**AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE ON GLOBAL GOVERNANCE AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

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**(BMS/IB/3067)**

**FOR**

**AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY**

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**JANUARY, 2024**

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**1.0 Abstract**

Global governance and international relations have long been shaped by dominant powers in the Global North, often sidelining the perspectives and contributions of other regions. This article explores the African perspective on global governance and international relations, emphasizing the continent’s unique historical, cultural, and economic experiences. It examines how Africa’s colonial past, diverse cultures, and resource-based economies provide critical insights into addressing global challenges such as inequality, climate change, and peace-building.

Furthermore, it argues that Africa’s active participation and representation in global governance institutions are essential for creating a more equitable and inclusive international system. By integrating African voices, global governance can benefit from innovative approaches and sustainable solutions that reflect the realities of a diverse and interconnected world.

**2.0 Introduction**

Global governance and international relations have traditionally been shaped by the dominant powers of the Global North, whose historical influence and economic might have dictated the frameworks, priorities, and norms that govern the world today. However, the dynamic and interdependent nature of the modern global landscape calls for a more inclusive approach—one that considers diverse perspectives and experiences. The African perspective, rooted in the continent's unique historical, cultural, and economic trajectories, holds significant value in enriching global governance and international relations. From its experiences of colonialism and the struggle for independence to its vibrant multicultural societies and resource-rich economies, Africa embodies resilience and innovation that can inform solutions to global challenges.

This article argues that Africa's distinctive voice is essential to addressing issues such as inequality, climate change, peace-building, and sustainable development, and highlights the need for its active participation in shaping the global order. By integrating African perspectives, the world can move closer to fostering a fairer, more equitable, and truly representative system of global governance.

**3.0 Historical Context: Africa's Experience with Global Governance**

Africa’s engagement with global governance has been deeply influenced by its history, spanning the colonial era, struggles for independence, the Cold War, and the post-Cold War era of globalization. These periods highlight the continent’s marginalization, resilience, and evolving agency in shaping international relations.

**3.1 Colonialism and Its Impact on Africa's Sovereignty and International Relations**

Colonialism was a defining moment in Africa’s interaction with global governance. European powers divided the continent arbitrarily during the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885, without any African representation. This division disrupted traditional governance systems, replaced them with exploitative colonial administrations, and undermined African sovereignty. Walter Rodney argues that "colonialism brought about the underdevelopment of Africa, as resources were extracted to fuel industrial growth in Europe"[[1]](#footnote-0).

Furthermore, African territories were excluded from international decision-making and treated as instruments of global geopolitical strategies. The economic exploitation and social fragmentation caused by colonial rule left lasting scars, shaping Africa's post-independence struggles for development and representation in global governance frameworks.

**3.2 Post-Colonial Era: Africa's Struggles for Independence and Self-Determination**

The mid-20th century saw Africa emerge as a battleground for the fight against colonial domination. Independence movements across the continent, such as Ghana’s under Kwame Nkrumah and Algeria’s war against French rule, emphasized the right to self-determination. Nkrumah famously declared, "The independence of Ghana is meaningless unless it is linked with the total liberation of the African continent"[[2]](#footnote-1). However, the transition to independence was fraught with challenges. Newly sovereign states inherited artificial borders, weak institutions, and economies structured to serve colonial interests. This era saw the creation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963, which sought to promote African unity and solidarity. Despite its noble goals, the OAU struggled to address internal conflicts and external pressures effectively.

**3.3 Cold War Era: Africa's Role in the Global Ideological Divide**

During the Cold War, Africa became a theater for ideological competition between the United States and the Soviet Union. This rivalry often exacerbated internal conflicts, as seen in Angola, where the Soviet-backed MPLA clashed with the U.S.-supported UNITA. Ali Mazrui observed that "Africa was both a victim and a participant in the Cold War, as external powers manipulated internal divisions while African leaders sought to leverage these tensions for economic and political support"[[3]](#footnote-2).

Despite these challenges, some African states navigated the Cold War strategically. Tanzania’s Julius Nyerere, for example, adopted a non-aligned stance, promoting African unity through Pan-Africanism and advocating for self-reliance. This period highlighted Africa's strategic importance while underscoring the continent’s vulnerability to external influences.

**3.4 Post-Cold War Era: Africa's Engagement with Globalization and International Institutions**

The post-Cold War period ushered in globalization, characterized by increased economic integration and the dominance of international financial institutions. Africa faced both opportunities and vulnerabilities during this era. Globalization provided access to foreign direct investment and international markets but also exposed African economies to external shocks and debt crises. Structural adjustment programs imposed by the IMF and World Bank often deepened economic inequalities, leading Thandika Mkandawire to critique these policies as "maladjusted to Africa’s realities, undermining social services and local industries"[[4]](#footnote-3).

In response, African nations sought to redefine their role in global governance. The formation of the African Union (AU) in 2001 signaled a renewed commitment to addressing continental challenges and amplifying Africa’s voice in global decision-making. Additionally, Africa began advocating for reforms in institutions like the United Nations, particularly for permanent representation on the Security Council.

**4.0 Key Challenges Facing Africa in Global Governance**

Africa faces significant challenges in its engagement with global governance. These issues—economic marginalization, security concerns, climate change, and health pandemics—not only affect the continent’s development but also have global implications.

**4.1 Economic Marginalization: Africa's Limited Participation in Global Trade, Investment, and Decision-Making**

Africa's role in the global economy remains limited despite its vast resources and growing population. The continent accounts for only about 3% of global trade and receives a disproportionately small share of foreign direct investment (FDI). According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), “Africa’s share of global FDI flows stood at just 5.2% in 2022”[[5]](#footnote-4). This economic marginalization stems from structural inequalities in global trade systems, reliance on primary commodities, and limited access to technology and finance. Africa's exclusion from decision-making in key global economic institutions exacerbates this marginalization. Despite being the most resource-rich continent, African nations have little influence in organizations like the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Calls for reform, such as increasing Africa’s voting power in these institutions, have gained momentum but remain unfulfilled.

**4.2 Security Concerns: Terrorism, Conflict, and Instability in Africa and Their Global Implications**

Africa continues to grapple with terrorism, internal conflicts, and political instability, which hinder its development and have global repercussions. Regions like the Sahel and the Horn of Africa are hotspots for terrorism, with groups like Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab, and affiliates of ISIS operating across borders. These groups not only destabilize local governments but also pose threats to international peace and security. Internal conflicts, such as those in Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo, often spill across borders, leading to regional instability and humanitarian crises.

As stated by the African Union, “conflicts in Africa consume vast resources that could otherwise be used for development, perpetuating cycles of poverty and instability”[[6]](#footnote-5). Strengthening African-led peace initiatives, such as the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), is crucial for addressing these challenges.

**4.3 Climate Change and Environmental Degradation: Africa's Vulnerability to Climate Change**

Africa is disproportionately affected by climate change despite contributing the least to global greenhouse gas emissions. Rising temperatures, prolonged droughts, desertification, and extreme weather events have devastating impacts on agriculture, water resources, and biodiversity. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) notes that “Africa is one of the most vulnerable continents due to its low adaptive capacity and high exposure to climate risks” [[7]](#footnote-6).

Climate-induced migration and resource-based conflicts, such as those over water in the Lake Chad Basin, highlight the urgent need for climate adaptation measures. African initiatives like the Great Green Wall, which aims to combat desertification, demonstrate the continent’s commitment to addressing environmental challenges. However, insufficient funding and limited access to climate finance hinder these efforts, underscoring the need for international support and collaboration.

**4.4 Health Pandemics: Africa's Experiences with Health Pandemics**

Africa has faced significant health challenges, including pandemics such as HIV/AIDS, Ebola, and COVID-19. The HIV/AIDS epidemic has had a devastating impact, with Sub-Saharan Africa accounting for nearly 67% of global HIV cases. Despite progress in treatment and prevention, the epidemic continues to strain healthcare systems and economies[[8]](#footnote-7).

Ebola outbreaks in West and Central Africa have highlighted the need for robust public health infrastructure and regional cooperation. Similarly, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed inequities in global health governance, with Africa struggling to secure vaccines due to supply shortages and vaccine nationalism. The World Health Organization (WHO) emphasized that “Africa’s delayed access to vaccines highlights systemic inequalities in global health systems”[[9]](#footnote-8). Efforts like the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) aim to strengthen the continent’s capacity to respond to health crises. However, sustained investment in healthcare systems and equitable access to global health resources remain critical.

**5.0 African Perspectives on Global Governance and International Relations**

African perspectives on global governance and international relations emphasize unity, self-reliance, equitable partnerships, and active participation in global institutions. These perspectives are informed by the continent's historical experiences and aspirations for a more just and inclusive world order.

**5.1 Pan-Africanism: The Ideology of African Unity and Solidarity**

Pan-Africanism emerged as a powerful ideology advocating for the unity and solidarity of African nations and peoples. Rooted in the struggles against colonialism and slavery, Pan-Africanism seeks to foster collective self-reliance, preserve cultural identity, and strengthen Africa’s position in global affairs. Kwame Nkrumah, a key proponent, argued, “The independence of every African state is meaningless unless it is linked with the total liberation of the continent”.[[10]](#footnote-9) The establishment of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963, and later its successor, the African Union (AU), reflects the institutionalization of Pan-African ideals. These bodies have promoted continental cooperation in areas such as peace and security, economic integration, and advocacy for Africa's interests in global platforms. Pan-Africanism remains a cornerstone of Africa's vision for global governance, symbolizing the continent's collective voice and agency.

**5.2 African Solutions to African Problems: The Importance of Homegrown Solutions**

African leaders have increasingly emphasized the need for homegrown solutions to address the continent’s challenges. This principle is central to initiatives like the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), which aims to resolve conflicts through African-led mechanisms such as the African Standby Force (ASF) and mediation efforts.

The 2013 Mali crisis is a notable example, where African-led peacekeeping operations under the AU and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) played critical roles before broader international involvement. As emphasized by the AU, “Sustainable peace in Africa must be anchored on African ownership and leadership”[[11]](#footnote-10). By championing African solutions, the continent seeks to move away from dependency on external interventions, which often prioritize donor interests over local needs. This approach also reflects a broader desire for sovereignty in addressing issues such as climate adaptation, public health, and economic reforms.

**5.3 South-South Cooperation: Africa’s Engagement with Other Regions of the Global South**

Africa's engagement with other regions of the Global South, particularly through South-South cooperation, reflects its pursuit of alternative development models and equitable partnerships. South-South initiatives prioritize mutual benefit and solidarity, offering a counterbalance to the often asymmetrical relationships with Western powers. Africa's growing trade and investment ties with emerging economies like China, India, and Brazil exemplify this cooperation. For instance, the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) has facilitated significant investments in African infrastructure, education, and technology. While such partnerships offer opportunities, they also raise concerns about debt sustainability and resource exploitation, prompting African leaders to advocate for more balanced agreements. Furthermore, platforms like the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) grouping provide Africa with a venue to influence global economic discussions and promote shared development goals.

**5.4 African Agency in Global Governance**

Africa’s assertiveness in global institutions has grown as the continent seeks to reshape the global order to reflect its priorities. African nations have consistently advocated for reforms in the United Nations (UN), particularly for permanent representation on the Security Council. This demand is rooted in the principle of equitable representation, given that Africa accounts for over a quarter of UN member states. Africa’s engagement with the World Trade Organization (WTO) highlights its push for fair trade practices. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), launched in 2021, underscores the continent’s commitment to enhancing intra-African trade and strengthening its bargaining power in global trade negotiations.

In the realm of finance, African nations have called for reforms in the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank to ensure greater inclusivity. The continent’s advocacy for debt relief during the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated its capacity to influence global economic discussions. As noted by the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), “Africa’s proactive approach during the pandemic showcased its growing leadership in global governance”[[12]](#footnote-11).

**6.0 Regional and Sub-Regional Governance in Africa**

Regional and sub-regional governance structures in Africa play a critical role in addressing the continent’s challenges and fostering integration, peace, and development. These frameworks are essential for advancing collective goals and ensuring stability in a complex and diverse continent.

**6.1 African Union (AU): The Role of the AU in Promoting African Integration, Peace, and Security**

The African Union (AU), established in 2001 as the successor to the Organization of African Unity (OAU), is the primary continental body tasked with promoting integration, peace, and security in Africa. Its vision is captured in Agenda 2063, which outlines the continent's aspirations for socio-economic transformation and unity.

The AU has been pivotal in peacekeeping and conflict resolution, often working through the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). The AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) is a notable example, where African forces have been instrumental in combating terrorism and stabilizing the region. According to the AU, “The APSA represents Africa’s commitment to taking ownership of its peace and security agenda”[[13]](#footnote-12).

In addition to security, the AU fosters economic integration through initiatives like the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which aims to create the world's largest free trade area by connecting over 50 nations. This initiative underscores the AU’s commitment to enhancing intra-African trade and reducing dependency on external markets.

**6.2 Regional Economic Communities (RECs): Promoting Regional Integration and Cooperation**

Regional Economic Communities (RECs) serve as the building blocks of Africa’s integration efforts. These organizations, such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and the East African Community (EAC), focus on regional cooperation in trade, security, and development.

ECOWAS has been particularly active in promoting peace and security. Its role in mediating conflicts, such as the Gambian political crisis in 2017, demonstrates its capacity for collective action. The ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) has also led peacekeeping missions in countries like Liberia and Sierra Leone, showcasing its commitment to regional stability.

SADC has prioritized economic cooperation and infrastructure development. The organization’s Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) emphasizes industrialization and regional value chains to boost economic growth.

EAC, one of the continent’s most integrated RECs, has made significant strides in establishing a common market and customs union. Its ambitious plans for a political federation highlight its commitment to deeper integration.

These RECs align with the AU’s broader objectives, reflecting a multi-level governance structure aimed at addressing the continent’s diverse challenges.

**6.4 Sub-Regional Governance: Addressing Local Challenges and Promoting Development**

Sub-regional governance complements the efforts of the AU and RECs by addressing localized challenges and fostering grassroots development. These governance structures often focus on issues such as cross-border resource management, localized conflict resolution, and community-based development initiatives.

For example, the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) plays a critical role in managing shared water resources and addressing security threats posed by Boko Haram. Similarly, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in the Horn of Africa has been instrumental in mediating conflicts in South Sudan and Somalia.

Sub-regional governance structures are uniquely positioned to address localized issues due to their proximity and understanding of cultural and socio-economic contexts. They also serve as platforms for collaboration among member states, enhancing collective responses to shared challenges.

**7.0 Africa's Engagement with Global Institutions**

Africa's engagement with global institutions has played an essential role in shaping the continent's influence in global governance. Through active participation in organizations like the United Nations (UN), the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), African countries have worked to advance their interests on the global stage. Their participation highlights both the challenges and opportunities Africa faces in the international system, and the evolving role of the continent in global decision-making.

**7.1 United Nations: Africa's Participation in the UN and Its Agencies:**

Africa's engagement with the United Nations (UN) is substantial, reflecting the continent’s importance in global diplomacy. With 54 member states, Africa comprises more than a quarter of the UN's membership, which gives it significant leverage in global decision-making. This participation, however, is not without its challenges, particularly in the area of representation and influence within key UN bodies.

7.1.1 UN Peacekeeping Operations: African countries have made substantial contributions to UN peacekeeping efforts, with nations like Nigeria, Ethiopia, and Rwanda providing troops for missions across the continent. For instance, Africa's involvement in peacekeeping in South Sudan, Sierra Leone, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has been crucial for stabilizing these conflict zones. As noted by scholars, "African countries are often the first responders to regional crises, stepping in where other international actors are slow to act"[[14]](#footnote-13).

7.1.2 Security Council Reform: One of Africa's persistent demands within the UN system has been for reform of the UN Security Council to ensure greater African representation. The C10 Group, which comprises 10 African countries, has argued for a permanent seat on the Security Council, citing Africa’s under representation given the continent’s population and geopolitical significance[[15]](#footnote-14).

**7.2 World Trade Organization: Africa's Engagement with the WTO and Global Trade Governance**

Africa’s relationship with the World Trade Organization (WTO) is central to the continent’s economic integration into the global trading system. While African nations are full members of the WTO, the continent faces significant challenges in engaging with global trade rules.

7.2.1 Trade Barriers and Agricultural Subsidies: One of the major issues that African countries have faced in the WTO framework is the subsidization of agriculture in developed countries. African agricultural exports, such as cotton, cocoa, and coffee, are often subject to tariffs or price distortions due to subsidies in Europe and the United States. African nations, through the Group of 77 (G77), have advocated for the reduction of these subsidies to create a more equitable global trading environment (Manning, 2020, p. 178). As one African trade expert puts it, "The current trade rules often marginalize African economies, especially in the agricultural sector"[[16]](#footnote-15)

7.2.2 Regional Trade Agreements: In addition to its engagement with the WTO, Africa has increasingly turned to regional trade agreements to bolster its economic standing. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which came into force in 2021, is a significant milestone for intra-Africa trade, aiming to reduce barriers to the movement of goods and services across the continent. As Adewale Adeyemo of the World Economic Forum notes, "AfCFTA presents an unprecedented opportunity for African countries to integrate their economies and challenge the trade dynamics of the Global North"[[17]](#footnote-16).

**7.3. International Monetary Fund: Africa's Relationship with the IMF and Global Financial Governance**

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has been a key player in Africa's economic development, providing financial assistance to countries facing balance of payments crises. However, Africa's relationship with the IMF has been marked by both cooperation and criticism.

7.3.1 Structural Adjustment Programs: Many African countries have participated in Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) proposed by the IMF, which require implementing austerity measures, privatization, and economic liberalization. While these measures have been justified by the IMF as necessary for economic stability, they have often been criticized for exacerbating inequality and poverty in African nations. Mkandawire (2005) argues that "IMF-driven reforms were designed to stabilize economies, but they ignored the realities of African social structures, which led to negative outcomes"[[18]](#footnote-17).

7.3.2 Debt Relief and Debt Sustainability: Over the years, the IMF has played a role in addressing Africa’s debt crisis by supporting initiatives such as the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative, which aimed to reduce the debt burdens of African countries. However, the continent's growing debt levels remain a pressing concern, particularly as many African governments have turned to China and other creditors for loans. The IMF has been involved in debt restructuring talks, but critics argue that the institution’s policy responses remain insufficient in addressing the root causes of Africa’s debt dependency[[19]](#footnote-18).

In addition to the UN, WTO, and IMF, African countries engage with several other global institutions, including the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Labour Organization (ILO), each of which plays a critical role in addressing challenges facing the continent.

**8.0 Some African Success Stories in Global Governance**

Africa has demonstrated growing influence and effectiveness in global governance through peacekeeping, trade, and climate change initiatives. These successes underscore the continent's agency and capacity to contribute meaningfully to global solutions.

**8.1 African Peacekeeping: Contributions to Conflict Resolution in Africa and Beyond**

African nations and organizations have played a pivotal role in global and regional peacekeeping efforts. The African Union (AU) and sub-regional bodies such as ECOWAS have led interventions to resolve conflicts and stabilize regions.

A prominent example is the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), established in 2007 to combat insurgent groups and support the Somali government. African nations like Uganda, Burundi, Kenya, and Ethiopia have provided troops and resources, showcasing a commitment to resolving African conflicts through African-led efforts. AMISOM's successes include reclaiming territories from Al-Shabaab and stabilizing key urban centers[[20]](#footnote-19).

In West Africa, ECOWAS has demonstrated strong leadership in peacekeeping through the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG). Notably, ECOMOG intervened during the Liberian and Sierra Leonean civil wars in the 1990s, preventing further destabilization of the region[[21]](#footnote-20).

African contributions extend beyond the continent. Countries like Ghana and Rwanda have been key contributors to UN peacekeeping missions, with deployments in regions like Darfur, South Sudan, and Haiti. These efforts illustrate Africa's growing role as a global peacekeeper.

**8.2 African Trade and Investment: Strengthening Global Economic Ties**

Africa’s trade and investment landscape has evolved significantly, marked by deeper engagement with major economies and regions. Partnerships with China, India, and the European Union (EU) have been transformative in terms of infrastructure development, resource management, and market expansion.

The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) has been a cornerstone of Africa’s trade and investment ties with China. Between 2000 and 2020, China invested over $120 billion in African infrastructure projects, including railways, ports, and energy systems[[22]](#footnote-21). These investments have boosted connectivity and supported Africa’s development goals, although concerns about debt sustainability persist.

Similarly, Africa’s trade relationship with the EU remains significant. The Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) aim to foster reciprocal trade relations and improve market access for African goods. Intra-African trade is also gaining momentum through the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), launched in 2021. AfCFTA seeks to create a unified market for over 1.3 billion people and enhance Africa’s global trade competitiveness[[23]](#footnote-22).

**8.3 African Climate Change Initiatives: Leadership in Environmental Sustainability**

Africa has emerged as a key player in global climate change initiatives, despite its limited contribution to global emissions. The continent’s vulnerability to climate impacts has spurred proactive measures to address environmental challenges.

One of the most prominent initiatives is the African Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative (AFR100), which aims to restore 100 million hectares of degraded land by 2030. This initiative aligns with Africa’s commitment to the Bonn Challenge and the Paris Agreement on climate change. By 2021, AFR100 had secured pledges to restore over 120 million hectares, showcasing the continent’s leadership in sustainable development[[24]](#footnote-23). Additionally, the Great Green Wall project, led by the AU, aims to combat desertification and improve livelihoods in the Sahel region. This initiative has restored millions of hectares of degraded land, creating jobs and enhancing food security in vulnerable communities[[25]](#footnote-24).

African nations are also advocating for equitable climate financing. During COP27 in 2022, African leaders emphasized the need for developed nations to honor their commitments to funding adaptation and mitigation efforts in developing countries. This advocacy reflects Africa’s assertive stance in shaping global climate policies.

**9.0 Conclusion**

In conclusion, Africa's involvement in global governance is significant, but it faces challenges like economic marginalization, representation, and debt dependency. The African Union and Regional Economic Communities are crucial for fostering intra-African cooperation and promoting peace. Pan-Africanism and African solutions to problems are central to Africa's approach to global governance. Africa's growing involvement in global issues like climate change, peacekeeping, and trade offers valuable perspectives. However, Africa's demand for greater representation in institutions like the UN Security Council and fairer trade practices within the WTO remains a concern. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) promotes economic integration, while initiatives like the African Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative reflect Africa's leadership in climate change action. Africa must continue advocating for reforms in global governance structures to ensure more inclusive decision-making. Strengthening regional institutions and promoting cooperation can help Africa address development challenges and push for a more equitable global order.

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