modest results were achieved. Contrary to popular opinion and expectations, results were positive. There was a commitment to complete the Doha Work Programme and conclude the Doha Round of negotiations

in 2006. The setting of a timeframe was a positive step. Another commitment made was the setting of a deadline to eliminate agricultural export subsidies by 2013. According to UNWES, this agreement 'represents a substantial systematic advance by bringing agricultural trade further under the umbrella of general multilateral trade rules, which prohibit the use of export subsidies'.^{xliv} The third milestone to come out of the Hong Kong meeting was a limited 'development package' for Least Developed Countries. The package includes the permanent granting of duty free and quote free market access by both developed and developing countries. Another commitment made was that developed countries would eliminate all export subsidies for cotton in 2006.^{xlvi}

Some of the concrete dates that were identified at the meeting include, 30 April 2006 where the meeting envisaged establishing full negotiating modalities on agriculture and industrial market access. The other is 31 July 2006 in which the draft schedules of concessions and commitments, including a revised offer in services and recommendations on issues relating to implementation of WTO agreements will be submitted. The third is 31 October 2006 where the final draft schedules of commitments in services will be produced. And on 31 December 2006, the Doha Round of Negotiations will be concluded.^{xlvii}

Whether Africa will benefit from these commitments still remains to be seen. But what is very clear is that there is a need for the political will if the Doha Programme of Work is to be realised.

Conclusion

This discussion has looked at Africa's relations with world in the fields of politics and economics. What emerged is that there is a history. And for many years, that history has been of marginalisation. At the UN, for example, Africa is still not represented at the Security Council, even though most of the security issues concern Africa. The World Bank and the IMF have through structural adjustment programs 'de-developed' Africa and slowed economic growth. The results are devastating for Africa. Most countries have lost control of the economy and their sovereignty has been weakened. The multilateral trade system is still unfavourable to African economies. There is however hope that the Doha Round of Negotiations might be completed in 2006. But this would require strong political will from developed countries.

Not all is gloom and doom. The year 2005 was probably the best in the history of Africa's quest to development. There was increased attention to Africa's needs at both international and local levels. A number of initiatives were developed to address the development challenge that faces Africa. Some of these included the Tony Blair Commission for Africa, the G.8 commitment to write off debts for HIPC's and provide more aid in return

for good governance and rule of law, as well as the UN Summit Outcome document that had a special section on Africa.

Africa's economic performance was also promising in 2005 at a growth rate of more than 5%. This trend is expected to continue in 2006. Politically, there were signs of relative stability, a condition for economic development. South-South Cooperation was also given much impetus, with South Africa playing a leading role, as the Chair of the G.77 plus China. China's rise heralded threats as well as opportunities for prospects for Africa. A number of countries in Africa have built relations with China on the political and economic fronts. China has begun investing in Africa especially in infrastructural projects. The flipside however is that there are concerns that China's move towards Africa is purely 'self-serving' and is based on economic profits.

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