

My Africa Tomorrow: Decades of Natural Resource Exploitation and Underdevelopment

Dr Lloyd Zimba

PhD-Leadership & Governance

Email: lloydzimba@yahoo.com

Abstract: *Africa is endowed with abundant natural resources such as diamond, gold, copper, emeralds, oil, gas, forestry, water, and arable soils. However, there has been no meaningful socio-economic development in a number of African countries indicative of the available resources. The Sub-Saharan region which houses more resources on the continent is the most affected region in terms of underdevelopment and poverty. The continent's natural resources have played a vital role in the development of the West since 15th century. The relationship between Africa and the West has mainly been strengthened on the basis of the exploitation of Africa's natural resources. Huge tonnes of resources are shipped out of the continent every year at low export value under the terms of international trade and investment leaving Africa with a trail of environment damage and underdevelopment. The development of the West and underdevelopment of Africa can well be examined within the context of Africa's natural resource exploitation. It is undeniable fact that these resources are depleting without any meaningful development and this threatens the survival of humanity in Africa. Therefore calls for prudent management of natural resources cannot be contested if African governments are to build better nations for the present and future generations.*

Keywords: Exploitation, Investment, Natural resources, Underdevelopment

1. Introduction

Africa an extraction site for raw materials

Natural resources are vital to human existence because they provide essential inputs such as air, food, energy and water. All goods and services for human survival are derived from natural resources. However the current global environment developments threaten Africa's natural resources. Multinational companies have driven a neo-imperialistic agenda by exerting their economic power and control over Africa. This has been facilitated by the weak West-dictated African investment policies which have attracted a cohort of international investors to the continent. In essence Africa has just become a caretaker and custodian of the resources without much benefit.

The volume of natural resources the continent possesses is able to transform the region into a high income, industrialized and developed economy. Africa has all what is needed for development. In reality Africa is supposed to be an economic global powerhouse. Shockingly the continent still grapples with underdevelopment and poverty whilst its resources are taken out to investors' home countries. Since Vasco Da Gama a Portuguese navigator opened the sea route to Africa over 500 years ago, the continent has had its doors wide open to let resources have a free-flow movement to the West. The scramble for Africa in the 19th century scrapped the continent's ownership of its natural resources. The agenda was necessitated by the Berlin Conference in 1884 which dictated and implemented terms of European policy of colonization and trade in Africa (Brantlinger, 1985). In reality there was no trade agreement made at the conference but a conspiracy by conveners to exploit resources of Africa and turn the continent into an extraction zone. The imperialist and neo-colonialist ideologies were deliberately enforced to benefit the West and disadvantage Africa because they were driven by an agenda for resource

exploitation and human rights abuse. This is evident by the underdevelopment and impoverishment that have characterized Africa.

The Western socio-economic hegemony on Africa has continued to date. The 19th century colonization era and 20th and 21st centuries' foreign direct investment (FDI) policies present the same Western camouflaged exploitative agenda aimed at controlling resources of Africa. It is evident that FDI policies have enabled foreign companies to take control of almost all important economic sectors on the continent. The investors have further gone into economic sectors that citizens are able to run hence reducing the locals to cheap-hard-labour suppliers compensated with low wages. Africa has remained a spectator and witness of the depleting irreplaceable natural resources. Out of the continent's abundant resources the West has built skyscrapers, quality railway and road networks on its continents whilst African nations struggle with impassable and life-threatening road networks, risky railway lines, and colonial infrastructure.

How can Africa develop when valuable resources are taken out? Industrial revolution is driven among other factors by the manufacturing sector (Horn, at el; 2010). Raw materials play a critical role in the development of the manufacturing sector which is vital to economic growth and employment creation. The export of raw materials prevents technology transfer to the continent and conversely it takes jobs and development out of Africa. Numerous jobs are created overseas along the supply chain processes whilst Africa imports expensive finished goods made from the raw materials which were exported at a lower value. Sadly the importation of goods by African nations means that foreign exchange is paid back to the investors' home countries. It can conclusively be stated that the continent is losing both natural resources and foreign exchange a situation which makes it difficult for Africa to develop.

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It is right to allege that the Western investment agenda in Africa is inimical and not helpful to the wishes of Africans because it has stifled socio-economic development of the continent. This situation has been taken advantage of by some African governments who have formulated weak investment laws in order for them to mismanage national resources. These laws include tax exemptions which mainly benefit investors. These policy loop holes have guided the continent on the path to underdevelopment and impoverishment. If this resource mismanagement trend continues, posterity will harshly come and judge this generation and question the wisdom of its forefathers. It is foreseen that the future generation will merely learn about the minerals that existed in Botswana, Central Africa Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, Kenya, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, Uganda, and Zambia without seeing any visible development the same way this generation is told about the species that went into extinction. One can confidently predict that the future generation will suffer more socio-economic challenges than this generation if African governments do not put up serious protective measures to save the available resources from exploitation.

An urgent call for Africa's investment policy change

Governments in Africa should enhance sustainable development agenda by jealously guarding natural resources against wasteful repatriation and depletion. The present generation should use resources wisely in realization that the future generations' survival depends on the same resources. There are two suggestive ways through which natural resources can be harnessed for the benefit of Africa. The first measure is to strengthen policy formulation on the development of the manufacturing sector on the continent. This can be enforced through implementation of investment policies that prevent exportation of raw materials which are vital to the manufacturing industry. Such policies are able to compel foreign multinational companies to establish their manufacturing industries within the region. The second solution is to cement socio-economic ties with the Asian economic giants such as China and India. China's win-win policy is beneficial to the continent's development agenda. In the recent years Africa's investment cooperation with China has shown positive economic development results in the region. This is evidenced by the improved infrastructure development and economic growth in a number of countries on the continent. China and India are further establishing manufacturing industries within the region which are providing employment opportunities to citizens and facilitating technology transfer.

2. Conclusion

Africa deserves development and Africans deserve dignified lives because of the abundant resources the continent has. However, the current generosity of uncontrollable repatriation of resources out of Africa has put the prospects of the continent's development in quagmire. It is not yet known of what Africa will become tomorrow. However there is hope for a prosperous African future. Governments in Africa should change their governance approach in regard to natural resource management. There is need for the implementation of economic and investment policies that are

aimed at protecting natural resources. It is time the exploitation of resources was stopped and Africa developed a manufacturing sector in order to industrialize the continent and create a better place for all generations.

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