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THE PLACE OF AFRICA IN THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY: PROSPECTS AND OBSTACLES

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Abstract: This paper examines Africa's evolving engagement with the international community from the pre-Cold War era to the present day, exploring its quest for a meaningful foothold in global affairs through the lens of Dependency Theory, as posited by Frank (1966). Frank's theory highlights the structural dependency of peripheral economies on core capitalist systems, which perpetuates underdevelopment. The paper assesses Africa's capacity to leverage its collective influence to reshape international relations and institutions, and whether its growing political clout translates into tangible influence and policy outcomes. Africa's ascendance in international politics hinges on harnessing its numerical

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strength and shared historical experiences to overcome economic and military disparities perpetuated by this dependency. The paper concludes that integrating its approach towards external actors and pushing for reforming the international system will be crucial in enhancing its global standing. Findings suggest that Africa's influence remains limited due to economic and military disparities. Its recommendations include strengthening regional integration, reforming international institutions, diversifying partnerships, and investing in capacity building to enhance Africa's global engagement and emergence as a significant player in shaping global governance and policy outcomes.

Keywords: International politics, Cold war, Post-cold war, Imperialism, African voice and development.

Introduction

Africa's influence in international politics remains limited, rendering its participation in international organizations marginal and ineffective in shaping global decisions. Despite recent strides in increasing Africa's quota and voice in global politics, effective representation remains elusive, leaving the continent without a significant presence in the international arena. The international community comprises numerous organizations, including financial institutions like the World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF), development organizations like the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), specialized agencies like the World Health Organization (WHO) and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), trade organizations like the World Trade Organization (WTO), and security and governance bodies like the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), whose decisions significantly impact African countries, prompting African leaders to advocate for equal representation and participation in decision-making processes that affect the continent's interests.

There are a number of international organizations where Africans have been able to register some effective representation, like the WTO and WHO. This has been as a result of the veto power they possess in lieu of the numbers that they have in these organizations. But, again, there is a general feeling that the entities in which

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African countries have a voice have limited or no consequences on the agenda and policy direction in the international arena, Zondi (2011) holds the view that international arena has realized that the only way they can forge a distinct role in the international diplomatic game and have significant impact in multilateral processes is when they act as a regional block. These initial gains are being felt in the trade and climate change issues where Africa has exerted blocking power to ensure that their input on issues affecting them are taken into consideration.

Africa's influence in international politics remains limited, rendering its participation in international organizations marginal and ineffective in shaping global decisions. However, a knowledge gap exists in understanding the dynamics of Africa's engagement with these international organizations, with scholars like Adedeji (2012) highlighting the lack of research on Africa's negotiating capacity, while authors like Taylor (2015) focused on Africa's strategic engagement with global governance structures, which has led to this study's exploration of Africa's role in international politics and its quest for meaningful participation in global decision-making processes.

Africa and the International Community: A Brief History

Developing countries have historically been underrepresented in international institutions (Adebajo, 2016). This can be attributed to their late entry into global diplomacy after gaining independence, when most governance regimes were already established (Mkandawire, 2011). The African group attempted to coalesce around the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the G77 to advance their interests and project their perspectives (Abrahamsen, 2000). Within the UN system, the G77 group of countries pushed for collective concerns through reciprocal solidarity. The South-South grouping pressed for major reforms in global governance and a new international economic order (Taylor, 2003).

However, African representation varies across international organizations, with more presence in policy-making bodies like the WTO and ICJ compared to the UNSC (Brien, 2018). Clark (2019) argued that even in organizations where Africa has representation, the major powers significantly influence outcomes. For example, the UN General Assembly's one-country-one-vote system led big powers to shift focus to the UNSC, where they could exert more control. The veto

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power in the UNSC often results in gridlocks, broken only by unilateral actions (Fisher, 2015).The multilateral system operates according to the whims of big powers, which prefer acting within and outside rules. For instance, the Bretton Woods institutions serve the global strategy of G7 countries led by the US (Babb, 2009). In the UNSC, only 21.4% of the African population has direct representation, despite most UNSC policies affecting African states directly.

The UN's leadership in generating ideas and formulating economic perspectives has been eroded by institutions like the IMF and World Bank, where weighted voting allows the US and its allies to shape global economic governance policies (Woods, 2006). The shift towards Bretton Woods' institutions has expanded their influence in economic management and policy processes. The big powers' reluctance to adhere to international rules is evident in the ICJ, where no permanent UNSC member has been subject to compulsory jurisdiction (ICJ Statute, 1945). Despite this, all permanent members have a jurist on the ICJ panel. In the Bretton Woods Institutions, developing countries are underrepresented on executive boards, making it difficult to ensure diverse interests are adequately represented (Best, 2014). African countries' participation in the WTO has been limited, but they must take a more active role to safeguard trade gains. Recent developments, such as the transformation of OAU into AU and the establishment of NEPAD and APRM, have led to increased cooperation between Africa and international institutions (Adebajo, 2016). The UN has provided financial and technical capacity to support these organizations. Africa's participation in international diplomacy has grown, but it faces challenges in negotiating and implementing deals to its advantage (Taylor, 2003). African countries have increased common positions and platforms in international diplomatic forums, enabling the African Group to play a more distinct role.

Right from the start, the African group and other alienated groups were obsessed with the reform of the world order already in place because that is the only way that their interests could find a place on the agenda of international politics. The main agenda of their proposals as argued by Barro and Lee (2005) has always been to:

>   i. reform of the UN system in general, and the UNSC in particular, with a view to broadening representation at the highest levels of global decision making, and to disciplining

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the use of the veto by the big powers in order to prevent the routine subversion of the will of the international community;

ii. recalibration of the voting rights and decision-making processes of the IMF and the World Bank, to ensure a greater voice for the countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America

iii. generalized reform of the international trading system, to make it fairer, remunerative and development-oriented;

iv. create a global integrated programme for commodities (agricultural and mineral) that would assure more stable and fairer prices;

v. create a new global currency, based on the special drawing rights, that could safeguard the development interests of all members of the international community;

vi. adopt rules that would govern the conduct and practices of Western transnational companies in the economic and political spheres, as well as in matters of technology transfer, patents, and copyrights amongst others

Theoretical Framework

The study is grounded in Dependency Theory, as posited by Frank (1966). This theory highlights the structural dependency of peripheral economies on core capitalist systems, perpetuating underdevelopment. Its relevance to the study lies in understanding Africa's position in the global economy and the challenges it faces in asserting its influence in international politics. Another relevant theory is the Constructivist Theory by Alexander Wendt (1992). This theory emphasizes the role of ideas, identities, and social constructs in shaping international relations. It could provide insights into how Africa's identity and interests are constructed and perceived globally, influencing its interactions with other nations and international organizations.

The study focuses on Dependency Theory to investigate Africa's limited influence in international politics, exploring how structural dependencies hinder its ability to shape global agendas. By streamlining the investigation to this specific theoretical lens, the study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the systemic barriers Africa faces and potential strategies for overcoming them.

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Africa's Global Perspective: Evolution from the Cold War to the Contemporary Era

Africa bore the brunt of Cold War bipolar politics, with both blocs vying for influence and rendering consensus in the UNSC on African matters nearly impossible due to competing spheres of influence. This dynamic relegated Africa to the periphery of international decision-making, particularly on issues that mattered most to them. Nevertheless, African states adeptly navigated this landscape by leveraging the rivalry between the superpowers to extract concessions, playing one against the other to advance their own interests. Fisher (2015) opined that the post-cold war global structure has produced opportunities for structured cooperation in international peace and security with economic development as one of the essential elements of stability. The African group has endeavoured to build a united approach in matters of world affairs and speak with one voice. However, this approach has dogged with a myriad of challenges especially where there is a strong national interest, such as security issues and conflict situations. In such scenarios, the African group has suffered the incapability of fronting a united position in either negotiations or voting. The immediate post-cold war period up to the 1990s was dominated with different approaches to solving African problems by international institutions.

The legacy of external decision-making for Africa is evident in policies like Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), which were imposed on the continent with little or no input of Africans. These policies have had devastating effects, including the collapse of local industries, increased unemployment, deepened poverty, and heightened dependence on imports and international creditors. The lack of African voices in policy formulation led to counterproductive outcomes, exacerbating the very issues they aimed to address. In the 1990s, Africa began to assert its presence in international institutions. This shift was marked by the restructuring of international institutions and the emergence of multilateral approaches to security intervention under the UN and regional organizations. The cooperation between the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the UN led to comprehensive approaches to peace-making and peace-building. The transformation of the OAU into the African Union (AU) in 2000-2007 marked a new era for Africa. The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) became a key platform for Africa's quest for greater influence in global affairs. This period saw increased cooperation between the international community and

the AU, including the development of the UN Ten-Year Capacity-Building Programme for the AU.

Africa intensified its efforts to speak with one voice, as seen in the 2005 "Common African Position" on UN reform, known as the Ezulwini Consensus (Barro & Lee 2003). The AU called for greater representation in the UN Security Council, including two permanent seats with veto power and five non-permanent seats. However, internal divisions and national self-interest have hindered Africa's ability to maintain a united stance. The Africa Group at the UN has shown some cohesion on issues like development, trade, and climate negotiations. African countries have also aligned themselves with the Group of 77 (G-77) and China to strengthen their negotiating position. In recent years, the African Group has engaged in efforts to formalize links with the UN, enhancing the symbiotic relationship between the two organizations. In the World Trade Organization (WTO), African states have become more active and embedded in the negotiating process. They have insisted on a development-focused discourse and vetoed agreements detrimental to their interests. The post-Cold War period has seen increased international intervention in Africa, with Africa's voice becoming more prominent in peace operations and capacity building. The question remains whether African countries have coalesced sufficiently as a group to effectively influence policy development at international deliberations, particularly at the UN.

In Search for Democracy, Development and Security: Home grown Solutions or International Interventions

The intensification of globalization according to Mkandawire (2019) and Bach (2020) has led to increased intervention by the global community in Africa's political, economic, military, and cultural affairs, with international organizations playing a significant policymaking role in states with ineffective domestic institutions. African states with limited influence in global policymaking are disproportionately affected by international policies. Nigerian scholars like Claude Ake, Sam Amadi, and Rotimi Suberu have contributed to the discussion on globalization, governance, and development in Africa. The lack of resources, unstable environments, and corrupt governments in some African countries has necessitated external intervention, often through international organizations. This

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complex dynamic has shaped Africa's development trajectory, with ongoing debates about the role of global governance in shaping the continent's future

The big question has always been whether these interventions have provided the best solutions to African problems or whether Africa should have resorted to homemade solutions to tackle African problems. The rallying cry by various African actors in global politics has been "African solutions to African Problems". But the question begs: can Africa tackle these problems on its own? Do we have effective and efficient institutional structures, and the managerial resources and capacity to go it alone? Can we manage without the financial, logistical and technical capacity of the international environment? This and more are crucial questions begging for answers.

Several studies have been carried to answer the questions posed above. But the results have been mixed and remain controversial. In a study on the impact of IFI programmes in 76 African and Asian countries through 34 annual observations from 1974 to 2007, Limpach and Michaelowa attest to the mixed impact of the different types of IFIs implemented in Africa on the various dimensions of democracy. The authors observe that "in a narrow sense, democratization cannot be imposed from the outside. We do not find significant effects of any type of IFI program on vertical accountability as measured by the degree of political participation and competitive elections in a country". On a different note, they also observe that "in a wider sense, however, IMF and World Bank programs do have political implications for changes in the extent of executive constraints and in the level of civil liberties in developing countries". Their main results reveal that the IFIs' traditional lending programs have negative short-term impacts on horizontal accountability in recipient countries, while their development policy lending to low-income countries increases horizontal accountability over the long term. In addition, this study shows that the IFI's PRS initiative strengthens civil liberties by promoting broad-based participation of civil society and, in particular the poor in the domestic political decision-making process.

In two other studies by Barro and Lee (2005) on IMF financial stabilization programs, they observe that these interventions have had a marginally negative effect, directly on democracy and indirectly on economic growth, especially on democracy and economic growth contemporaneous and the lagged five-year

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period. On the contrary other studies have illuminated the positive impact that international intervention has had in Africa. The study by Nelson and Wallace reveals that countries being under any kind of IMF program show significantly higher democratization levels, and concludes that the conditions attached to the loans disbursed by the IMF have a positive effect on the quality of democratic institutions in participating countries. These positive effects grow over time. For a one-year time lag, no apparent relationship between the participation in an IMF program and the level of democracy is detected. However, in the three-year and five-year lagged models, the coefficients for participating in an IMF program become stronger and statistically significant. Similarly, the path-breaking study by Abouharb and Cingranellion the IFIs' human rights impact looks at the length of time a country has been under a structural adjustment programme by either the World Bank or the IMF in the 1980 to 2003 period so as to determine how efficient and developmentally supportive these programmes were to African states. The authors find that longer exposure to structural conditionality is positively correlated with procedural democracy and development. At the same time, their findings, which suggest that long-term structural adjustment has a negative impact on a wide range of civil, worker and human rights, points to the paradox that structural adjustment "may have simultaneously advanced procedural democracy and a decline in substantive democracy".

Positive impacts of Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) processes are seen in three key areas, namely:

i. that the PRS consultation process created new space for domestic policy dialogue and resulted in an unprecedented engagement of civil society organizations in poverty policy debates;

ii. that the PRS process contributed to a much stronger focus on poverty inside government; and

iii. that the PRS approach focused attention on donor coordination internationally and at the recipient country level (e.g., Booth, 2003; Molenaers & Renard, 2003; World Bank and IMF, 2005; Driscoll & Evans, 2005).

However, a lot of challenges for achieving national ownership and democratic control of the PRS process are still remaining. They are mainly seen in the areas of institutionalizing sustainable participation and taking the domestic political

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context into account. Even though the ownership principle suggests participation of a variety of actors, in practice the PRS process was often characterized by "government ownership" rather than broader "country ownership". Moreover, governments often limited participation by depoliticizing the topics open for discussion and by politicizing the selection of participants. Another challenge that has not attracted enough attention so far is that many PRS processes have unfolded in semi-democratized states in which domestic politics tend to be patronage-based, with fragmented party systems, politicization of administration, as well as weak state regulatory and implementation capacities. Some case studies indicate that there is a risk that PRS will become identified with the political party in power and be discarded when there is a change of government.

In spite of the above state of affairs, in the past two decades according to World Bank (2013) has been an incessant push for African solution to African problems. The African Group has been calling for the need for homemade solutions to tackle the problems bedevilling Africa. In support of their call they have attempted to come up with a series of initiatives aimed at enabling the continent deal with its own problems based on an agenda, managed by Africans and designed principally to promote and foster an African agenda. One of the most significant of the initiatives that emerged was the Conference on Security Stability Development and Co-operation in Africa (CSSDCA). More importantly, the challenges of peace and security became almost intractable. The meeting concluded that Africa had to tackle the interrelated problems of security, stability, development and co-operation through its own means and to engage the rest of the world within a holistic and composite framework designed, owned and driven by Africans. The Africa Leadership Forum accepted the challenge to drive this process. In November 1990, it convened in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in collaboration with the Secretariats of the OAU and UNECA, a meeting of prominent African personalities drawn from government, business, academic, international and non-governmental organizations to brainstorm on concrete strategies to cope with the world's new realities. The meeting recognized the need to develop a framework for Africa along the lines of the CSCE. A Steering Committee, comprising about half of the conference participants, was set up to guide further activities in this direction. The committee restructured the principles into four main goals: security, stability, development and co-operation.

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The CSSDCA process as posited by Knadawire (2019) stresses the inter-linkage between peace, stability, development, integration and co- operation. It creates a synergy between the various activities of the African continent and seeks to consolidate the various critical issues relating to peace, security, stability, development and cooperation. The underlying thinking of the CSSDCA process was recognition of the fact that the problems of security and stability in many African countries had impaired their capacity to achieve the necessary level of intra and inter-African cooperation that is required to attain the integration of the continent, which is also critical to the continent's socio-economic development and transformation. Indeed, the premium on social and political stability was rising rapidly at a time when the changing international political framework had begun to marginalize the African continent and its concerns. There was also a growing awareness that the progress that the continent had recorded in the sphere of economic development left much to be desired and that poor economic performance underlined the rising wave of domestic conflicts. NEPAD, a new development programme, developed by African leaders, aims at tackling the continent's multi-faceted crisis, reflected in poor economic performance, bad governance, corruption and mismanagement, conflict and insecurity. More specifically NEPAD seeks to arrest and eradicate the deepening poverty on the continent; promote growth and sustainable development; halt and reverse the trend of the continent's marginalization; and restore peace, security and stability. These are to be achieved in partnership with the international community especially foreign donors. In addressing these issues, NEPAD identifies certain key areas whose tackling enhances the achievement of its overall aims. These include peace and security, economic and corporate governance, infrastructure, agriculture, and access to international markets.

The achievement of these objectives necessarily affects the continent's relations with the international community. In contrast to previous developmental paradigms, which required the bulk of the efforts from African states, NEPAD projects itself as a partnership between the continent and the international community to promote the development of the former (Lehman 2008). But, in seeking the partnership of the international community, NEPAD attempts to accelerate the integration of the increasingly marginalized African continent into the global economy. And although the NEPAD project emphasizes mutual partnership, Africa is heavily dependent on financial aid from the North.

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Moreover, by relying on external funding, NEPAD is unlikely to change either the current configuration in Africa's international relations with the North or the contents of the former's foreign policies. While the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) more or less supplanted the CSSDCA and was given prominence over of it, the fact remains that security and stability remain the pillar upon which Africa can build its prosperity and relevance in the global market of development. The APRM is designed as a comprehensive mechanism based on the utilization of common diagnostic tools and measurement criteria for assessing performance and cross-referencing inputs for assessments from all stakeholders in African States and society.

Though it provides the basis for continuous engagement of the political leaders on issue of governance, its implementation for almost eight years has not reduced the assertion made in this paper that internal security remains the most daunting challenge confronting development in Africa. This is not to argue that Africa will not require outside assistance. Rather, it is to suggest that positive developments will depend, finally, on Africans developing "African solutions to African problems". Indeed, we believe that the only way that there can be positive outcomes in Africa is if African countries are no longer the junior partners on issues that most directly affect them. Murithi (2022) argued that there is the real possibility of the continent growing faster and becoming more democratic and more secure while addressing critical social issues, especially the empowerment of women. Indeed, to a certain extent, success will breed success, as investors are attracted to growing economies, which will in turn cause them to grow even faster, thus attracting even more investment, in an ever-increasing upward spiral. Political stability will reassure those who lose elections that they need not go back to the bush to win political power, and the enrichment of the rural areas will bind countries together after decades when the minorities in the urban areas benefited disproportionately.

Assisting the development of the AU capacities to channel its own path in addressing African problems is where the international community should focus their priorities on. They main goal should be to ensure a structured interface between the AU and the international community. The lack of economic and material resources is one of the biggest challenges that all democracy, development and security initiatives contend with in Africa. At present, funding

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from external donors is a necessity in order to improve capacity. NEPAD, AU and other initiatives engaged in democracy, development and security initiatives are largely funded by external actors. All operations are also greatly influenced by international expertise, advisors and companies. What African actors need to guard against is that this external funding is not accompanied by too much influence in decision-making processes or leadership. Developments in Africa require increased international cooperation, which will need to be based on strong African leadership, internationally, regionally, nationally and at the various sub-state levels. The AU, NEPAD, the African regional organizations and its regional trade organizations will need to lead the way, with committed support from national leaders (Hoste, 2011).

Rethinking the African Agenda - Options for Reforms and the Challenges

Africa, a continent rich in cultural diversity and natural resources, has faced numerous challenges in its quest for democratic governance and sustainable development. The influence of international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank has shaped the economic policies of many African countries. While these institutions aim to promote economic stability and growth, their policies have often been criticized for undermining national sovereignty and exacerbating social inequalities. As Africa continues to navigate the complexities of globalization, the need for reform and sustainable development become increasingly pressing.

Africa's Option for Reform

The argument advanced by African countries for reform in the international governance system is primarily predicated on the need for greater justice and a more equitable representation in world affairs, with special emphasis on the institutions of global governance. Africa has the single biggest bloc of states in the General Assembly, yet does not have a permanent seat on the UNSC—complete with the power of veto. As outlined in the Ezulwini Consensus of 2005, the region has staked a claim for two permanent and five non-permanent seats. The continent has also added its voice to calls for the reform of the Bretton Woods institutions, and the restructuring of the existing weighted voting system, both to increase the African share of influence and to broaden the decision-making base.

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Africa has several options for reform. One crucial step is strengthening democratic institutions, such as parliaments and judiciaries, to promote accountability and transparency. By enhancing the capacity and independence of these institutions, African countries can build trust in government and improve service delivery. Additionally, promoting good governance through anti-corruption measures and public sector reform can help to reduce corruption and improve the business environment. Regional integration initiatives, such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), can also promote economic growth and development by increasing trade and investment among African countries.

Investing in human capital is another key option for reform. By prioritizing education, healthcare, and social protection, African countries can build a more productive and resilient population. This can help to promote economic growth and reduce poverty and inequality. Furthermore, diversifying economies and promoting entrepreneurship and innovation can help to reduce dependence on primary commodities and promote sustainable development. By promoting a more diversified and competitive economy, African countries can create jobs and improve living standards for their citizens

In recent years, routine invitations have been extended to selected African leaders to attend G7 meetings, usually sessions devoted to discussing the continent's problems and offers of aid. These invitations may have been designed as a gesture of inclusivity and solidarity that speaks simultaneously to Africa and the civil society/social movement critics of that forum's role in global economic governance, but have hardly succeeded in redressing the fundamental imbalances in the rules and operations of the international financial system. That is why, alongside the basic political governance issues, African countries also have a strong interest in pursuing a reform of the international development architecture.

The forging of a new economic, social and political governance order that is the culmination of an accelerating global realignment process, is evidenced by the re-emergence of China along with India, Russia, and Brazil. the increased significance in global economic affairs enjoyed by the East Asian countries, Turkey, South Africa, Argentina, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf States to cite the most prominent new entrants; and the prospect of long-term decline that the old

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economic powers, many in the EU, face. It will be an order that will come complete with a radical redistribution of power, authority, and influence, and involve a rewriting/reinterpretation of rules pertaining to the global multilateral institutions. The old world order is gradually dying, while the new is struggling to be born (Kabia, 2011). Debates have already been held and theories are presently being spawned about how such a new order might eventually emerge: by war or by peaceful means; through revolution or evolution; by negotiation, compromise-making and consensus-building or through politico-military fiat; or through a complex combination of all these elements.

While interesting, the only relevance of these debates and theories to this paper is the extent to which they appear to be influencing the choices of major players regarding the need for change in the existing global governance order. The UN family of organizations is looking at the need to work and deliver as "One UN", rationalizing and streamlining agencies with overlapping mandates in order to improve effectiveness and impact and to cut down on costs (Neething, 2003). The ICC has been grafted onto the broader governance system through the assiduous pressure mounted by civil society coalitions whose voices in world affairs are also growing in significance. The IMF (2019) and World Bank (2013) weighted voting systems have also been occasionally tinkered with in order, initially, to accommodate countries such as Japan and, more recently, Saudi Arabia and China, and to replenish the funds put at the disposal of the institutions.

According to Frances, (2006) the workings of the existing international governance system are limited in scope and fragmented and piecemeal in nature. They have also been essentially reactive, rather than proactive. Unsurprisingly, the calls for more comprehensive, integrated reform remain as strong. It is to be expected that the weak and the marginalized in any political order would always have a strong interest in a radical reform programme, in the hope that the changes will offer them more say and benefits. By the same token, the strong and the main beneficiaries from an existing political regime would be most reluctant to embrace any change that could remove their privileges, whittle down their influence, and curb their power, even if they make gestures in favour of reform out of enlightened self-interest. The different regions of the world, or at least countries located in different regions of the world, have sketched out their proposals for reform of particularly the UN, the Bretton Woods institutions, and the post-G7

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framework. Their reasons, approaches and ambitions differ, which is why the formal work of reform promises to be a complicated process, to say the least. The member states of AU have begun harmonizing their individual negotiation positions on major international issues in order to turn their numbers into real political clout in international negotiations. While the African Group has existed in UN processes since the 1960s, in the last two decades it has gained prominence for pro-active approach in some cases and for advancing nuanced and distinct positions in key international negotiations. The idea of a discernable common African agenda is also gaining currency in all global multilateral forums. The strengthening of continental and regional integration has given further impetus to this notion of concerted diplomacy by Africa.

The Challenges of Rethinking Africa

Despite these options for reform, Africa faces several challenges that hinder its progress towards democratic governance and sustainable development. One major challenge is the weakness of institutions, including lack of transparency and corruption. These weaknesses undermine democratic governance and accountability, making it difficult to promote development and reduce poverty. The influence of international financial institutions, such as the IMF and World Bank, can also limit national sovereignty and undermine domestic policy-making. Many African countries are heavily dependent on primary commodities, making them vulnerable to fluctuations in global commodity prices.

Social inequalities, including poverty, inequality, and exclusion, are also significant challenges facing Africa. These inequalities can undermine social cohesion and stability, making it difficult to promote development and reduce poverty. Climate change poses another significant threat to Africa's development, with many countries facing challenges related to drought, desertification, and sea-level rise. By addressing these challenges and pursuing options for reform, Africa can work towards building more democratic, stable, and prosperous societies.

African states approach negotiations through formation of a harmonized position based on agreed principles for negotiations and common sets of demands and the building of alliances to further these. The challenge of a harmonized African position according Nelson & Wallace, (2005) includes how to leverage a regional

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approach in a global system that still sees states as the main actor in negotiations; and how to form a common regional position while still allowing flexibility for bargaining concessions. There is inadequate institutional mechanism to coordinate this interface especially at the political level because the Committee of African Ministers of Integration remains an ad-hoc body. The AU remains an intergovernmental organization whose decisions are still driven by interests of individual member states.

The failure of AU to transform into a supranational organization has undermined the ability of the Africa Group to present a concretized common position. While the intention has been to turn the institution into a supranational body underpinned by shared sovereignty, nation states are reluctant to cede any sovereignty to the organization in order to enable it to independently pursue the common interests of the continent. For this reason, individual state's interests tend to compromise the shared interests that common positions epitomize. This is why member states tend to choose one or more of them to champion or manage its common position instead of mandating the chairpersons of AU and AUC to represent their common interests. In the view of Eberlei (2011), the idea of a concerted negotiating position is weakened by lack of a framework for coordinating external relations by RECs and AU. As a result, both RECs and AU conduct international relations separately and often in competition with each other. There is very little evidence of alignment of RECs' international relations and Africa Common Positions. The draft protocol on relation between the AU and RECs is vague on this matter; only pointing out RECs should ensure that their international engagements are in harmony with harmonized policies and programmes between the two tiers of continental governance.

The compromise mechanisms tend to over-estimate the ability of the AU central organs to manage continental diplomacy when the power still lies with national capitals (Brien, (2018). By and large, there is no room for compromise during negotiations because it is often extremely difficult for AU to work out areas of compromise beforehand because that would require difficult internal negotiations. There is need for institutionalization of AU-UN peace and security cooperation since the two organizations are complementary to each other's efforts and individually bring comparative advantages based on resources, experience and knowledge of realities on the ground. The 2000 AU Constitutive Act and the

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2002 AU Peace and Security Council Protocol provide the legal framework for the AU cooperation with the international community and the UN in particular. Africa has resolved to determine its future destiny and is increasingly placing African problems on the international agenda. In the final instance, the AU-UN cooperation is situated within the framework that suggests unless democratization, institutionalization of good governance and economic stability takes root in the continent, peace will remain elusive and peace efforts a self-perpetuating industry.

On the wider international agenda of the UN, the Bretton Woods institutions, the EU, the G8, the US and other bilateral parties, the adoption of an integrated approach to African problems, including political, developmental and economic dimensions must become a first priority. African leaders will need to promote this actively; international attention for Africa is still too often only the result of determined action by groups and individuals outside Africa (Clark, 2013). While Africa is increasingly capable of preventing, managing and resolving conflicts, additional resources and enhanced political commitment are urgently required. Across the continent, five themes are emerging as increasingly central: increased peace, security and stability through conflict prevention, management and resolution; good governance and good policy; investing in people, by improving health and education and combating HIV/AIDS; pro-poor growth through support for the private sector in Africa; and sustainable development, focusing on the management of natural resources, environment and water.

The governance reform process underway in the IMF will (slightly) redistribute voting power between developed and developing nations. Wood, (2016) observed that the lack of adequate representation of Africa has been specifically acknowledged by building protection for African votes into the framework for reform, and by designing other mechanisms for African states to have power (an extra representative on the Board and more frequent meetings with management). Governance reform at the World Bank usually mimics that of the IMF. As has been pointed out in previous publications, the proposed reforms therefore will do little to raise Africa's total voting power, and therefore voice at either institution. As Tieku (2011) argues, the advent of the AU saw regional leadership of negotiations in Burundi improves markedly on the protracted process led by the OAU. Nevertheless, the complexities and nuances of such negotiations demand

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skilled mediators able to draw on substantial expert and institutional back up if the failures of that process are to be overcome. John Kabia also highlighted limited funding provided by member states, the level of corruption and the weak economic conditions as factors which undermine the efficacy of regional organizations like ECOWAS. Even in Africa's most developed state, South Africa, concerns arise about its ability to draw on enough expertise to effectively manage and lead the climate change negotiations as chair and host of the Durban 2011 round. This has its own influence on the development of Africa and its environs.

Best (2022) notes that Africa needs to fund its own training of technical capacity, which is happening through AERC, MEFMI, and some other regional and sub-regional organizations. It needs to campaign on voting issues in a more united way, for example agreeing on a rotating seat in the Security Council rather than continuing to fight over which one or two countries should have a seat. Larger African countries could give smaller low income countries more say. The inability of African countries to forge a much more coherent identity and consistently maintain a united stance on a wide range of issues means that African countries are at a disadvantage when it comes to promoting the continent's interests. The way forward for Africa in the international community involves a multifaceted approach that leverages its growing economic and demographic potential while addressing internal challenges. To strengthen its global partnerships, Africa must diversify its trade relationships beyond traditional partners and engage in mutually beneficial collaborations in technology, infrastructure, and innovation. Amplifying African voices on key global issues such as climate change, reform of international financial institutions, and promotion of peace and security is crucial. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and other regional integration initiatives can boost intra-African trade and enhance global competitiveness. However, Africa must also address internal challenges including corruption, governance issues, infrastructure deficits, and conflict. By harnessing international support through development assistance, capacity-building programs, and investment in infrastructure and human capital, Africa can drive sustainable development and improve the lives of its citizens. Ultimately, a strong, unified, and proactive Africa can enhance its position in the international community and shape a more equitable global order.

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Conclusions

As Africa navigates the complexities of global governance, several pressing issues come to the fore. The continent's historical marginalization and ongoing struggles for representation raise fundamental questions about its place in the international order. Can Africa leverage its growing demographic and economic weight to assert its interests more effectively? How can African nations balance their individual needs with the imperative of continental cohesion and collective action? What role should regional and international institutions play in supporting Africa's development and amplifying its voice? As we reflect on these questions, it becomes clear that Africa's path to greater global influence will depend on addressing these challenges and harnessing its unique strengths and opportunities.

The study's findings underscore the essential elements for a region or continent to wield significant global influence:

i. Firstly, possessing a critical mass of numbers is crucial, as it provides a foundation for collective action.
ii. Secondly, acting cohesively as a regional or continental grouping enables unified decision-making and strengthens negotiating power.
iii. Thirdly, having substantial economic and military muscle is vital for shaping the global agenda and ensuring strategic autonomy and,
iv. Fourthly, a common identity that defines shared interests at the global level facilitates collective action and promotes a unified voice.

However, the analysis reveals that Africa falls short in several of these key areas. Despite having a substantial critical mass of numbers, Africa lacks cohesiveness and economic and military muscle to effectively shape the global agenda. The continent's vulnerability to external manipulation by Western and Eastern powers, rising powers, and global multinationals further erodes its bargaining power. Bilateral agreements often undermine Africa's collective interests, highlighting the need for a more integrated approach. To achieve greater global relevance, Africa must adopt a twin strategy focused on reforming the international system and integrating its approach to shape the global agenda, thereby enhancing its negotiating power and promoting a more unified voice on the world stage

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Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends as follows:

i. Africa should prioritize regional integration initiatives, cooperation, increase bargaining power, and promote a unified voice in global affairs

ii. Africa should such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), to enhance economic

iii. invest in capacity building initiatives, such as training programs, institutional development, and infrastructure diversify its partnerships beyond traditional Western powers to engage with rising powers, such as China, India, and Brazil, to leverage new opportunities, technologies, and investments.

iv. Africa should development, to enhance its negotiating capacity, policy-making capabilities, and global competitiveness.

v. Africa should prioritize continental cohesion by fostering a shared vision, promoting pan-Africanism, and enhancing regional and national institutions to support collective action and decision-making.

vi. Africa should advocate for reforms to international institutions, such as the United Nations Security Council, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank, to ensure greater representation, participation, and influence for African countries in global decision-making processes.

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