



What does Africa really want?

As we celebrate yet another Africa Day, the question of what Africa really wants (and or what Africans, wherever they are, want) cannot be avoided. This question is forever lingering, and it becomes sharpened when Africa interacts with the rest of the world. The question must be confronted or posed directly especially given the fuzzy and amorphous relations between Africa and the rest of the world, China included.

Regarding China in particular, many questions remain. Among them, and the most fundamental one, relates to what does Africa really want from China. This is the question that only Africans within the African continent, or their representative body – the African Union (AU) Commission – should address. The Chinese appear very clear about what they want, hence the contradictions in the Chinese foreign policy as epitomised by the recent South Sudan case and also its new partnership with France on Africa.

Speaking in the context of the AU's Agenda 2063, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma said “the Chinese would help [us] build the Africa we want”. Of course this is naïve – particularly when national interest is taken into account – that any country, especially in another region, would help Africans build the Africa Africans want. Rather, China will help Africa build the Africa that the Chinese want. As for the Agenda 2063, just like the questionable “Africa rising” narrative and the so-called Sustainable Development Goals, so much has been said as far as the caveats of these initiatives is concerned.

Without a doubt, it is important that countries of the global south close ranks especially as the Empire and imperialism continue to run amok relentlessly. As argued elsewhere: the transformation of global relations for a just world can only be led by the global south. Africa, as part of the global south, has an important role to play in the transformation of global relations so that the whole of humanity benefits from the fruits of whatever progress is made. It might very well be that the global south needs its own vision and its own approach to development, instead of Africa pulling alone.

Indeed, in the desperate search for development, Africa has become a sort of laboratory in which various developmental experiments are performed. So-called development strategies such as Structural Adjustment Programmes, Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative, Blair Commission on Africa, New

Millennium Challenge Account under Bush Administration, African Growth and Opportunity Act under Clinton administration and Power Africa of the Obama administration and hordes of others have been designed by external interlocutors, which continue to see Africa in Hegelian terms of being the pupil, nay, undeveloped, hidden and dark continent of the world that is in need of parenting, tutelage and salvation. It is in this context that I have been arguing for own alternative socio-economic development approach for the African continent, and I have advanced some proposals to that effect.

Phineas Bbaala, an academic at the University of Zambia, recently made a point that “notwithstanding China’s long solidarity with Africa throughout the liberation struggle, and its contribution to the continent through foreign direct investment, infrastructure development, trade and bilateral aid, some of its recent engagements with the continent have raised questions of neo-colonialism tantamount to those in the North-South relations”. Bbaala concludes that although Africa-China relations are still largely “win-win” they could soon plunge into “win-lose” relations in favour of China. I am actually wondering if the relations could not end as “lose-lose” because all countries in the global south need each other and a quarrel between China and Africa would be unfortunate.

So, what do we want from the Chinese or anyone or any other country for that matter? I have argued that the starting point should be (1) thought leadership, (2) thought liberation and (3) critical consciousness (of both the political elites and the citizens). Africans must transform their thinking and orientation so that we can be free from dependent and subservient tendencies, especially to the so-called partners. Africa needs no validation of her internally devised strategies of development from anyone – we must follow any path that we think is best for us. The African intelligentsia is critical for this and we must commend those who have played their roles, often against all odds and making sacrifices.

In conclusion, 2016 is also an important year for Africa for we celebrate 120 years of Adwa African Victory, which drew its inspiration from ImpiYaseSandlwana. Celebrating such achievements, including the victory of the Khoi against the Portuguese in 1510, is part of remembering Africa’s glorious past. Being aware of the advanced knowledge that Africans created, as captured in the Egyptian Book of the Dead far before Walata and Timbuktu became prominent, which the so-called early Greek philosophers appropriated, is an important part of the quest for self-assertion and self-understanding to reclaim lost glory and recover Africa’s stolen legacy.

AiméCésaire, in a 1967 interview with the Haitian poet Rene Depestre, talks of a call to Africa: a process of disalienation and detoxification as an effort to reclaim Africa’s authentic character and to reclaim the African heritage – a way of emancipating consciousness.

Let us heed Césaire's call! Otherwise, African renaissance and pan-African unity will remain a pipe dream.