



## **AFRICA'S FUTURE IS IN THE UNITED AFRICAN STATES**

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It is in history that we learn what to do and what not to do. The answers for the future of the African continent are in early Africa and in the period immediately after the political independence of many African countries. Colonialism disrupted Africa's development journey. Slave trade and slavery caused irreversible harm. Imperialism distorted Africa's socio-economic development.

Political independence came and Africa tried to regain its strength, but neo-colonialism, neo-imperialism and coloniality ensured that Africa remains at the bottom. When socio-economic development was gaining momentum, structural adjustment programmes were imposed on Africa.

Many African countries have not yet fully recovered from those World Bank and International Monetary Fund programmes which were imposed at the back of the oil price crisis that had nothing to do with Africa. African economies have continued to endure global economic and financial crises that have delayed economic recovery in Africa.

It is worth looking at early Africa and the period immediately after political independence because we see commendable socio-economic progress during those times. There were theories and perspectives that shaped how African countries approached development, particularly leading to political independence and during the three decades of the post-independence era.

There were many attempts at pursuing home-grown development strategies and policies. There was space for experimentation and debating what could work better for a politically independent Africa. I am reminded of the wager at the eve of political independence of their respective countries between Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Félix Houphout-Boigny of Côte d'Ivoire because that debate influenced development thinking in Africa. Two of the most well-known political figures on the continent at the time, in the late 1950s, represented conflicting perspectives on how to develop Africa.

At the eve of political independence, there was another critical debate about the approach to be followed for uniting Africa. The Monrovia group – because its first meeting was in Monrovia – of African countries argued that independent African countries should co-operate and co-exist but without political federation and deep integration that the Casablanca group pushed for. The Casablanca group argued for the African political unification or federation of African countries into a single African country. Like the Monrovia group, the Brazzaville group, which was primarily made up of former French colonies, preferred the gradualist strategy that began with regional economic and cultural cooperation.

In the context of early Africa, leading scholars teach us that African societies varied in structure as they evolved to suit their local hostile and favourable environmental conditions. Lives and livelihoods in the early (precolonial) Africa were largely constructed around agricultural activities (crop cultivation, hunting, fruit and root gathering, etc.). Mining also played a major socio-economic role with products also exchanged under barter trade to access other basic household requirements. It is also worth noting that trade within Africa compared to other global regions was robust before colonialism as many scholars have argued or demonstrated.

The approach to socio-economic development was communal in early Africa. For instance, despite its scarcity in the highlands, land was not viewed as a commodity in early Africa. Early Africa also made huge contributions to the fields of science and technology. Medicine, geometry, and philosophy were among the most advanced fields in early Africa. For an example, as the idea of antiseptic surgery was just beginning to take hold in Europe, Africans were performing operations under antiseptic circumstances. It is worth noting that unlike what later emerged during the colonial era, medicine in early Africa was a public good.

Without a doubt, Africa would have done much better if it were not of because of the challenges and the many constraints, including corruption and generally weak leadership at the political level especially but leadership across all spheres and sectors in African countries and at the level of the African Union has been weak. Of major concern, as argued many times, is lack of thought leadership in the political stratum in Africa. Thought leadership has to do with the ability, based on thorough appreciation of history and context, to comprehensively decipher phenomena and be able to come up with possible solutions that are sound.

It is instructive that Africa performed well during 1950-1980. More people in the various Sub-Saharan African countries received education, were increasingly living longer and the overall standard of living was improving.

Problems start in the mid-1970s. As the Historian Martin Meredith dramatically puts it in his book *The State of Africa*, “so steep was Africa’s economic decline during the 1980s that it became known as ‘the lost decade’. By the mid-1980s most Africans were as poor or poorer than they had been at the time of independence.”

Social and economic development in Africa, for many countries on the continent, started deteriorating in the 1970s, even for countries that had gained political independence in the 1950s/1960s. This was largely to do with the global oil crises. The structural adjustment programs (starting in the 1980s) exacerbated the setback that many African countries experienced, from which many of them took a very long to recover, and some never have. Indeed, the culpability and culpability of those in leadership in Africa are as much to blame as the external influence that they permitted if not supported it.

The most important lesson in the history of Africa and the world is that the unity of Africans wherever they are is indispensable. Ultimately, the United African States is the answer to the many (if not all) challenges the African and Caribbean countries face.

It is in this context that the Pan-African Federalist Movement (PAFM) is working hard towards the Pan-African Federalist Congress. As part of that endeavor, the PAFM is mobilizing Africans wherever they are to embark on the Great March for Africa during this 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary day of the Organization of African Unity (OAU).