



# A Single Factor Theory of Africa's Underdevelopment

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**Abstract:** Africa is in dire need of economic, socio-political and infrastructural developments that will take it out of abject poverty and other forms of backwardness that have made it a subject of scorn among its peers in spite of its vast natural and human resources. Many scholars have attributed the economic and developmental state of the African continent to a number of factors including colonialism, poverty, poor leadership, illiteracy, war and ethnic rivalry. This study, while not disputing those reasons as identified by earlier scholars, is rather of the view that there is a singular factor that is fundamental to Africa's underdevelopment and all other factors aside this singular factor are somehow offshoots of that singular factor. The study established that the first step ever towards any significant development in the history of mankind was prompted by the climate. Therefore, the development of Africa could not have been at the same pace with the rest of the world that were not equally endowed with favourable climates like those in Africa. The early discoveries and developments in the history of mankind encouraged more advanced developments. It became obvious from this study that the creative and problem resolution ability of the early African man was greatly incapacitated by the continent's favourable climatic conditions whereas the less favourable conditions of his counterpart in other continents turned out to be an advantage to his counterpart's early and progressive developments over the ages. African leaders need to be more people oriented in their economic programmes, promote national interests above their personal and foreign masters' interests for the good of the continent that has not only become a mockery but also a global problem in view of the high influx of its people on illegal migrations to the rest of the world for the purpose of seeking better lives. The continent should therefore be both economically and politically independent.

**Keywords:** Africa, Climate, Colonialism, Theory, Underdevelopment

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## 1. Introduction

Several literature regard African countries generally as undeveloped, underdeveloped or developing [7, 9, 11, 37]. Only a few of them like South Africa, Algeria and Mauritius are regarded as near developed or emerging markets with respect to infrastructure [10, 12, 66]. It is obvious that several economic indicators like high unemployment rates, high inflation, high cost of living and import dependence, as well as socio-political factors such as political instability, insecurity and prevalent social vices especially among the youths are prevalent in virtually all African countries.

Africa has also been described as a highly endowed continent with an abundance of natural and human resources [30, 57, 59]. Several of the natural resources remain largely untapped while the human resource that ought to be an asset to the continent has become a liability not only to itself but to

some other continents of the world. The continent is plagued with high levels of unemployment, illiteracy, avoidable diseases, youth involvement in acts of terrorism, militancy and other social vices [59, 73-74]. Many youths have tried to escape from the continent to seek better lives elsewhere, especially in Europe and America, where they would not mind living as slaves and refugees. For the past few years, the continent has received pitiable news of many African youths losing their lives on the high seas while trying to cross in rickety and unlicensed boats from Africa to Europe. Many European countries have numerous Africans as illegal immigrants making a living through menial jobs and worse still through prostitution. There is no doubt that many Africans and their descendants living within and outside the continent have made and are still making phenomenal impact in every facet of life. However the state of the African underdevelopment which has invariably prompted some of its citizenry to seek better lives outside the continent is a

source of concern for this study.

The state of a nation's socio-economic development goes a long way to define the respect that would be accorded the citizenry. Citizens of developed economies generally attract more respect from undeveloped economies as they are most often regarded as expatriates or tourists when they visit. However, citizens of the undeveloped economies attract less respect and are often despised and treated as illegal immigrants and refugees.

Many scholars agree that the African continent is lagging far behind others in terms of economic growth and development, standard of living, security and political stability [6, 9, 19, 47, 51]. In fact, Africa is described as the least developed continent in the world [42]. The scholars have equally identified several reasons such as political instability, colonization and deliberate attempts to frustrate its development by the developed economies as being accountable for the poor state of development in the continent. Africa is more import dependent than export dependent [4, 60]. What it exports are largely agricultural produce and raw minerals for meagre incomes compared to where value is added to the items prior to export.

This study took cognizance of the pre-colonization era where Africa was free like any other continent of the world to determine its fate. There is no widely acceptable date the earth came into existence, therefore determining the age of the world lies between the dates provided by the various religious books and archaeological findings. While many of the religious books put the world's age in thousands of years, the archaeologists put it at millions and billions of years [33, 36, 52]. This study would therefore assume that there was a time in history when the people of the world regardless of colour, race and location had the same opportunities to develop to their maximum potential.

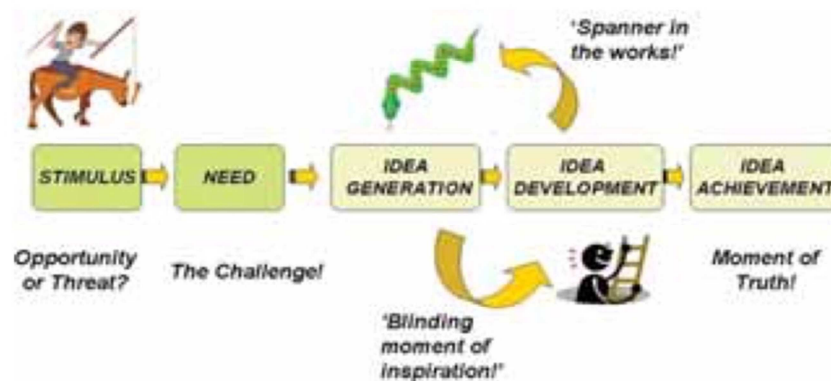
Why is Africa, regarded as a third world economy, visibly far behind most countries of the world to the extent that most of the products of mechanical, technological, medical and socio-political advancements found within the continent have their origins traceable to some other continents? If the argument that the world is flat, which literarily means a level playing field, is upheld, it therefore pre-supposes at least for the purpose of this study that every form of development was once at zero (flat) level [14, 23]. One can then seek to know the explanations for the disparity in the levels of development and advancement from one country to the other. Why are some countries lagging behind others in terms of development and advancement? The question this study would be addressing is, what could have triggered the development in the developed economies at the beginning of their worlds that made them far ahead of their African counterparts? Similar to that question is, what could have made Africa so complacent, right from the beginning of its world that left it behind its counterparts in terms of innovation and development?

## 2. Conceptual Framework

Inventions can oftentimes be the solution to challenges or limitations of the human society and the human race at large. Developments recorded by the human race throughout the ages can in a way be regarded as the outcomes of innovation and inventions borne out of necessities and the need for improvement.

Figure 1 below provides a conceptual framework for development arising from necessity and frustration. The process of initial development therefore entails a stimulus that creates a need for solutions.

### 'Necessity the mother of invention'



Source: [76].

**Figure 1.** Simple model for illustrating the nature of the creative process.

The stimulus could be life threatening issues that create the need for survival which leads to a generation of ideas. The ideas go through the process of validation and are thereafter subjected to experimentation which depicts idea development

as shown in Figure 1 above. When the idea is tested and is able to satisfy the needs created by the stimulus, a development is said to have been achieved.

### 3. Literature Review

Economic development often signals advancement and progress, however the level and pace of development vary from one country to another. What triggers development also varies from one economy to the other [8, 18, 27, 29, 31, 67]. Innovation plays a very critical role in world development even from the medieval ages and this is evidenced in improved standards of living, improved efficiency and economies of scale amongst others [2, 22, 54, 64]. In fact, several studies have tried to explain the evolution and progress of human development aided by innovation. For instance, a study of the early to Middle Stone Age transition and the emergence of modern human behaviour revealed that some of the early inventions could be traced to the Sangoan industry (a Paleolithic tool making style) traced to the Congo basin, Lower and Middle Nile, and other parts of Africa [75]. A study traced human development from the Paleolithic period through to the Mesolithic period, the archaic to the modern state [32]. In each of the stages of development, humans were challenged by their survival instincts which was referred to as stress [32].

Many factors account for the level of world development and the disparities in development from one economy to the other. For instance, South Korea's economic success and development can be traced to its colonization by the Japanese between 1905 and 1945 [41]. The Japanese influence turned a country that was known for corruption and ineffective social institutions into a highly authoritarian and penetrating organization that was capable of simultaneously controlling and transforming the economy into a production-oriented one, with an increase in manufacturing activities and exports. It is interesting to note that the colonialism that advanced the Korean economic development was also given as the major cause for the backwardness of Africa's economic development and growth. Africa was described as a continent plagued by hunger, war, illness and poverty and may be tending towards a catastrophe [50]. The actual state of Africa was further corroborated as a continent in abject poverty, state weakness and insecurity which is now threatening the security and welfare of other continents [70].

The state of Africa's underdevelopment was viewed by two schools of thought: the endogenous) and the exogenous). The endogenous school of thought argues that the bane of Africa's development is an inside problem caused and located within the continent and its people. This school of thought refuses to accord any serious importance to whatever damages that could be attributed to colonialism of the African countries. In fact, some scholars belonging to the school of thought argued that African colonialism brought political stability to the continent while it also laid the foundation for its economic independence and infrastructural development [50]. This school of thought believes that the underdevelopment of Africa was caused by the post-colonial political system of the continent rather than colonialization. This school of thought strongly believes that the continent is more advantaged on many fronts than a lot of the developed

economies in terms of the abundance and variety of natural resources the continent possesses. It traces the bane of Africa's emancipation and development to the massive level of corruption, weak leadership, lack of corporate governance, ethnic and religious conflicts, political instability, high level of illiteracy, promotion of personal interest above national interest, absence of the rule of law and poor education system. In examining some of the reasons put forward by the endogenous school of thought, it may not be out of the way to consent that compared with other developed continents, Africa is far behind. For instance, while there has always been a high level of illiteracy on the continent, many of those that were able to acquire education within the continent were barely proficient and grossly lacked the technical know-how required in bringing acquired knowledge to practice because the educational curricula were mostly theoretical and archaic. The prevalence and the effects of these inadequacies are visible across the continent.

The second school of thought (exogenous) believes strongly that the colonialization of Africa was the major drawback of the continent's emancipation and development. It argues that imperialism and slave trade ensured that the most brilliant and agile Africans, who could have developed their continent, were forcefully taken away while those that were able to escape were left traumatized and in fear and could not really do anything to advance the course of their development. Furthermore, colonialism introduced ethnic supremacy among tribes that had once been living together in unity prior to its advents. The continent was turned to a raw material production colony for European factories and exploited by their Caucasian and African collaborators. The effect remains till date. The school of thought believes that Africa is poorer and socially and developmentally backward today than it would have been had colonialism not occurred [5, 34, 63, 65, 72]. According to the school of thought, African countries are poorer today than they were at independence. The effect of European slavery and colonialism is evident in the continent's technological deficits and political and economic backwardness [5]. A political system that was alien to its natural tendencies and system of governance and emancipation was imposed on the continent by the colonial masters. The new political system distorts the continent's growth and development to the extent that it is yet to recover and may never recover. In another vein, colonialism was not only repressive to the colonized and their development but equally exploitative of the people's intellects, energy and economic resources to the advantage of the colonial masters and deprivation of the colonized [5]. Colonialism is a system associated with economic depression, political repression and cultural oppression of the colonized by the colonial masters [58, 70]. In summary, the exogenous school of thought believe that colonialism should be blamed for the current state of Africa's development. It is evident from the Rwanda genocide that the colonial master caused a major division and hatred between people of the same tribe and culture who were brothers and lived peaceful with each other before the arrival of colonial

masters and the Church [45, 77].

While both schools of thought may not be ignored in exhuming reasons for why and how Africa is where it is today in terms of development whether political, economic or technological, there should be at least one fundamental factor in nature that accounts for the continent's underdevelopment. The reason why the arguments of the two schools of thought are being discounted lies in the fact that not only is it that the African continent was colonized, America was also colonized by Britain just like the Koreans were colonized by the Japanese. Those other previously colonized economies have since been emancipated and stand shoulder to shoulder if not taller in every aspect of development than their colonial masters. For instance, America for several decades has been the world power and leads in terms of technology while it has exported its political systems to several parts of the world. It remains a close ally of no lower repute to Britain, its former colonial master. Australia was once a colony of Britain, but today it's almost at par with its colonial masters and /or the rest of the developed world. Many attempts to colonize China failed but nevertheless it has had its own share of an oppressive and repressive system of governance under the emperors. It was able to do away with the imperial system of governance and introduced a more liberal and people oriented governance style and without any doubt, China remains a country to be reckoned with in terms of economic and technological development.

An unpublished statement was also made by a Nigerian presidential aspirant that "blacks are not wired to invent" [62]. In spite of the level of civilization that Europeans and the rest of the world brought to Africa through education, travels and technology amongst others, some repressive beliefs among Africans still subsist. For instance, albinos are still considered as evil and in some places are killed for ritual purposes [17, 49, 68, 71]. The killing of twins in parts of Nigeria which was stopped by the intervention of Mary Slessors, a Scottish missionary to Nigeria between 1876 and 1915 would have continued till later years [3, 20-21]. The practice of burying servants with native kings who were in some cases educated and civilized are feared to still be in existence in some parts of Africa.

Why is Africa different? Some racist explanations exploiting nature put the blame for the continent's underdevelopment on the colour of Africans [24, 35, 69]. Some other scientifically unsubstantiated theories argue that Africans possess lower IQs compared to other races [16, 40, 46]. In trying to justify the low IQs of Africans, the school of thought considers the level of wastage and flamboyant display of wealth by Africans in the midst of poverty, especially where such wealth could be deployed for more productive activities and for the betterment of their society. For instance, currency notes from supposedly hard earned incomes are usually displayed and trampled upon by the blacks at societal parties like weddings, parties and funerals while some people sew the notes together to make garments, umbrellas, shoes and bags. The arguments for the low IQ levels of blacks compared with whites were not necessarily

in written or oral examinations but in the application of common sense. Though this study would also be exploiting nature to explain the reason behind the underdevelopment of the African continent and if any, the slow pace of the development. The continent's climate would be the basis for the explanation.

There is no dispute that Africa is underdeveloped and lags behind other continents but the cause of the underdevelopment remains uncertain [11]. There are divergent views by scholars as to the primary cause of Africa's underdevelopment. Some scholars attributed the state of Africa's underdevelopment to the prevalence of diseases on the continent [13, 25]. Others opined that the slavery of African citizens by the various colonial masters distorted the continent's self-development and growth [26, 38, 48, 55-56, 61]. The European colonial powers terrorized, exterminated, abused and misused indigenous Africans and left the continent in a state of underdevelopment and the survivors impoverished [7]. Africa is yet to recover from the damages done by colonialism to the psyche and mental balance of the Africans while some of the past and incumbent African leaders operate in manners not too different from the styles of the colonial masters. The colonial masters may not be wholly responsible for the continent's underdevelopment rather the application of inappropriate development theories is the major bane of continent's development [53]. Africa has been bombarded with several development theories which, though worked effectively to transform the developed countries but, were inappropriate for the Africa in every respect as they made the continent depend on the developed economies for development. Africa should have its home grown development theories that are peculiar to the continent's specific needs and resources [53]. Such theories should promote the dissociation of the continent temporarily from international trades so that it can establish its own and develop its own industries to the point that it can trade competitively in the global markets without being exploited as it is being done now. The theory of dependency is a situation in which the development and growth of an autonomous nation's economy is dictated by the activities and policies of another nation [28]. The theory makes one nation subservient to another; though it may be autonomous in word, it is not in a political and economic manner. The dependency theory is in practice across the African continent. It is hurting, repressing and limiting for the continent.

This study is not discrediting the reasons that these scholars have advanced to explain the underdevelopment of Africa, however it is of the view that those reasons are possibly offshoots of at least one fundamental reason that was present at the point in time the entire universe was at zero level of development. Human development of all forms, aside creation attributed to divine nature, was the product of evolution, starting from inventions and innovation to improvements. The pre, post and stone-age preservative, mechanical, technological, infrastructural and a host of other life-dependent evolutionary developments occurred at ground zero. A study of the early man through the Stone Age tracked

provided a track from ground zero level of development of how humans evolved from prey hunting, fruit gathering and nomadic lifestyle to inventing weapons and making fire from stones [44]. It is this fundamental reason that the study decided to identify and examine the single factor that possibly triggered African underdevelopment at the point the entire universe was at zero level of development. This study is also not denying the early inventions that have traces to Africa. Some of the early inventions in Africa that are traceable to periods from Middle Stone Age and Late Stone Age include the lithic technology found in Tanzania and Kenya and production of blades in bifacial and unifacial forms in East Africa [15, 43]. Egypt is prized among the early inventors of arts, engineering, medicine, astronomy, mummification and sports [1, 39].

#### **4. The Effect of Climate on Africa's Development**

This study aims to explore the role of climate in explaining the underdevelopment of Africa from the time the entire human race was assumed to be at zero level. The assumption is that every race was created with the same IQ level but with different natural resources depending on their location. The one factor theory of development that this study is proposing to explain African underdevelopment would be illustrated as follows.

Africa's climate is considered more favourable and friendly than most other parts of the world. Assume a piece of cloth is given each to a naked African and a naked European, both living in their own respective continents, and that there is no other form of civilization (zero level) in any of these continents. Further assume that neither of them knows about the existence of the other or any other human on the surface of the earth. While the African, because of his continent's friendly climate, may decide to tie the cloth around his neck, waist or not at all, he has a higher chance of survival than the European whose climate could be life threatening due to the harshness of the weather especially in winter. The harmattan season which is the equivalent of winter is not as life threatening as the latter. The European will have to devise a way of deploying the same piece of cloth given to his fellow African in a manner that keeps him warm, which requires deep thinking, invention, innovation and resource management. If the African was also put in that life threatening state, he would have done the same, as his survival thinking faculty would be activated much more, and faster than when he was put in an environment with a friendlier climate. The analogy of the piece of cloth can be extended to two men that suffer from serious mental illness of the same proportion, each living in the two continents - climate-friendly Africa and cold Europe. While the one on the African continent can walk about and survive in the harshest of the continent's weather, his counterpart in Europe dares not. Otherwise, he would freeze to death. This analogy further presupposes that no amount of mental illness would

likely make a madman in Europe walk about naked in the harshest of weathers. The harsh climate or situation has the potency to activate the thinking faculty of a man and bring out the best in him. This implies that the climate of a continent impacts significantly on the innovative ability of the continent's inhabitants. Similarly, the fertility of the arable land across the African continent coupled with favourable weather conditions all through the year did not pose any challenge to the continent at the outset of human development. In some parts of Africa today, crops require no fertilization to improve yields. Irrigation is not required to sustain crops and in many cases, seedlings dropped by birds in transit can grow and blossom without any husbandry. This is the generosity of the African climate which, rather than challenging the thinking faculty of the continent's inhabitants has left them contented with its nature's produce.

In a nutshell, the generally friendlier African climate did not pose much of a challenge that would have activated the innovative faculty of the African man. This argument is in consonance with a common saying that "necessity is the mother of invention". The necessity for survival posed by the harsh climate in many developed continents prompted inventions which were continually improved upon. It may be argued that the developed economies may have overcome the necessity for survival, but their continued development may not be unconnected with the need for more efficient systems, improving the standard of living of its people, increasing competition and for economic and political reasons amongst others. It may also be argued that not all parts of Africa have friendly climates. However, it was much easier to migrate from unfriendly climatic regions in Africa to friendlier ones unlike other continents where they might likely experience similar climate across the continents at the same time and/ or where mobility at the early stage of human development could be a challenge, if not impossible.

#### **5. Conclusion**

This study has not discredited the several accounts by earlier studies to explain the underdevelopment of the African continent but rather considers them as factors arising from a single factor that is fundamental to the take-off of any form of human development from ground zero. The study has established that the first step towards any significant development in the history of mankind was prompted by the climate. The early discoveries and development encouraged more advanced development. The development of Africa could not have been at the same pace with the rest of the world as they were not equally endowed with favourable climates like those in Africa. It is obvious that the creative and problem solving ability of the early African man was greatly incapacitated by the continent's favourable climate whereas the less favourable climate of his counterpart in another continent has turned out to be an advantage to his counterpart's early and progressive development over the ages. However, now that the global climate change has not exempted the African continent from its adverse effects, it is

time for the continent to develop and be committed to home grown policies that will aid its rapid development and close the massive gap between it and the rest of the world.

African leaders need to be more people oriented in their economic programmes and promote national interests above personal and foreign masters' interests for the good of the continent. This is pertinent now that Africa has not only become a mockery but also a global problem regarding the illegal migration of African citizens to the rest of the world for the purpose of seeking better lives. There is no doubt that the continent is vastly endowed with all natural resources and it should be a bride to be courted and not humiliated or trampled upon by the developed economies that in any case cannot exist without the African continent. Africa should therefore be economically and politically independent of the world.

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