

From African village
to Global village



BY MWALIMU GEORGE NGWANE

GLOBALISATION

Going global

The central theme of the Africa-France Summit (which took place in Yaounde from 17-19 January 2001) was to discuss how prepared Africa is for globalisation.

Bala Usman, a renowned Nigerian political scientist, defined globalisation as 'an empty political cliché with a neocolonial outfit'. His compatriot, Tade Akin Aina, declared globalisation as a new phase of capitalist expansion, focussed on exploitation, accumulation, inequality and polarisation.

In its most basic form, Senegalese writer, Demba Moussa Dembele, regards globalisation and structural adjustment programmes as being among the main instruments of the West's recolonisation strategy of the African continent.

The concept 'globalisation' can be traced back to the 1970s. It was during that time that some European scholars developed the concept of the 'New International Division of Labour' - essentially, the concept refers to large-scale companies in developed countries exporting more of their production to less developed countries, thereby taking advantage of the lower labour costs. While this happened,

developed countries remained at the centre of these international companies, due to their advanced position in communication and transport (...CODESRIA Bulletin, 1997). Eurocentric discourses on globalisation have focussed on its advantages *vis-a-vis* Africa. Apologists say globalisation would fight inflation and secure financial stability through liberalised economies. They maintain that through observing the rules of open trade, fair competition and unfettered capital movements, globalisation is potentially the most effective way to end world poverty and spread the benefits of modernisation throughout the world.

On the other hand, Pan African scholars argue that due to the harsh realities of unequal exchange, income polarisation between developed and developing countries, and the continued deterioration of developing countries with regard to trade, neo-liberal globalisation is an illusory concept. Weakened economic control - due to the policies of the IMF and the World Bank within the framework of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) - will give globalisation the impetus to confine Africa as the supplier of raw materials and commodities, and the consumer of manufactured goods from developed countries. Consequently, this means that globalisation will more than likely increase the income gap between the developed North and the less developed South. In fact, the 1999 United Nations (UN) Human Development Report revealed that a fifth of the world's people are living in the highest income countries and enjoy 86% of the world's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), 82% of the world's export markets, and 68% of the world's direct foreign investment. Meanwhile, the bottom fifth - mainly the poorest countries in Africa - has about one percent in each sector. The report further highlights the wealth gap by stating the fact that the richest 200 people in the world have a net worth of US\$1,032 billion - equivalent to the income of 41% of the world's population (AFRICA Today, 1999). This inequality, according to columnist Tunde Obadina, reflects a stark reality of life in our globalised world - wealth tends to generate more wealth, poverty breeds poverty. How does one reconcile this paradox of African poverty when, in addition to its reservoir of human resources, our continent has 97% of the world's chrome reserves; 85% of the world's platinum reserves; 64% of the world's manganese reserves; 25% of the world's Uranium reserves and 13% of the world's copper reserves (without mentioning bauxite, nickel and lead); 20% of the world's oil trade; 70% of the world's cocoa production; one-third of the world's coffee production and 50% of the world's palm produce. (Organisation of African Unity O.A.U handbook).

In spite of all these riches, Africa has 34 of the 48 poorest countries of the world... Eh Eh Africa! Debt cancellation, or admission into Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC), have not proven to be economic antidotes for Africa's debt burden. Furthermore, what global solitarity are we talking about in a world that knows no morality? In addition, why has black Africa, which accounts for about 26 million HIV patients, been refused affordable generic drugs? While we have broken the silence on AIDS, Western pharmaceutical laboratories have not broken the drug production monopoly for this pandemic. For example, Pfizer (a French pharmaceutical company) sells Fluconazole at FCFA 6200 a capsule in South Africa, while its generic is sold at FCFA 813 in India and FCFA 325 in Thailand (Jeune Afrique Economie, September 2000). In other words, while the least affected countries have access to capsules, the hardest hit (in Africa) have access to condoms. Where is the global justice in AIDS research, when medical practitioners (hail Professor Anomah Ngu) and traditional healers are refused recognition for their findings?

Owing to the blatant double standards in globalisation, African leaders and scholars have been trying to circumvent it by proposing concrete Pan African agendas. Various resolutions and declarations adopted by African heads of states in Algiers in September 1968, and in Addis Ababa in August 1970 and May 1973, stress that the economic integration of the continent is a prerequisite for the realisation of the

OAU's objectives. Successive declarations, such as the Monrovia Declaration (July, 1979), the Lagos Plan of Action (1980) and the Abuja Treaty (1991), have been adopted to promote economic, social and cultural development to integrate African economies, thereby increasing economic self-reliance and promoting an endogenous, self-sustained development (OAU handbook). Weh! African leaders! Do you always remember what you sign? Then, in 1999, Muammar Gaddafi relived the dream of Kwame Nkrumah, Lumumba, Cheik Anta Diop and Sankara - the dream of a continental village by way of an African Union. The Act has already been signed by 35 countries, and four national assemblies have already ratified it (President Biya assured the nation, during the Africa-France press conference, that Cameroon would soon sign and ratify it). Hopefully, the African Union will be a force to be reckoned with by next year.

It is only logical that African leaders continue with this coherent and collective strategy, aimed at defending the basic interests of Africans. In his book, Communal Liberalism, President Biya cautioned Africans to be aware of the fact that a disunited Africa could not hope to change anything within the world order. Cameroon needs to muster all its force, so as to contribute to the strengthening of African unity at the continental, regional and sub-regional levels. Without an African Union, Africa will remain marginalised and exploited, mere pawns in the global game. In the end, instead of being a member of the global village, Africa will become a victim of global pillage. Europe has had its European Union. It must now allow Africa to have its own African Union - then we can both sing the global song. African leaders must break away from the 'herd' mentality that makes them followers of another's path. Instead, they should be 'blazers of their own trails'.

It is against this backdrop that the Africa-France Summit could arguably be seen as a distraction from the ideal of an African Renaissance, which was gathering huge support during the Lome OAU 2000 summit. The Africa-France Summit was also a neocolonial sabotage to the advancement of the African Union ideal designed to usher Africa into the third millennium. Yes! Whenever the African people try to reclaim their vision of unity and intra-Africa trade, whenever we attempt to reassert our unshakable survival strategy as a continent, the West (in connivance with their African quislings) transforms our collective symphony into a jangling cacophony of self-interest. But for how long? Should we face these betrayals by resigning to fate and leaving our destinies in the hands of those who continue to sabotage our development? Independence, where are you? (Manu Dibango) Why is it - to paraphrase Michael Odhiambo - that a continent which, 41 years ago, appeared poised for a quantum leap into development and modernisation, suddenly started slipping into the doldrums of hopelessness and despair? The answer lies in a crisis of leadership and the weakness of Africa's civil society. Nonetheless, the idea of an African Union is evolving and growing. From the west coast of Ghana, to the eastern shores of Tanzania, the echoes of greater economic integration and continental unity can be heard. Multi-party democratic futilities and misguided economic policies are the last dark comedies of an Afro-pessimistic century. The new century in Africa will be characterised by three 'D's'- Decolonisation, Democratisation and Development. These goals will not be achieved via decisions made in Washington, New York, Paris, Brussels or London. They will be achieved by building a new and united Africa. Only as a united continent, can Africa restore its role 'as an active player on the world stage, and a leading participant in building a pluralistic and progressive world civilisation'. Is Africa listening?

Notes

References
