



## Globalization and the Underdevelopment of Africa: A Critical Analysis

HAMMOND OGIE OTEGHEKPEN, HARRIET EDOSEGHE OTEGHEKPEN  
University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria

**Abstract.** The intensification of global social, political, economic and cultural relationships has brought positive gains for some parts of the world, but this cannot be said of all countries and regions of the world. Many countries in the Global South have not had a fair share of the benefits of globalization due to the exploitative activities of the developed countries and their control over international organizations. These exploitative and hegemonic actions have resulted in the direct and indirect underdevelopment of African countries. The article therefore delves into the conceptual analysis of globalization, impact of the globalization process on the underdevelopment of Africa and recommendations on strategies to drastically reduce these negative impacts of globalization and benefit from the dividends the phenomenon has to offer African countries. Drawing on the Dependency Theory and adopting a critical literature synthesis, as the primary methodology, this paper makes the claim that an unfair international division of labor is maintained by the current global economic architecture. Because of this arrangement, African countries are positioned as both consumers of manufactured goods from the global "core" and constant suppliers of basic commodities. The study discovered that institutions like the IMF, World Bank, and WTO use policies to keep Africa weak, and that slavery, colonialism, and globalization generate inequality to impede African prosperity. Therefore, the report advises African leaders to navigate globalization by putting measures like investing in technical education, diversifying businesses, and encouraging import-substitution industrialization into practice.

**Keywords:** Globalization, Underdevelopment, Africa

### 1. Introduction

Globalization has grown to be the most extensive and dynamic trend in contemporary times, giving the world economy shared characteristics. Globalization is not a novel concept, both in Africa and globally. However, the meaning of the term depends on how one defines and describes globalization. For the continent, transcontinental ties and interactions are nothing new. Africa's history is distinguished by the involvement of external European and American parties. Beginning in the 15th century, African had extensive contact with the outside world, primarily Europe and America (Kasych and Vochozka, 2019).

As a result, Africa's history has experienced significant social, cultural, political, and economic change (Nadew, 2020). All facets of life—economic, cultural, environmental, and social—as well as interactions between governments and countries across the five continents are impacted by the multifaceted phenomenon of globalization. Increased financial and foreign direct investment flows, as well as an intensification of cross-border trade, are the hallmarks of the globalization phenomenon, which is fueled by fast deregulation and advancements in information technology (Daouas, 2001).

### 2. Globalization: Conceptual Analysis

The concept of globalization has a relatively long history that has generated enormous interest and debate among contemporary scholars. For them, the concept of globalization is not new, despite some scholars are of the opinion that globalization is categorized into three major epochs - 1870-1914, 1945-1980 and from 1980 till date. For these scholars, African has been in contact with other parts of the world and also had significant interactions within it. Interactions with the outside world particularly Europe

and America commenced way back in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and this interaction has significantly altered the course of African history- culturally, politically and economically (Osaghae and Haaga, 2016).

Different authors have used the concept of globalization in different ways. It has been used to refer to political and social strategies, a philosophy, and a market strategy. Nonetheless, academics generally agree that it guarantees the world's connectivity into an approachable and linked village, influencing conventional and domestic economics, ideologies, and events, thereby guaranteeing the closeness of economies, societies, and politics (Adesanya, 2022).

Although academics and the media have been using the term "globalization" a lot lately, it is not a completely new phenomenon. There are political, social, and economic definitions for the term "globalization." According to Awdel, Odel, and Saadi (2020), it can also be described as power in international economics, growth in global economics, broader intelligence, and higher scale and level of economy in respect to world boundaries.

### **3. The Concept of Underdevelopment.**

According to Cinjel, Abubakar, and Orluchukwu (2020), underdevelopment refers to societies that are deemed to be economically poor, low in industrial production, low in technological development, low in purchasing power, politically unstable, prevalent poverty, disease, squalor, low per-capita income, short lifespans, and primarily agrarian economies. Underdevelopment is defined as the opposite of development. A comparative aspect and the relationship of exploitation—that is, the exploitation of one country by another—are the two main components/aspects of underdevelopment, according to Walter Rodney (Arabu, 2024).

According to the UNDP (2001), underdevelopment is the state in which a nation has low per capita income, high levels of poverty, low levels of education, and insufficient industrialization and resource utilization. It goes on to say that the government's failure to provide for the needs of its citizens and promote their welfare is a major factor in developing nations. States with limited economic growth, poor governance, widespread extreme poverty, poor health, and slow educational advancement are considered underdeveloped.

### **4. Globalization: Historical Analysis**

Globalization, the process of nations becoming more integrated and dependent on one another in the political, social, cultural, and economic domains, emerged throughout a number of eras. Some scholars trace globalization back to the third century BCE, well before the European Age of Discovery and exploration of the New World, despite the fact that many scholars think it is a relatively new phenomenon (Frank, 1998). The earliest indications of modern globalization date back to the prehistoric era. Globalization was largely shaped by our forefathers' geographical expansion to every continent in the planet. The vast majority of people on the planet now lead settled lives thanks to the expansion of agriculture, which accelerated globalization (Steger, 2009).

The Islamic Empire established trade routes across the Indian and Mediterranean oceans during the Middle Ages. Later, these spread as far west as Muslim Spain and as far east as Indonesia. They and the Silk Road helped to the growth of globalization by connecting a significant portion of the then-known world. An important turning point in the evolution of globalization was the Age of Discovery, which began in the sixteenth century (Chukwuemeka, Okpe, and Adakwa, 2024).

### **5. Economic Globalization and Underdevelopment of African Economies.**

Uzodigwe, Oguche, Akogwu, Arinze, and Ezech (2023) state that economic globalization is one of the three primary aspects of globalization that are frequently observed in both academic and international contexts. The extensive international flow of products, capital, services, technology, and information is referred to as economic globalization. It is the increasing interconnection and economic integration of national, regional, and indigenous economies worldwide as a result of increased cross-border trade in capital, technology, goods, and services. European expeditions motivated by imperial ambitions and resource exploitation marked the beginning of the penetration of western civilization and culture into Africa. African academics contend that this practice continued even after independence, influencing the course of the continent. Africa faces many issues in the twenty-first century, such as the legacy of colonialism, foreign aid, foreign direct investment (FDI), discussions about climate change, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and cultural diplomacy as a new strategic tool (Andrew, 2015).

It is impossible to comprehend Africa's current situation without looking at its colonial background. Colonialism was essentially an exploitative endeavor in which European nations took wealth, resources, and cheap labor from Africa, creating the groundwork for structural underdevelopment. Africa's colonial past is intricately linked to its current state. Colonialism was fundamentally an exploitative endeavor to extract Africa's wealth rather than a civilizing mission. European powers destroyed pre-existing African systems and imposed artificial borders, frequently forcing hostile communities into single states and creating the conditions for protracted ethnic conflicts (Adams, 2025).

Africa's place in the world economy is significantly biased in favor of Western nations. African nations are kept at the bottom of the global value chain by unfair trade agreements that guarantee they will continue to export raw resources without adding value. African goods find it challenging to compete when Western nations use tariffs, quotas, and subsidies to safeguard their industries. This is having an impact on the development of African nations since it is evident that the majority of raw materials in the world today are sourced or originate from Africa. Despite making up a sizable portion of the raw material industry, Africa still has little to no control over trade values, so it is still unclear how this will lead to growth (Adams, 2025).

In terms of economic growth and development, African nations have benefited comparatively less from the advantages of globalization than other regions of the world. The majority of African nations failed to seize the opportunity presented by the dynamic growth momentum associated with globalization in the 1970s and 1980s because they had primarily adopted an inward-oriented development strategy in the early decades of the post-independence period. They faced modest growth and stagnation and were mainly marginalized rather than becoming increasingly integrated into the global economy. Consequently, poverty has become more prevalent and severe in the area. The number of impoverished people in Africa nearly doubled from 164 million in 1981 to 313 million in 2001, according to the US\$1 per day international poverty level. Although globalization has helped Africa's economy grow somewhat, it hasn't yet made it easier for the continent's nations to undergo the structural change necessary to speed economic development and poverty alleviation. Rather, globalization has done very little to alleviate poverty and has instead tended to increase intra-country inequality (Nissanke and Thorbecke, 2007).

## 6. Political Globalization and Underdevelopment in Africa

Political globalization, is the growth of state integration in the international political arena, both in terms of size and function. They claim that it is the growth of an international political system and its institutions, which oversee interregional trade. Political globalization is the growth of state integration in the international political arena, both in terms of size and function. They claim that it is the growth of an international political system and its institutions, which oversee interregional trade (Uzodigwe et al. (2023).

Over the years, researchers in Africa have been concerned about globalization. While some contend that it has greatly benefited the continent of Africa, others disagree, believing that it has caused more harm than good. Scholars from both rich and developing nations have debated the idea of globalization. While proponents argue in favour of globalization, opponents see it as an attempt at the re-colonization of the weaker economies by the stronger nations.

One may argue that Africa is a continent with a number of political inequalities. Political disputes between political parties or between ethnic groups are a constant occurrence in African nations (Onebunne, 2017).

According to Obasa (2020), neo-colonialists and imperialists from developed nations have shaped Africa's political structure. This is experienced by the countries of sub-Saharan Africa through financial aid and other forms of help. The neo-colonial state frequently receives international loans and aid with "strings" attached. The pursuit of policies in the neo-colonial state that benefit imperialists and the payment of greater interest on loans given to the neo-colonial nations for development objectives are two examples of these threads. Therefore, foreign aid and loans are revolving credits that are paid for by the neo-colonial master, go through the neo-colonial state, and then return to the neo-colonial master as higher profits (Obasa, 2020).

Africa has had to deal with a number of issues, including political instability, conflict, and weak institutions, which have further impeded growth and prolonged the cycle of poverty in many nations. Globalization has made these problems worse and presented Africa with both opportunities and difficulties. Globalization has made it possible for African nations to access international markets and draw in foreign investment, both of which can promote economic growth and development. However, it has

also increased competition, marginalized some African nations and widened the gap between the global north and south. From a political standpoint, globalization has also made problems in Africa worse by encouraging economic liberalization and deregulation, which have raised social unrest and inequality. Additionally, globalization has made it easier for terrorism and transnational crime to proliferate, endangering Africa's peace and progress (Jev, Wanan, Jacob, Yusuf, Bobuin, and Yongo, 2024).

Africa has fared much worse than other regions during the last 50 years of globalization. Africa now faces economic, political, social, cultural, and environmental issues as a result of globalization. The meddling of international players in African politics is one of the main challenges of globalization in Africa. The feeling of unity and communal life gave way to individuality as a result of economic globalization. Because politics cannot accomplish its objectives without the participation of the masses, this made African politics challenging. Africans' rights to autonomy and self-determination were taken away by globalization. However, this gave African politicians a puppet role in the continent's internal affairs.

This is due to the fact that if the politicians did not modify their policies and tactics to allow the entry of multinational firms, the source of foreign aid would cease. African governments' ability to protect national security and peace was curtailed by globalization. The dishonest organizations of international actors make the majority of the decisions that affect Africans' destiny (Nadew, 2020).

## 7. Cultural Globalization and Underdevelopment in Africa

Losing cultural and national identity is a primary risk of globalization, which frequently eradicates local traditions and can develop into a covert form of neo-colonization. For example, the United States exercises this influence through CNN and its dominance over the United Nations Organization to counter opposition. Additionally, individuals risk losing their unique identity to the anonymity of the global mass, resulting in inauthenticity and a lost sense of self (Adefarasin & Adefarasin, 2023).

In Africa, external cultural hegemony undermines autonomy, self-determination, and cultural diversity. Due to the arrival of video films and modern technologies, people are abandoning traditional practices like drama, carvings, and melodies (Belete, 2024).

Ultimately, cultural globalization spreads Western lifestyles as an old enemy in a new form, acting as an expression of colonialism and imperialism. In Nigeria, adoption of Western civilization has restricted African practices, leading to a general decline in morality and responsibility. Similarly, most South Africans have given up their African language, culture, and religion to emulate American rap artists (Daramola, 2020). Western media accelerates this decline by acting as a devil's advocate, constantly barraging African media with meticulously crafted content to spread Western culture—a phenomenon explained by cultural imperialism and acculturation theories (Daramola & Oyinade, 2015). Finally, globalization has commercialized African culture, exploiting traditional music and art for financial benefit. Packaging and selling these artifacts as exotic commodities without regard for cultural relevance has caused a severe decline in cultural values and authenticity (Ukhami, Lassana, & Kabir, 2024).

## 8. Globalization and Environmental Degradation in Africa

Economic globalization propels environmental deterioration in Africa by hastening resource extraction, industrial manufacturing, and pollution via heightened international commerce and multinational investments [Obiora, 2019; Akadiri et al., 2022]. This procedure amplifies energy usage and environmental impacts, whereas lenient ecological policies in emerging countries intensify deterioration and diminish living standards [Akadiri et al., 2022; Aladejare, 2025]. Moreover, worldwide resource demand leads to land displacement, adversely affecting African indigenous populations through climate-induced catastrophes and the disruption of their traditional, low-carbon economies [Forzong, 2025].

## 9. Theoretical Framework

Dependency theory, a school of thought that emerged in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, posits that the global economic system is structured to benefit a “core” of wealthy nations at the expense of a “periphery” of developing countries. Its central tenet, that underdevelopment is not a stage, but a condition created by the integration of peripheral nations into the global capitalist system on unequal terms, provides a powerful critique of modernization (Almakaty, 2025).

Dependency theory serves as a core analytical framework for this study, arguing that modern globalization perpetuates the underdevelopment of African nations by enforcing a system of economic exploitation and subordination. This perspective

suggests that current global integration mechanisms actively hinder local development, resulting in a persistent cycle of dependency rather than sustainable economic growth

The propounders of dependency theory are Paul Baran (1957), Andre Gunder Frank (1966), Theotonio dos Santos (1970), and others. They are of the opinion that dependency places primary responsibility for African poverty and underdevelopment on Western imperialist powers. It holds that these powers have impoverished Africa and the rest of the third world so that today poor countries are dependent on rich ones (Okechukwu and Arua, 2019).

## 10. Conclusion

Academics observe that Africa's growth following independence continues to be unsatisfactory. Although historical elements such as colonialism and neo-colonialism are sometimes cited as culprits, the primary cause of Africa's underdevelopment is the West's apprehension that African industrial growth will undermine Western capitalism. If Africa were to refine 70% of its own raw materials and manufacture its own machinery, Western firms would forfeit access to inexpensive resources and controlled markets. To combat this systematic oppression and use globalization, African leaders need to implement targeted structural strategies.

## 11. Recommendations

In order to combat the predatory dynamics of globalization, African leaders need to reshape the continent's role in the international marketplace. Essential tactics encompass allocating resources to vocational education, enhancing infrastructure, assisting small and medium enterprises with contemporary manufacturing technology, and implementing import-substitution industrialization to disrupt the entrenched global division of labour.

Moreover, Africa should emphasize the development of digital infrastructure and human resources to localize technology and diminish its dependence on Western neocolonial powers. Due to the potential for successful autonomous industrialization to provoke Western economic sanctions or military destabilization, the African Union must enhance continental integration to establish a cohesive market and a coordinated defense strategy. To attain technological autonomy, African decision-makers ought to circumvent Western obstacles and establish unimpeded alliances with Eastern Bloc and Western-

labeled "rogue" nations to obtain sophisticated scientific expertise.

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