pavillon de la création et de l'innovation sociale

INNOVATION FOUNDATION FOR DEMOCRACY

In partnership with the Paris Peace Forum and the International Commission of Jurists (Kenyan Section)

Bringing society back in

60 propositions in the service of African futures

White Paper submitted to Heads of State and Government on the occasion of the Africa Forward Summit, Nairobi, 11–12 May 2026

Johannesburg, 5 May 2026

Table of contents

FOREWORD

Achille Mbembe

The contributions that follow form part of the *White Paper* submitted to Heads of State and Government on the occasion of the *Africa Forward Summit* in Nairobi (11–12 May 2026). The *White Paper* is composed of six chapters, each structured around a set of findings and accompanied by recommendations. Conceived by the Innovation Foundation for Democracy in partnership with the Paris Peace Forum and the International Commission of Jurists (Kenyan Section), it was prepared in three stages and in advance of the Summit itself.

The first stage was devoted to determining its principal themes, in direct and indirect dialogue with those of the Summit itself, but with the assumed accent of civil societies. Taking as its privileged interlocutors "youth and entrepreneurship", the Summit chose to focus its deliberations on innovation, sustainable growth, the training and employment of young people. Its key themes include green industrialisation, digital transformation and artificial intelligence, food and health sovereignty, the financing of development, and the reform of international financial architectures.

The stated objective is to support the energy transition, to contribute to the development of the value chain of the *blue economy* and to environmentally respectful industrialisation. The strengthening of national health systems, the local production of vaccines and medicines, and the development of a sustainable, high-value-added agriculture are also part of its major preoccupations. The same is true of the acceleration of investments in digital infrastructure and of the development of solutions in the technology sectors, in the cultural and creative industries, and in sport.

All these issues will, beyond doubt, determine African futures, on condition that none of these questions is approached through the accountancy, legal, financial, micro- and macroeconomic spectacles alone with which we have grown accustomed to seeing and describing the world. For, however useful they may be, quantitative modellings on their own have proved ineffective on the continent. In the end, experience shows that their real spillover effect at the level of societies and communities is negligible. More than half a century of failures arrives, in this respect, at the same conclusion: **nothing will be achieved without societies**. To recover legitimacy and a concrete capacity for action, we must project ourselves over the long term and anchor everything in **the strength of societies** themselves – in their creativity and their capacities for resilience, in their forms of knowledge and their own resources, and in their dynamic potential.

Consequently, macroeconomic decisions concerning digital matters, health, food, agriculture, the blue economy, culture or sport will have impact only if they take account of the great planetary limits, climate, the rarefaction of natural resources (energy and mineral), inequalities (notably of gender), the dynamics of capital, and

public and private debts. To guarantee sources of supply and to capture ever larger market shares is no longer enough, and the production of profits is not the whole of value. Several other factors must be taken into account in the struggle against entropy – beginning with the liberation of speech, the consent of citizens, the development of civic infrastructure, the quality of institutions and of natural ecosystems – in short, the acquisition of capacities to endure.

Furthermore, unbalanced economic models, founded almost exclusively on extraction, will lead to disruptions, since they do not allow for the consolidation of the social bond, of health and care, of access to food, water, a plot of land, a piece of pasture, education, gender equality and the protection of fundamental human rights. Hence the necessity of accelerating the search for endogenous alternatives capable of releasing the capacity of communities to produce originality and singularity, and of nourishing the living wellsprings of création sociale (social creation). Hence, too, the urgency of reconciling purely material interests with values and of placing back at the centre of the debate on African futures the essential question of the ends that the economy enables us to attain – growth for what, at what price, and for whom? Such debates must have as their horizon the invention of an endogenous and properly substantive democracy, drawing on the values of *Matrimoine* (Matrimony – the female counterpart to *Patrimoine*/patrimony).

It is these considerations that have guided the choice both of the six chapters of the *White Paper* and of the general theme of the Pavilion: **the strength of societies.** The transformations under way on the continent are part of a process of *création générale* (general creation). Everywhere, cities are exploding and the population continues to grow younger. Territorial powers are recomposing themselves and households and domestic units are reconfiguring. Patriarchy and gerontocratic power are forcefully contested. Village networks are ceaselessly metamorphosing. New identities are forged and added to older ones. Regional origins and ethnic and religious ties remain alive and continue to feed political, symbolic and material claims. Carried by many collectives, associations and grassroots communities, a new cultural, political and artistic consciousness is taking shape. It is animated by the desire for a substantive democracy founded on our languages, our forms of know-how and our cultural inheritances. This aspiration is already exemplified in various field experiences. It takes form in the daily struggles for the satisfaction of vital needs. It is in these daily struggles that the egalitarian horizon of democracy is embodied – and women as well as young people are its key actors.

The production of the *White Paper* required the constitution of a multi-disciplinary team of 24 experts, who carried out numerous consultations. The first version of the six chapters thus brought together was the subject of debates in the form of webinars that gathered hundreds of members of a broadened, multinational public. The whole of this work and its results were the subject of a presentation at the Pavilion of 10 May 2026, devoted to creation and social innovation. The Pavilion took place in advance of the Summit itself and had as its general theme: **the strength of societies**.

The process thus set in motion was organised around the following six themes:

1. African minerals and the economy of nature in the service of community autonomy and security

Around one third of African wealth is held in the form of natural capital. Such is the case, in particular, of deposits of oil, copper, cobalt, manganese, lithium, vanadium and other non-renewable minerals. Thanks to these resource endowments, the continent could benefit from the transition towards low-carbon economies. The continent also has an immense renewable natural capital – in the form of arable land, water resources and the biodiversity of ecosystems.

On what conditions can the exploitation of African critical minerals and other raw materials favour a better insertion of the continent into global value chains and serve to correct the imbalances of an international economic system that does not ensure a fair distribution of wealth in the world? How are national frameworks for sharing the benefits of the exploitation of African natural resources to be put in place? How can equitable benefits from extractive projects be guaranteed for communities? How can critical minerals be used to promote endogenous capacities, to ensure environmental stewardship and community security, and to guarantee the possibilities of equity and intergenerational justice?

2. How to reform institutions and build endogenous democratic models?

In many African countries, experiences carried in large part by women and young people, with the aim of restoring meaning to democratic practices, are under way on the ground. This is particularly the case at the level of local or neighbourhood communities. These experiences are accompanied, in many cases, by a renewal of thought and forms of knowledge.

New understandings of the dynamics of innovation are also emerging, in support of efforts to transform the frameworks of public action. Thanks to heightened levels of citizen participation, the contours of endogenous democratic models are appearing. Yet, in order to renew in depth the ways of governing and to root the rule of law, a new cycle of structural reforms must be set in motion. Certainly, there is more than one possible mode of government. But *création générale* – the true name of development – can be achieved only if everyone contributes through their voices and their innovations, at the close of a collective deliberation. Africa being composed of a majority of young people, these reforms must aim at reducing the intergenerational fracture which today forms the backbone of Africa's major conflicts. As a matter of fact, there is no substantive democracy without generational renewal and without a contract of equality between the genders.

Under such conditions, what are we bound to leave to the generations that are to come, and why? What share of the common wealth is theirs by right and which it is important to safeguard? Which legal instruments must be mobilised if the project of balance and equity between generations is to be given meaning? What is to be done to nurture skills and capabilities and to revitalise institutions? How are we to awaken the reformist imagination, to draw on local forms of knowledge and know-how, to lay the foundations of a renewed dialogue on the transformation of institutions, and to show that alternatives are possible?

3. New technologies in the service of material security and the rule of law

On the global scale, the generalisation of digital technologies and, eventually, of automation, presents challenges for the creation of jobs and durable prosperity. African uses of digital technology must nevertheless be grasped as closely as possible. This is particularly the case from the perspective of strengthening the rule of law and of advancing substantive forms of democracy on the continent.

It is therefore appropriate to enquire into the practices already under way of using technological tools for the purposes of bottom-up economic empowerment, the strengthening of the public sphere, and dialogue on public policies (notably in the sectors of health, education, gender equality, the environment and the climate, and so on). Do they take account of endogenous forms of knowledge, local languages, the rights of individuals and communities, and do they favour the development of critical faculties and the progress of the rule of law? What must be done to democratise digital skills, to favour equitable access to technologies, and to better sensitise individuals and communities to the issues of truth and responsibility in the digital space?

4. Women, democracy and the transformation of power relations

Women's struggles in Africa have helped to articulate the multiple forms of oppression rooted in patriarchal structures. They have opened the way to profound transformations in the law, in representations, in institutions and in cultural practices. Yet these advances remain fragile. What this sequence interrogates is less the finding, already well established, than the method. What remains to be done in order effectively to move beyond patriarchy in its visible and invisible, material and symbolic dimensions, as well as in its institutionalised and internalised forms? What strategies, what alliances would make it possible to go faster and further in fields such as democracy in health and sexual rights, the right to nature or the right to subsistence? What high-impact dialogue tools do we need? What forms of women's power must today be recognised, supported and institutionalised in order to bring about forms of life truly liberated from masculine domination? What would a substantive democracy concretely look like, founded on the powers of the feminine and on the values of *Matrimoine*? In which experiences is it already embodied, and how are these to be made known, networked, amplified and disseminated?

5. The future of international solidarity

As several countries of the North reorient their budgetary and geopolitical priorities, the progressive retreat – or redefinition – of official development assistance is profoundly reconfiguring the relations between donor States and African societies. While this disengagement may weaken some essential sectors, it also opens the possibility of a refocusing on endogenous dynamisms and transversal solidarities.

In such a context, what are the implications of the shift now under way? What alternative models of cooperation must be invented? How are we to rethink solidarity and development no longer as dependence, but as a collective capacity to respond everywhere to vital needs, to support creation and to protect the living? What might the role of civil societies be in rebuilding transnational and pluriversal solidarities, bearer of an ethical, political and citizen register of action?

6. Maternal and child health

At a time when public resources are under heavy strain, maternal, neonatal and child health remains one of the fields in which the margins of progress are the most substantial. According to recent estimates, nearly five million children under the age of five still die each year from largely preventable causes, and the trends observed since 2024 raise fears of a reversal of the progress accomplished over the preceding decades. On the African continent, the health of mothers and children remains a central revealer of the capacity of public systems to protect the most vulnerable and to prepare the future.

Yet solutions exist and are available at scale and at low cost. The reconfiguration now under way of the dynamics of development aid imposes a rethinking of responsibilities and the creation of the partnerships that will enable these solutions to be implemented. How can maternal and child health be made a durable political priority in a context of constrained resources? How can we make better use of the tools and forms of knowledge already available in order to save the greatest number of lives? How can maternal and child health be inscribed within sovereign policies carried by African States, capable of responding to the demographic and social challenges of the decades to come?

This *White Paper* intends to remain open. Our wish is that it continues to be enriched after the Summit with new entries and contributions – even at the risk of being transformed into a vast fresco, or indeed into a "bank of ideas". This is what will make it both a living tool and a source of creativity capable of nourishing the hopes of today and of tomorrow.

INTRODUCTION

Achille Mbembe

This *White Paper* is conceived at a moment in which international relations are hardening, while force and coercion tend, as in colonial times, to substitute themselves for law on the global scale.

The hardening of international relations and asymmetrical relations

Almost everywhere, choke points crystallise multiform tensions. The threats of violence are becoming generalised. Increasingly, they translate into sanctions, blockades, the suspension of supplies necessary for economic life, the implosion of security guarantees – particularly for fragile States – and the multiplication of protection rackets. A growing number of States and non-State organisations are prepared to use force to advance their interests.

The rise of protectionism and the permanent threats of material reprisals are a source of international tensions. They lead to the appearance of new systemic risks, since they call into question the reliability of energy exchanges, the freedom of maritime navigation, and global supply chains. The links between non-bank financial intermediaries and banks are growing ever more complex, accentuating in the process the opacity of cryptocurrency flows and of offshore financial centres. As a result of the instrumentalisation of technologies, of the media, of finance, of trade and of military force on the global scale, new fractures between the various regions of the world are opening up. Disregarding State borders or, paradoxically, drawing upon them, a planetary chain very different from the official cartographies is emerging.

Adopting a long-term outlook

At the same moment, Africa is undergoing simultaneous and profound mutations that are redrawing its place on the world chessboard and affecting continental socio-political equilibria. The transformations under way translate into cascading ruptures, an intensification of struggles for access to the means of existence, the return of mass-scale stakes, and the appearance of new inequalities and new conflicts – particularly between classes, genders and generations. The African demographic leap coincides with an abrupt generational reversal, the technological awakening of societies, an acceleration of processes of artistic and expressive invention, the intensification of practices of mobility and circulation, and the multiform quest for development models drawing on the wealth of our own traditions.

At times left to their own devices, many communities are exposed to major risks and to an often-structural absence of protection and care. Wherever these risks and threats have not been brought under control, natural and human capital has been wasted.

Individuals and communities have been plunged into an objective state of destitution, with the effect of accentuating their vulnerability and depriving them of the capacities and resources necessary for a dignified and autonomous life. In this context, the quest for protection and for an integral security has become one of the major issues of any politics of the African present and future.

Notwithstanding the repeated cycles of macroeconomic adjustment, the imbalances that the continent faces are excessive and persistent. Of all the processes described above, Africa, perhaps more than other continents, suffers heavily. For, in spite of many proclamations, asymmetrical relations persist. The thresholds at which cooperation takes shape – or coercion is exercised – are increasingly inflected by the technological, climatic and environmental constraints manifesting themselves across the entire Earth system. The new balances of power crystallising at the planetary scale remain, in essence, the result of the exploitation and industrial organisation of the world – that is, of the over-exploitation of resources and the colonisation of almost every niche of life by capital. In the face of the decline of multilateralism, most major and middle powers are choosing to invest in highly targeted assets and in technologies key to defence (satellites, military clouds, drone–aircraft connectivity, quantum computing, artificial intelligence, and so on).

In Africa, the processes briefly described above build upon unbalanced growth models, set against chronic weaknesses in productive investment and a lack of appropriate governance for integrating markets in goods, services, and capital. Indeed, Africa's weight in world trade remains marginal, and its industrial positioning negligible. Owing to tyrannical and archaic forms of government, its human capital is exposed to risks at times unheard of. The continent does not, however, escape the great questions of our time, which concern the fate of Earth – that is to say, that which connects us, engages us and transforms us as living beings among living beings.

The contraction of the world will inevitably lead to an exacerbation of the importance of the mineral, energy, chemical and biological resources of which Africa is, in many respects, one of the natural reservoirs. As technological evolution now mobilises atomic elements as well as a growing number of molecules of biological or human-synthetic origin, another energy, mineral, biological – and indeed food and health – geopolitics will inevitably take shape. The question nonetheless remains: is it possible to keep a functional world economy afloat in the face of the fragmentation now under way? If the transformations it is undergoing are not mastered, Africa risks facing a metabolic rupture – that is, a serious desynchronisation and split between social processes and natural processes.

At the same time, by virtue of its mass and of its demography, the continent will inevitably take part in the increasing complexity of the world over the course of this century. Are the new digital technologies not contributing to the emergence of new African commons? Are not domestic markets being structured? In this moment of the end of one world and the birth of another, the continent is progressively taking up the relay, becoming one of the engines of global growth. More than ever, while old beliefs are being shaken and certainties are fissuring, Africa invites itself in and invites others to rethink their links with it by projecting themselves over the long term.

Sustaining the demographic dividend

From this point of view, the deployment of capital capable of actively sustaining the continent's demographic dividend is perhaps the priority of priorities. It will make it possible to fund African public goods, to reduce the structural unemployment of the young, to favour the economic empowerment of women, to multiply agricultural value chains, to facilitate access to energy, to invest in the construction of regional connectivity infrastructure, to drive forward digital transformation – in short, to broaden economic opportunities for all Africans. Yet many structural obstacles prevent the continent from mobilising the financial resources at scale that it needs to fund *création sociale* (social creation). It is estimated today that these needs amount to a minimum of USD 400 billion per year.

Furthermore, today more than yesterday, many recognise that these needs will scarcely be met by concessional financing – which, in any event, is hardly designed to support large-scale transformation. Moreover, the persistence of high costs of capital for African countries gravely compromises the continent's capacity to invest in its own development on the basis of a democratically assumed definition of its own priorities.

Endogenous reserves and capacities

Endogenous reserves and capacities are nonetheless not lacking. Africa has around USD 4 trillion in medium- and long-term savings. Its financial ecosystem comprises a plethora of actors: central banks, sovereign funds, pension funds, insurance companies, investment banks, commercial banks, savings banks, stock exchanges, guarantee systems, regional commercial banks, national and regional development banks, securities exchanges, private-equity funds, deposit-and-consignment funds, guarantee funds and other development finance institutions. Yet the scarcity of resources will not be met without an interdependent chain of multi-scalar reforms aimed at releasing the continental potential. Such is the case of the reform of the international financial system. In parallel, it is necessary to reorganise the way in which capital and risk are deployed within the African financial ecosystem.

The African financial sector must therefore be put to work to build a continental system of self-protection and self-insurance. Concrete instruments and frameworks for building a new financial architecture in the service of the continent must be devised. One of the objectives of this new architecture must be to unlock the continent's vast domestic savings and to orient them systematically towards productive investments across the continent. To this end, it is necessary to put in place new instruments of coordination, mechanisms of credit enhancement, and to strengthen market infrastructures. The creation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA; *ZLECAf* in the original French) constitutes an important step in this direction, on condition that it serves, among other things, to share risks and guarantees with a view to reducing the cost of capital for African borrowers.

By integrating African capital markets through harmonised regulatory codes, cross-border listings, local-currency instruments and securitisation platforms, the assets generated on the continent may be refinanced, recycled and redeployed at scale.

General creation

But we must go further. The most profound transformations on the continent are taking place in the field of ideas, of culture, of the arts, and in that of social innovation. This is clearly seen in those regions of the continent that have preserved solid traditions of peer-to-peer relations; where the desire for equality – whether between elders and social juniors or between men and women – and for cooperation resting on equality is increasingly irrepressible.

In other regions, ravaged by conflict, economic and social reconstruction takes place on the basis of the two principles of self-organisation and the pooling of resources and skills. Here and there, there are genuine collaborative markets, a generally informal community capital, and an associative fabric that structure the resilience of communities. But it is above all in the cross-border regions that a great part of the economic and commercial creativity comes into view. As is increasingly recognised, these efforts of pooling lie at the basis of ***création générale*** (general creation) – the new name for what, until recently, was still called "development".

A polycentric Africa

The Africa emerging before our eyes is an Africa of multiple zones and scales – what may be called *une Afrique à fuseaux multiples*, a polycentric Africa. To move beyond the logic of extraversion and advance the relocalisation and reterritorialisation of economic systems and exchange, we must ground our approach in the continent's eco- and bio-regions. These bioregions, these ecological localities, do not correspond to the existing administrative demarcations, still less to the official borders that separate States.

They result, on the contrary, as much from ecosystems sometimes interwoven with one another as from the logics of circulation and mobility that govern the life of communities. To rebuild a viable and desirable Africa, we must start from its eco- or bio-regions. We must reinvent the economy and finance it from its forests, its watercourses, its trades of wood, water, wind, sun and rain. Above all, we must invest in cross-border zones and in the immense network of secondary cities.

To carry through these large-scale transformations, one of the priorities is to "de-confine" the continent, to open it widely upon itself, to transform it into a vast space of circulation, to accompany the inevitable cycle of internal mobilities that will result from demographic growth, and to re-open the question of internal borders with a view to reorganising them.

01

African minerals and the economy of nature in the service of community autonomy and security

Loïc Rakotoarisoa

Executive summary

Africa occupies a central place in the global economy of transition minerals. This centrality is driven first by the energy transition, and then by the digital transition, the rise of artificial intelligence, the securing of supply chains and the intensification of geo-economic rivalries. Yet centrality alone does not guarantee the autonomy of producer countries. The risk is that the continent will remain indispensable to the transitions of others without gaining mastery over the places where transformation, financing, standards, technology, market access and value capture are actually decided.

This chapter proposes a shift in perspective. A natural-resources policy can no longer be assessed solely on the basis of extracted volumes, announced investments or the public revenues it generates. It must be judged by what it actually transforms: in economies, in territories, in productive capacities, in working conditions, in the protection of natural capital and in the security of communities.

Three tests structure this approach: a test of value captured and retained, to measure the resource's capacity to build productive, technological, energy and financial capacities in producer countries and regions; a test of territorial sustainability, to assess its effects on water, soils, biodiversity, land, food security and livelihoods; and a test of power, participation and recourse, to verify that communities, workers and local authorities have effective means of influence, monitoring, contestation and redress.

The chapter sets out eight strategic orientations:

1. Change the doctrine for evaluating projects;
2. Reposition negotiation at the actual level of economic power;
3. Make local value creation a trajectory of productive and regional capacities;
4. Move natural capital out of its status as an adjustment variable;
5. Make local communities a centre of gravity in resource governance;
6. Replace uncertain compensation with enforceable territorial pacts;
7. Make traceability a tool of public governance;
8. Build an integrated public capacity commensurate with the resource.

The central thesis is as follows: African minerals will become a lever of autonomy only if producer States manage to govern jointly what is still too often administered separately – extraction, processing, energy, financing, the environment, labour, community rights,

infrastructure, traceability and industrial strategy. Africa will not turn its centrality into autonomy by extracting more, but by governing better.

Introduction

Africa has once again become central to the global political economy of resources. The energy transition, the partial relocation of industrial sovereignties, the securing of supply chains and the rise of geo-economic rivalries are restoring strategic importance to the minerals of which the continent holds a decisive share. Africa concentrates roughly 30 per cent of the world's mineral reserves. The IEA further notes that it already supplies major shares of several inputs essential to low-carbon technologies: about 75 per cent of global manganese demand, 70 per cent of cobalt and close to 20 per cent of unprocessed copper.[1] The African Union has now stated this unambiguously in its African Green Minerals Strategy adopted in 2025: the issue is no longer simply to extract, but to add value at source, to industrialise regionally, and to convert mineral wealth into resilience, jobs and diversification.

This centrality unfolds within a profoundly transformed geopolitical context. States and major economic blocs are now seeking to secure their supplies, diversify their partners, reduce dependencies deemed excessive, and control the strategic segments of value chains. Transition minerals are therefore no longer merely commercial resources: they have become assets of economic, industrial, energy and technological security. For African producer countries, this reconfiguration opens a window for negotiation, but it also carries a risk: that of being drawn into new bilateral or regional partnerships without any genuine transformation of their productive position.

To this principal dynamic must be added the digital transition and, more recently, the rise of artificial intelligence. Their importance lies not only in software, data or digital uses, but in the material infrastructures they require: data centres, electricity networks, cooling equipment, electronic components, copper, aluminium, gallium, germanium and other critical materials. AI does not therefore replace the energy transition as the principal driver of mineral demand; rather, it intensifies certain of its effects, particularly on energy, networks, technological equipment and critical supply chains.

Since 2025, AI has become an explicit parameter in energy and industrial planning. The International Energy Agency estimates that data centres consumed approximately 415 TWh of electricity in 2024 – close to 1.5 per cent of global consumption – and that this demand could almost double, reaching some 945 TWh by 2030. This acceleration confirms a reality that is often underestimated: the digital transition is not immaterial. It rests on energy-intensive and material-intensive physical infrastructures, which reinforce the strategic centrality of African minerals.

The chapter is also situated at a moment when the governance of transition minerals is becoming a central object on international agendas: the African Union, the G7, the G20, the COP, UNEA, development finance institutions and United Nations initiatives. These forums converge around a handful of keywords – security of supply, diversification, traceability, standards, value addition, beneficiation, local content – but they do not

1 International Energy Agency

always assign them the same meaning. For African producer countries, the issue is precisely to shift the debate: it is not only a matter of making supply chains safer for buyers, but of making them fairer, more productive and more structuring for producer economies and territories.

The work led by the Paris Peace Forum and its Global Council for Responsible Transition Minerals fits squarely within this dynamic. It reminds us that the global governance of transition minerals cannot be reduced to a logic of supply security for consumer countries. It must also address the fragmentation of multilateral approaches, the organisation of markets, the conditions for value creation in producer countries, the financing of responsible exploitation, and the social and environmental sustainability of value chains. This perspective converges with the central argument of this chapter: the mineral transition will be politically sustainable only if it brings together security of supply, economic justice, local industrialisation and community security.

But this new centrality does not yet amount to autonomy. It may open a trajectory of productive transformation, of moving up the value chain, of relative technological sovereignty and of securing territories. It may also reproduce, in an even more complex form, an old economy of extraction, raw exports and renewed dependence. The impasse lies precisely there: becoming more indispensable to the world without becoming more sovereign over the places where transformation, financing, technology, standards, market access and value capture are decided. The IEA shows, moreover, that the geographical concentration of refining intensified between 2020 and 2024, with the average share of the top three refining countries rising from around 82 per cent to 86 per cent for the principal critical minerals, while export restrictions are multiplying – including on minerals such as gallium and germanium, which are key to semiconductors.

To understand this impasse, the focus must be shifted. The mineral question can no longer be read solely through the lens of an export sector, nor judged solely on the basis of extracted volumes, announced investments or public revenues. It must be re-inscribed within an *economy of nature* – that is, within a broader reflection on the material conditions of territorial life: water, sunlight, soils, biodiversity, wildlife, competing land uses, food security, working conditions, the social equilibrium of mining basins, local productive density, institutional quality and community security. Such is the purpose of this reflection: to move beyond a purely extractive reading and to judge the resource by its effects on collective autonomy.

Dispossession, in fact, is not limited to the capture of rent or to the imbalances of the extractive contract. It can also result from an unequal distribution of rights of use over nature itself. When forest communities see their subsistence access to wildlife or other essential resources curtailed, while recreational, commercial or solvent uses remain open to others, what is at stake is not merely an economic inequality. It is a political hierarchy of rights, uses and legitimacies that takes shape, to the detriment of food security, territorial autonomy and the capacity of the populations concerned to remain agents within their own environment. The justice of resources must therefore be conceived more broadly than as a matter of financial redistribution: it also concerns priority access to the material conditions of life and the full recognition of communities as sovereign actors in the governance of their territories.

This chapter rests on a simple conviction: a natural-resources policy is judged not only by what it extracts, nor even by what it brings in. It is judged by what it actually transforms in the economy, in the territories and in the lives of populations.

Three tests will serve here as a compass. First, a test of value captured and retained: does the resource build productive, technological, energy and financial capacities in the country and in the region? Next, a test of territorial sustainability: does it protect the vital uses of water, soils, biodiversity, land and livelihoods? Lastly, a test of power, participation and recourse: do communities, workers and local authorities have real means of influence, monitoring and contestation over the projects that shape their future? On this basis, the argument unfolds in two stages: first, the findings and bottlenecks that still prevent the resource from becoming a lever of autonomy (Part 1); then a set of reasoned, prioritised recommendations to ensure that African centrality becomes something other than a centrality endured (Part 2).

Part 1 – Findings and challenges: why the centrality of African resources is not yet being converted into autonomy

1.1 A genuine strategic centrality, but one still commanded from outside

African centrality is now an established fact, but it does not yet translate into equivalent mastery of value chains. The continent occupies a decisive place in the global supply of strategic resources: the IEA estimates that it already provides a major share of world demand for manganese, cobalt and unprocessed copper, while also holding significant reserves of lithium, graphite, nickel, rare earths and platinum-group metals. Yet it still controls little of those segments where the bulk of value, technology and decision-making power is concentrated. Dependence has therefore not disappeared; it has shifted. It no longer plays out solely between extraction and industry, but between the place where the resource is found and the place where transformation, financing, standard-setting and economic command are exercised.

This dissociation becomes still more visible as the demands of the energy transition and the digital economy intensify. African resources are increasingly drawn upon in productive chains that extend far beyond the mining sector alone, without this expansion of demand yet sufficiently altering the continent's place in the actual architecture of value. The bottleneck is therefore not geological; it is strategic. What is still lacking is not the resource, but a sufficient grip on the spaces where standards are set, market access is secured, structuring investments are decided and the most transformative segments of the chain are concentrated.

The question is therefore no longer one of access to the deposit, but of the position occupied within the political economy that orders the resource. So long as that position remains peripheral, the material centrality of the continent will continue to produce more dependence than autonomy. Africa will be at the heart of the supply system without yet being at the centre of the system of command.

1.2 The abundance of resources does not, on its own, produce productive transformation

The second observation, linked to the first, is decisive: geological abundance does not, on its own, translate into productive transformation. Possessing the ore is not enough to

build an industry. It is also necessary to have reliable energy, logistical infrastructure, financing capacities, technical skills, a fabric of intermediate enterprises, and a coherent strategy for moving up the value chain. The work of NRGI reminds us in this regard that many African countries face a problem of scale: taken in isolation, their volumes, markets or industrial capacities are not always sufficient to make certain stages of transformation fully competitive.

The African problem is therefore not solely one of insufficient rent; it is also one of weak productive density around the resource. Too often, extraction operates as an enclave: it exports, generates revenues and creates activity, without sufficiently restructuring the surrounding economy. It does not give rise, on the necessary scale, to a dense industrial ecosystem, a broad technical base, or a build-up of skills capable of durably altering the country's place within the value chain.

This limitation appears all the more sharply because today's major industrial trajectories are no longer played out at the national level alone. Competition over critical minerals rests on long, integrated, capital-intensive and highly technological chains. In this context, the lack of regional coordination constitutes a major handicap. NRGI shows that more effective African cooperation could enable the pooling of volumes, the sharing of certain infrastructures, a more rational distribution of transformation segments and the broadening of end markets. But it also shows that such cooperation requires moving beyond immediate national interests, institutional asymmetries and deep-seated political inertias.

The challenge, then, is no longer simply to possess the resource, but to become a strategist of its transformation. So long as that shift has not been made, Africa will remain more an extractive base for the transitions of others than an industrial driver of its own transformation.

1.3 The resource transforms territories before it transforms the economy

The third observation is central to the overall economy of this chapter: a natural resource never acts as a mere economic asset. It also acts as a force that recomposes territories. A mine, a forest area, a protected area, an exploration permit, a restriction on access to wildlife, or a use concession does not merely modify a legal or productive landscape; it transforms the very conditions of local life. It redistributes access to water, land, the forest, mobility, subsistence and security and, more profoundly, to the continuity of forms of life. Analyses by the World Resources Institute on conflicts linked to land and resource rights in Africa show that these tensions are neither marginal nor accidental: they often stem from a legal architecture in which communities hold limited rights over the lands they occupy, while the State grants other actors rights over the subsoil, the forest or certain decisive uses of the territory.

This recomposition also concerns labour. Mineral value chains cannot be assessed solely on the basis of volumes produced or the value exported. They must also be appraised on the basis of the concrete conditions in which workers extract, transport, sort, process or market the resource. In certain contexts – particularly in artisanal and small-scale mining – the risks are especially high: exposure to dust and toxic substances, accidents, the absence of social protection, informal employment, the presence of children, and dependence on poorly regulated intermediaries. An economy of nature cannot

therefore be separated from an economy of decent work: what the resource transforms in territories is also measured by the way in which it protects, or weakens, those who live directly from it.

This observation must be taken seriously, for it leads to a shift in perspective. Mineral policy – and, more broadly, resource policy – cannot be understood without examining how it concretely recomposes territorial equilibria. The question is therefore not only what the resource yields. It is also what it does to the local organisation of life: to uses, to trade-offs, to vulnerabilities, to dependencies and to the agency of the populations concerned. A resource may generate revenues, attract investment and produce public receipts while at the same time eroding the social and ecological conditions that make a territory habitable. It is precisely this contradiction that a strictly extractive reading tends to render invisible, by artificially separating economic performance on the one hand from the real conditions of territorial life on the other.

It is at this point that the notion of an economy of nature takes on its full meaning. It compels us to think together what public policies too often dissociate: the exploitation of the resource, the state of ecosystems, community uses, food security, working conditions, customary rights, conflicts of use, and the capacity of populations to remain actors within their own environment. It reminds us, in other words, that a resource is never merely a wealth to be extracted or to be valorised; it is also an element of territorial equilibrium, a means of subsistence, and at times a direct condition of collective security. It is only at this scale – that of ecosystems, uses, labour and the social relations attached to them – that the genuine quality of a resource regime can be assessed.

1.4 Natural capital is too often treated as an adjustment variable

The fourth observation is that the destruction of natural capital remains too often underestimated, even though it directly compromises the durability of extractive trajectories. The work of the World Resources Institute shows that mining expansion is moving into ever more sensitive forest areas, with tangible effects on deforestation, water resources, biodiversity and the living conditions of populations directly dependent on these ecosystems. The *Beneath the Green* report on the Democratic Republic of the Congo goes further still: it documents the way in which activities linked to cobalt and copper extraction degrade water quality, affect the health of nearby populations, weaken agricultural incomes and compromise local food security.

A common misunderstanding must be dispelled here. The fact that a mineral is strategically useful for the energy transition or the digital economy says nothing in itself about the justice of its conditions of extraction.

A resource may be decisive for the global climate and destructive of the material conditions of local life.

A serious policy cannot, therefore, be content to set an abstract global interest against concrete territorial harms. It must hold both scales together, and arbitrate accordingly.

This point is central for the African continent, because it touches upon a recurrent historical error: treating nature as an available stock rather than as a living productive

base. Water, soils, the forest, wildlife and the ecological fertility of territories are not the backdrop of development; they are one of its fundamental conditions. When a mining or forestry regime durably degrades them, it does not produce only an environmental harm. It weakens subsistence capacities, reduces territorial resilience, and erodes the very base from which sustainable prosperity can be built.

1.5 The security of communities remains weakened by an unequal hierarchy of use rights

The question of resources cannot be reduced to the sole sharing of the revenues drawn from their exploitation. It also bears, and perhaps first of all, on the effective distribution of use rights. When an administrative order restricts subsistence access to wildlife, or to other resources vital for forest communities, while maintaining recreational, solvent or commercial uses to the benefit of other actors, it does not produce only a distributive inequality. It institutes a political hierarchy of rights that directly weakens food security, territorial autonomy and the capacity of communities to remain agents within their own environment. Dispossession then manifests itself not only through the capture of rent; it unfolds in the very organisation of legitimate access to nature.

This reasoning applies to forest areas, but also to mining basins, where access to water, land, agricultural fields, subsistence resources and places of life directly conditions community security.

This angle is decisive, because it requires broadening the chapter's argument. Dispossession does not pass solely through the extractive contract, taxation or weaknesses of redistribution. It can also be lodged in the very definition of the uses that are authorised, tolerated or prohibited.

Who may hunt, gather, circulate, conserve, transform or valorise the resource? On what conditions? For whose benefit?

These questions are far from secondary. They touch the very heart of the sovereignty experienced by communities. They determine whether communities still live from their environment, or whether they are progressively excluded from it to the benefit of more powerful, more solvent or better recognised actors.

From this perspective, the mobilisations observable in forest areas take on strategic significance. They remind us that autonomy is not reducible to receiving a fairer share of revenues; it also presupposes being recognised as a legitimate subject in the governance of the territory and of the resources on which daily life depends. Experiences of participatory mapping, community forestry and advocacy in favour of local management arrangements move in precisely this direction: they seek to restore to communities a capacity for action, protection and arbitration over their own spaces. The issue is therefore not only economic. It is institutional and political: it concerns the place accorded to communities in the government of the ecosystems that condition their subsistence, their security and their social continuity.

The issue is therefore not solely one of redistribution. It is more fundamentally one of recognition. For a community that no longer controls access to the resources on which it depends to feed itself, sustain itself and project itself into the future is not merely

less well served; it is, in the strong sense, dispossessed of its capacity to inhabit its own territory politically.

1.6 The political space for green industrialisation remains too constrained

A further bottleneck lies in the political space that producer States actually enjoy to organise their move up the value chain. The instruments needed for green industrialisation – local content, performance requirements, public preferences, export conditions, technology-transfer obligations, industrial clauses in corridors or special economic zones – are precisely those that industrialised countries have historically used to build their own productive bases. Yet these instruments are today often hemmed in, contested or neutralised by trade agreements, investment treaties, arbitration mechanisms, stabilisation clauses or financial conditionalities.

The challenge is therefore not only to negotiate mining projects more effectively. It is also to defend a sufficient political space so that producer countries can orient the resource towards industrialisation, the creation of local value, regional transformation and the domestic energy transition. Without this space, the move up the value chain risks remaining an objective that is proclaimed but legally, financially or contractually obstructed.

1.7 The mismatch between the place of negotiation and the place of decision remains a strategic bottleneck

In many cases, States continue to negotiate at the level of the permit, the local contract or the operating subsidiary, while a determining share of economic, financial and industrial power lies at the level of the transnational group. Mining negotiations in Africa thus remain marked by asymmetries of capacity, expertise and information; but their deepest difficulty lies elsewhere. It is that the legal place of negotiation does not always coincide with the actual place of decision.

This mismatch has structuring effects. It limits the reach of the commitments obtained, because these are often lodged in entities that carry only a fraction of the group's strategy. It obscures the effective centres of command, the fiscal circuits and the intra-group arbitrations. Lastly, it reduces the State's capacity to orient the resource fully towards objectives of local transformation, even when the regulatory framework is tightened. The problem is therefore not only one of an unfavourable balance of power; it is also that of a negotiation that does not always take place at the right scale.

So long as this asymmetry in the location of power is not better addressed, States will continue to negotiate below the place where structuring investments, market outlets, industrial choices and the actual modalities of value capture are decided. And so long as this situation persists, the mineral wealth of the continent will produce more strategic dependence than genuine autonomy.

1.8 The resource is still too often governed in silos, when it requires an integrated capacity

Even where public orientations are sound, their implementation remains too often fragmented. Taxation, the environment, industry, energy, transport, employment, training, security, sub-national authorities and economic diplomacy continue to be

conceived as separate fields, even though the resource places them under simultaneous strain. It alters energy needs, recomposes logistical corridors, transforms land uses, calls for social arbitrations, and engages at once issues of industrial sovereignty, territorial stability, decent work and community security.

This fragmentation limits the actual reach of public action. It prevents the permit from being articulated with an industrial strategy, transformation with an energy policy, redistribution with a territorial doctrine, and the protection of ecosystems with a clear conception of community autonomy. The result is governance that is often procedural, sometimes technically correct, but insufficiently capable of guiding a coherent and durable trajectory. Instruments multiply; the integrated vision remains too often incomplete.

At the heart of the matter, this is where the principal challenge of government crystallises. Africa lacks neither resources nor ambitions, nor even normative tools. What it still too often lacks is an overarching vision sufficient to govern the resource as an economic, territorial, ecological and political fact at one and the same time. So long as the mine, the forest, wildlife, energy, industry, labour and territorial rights are administered separately, the resource will continue to produce more centrality than sovereignty.

1.9 Local communities remain too often peripheral in decisions that shape their destiny

Discussions with experts in the field, and notably the webinar of 10 April, brought to light a point of concern that should now be made more explicit in this chapter: in many projects, local communities still intervene only downstream, at a moment when the overall economy of the project has already been settled. Information reaches them late, consultation often remains procedural, and positive law still says too little about what should follow when communities refuse, contest or condition the project. In other words, participation may exist in law, but it remains too weak in actual decision-making.

This mismatch is compounded by a twofold invisibilisation. On the one hand, communities are insufficiently recognised in their social, cultural and territorial diversity: they are spoken of as a single bloc, when their forms of knowledge, their uses, their vulnerabilities and their forms of authority are differentiated. On the other hand, they are still too rarely equipped to grasp the full implications of a project, to document their own lived experience, to defend their priorities and to negotiate on less unequal terms. The result is a cognitive and political asymmetry that weakens the very legitimacy of projects.

The issue is therefore not only one of social acceptability. It is one of recognising the agency of communities. To recognise local communities as such is to acknowledge that they are not mere populations to be informed or compensated, but legitimate subjects of decision when the project engages their territory, their resources and their conditions of life. Without this shift, the passage from law to practice will remain incomplete, and the governance of resources will continue to be built on a promise of participation too often belied by the facts.

Part 2 – Reasoned recommendations: how to transform the centrality of African resources into a lever of autonomy, security and durable value

The recommendations that follow do not constitute a list of isolated instruments. They form a doctrine of public action. Their common thread is to shift the governance of resources from a logic of compliance to a logic of transformation. The point is not simply to regulate extraction more effectively, but to select, negotiate, finance, monitor and, where necessary, refuse projects on the basis of their actual contribution to productive autonomy, territorial sustainability and the security of communities. This approach presupposes an integrated public capacity, capable of articulating industrial strategy, energy policy, the protection of natural capital, community rights, financing, traceability and economic diplomacy.

2.1 Change the doctrine of evaluation: judge the resource by what it actually transforms

The first recommendation is to shift the centre of gravity of public decision-making and the indicators that frame it.

So long as a natural-resources project is judged primarily on the basis of the volume extracted, the amount invested or the tax revenues anticipated, it reproduces an enclave logic.

Yet it is precisely this logic that has long prevented the resource from durably transforming African economies. The IEA recalls that, despite its major role in the global supply of unprocessed minerals, Africa today captures less than 1 per cent of the value generated by the manufacture of clean-energy technologies and their components. It also stresses that the economic contribution of minerals can be increased through a move up the value chain into processing, smelting and refining. The decisive question is therefore not only that of extraction, but that of the quality of the transformation that a project actually enables.

A credible evaluation should, accordingly, rest on three simple tests, which would concretely modify the criteria for the authorisation, monitoring and accountability of projects.

The first is a test of value captured and retained. It bears not only on tax revenues or the scale of investment, but on the capacities actually built within the local and regional economy: on-site processing, the upgrading of skills, the densification of the productive fabric, the development of local suppliers, the creation of skilled jobs, shared infrastructure, access to energy, certification, maintenance, and spillover effects on industrial services.

The second is a test of territorial sustainability. It bears on the availability of water, the state of soils, pressure on forests, biodiversity, wildlife, food security, livelihoods, cumulative effects, and the ecological resilience of the territories concerned.

The third is a test of power, participation and recourse. It bears on land tenure security, working conditions, social stability, access to subsistence resources, grievance mechanisms, local redistribution, the participatory monitoring of commitments, and the capacity of populations to remain agents within their environment.

This triptych is consistent with the African Green Minerals Strategy, which explicitly calls for moving beyond raw exports to build value addition at source, integrated value chains, employment and economic diversification.

The practical consequence is clear: evaluation must no longer be a mere exercise in compliance, but an act of strategic selection. A project should no longer be authorised because it promises tonnages, but because it demonstrates, in a verifiable manner, that it improves the country's productive position, that it does not destroy the ecological base of territorial life, and that it strengthens – rather than weakens – the security of the communities concerned. Public evaluation must become the place where the State prioritises, arbitrates and, where necessary, refuses. It is on this condition that it will cease to record extraction and begin to organise transformation.

> ***Lessons from experience – Financing and de-risking***
>
> *The move up the value chain in producer countries does not depend solely on the availability of deposits. It also depends on the capacity to finance infrastructure, energy, processing units, industrial SMEs, laboratories, public oversight capacities, traceability mechanisms and arrangements for community participation. Financing must therefore be conditional upon verifiable objectives of qualified local content, the transfer of skills, respect for social and environmental rights, and the creation of territorial value.*

2.2 Reposition negotiation at the level where economic power is actually exercised

The second recommendation is to correct a structural shortcoming of African extractive regimes.

States still too often negotiate at the level of the permit, the local contract or the operating subsidiary, while a decisive share of economic, financial and industrial arbitration is exercised at the level of the transnational group.

The work of the Carnegie Endowment recalls that negotiations between African governments and investors remain marked by asymmetries of capacity, technical skills and information, in agreements that often commit countries for several decades. The problem is therefore not only one of the place of negotiation; it is also one of the capacity to negotiate, to model, to verify and to monitor commitments. Addressing this requires strengthening public negotiating teams, drawing on financial, industrial, environmental and legal expertise, using model clauses adapted to objectives of transformation, and pooling certain skills at the regional level where the national scale is insufficient.

The practical consequence is clear: a part of the commitments obtained remains incomplete, because it is lodged in entities that carry only a fraction of the group's strategy. To reposition negotiation at the right scale therefore presupposes three requirements. The first is transparency over control structures and beneficial owners. The EITI recalls that the aim of beneficial-ownership transparency is precisely to enable the public to know who really owns and controls extractive companies, in order to deter improper practices and better monitor the risks of capture, particularly where politically exposed persons are involved. The organisation recommends public registers,

the identification of the real owners of companies holding licences or contracts, and obligations regarding the reliability and verification of data.

The second requirement is contractual transparency. The EITI stresses that the full publication of contracts, licences and concessions makes visible the rules that govern extractive projects, the revenues anticipated for the State, and the financial and social obligations of operators. It also recalls that the EITI Standard requires member countries to disclose contracts and licences granted or amended since 1 January 2021. In other words, transparency is no longer a supplement to good governance; it has become a condition for the very legibility of the economic relationship.

The third requirement is the consolidation of structuring commitments. Local transformation, shared infrastructure, technology transfers, qualified local-content requirements, major environmental obligations: these subjects should not be negotiated solely at the level of the operational subsidiary, but at a level consistent with the place where the group's arbitrations are actually exercised. It is in this perspective, too, that NRGI recommends strengthening transparency on contracts, beneficial owners, payments, commercial flows and export data, while investing in the institutional and technical capacities of States.

The logic of this recommendation is straightforward. A State does not secure better value capture by negotiating more harshly in the wrong place. It improves its position by negotiating where investments, structures, flows and counterparts are actually decided.

In short, the point is not only to negotiate more, but to negotiate at the right level. So long as States deal at the local level with choices that are made at the level of the group, the resource will continue to weigh in the world economy without being fully converted into strategic autonomy.

2.3 Make local value creation a trajectory of productive and regional capacities

The third recommendation is to move beyond an over-simplified alternative between raw exports and immediate, full-scale industrialisation. The challenge is not for each country to transform its entire output on its own, but for it to identify, at the right scale, the value-chain segments that are economically and strategically relevant to develop. In many cases, that scale will not be strictly national. NRGI's 2025 report stresses in this regard that the success of African mineral value chains will depend on the capacity to pool supplies, develop cross-border infrastructures, broaden markets and distribute transformation functions more coherently. It also recalls that this dynamic presupposes targeted choices, transparent private-sector involvement, a credible sharing of benefits between countries, the strengthening of regional institutions, and clearly assumed African leadership.

Local value creation must not be reduced to the installation of a processing or refining unit. It must be understood as a trajectory of capacities: the development of local suppliers, local procurement, skilled jobs, maintenance, repair, engineering, certification, quality control, access to technologies, energy and logistical infrastructures, and the industrial services that surround the mine. The decisive question is therefore not only what share of the ore is processed locally, but what share of the productive capacity remains in the country and in the region.

This trajectory also presupposes usable access to technologies. Local transformation does not depend solely on capital or infrastructure; it also depends on know-how, licences, standards, software, data, technical documentation, training, tooling, certification, and the capacity to operate and maintain equipment. Without such usable access, a country may host a processing unit while remaining dependent on outside actors for technology, maintenance, certification and the updating of processes. A green industrial policy must therefore articulate finance, technology, standards and skills, rather than confine itself to the investment-extraction couple.

This move up the value chain finally presupposes financing something other than extraction. The financial instruments mobilised around transition minerals must support energy and logistical infrastructures, processing units, local suppliers, certification laboratories, training centres, industrial SMEs and regional projects. A mineral policy oriented towards autonomy should therefore combine public financing, development banks, guarantees, risk-sharing instruments, climate finance, sovereign funds and private capital, conditioning them upon verifiable objectives of capacity transfer, qualified local content and the creation of territorial value.

The criterion of success is not symbolic; it is strategic. It consists in identifying the links of the chain in which a move up the value chain can actually be sustained by volumes, energy, infrastructure, skills and market outlets. Without such a foundation, transformation will remain a slogan. Once such a foundation is in place, it can become a lever of productive power. The real challenge lies there: to move Africa beyond the geography of extraction and into the geography of decision-making, transformation and value capture.

> ***Lessons from experience – Local value creation***
>
> *Local value creation cannot be reduced to building a processing plant. It presupposes a progressive trajectory of capacities: reliable access to energy, logistical infrastructure, local suppliers, skilled jobs, technical training, certification, maintenance, engineering, laboratories, financing and access to markets. The true indicator is therefore not only the share of the ore processed locally, but the share of productive, technological and institutional capacity that remains in the country and in the region.*

2.4 Move natural capital out of its status as an adjustment variable

The fourth recommendation is to place natural capital back at the heart of public decision-making. Water, soils, forests, biodiversity, wildlife, and more broadly the ecological equilibria of territories, can no longer be treated as ancillary costs of a strategy of valorisation. They are one of its fundamental conditions. The African Green Minerals Strategy says so clearly when it articulates mineral exploitation, climate resilience and sustainability: there can be no credible strategy of resource valorisation without rigorous ecological arbitration.

This presupposes, first of all, a change in the way projects are authorised. Environmental and social assessments must no longer be confined to measuring harms project by project. They must integrate cumulative effects, competing uses of the territory, thresholds of irreversibility, and the consequences for food security, access to

water and livelihoods. The relevant question is not only whether a project is technically capable of being offset; it is whether it remains compatible with the continuity of territorial life.

Where extractive pressure durably degrades ecosystems, weakens subsistence activities or destroys the material conditions of human habitation, public decision-making cannot take refuge behind the macroeconomic or climatic utility of the mineral alone. It must arbitrate explicitly between global interest and local sustainability. The World Bank stresses, moreover, in its recent work on a just transition in the transition-minerals sector in eastern and southern Africa, that mining value chains must be conceived in such a way as to take account of the risks of social exclusion, fragility and conflict.

The point is therefore simple: a just transition does not consist in shifting costs to extractive peripheries. It consists in refusing to allow a territory to become the silent support of a benefit produced elsewhere. So long as natural capital is treated as an adjustment variable, valorisation will remain politically fragile and territorially contestable. The day it once again becomes a principle of arbitration, the resource may begin to be governed as a durable basis of prosperity, rather than as a wealth to be mobilised immediately.

2.5 Make local communities centres of gravity in resource governance

The fifth recommendation is to change the centre of gravity. Local communities must no longer be conceived as a public to be consulted at the periphery of the project, but as legitimate protagonists whose voice, rights and forms of knowledge must weigh on the decision itself. The justice of resources is not solely a matter of financial redistribution; it is also a matter of political recognition, respect for cultures, land tenure security, and the effective capacity to orient the use of the territory.

In concrete terms, this presupposes, first, a legal and operational recognition of communities as such. A project should not be authorised without a serious identification of the groups concerned, of their uses, their vulnerabilities, their local or traditional authorities, and their actual dependence on the resources targeted. Experiences of participatory mapping and community forestry show that it is possible to document these realities robustly. But this recognition must occur upstream, before the essential arbitrations are locked in, and not when the project is already socially and economically tied up.

It presupposes, next, securing customary land rights and the rights of use over the resources upon which food, mobility, subsistence practices and the continuity of local forms of life depend. Here too, the challenge is not simply to compensate communities more effectively. It is to recognise that they have a priority interest in living from their environment, and not a residual right subordinated to economically or administratively better-endowed uses. The securing of land rights must precede, as far as possible, the granting of extractive rights.

Lastly, there must be a shift from a logic of late information to a logic of transparency and informed consent. Projects must be presented in a manner that is comprehensible, contradictory and culturally appropriate; communities must be able to receive technical and legal support; and the law must provide for what happens when they refuse,

contest or condition the project. Without a clear procedure on the scope of such refusal, consultation remains incomplete. The objective must be straightforward: to ensure that communities are not merely consulted on the resource, but placed at the centre of any initiative that engages their destiny.

Artisanal and small-scale mining must also be integrated into this approach, and not treated solely as an anomaly to be eliminated. In many territories, it constitutes a source of income, employment and subsistence, while exposing workers, and at times children, to particularly high risks. The challenge is therefore to formalise it progressively, to secure workers, to combat criminal networks, to improve traceability, to strengthen cooperatives, to organise access to financing, and to build bridges towards more responsible value chains. A mineral policy that excludes artisanal and small-scale mining risks producing greater informality, conflict and territorial injustice.

In other words, the passage from law to practice requires resources: independent support, access to information, negotiating capacities, effective grievance mechanisms, participatory monitoring and obligations of transparency throughout the project cycle. It is on this condition that the governance of resources will cease to be merely extractive or redistributive, and will also become a policy of recognition, security and territorial autonomy.

> ***Lessons from experience – Communities, rights and territorial security***
>
> *A mineral transition cannot be described as just if it shifts social, environmental and territorial costs onto extractive communities. Participation must not be confined to a late consultation; it must take place upstream, when the essential parameters of the project can still be discussed. Communities must have access to comprehensible information, independent support, effective remedies and enforceable rights over the commitments made.*

2.6 Replace uncertain compensation with enforceable territorial pacts

The sixth recommendation is to move from a logic of vague compensation into a logic of enforceable territorial commitment. Too often, social-responsibility policies, ad hoc compensation arrangements and the social obligations attached to projects remain imprecise in their content, weak in their monitoring and limited in their legal reach. They distribute counterparts without truly securing territories. Yet communities do not need peripheral promises; they need clear, verifiable commitments aligned with their actual priorities.

These territorial pacts should rest on a core of explicit obligations: access to water, food security, land tenure security, local redistribution, grievance mechanisms, basic services, qualified local employment, conditions of mobility, the protection of subsistence uses, and transparency over the project's commitments. In forest areas, they should explicitly include access to the resources essential to daily life, as well as the modalities of recognised local management. In mining basins, they should articulate more closely economic transformation, territorial redistribution and community security, so that the benefits of the project do not remain dissociated from the costs borne locally.

The challenge is to change the underlying logic. It is no longer a matter of communities receiving, in an uncertain manner, a few counterparts at the margins of the project. It is for them to have rights, guarantees, verifiable commitments and clearly identifiable avenues of recourse. A territorial pact is not a social supplement; it is the instrument through which a project becomes politically sustainable, territorially legible and institutionally responsible.

A territorial pact is not an incidental concession granted to communities; it is the minimal form of justice and stability without which no durable valorisation of the resource can claim to be legitimate.

2.7 Make traceability a tool of governance, rather than a mere market passport

The traceability of transition minerals will become one of the dominant languages of international debate. It can, however, follow two very different trajectories. If it is confined to chain-of-custody arrangements, technical auditability or product passports, it risks becoming a mere instrument for securing supply on behalf of buyers, insurers and financiers. It will then facilitate market access without necessarily transforming the actual conditions of extraction, governance and value sharing.

This approach is all the more important because recent debates around standards-based markets reveal a real risk of fragmentation. Standards designed without sufficient participation by producer countries may produce the opposite of the intended effect: excluding certain actors, raising the cost of market access, favouring operators already in compliance, and creating a hierarchy between 'premium' value chains and relegated ones. The response cannot, therefore, be the rejection of standards, but their co-construction. Standards must be progressive, accompanied by realistic roadmaps, supported by technical assistance, and integrated into national frameworks rather than imposed as mere conditions of access to external markets.

But if it links mineral flows to licences, contracts, beneficial owners, payments, customs data, social and environmental obligations, mechanisms of recourse, territorial impacts, working conditions and the value actually retained locally, traceability can become a genuine tool of public governance. The challenge for African countries is therefore not to refuse traceability, but to broaden its content: to trace not only the mineral but also the rights, obligations, responsibilities, payments, impacts, remedies and benefits.

A traceability that is useful to producer countries must therefore not only answer the question: where does the mineral come from? It must also answer more structuring questions: Who owns? Who exports? Who benefits? Which contracts? Which licences? Which payments? Which remedies? Which impacts? What value remains in the country? What real participation by communities? What protections for workers? It is on this condition that traceability may become something other than a tool of compliance for markets: a lever of public integrity, territorial accountability and local transformation.

> ***Lessons from experience – Standards and global governance***
>
> *Standards of traceability, transparency and sustainability can only be legitimate if they are co-constructed with producer countries. When they are defined principally by consumer countries, they risk becoming market barriers, fragmenting value chains,*

> *and creating a two-tier system between 'premium' and 'low cost' minerals. The governance of transition minerals must therefore make standards a lever of trust, of market access, of skills development and of value creation in producer countries.*

2.8 Build an integrated public capacity commensurate with the resource

The systemic recommendation is undoubtedly the most decisive, since it conditions all the others. Africa lacks neither resources, nor ambitions, nor even instruments. What it still too often lacks is a public capacity sufficiently integrated to govern the resource as an economic, territorial, ecological and political fact at one and the same time. So long as taxation, industry, energy, the environment, employment, transport, security, sub-national authorities and economic diplomacy remain conceived as separate fields, public action will continue to correct effects without genuinely transforming the overall trajectory.

The challenge is therefore to move from an administration in silos to a true strategic capacity. This presupposes linking the permit to an industrial strategy, transformation to an energy policy, redistribution to a territorial doctrine, the protection of ecosystems to an explicit conception of community autonomy, and economic negotiation to a clear vision of the country's strategic interests and, where relevant, those of the region. It also presupposes organising a capacity for implementation over time, bringing together administrations, sub-national authorities, researchers, communities, the private sector and civil society, in order to document effects, adjust instruments and inscribe reform within a longer horizon. The World Bank and the African Union converge on this point: without coherent public capacity, transition-mineral wealth will be converted neither into durable industrialisation nor into a just transition.

The real challenge is therefore not to add yet another mechanism, but to give the State the capacity to govern together what it still too often administers separately. Transforming African centrality into autonomy presupposes less an additional resource than a public intelligence of the resource: a clear doctrine, an assumed hierarchy of rights, a credible move up the value chain, and an effective capacity to hold together extraction, transformation, territory and collective security.

At its core, the question is not only how better to manage the resource; it is whether the State is capable of making it a principle for organising the future. For a resource becomes a lever of autonomy only when it ceases to be administered in fragments and is governed as a whole.

Conclusion

Africa does not need additional resources in order to count for more. It needs to transform, in a different way, those that it already possesses. The whole challenge of the present moment lies there. The mineral centrality of the continent is now established; it is reinforced at once by the energy transition, by the reconfiguration of global industrial chains, and by the rise of an intensely material digital economy. But this centrality, on its own, guarantees neither autonomy, nor durable prosperity, nor community security. So long as it remains embedded within value chains whose centres of decision, transformation and capture remain largely external, it will produce more dependence than mastery.

The heart of the problem is therefore no longer to demonstrate the importance of African resources. It is to determine the conditions under which they may cease to be an exposed wealth and become a lever of productive power, territorial stability, decent work and political recognition. That is why this chapter has proposed a shift in perspective. A resource policy can no longer be judged solely on the basis of extracted volumes, announced investments or anticipated revenues. It must be evaluated against three more decisive criteria: the value actually captured locally, the preservation of natural capital, and the real effect of economic activities on the security of communities, workers and territories. It is on this condition that it becomes possible to distinguish an apparent valorisation from a true transformation.

This shift compels us to acknowledge an obvious point that is too often sidestepped: the question of resources is inseparably economic, ecological, territorial and political. It engages Africa's positioning within the world economy, but also access to water, land, the forest, wildlife, subsistence uses and the concrete conditions of local life. It engages redistribution, but also the hierarchy of rights. It engages contracts, but also the recognition of communities as legitimate subjects of their territory. It engages, lastly, the State's capacity to hold together what it still too often administers separately. Without this overall capacity, the resource will continue to be governed in fragments, when it should be conceived as a principle of organisation for the long term.

The bottom line can then be stated simply. Africa will not transform its centrality into autonomy by extracting more, but by governing better. Better – that is, by negotiating at the right scale, by selecting credible segments for moving up the value chain, by making natural capital a principle of arbitration, by recognising community use rights, by protecting workers, by territorialising the obligations attached to projects, by making traceability a tool of accountability, and by rebuilding an integrated public capacity commensurate with the resource. It is on this condition that African minerals will cease to fuel principally the transitions of others, and will become also one of the foundations of the continent's own transformation.

The priority, therefore, is not only to make African minerals a better-managed resource. It is to make them an instrument of productive sovereignty, territorial justice and collective stability. It is on this condition that Africa's new mineral centrality may become something other than a renewed dependence: a capacity for transformation, assumed and governed by the continent itself.

02

How to reform institutions and build endogenous democratic models?

Jean-Eudes Biem

Executive summary

Africa is sliding towards a new cycle of authoritarianism, precariousness and conflict, even though African peoples remain, in their majority, attached to democracy and continue to expect it to deliver popular sovereignty, justice, order, security and shared prosperity. Read against the grain of history, this cycle can be averted or contained only through far-reaching reforms – reforms capable of producing not merely African solutions to African problems, but solutions that are authentically endogenous, culturally sustainable and effective in everyday life. This chapter proceeds in two parts to show how to reform institutions and build new democratic models capable of lifting the persistent burdens that weigh on the States and societies of the continent.

The first part offers a structural analysis in the service of anticipation. It reviews how, since the late nineteenth century, Africa has known waves of reform, but too often under external direction, with authoritarian, liberal or technocratic models that have remained ineffective in the face of the aspirations of peoples. The wave of the 1990s introduced pluralist elections, liberal constitutions and the formal institutions of the rule of law, without reducing poverty, corruption, insecurity, the confiscation of power, the distance of public services from citizens, or the weakness of countervailing powers. The result has been an electoral and democratic fatigue that nourishes authoritarian narratives, military ruptures and the temptation of the security shortcut, without effacing the deep aspiration to a more substantive democracy. With corruption and predation having become the principal pathways to enrichment, the Africa of the 2020s has entered into trajectories of violent collision that will pit impoverished masses struggling for subsistence against ruling classes struggling to preserve family fortunes built on the privatisation of common goods.

The second part recommends four major sets of next-generation reforms in order to regain the historical initiative, redirect prevailing trends, and build a peaceful, prosperous and innovative African democratic civilisation grounded in endogenous models drawn from ancestral traditions and contemporary creativities.

1. **Endogenist reform of the principles, methods and coordinates of governing States and societies:** it aims to limit the perverse effects of extraversion and to channel and negotiate State–society conflicts more effectively. The strategic political-economy model put forward is that of **Asset-Based Capacity Development (ABCD; DCBAP in the original French)**. It draws first and foremost on the capacities, sources, resources, know-how and inheritances of African cultures and societies themselves.
2. **Reform of powers, institutions and procedures:** it aims to refound the State on the traditional African polyarchic principle according to which no one ever decides

alone for the common good. On the basis of this principle, competition is replaced by democratic consensus and association, and the shared exercise of power has as its purpose the productive coexistence of all components of heterogeneous societies. This implies a new federative spirit, resting on practices of subsidiarity and a combination of direct and representative democracy capable of making communities into building peoples at every level.

3. **Reform of electoral systems:** it aims to pacify elections and to render them productive on the basis of models that conform to traditional African electoral principles, which seek to guarantee the benefits of the vote to the entire population. In concrete terms, these principles translate as follows: the combination of direct and representative democracy; consensus and association of all components of the body politic in the exercise of power; voting argued through testimony; ranked-choice voting; compulsory voting, including for children (with regulated family and lineage voting); elections without candidates and focused not on partisan competition but on the evaluation of options, costs and benefits that are most unifying and effective; and so on.
4. **Reform of economies and societies:** it aims to make democracy an intimate and everyday reality – a spirit, a way of living and a method of seeking and guaranteeing truth, justice, peace and reconciliation at every level. It takes shape in the following fields: democratising the economy, the management of the commons and the means of meeting basic needs and of investing (land, credit and labour rooted in solidarity); upgrading traditional industrial know-how; building endogenist educational systems to support the whole and to guarantee intergenerational justice.

Introduction: For a second continental wave of democratic transitions

After the abandonments of democracy and sovereignty that marked the reforms surrounding independence, and after the failure of the wave of liberal democratisation of the 1990s, how are institutions to be reformed and endogenous democratic models to be built in Africa today? The compelling answer is that this can be done with relevance and effectiveness only in the direction of a democracy that is at last substantive – through the historical overcoming of the syndrome of formalism without substance that afflicts liberal democracy globally and in Africa, both being eroded by an accelerating drift towards authoritarianism and plutocracy. To safeguard the future, African States and societies are now confronted with the challenge of moving beyond the occasional touching-up of constitutions, electoral laws, administrations, parties and formal institutions. The challenge is to reach the heart of the problem: the reconstruction of power on the basis of the resources of societies themselves, and its reorganisation around the goals of protecting life from oppression, dispossession, indignity, destruction and everything that leads thereto.

Until now, the reform cycles experienced by the continent have been marked, essentially, by what must be called external direction. Today, Africa is entering a phase in which democratic reform must change both its orientation and its ambition. The democracy that is sought must take on broader meanings than the dominant representative, liberal, individualist, electoralist and partisan model. The implantation of this decaying model has often left intact, or even reinforced, the deeper drivers of the confiscation of power, the seizure of resources, the weakness of social control, the distance between governors and the governed, external dependence, material precariousness and corruption in all its forms.

The pillars of the conduct of collective affairs must abandon the terrain of surface adjustments and open onto a refoundation of the political that is capable of solidly linking institutions to societies, territories, families, generations, economies, forms of knowledge and the commons, in the service of protecting the living. The African democracy that is to be built must become a way of deciding, arbitrating, producing, distributing, transmitting, repairing, sanctioning and protecting. It must permeate every everyday practice of responsibility. Equality before the law, equity, accountability, voting and the other universal elements of democracy will retain their place in it, but inserted within a richer architecture of consensus, control, recall, protection of the weak and service to the common good.

The substantive democracy towards which this orientation and this ambition lead aims at the concrete realisation of the public goods that peoples are not only entitled to expect from government, but bound to bring about through government on a daily basis: just order, security, accessible justice, dignity, work, subsistence, protection of the commons, access to the means of production, to housing, to forms of knowledge, to services and to responsibilities. A democracy that organises elections while leaving the economy in thrall to rent, corruption, capture and ostentatious consumption loses its social force. A democracy that proclaims popular sovereignty while abandoning communities to material precariousness undermines its own legitimacy. A democracy that speaks in the name of the people while reducing citizen speech to a periodic ballot weakens its anchorage. Substantive democracy joins political freedom to the capacity to live with dignity; it joins the rule of law to real security; it joins representation to listening; it joins prosperity to justice within and between all generations.

The historical urgency stems from this contradiction: by an absolute majority of 66 per cent, African peoples continue to prefer democracy massively, while available institutions struggle to convert this preference into durable trust. The electoral fatigue observed across the continent reflects less a rejection of the democratic ideal than a weariness with forms that protect little, deliver barely, sanction weakly and too rarely produce the everyday experience of justice. This fatigue feeds authoritarian narratives, military ruptures, violent contestations, distrust of elections and the appeal of promises of immediate order. Yet authoritarianism has already shown its cost: fear, confiscation, dependence, poverty, public silence, and electoral violence against the backdrop of States that tend to collapse the moment the hour of succession strikes. The expected response calls for a second continental wave of democratic transitions. The wave of the 1990s led the countries of authoritarianism towards an imported liberal democracy. The new wave must lead the continent towards democratic models that are endogenous, rooted, substantive, sustainable and capable of delivering the concrete ends of government.

To this end, the general approach of this chapter, and of the reforms it proposes, mobilises a key **triptych: political innovation, institutional refoundation and endogenous development**. The political innovation that serves as the basis for the refoundation must be both restorative and adaptive. It consists in retrieving and adapting Africa's endogenous democratic traditions – among them the palaver, consensus, radical polyarchy (no one ever decides alone, neither in principle nor in practice), shared power, voting by testimony, councils of elders, social and moral countervailing powers, the rotation of responsibilities, productive solidarities, the sacredness of life and of the commons, the right to subsistence, family, lineage and

community mediations, and so on. It restores in order to transform, to update and to render operational the principles that protect the community, distribute power, guarantee speech, limit abuse and preserve the commons as such and for the benefit of future generations. Institutional refoundation translates these principles into rules, procedures, guarantees, electoral systems, mechanisms of accountability, oversight arrangements and forms of government adapted to contemporary States. Endogenous development is the finality of the whole, providing its criterion of truth. A democratic reform takes on its full meaning when it releases the internal productive capacities of societies, strengthens communities, multiplies and protects the means of a dignified existence, encourages technological innovation, transmits forms of knowledge, and prepares the future.

This chapter therefore proposes a clear path: to begin with what Africa already possesses, to transform what deserves transformation, to institute what can endure, and to build a democracy capable of becoming an African political civilisation of responsibility, justice, truth and generalised care. It is divided into two parts. The first offers a structural analysis serving the anticipation of what Africa will become depending on whether or not it engages the reforms indispensable to taking a different course from the present drift towards heightened authoritarianism, scarcity and conflict. The second offers a set of concrete and practical recommendations addressed to decision-makers and to all relevant actors.

Part 1 – Structural analysis: deteriorating trends and the imperative of reform

A historical reading of African reforms leads to an evident truth: the continent has faced needs for far-reaching institutional reconfiguration at intervals averaging roughly a generation (25–30 years). For the past 150 years, reform cycles have unfolded at this frequency, but always under external direction and with exogenous references, and rarely on the basis of Africa's own political, social, economic, cultural and civilisational rationalities. Revisiting the historical cycles of crises and reforms casts light on the diagnosis of the problems to be resolved through next-generation reforms, in order to avoid foreseeable, structurally programmed catastrophes. It is from the perspective of "deprogramming" conflicts that we may here identify and assess the availability of the endogenous sources and resources of the most promising reforms.

1.1 Historical waves of reform in modern and contemporary Africa

Since the late nineteenth century, Africa has known takeovers, territorial reorganisations, administrative overhauls, economic restructurings, constitutional engineerings, institutional transitions, programmes of modernisation, imposed adjustments and, subsequently, political liberalisations. This accumulation of reforms has produced States, administrations, borders, school systems, lexicons, monetary standards and constraints, political parties, problematic elections, more or less stabilising constitutions, as well as jurisdictions and public policies bearing a westernisation that imposed itself as if there were no alternatives. Modern history is punctuated by six generations or major waves of reform that recycle the same logic: to reform Africa so as to bring it into models already constituted outside of it, instead of starting from African forms of government and legitimation, of deliberation and sanction, of control and solidarity, of production and transmission.

The first major wave is that of colonial takeover reforms. They subordinated and supplanted African socio-political systems that rested, to varying degrees, on consultation, the palaver, consensus, the distribution of powers, lineage arbitration, the control of those holding authority, the land commons, and productive solidarities. With a few exceptions (the case of Algeria, where France was present from the 1830s), this wave took place in the late nineteenth century. The colonial order introduced a government of command, founded on coercion, centralisation, imposed taxation, cash crops, extraction, administrative policing, school and religious supervision, and the hierarchisation of populations according to the needs of empire. These inaugural reforms put in place three pillars: (1) Christianisation and schooling in European languages, which captured the imaginary; (2) the monetisation of the economy, which extraverted it through export crops, forced labour and commercial dependence; and (3) the centralising administration – crucible and principle of tyrannical or totalitarian government – which imposed command upon deliberation. African territories became spaces to be exploited, converted, classified, taxed and rendered productive for an external centre. African peoples internalised the idea that to be governed is to submit to force and extraversion, ceasing to be the source of the norm in order to become objects of procedures, regulations, censuses and obligations decided elsewhere.

The second generation of reforms emerged in the inter-war period, in the shadow of a nascent international system already threatened by the fascisms of the European powers that had emerged as losers from the first wave, while colonial policies continued under minimal regulation by the League of Nations. By enlarging the British and French colonial empires through the addition of former German possessions, the new order entailed requirements of administrative reorganisation. The whole was carried out within the maintenance of the priorities of "development for export", with marginal changes consisting in a relative strengthening of education and of subordinate native participation in command.

The third generation of reforms, more political, came with the close of the Second World War. It aimed to reorganise the relations between the colonial regime and its subjects, with the preparation of the modalities for granting and exercising the right of peoples to self-determination. It is in this wave that the democratic question becomes more explicit in reform agendas. These reforms included, among other things, the right to vote and the legislation framing elections, which took place almost everywhere during the 1950s. In the French empire in particular, the establishment of territorial assemblies put an end to direct administration under the rod of colonial governors and *commandants de cercle*. Overall, the reforms went hand in hand with the consolidation of capitalist economic institutions, whose objective was to expand the extraction of natural resources and the major export cash crops.

The fourth major wave came in the wake of decolonisation, with the move to internal autonomy and preparation for the granting of independence. Aiming to respond a *minima* to the will to emancipation while at the same time cutting short the demand for independence, French reform engineering in particular consisted in tying the colonies to the "mother country". The ideas of the *Communauté française* and the *Union française* were thus conceived to serve as frameworks for African countries to access internal autonomy. So it was that the Loi-cadre of Gaston Defferre was imposed, defended in Africa by partisans of the continuation of the *Union française* – among them Félix Houphouët-Boigny and Léopold Sédar Senghor – and rejected by independantists such

as Sékou Touré and Ruben Um Nyobè, who called for substantive reforms and authentic sovereignty. As regards democracy, it was already entering ambivalence. It was in democracy's name that Um Nyobè, for example, claimed a true independence that was due to Cameroonians under the Trusteeship Agreements. It was also in democracy's name that the French authorities, through the words of Pierre Messmer, "decided to pursue and eliminate him", opening the way to independence under control. These independences would end up suspending both sovereignty and democracy alike, and many Africans would draw the lesson that the two go together and require the continuation of the struggle.

The fifth generation aimed at the consolidation of the new States in the 1960s. Constitutional and institutional in nature, it produced extremely contrasting outcomes: stabilising powers in some places, generating instability elsewhere, opening the way to coups d'état, which themselves prolonged the process of external reorganisation of States, societies and institutions. Over the three decades that followed, reforms drifted ever further from democracy, with the archetype being the imposition, almost everywhere on the continent, of single-party regimes. Timid reforms such as the limited restoration of multipartism in Senegal merely confirmed the non-democratic nature and ends of all reforms under the Cold War. These reforms consisted in imposing a capitalist or pseudo-socialist African State around potentates and autocrats shielded from pro-democratic contestation by the arms, networks, resources and other contributions of international powers, within the quasi-static order of pré-carrés (spheres of influence).

The sixth and most recent major wave of institutional reform took place in the early 1990s. Its principal aim was to put an end to that thirty-year static order. In the dual context of structural adjustment and the loss of influence of the socialist-communist world, this wave amounted to institutional reforms aimed at instituting liberal democracy and the market economy. Once again, in response to the demand for the liberalisation of political systems following internal protests and the debt crisis, this generation of reforms was inscribed within the external direction of the reorganisation of African institutions. These reforms have now produced all their effects and have exhausted themselves at the same time as the influence of the Western powers that most promoted them has declined – those very powers themselves now sliding towards plutocratic oligarchy. The rising influence of new powers such as the BRICS in Africa has opened ambivalent possibilities of diplomatic independence.

On the one hand, these possibilities appear favourable to the self-influence and self-reference indispensable to leading reflection on the future of institutions and democracy in Africa. On the other hand, since the political and capitalist models of these powers are sometimes illiberal, rapprochements may contribute to a marked authoritarian temptation. In either case, cooperation has not escaped the economic logic that confines African institutions within the limits and constraints of rentier States. The structures of interest and exchange thus constitute mortgages against democratic reforms – combinations and collusions of internal and external resistances that form part of the very problems to be resolved for and through such reforms.

1.2 Diagnosis: the challenges of next-generation reforms

The historical record reveals six generations of reform and a twofold outcome. The first outcome is a vicious circle of two thirty-year cycles from which Africa must urgently

break free. The first cycle (1960–1990), dominated by authoritarianism and growing impoverishment, gave rise to social struggles that seemed destined to be settled by the adoption of liberal democracy. The second (1991–2020), marked by poverty and insecurity, has ended in an impasse that is now bringing Africa back to the temptation of the authoritarian shortcut, which carries within it all the difficulties of the first cycle. It is well known: misery brings peoples to revolt, and revolt brings peoples back to misery, especially if one chooses authoritarian shortcuts rather than engaging in the long, indispensable and inevitable work of building enduring solutions and safeguards drawn from long-run experience.

The second outcome concerns the inscription of African prospects of reform towards a substantive democracy within the global systemic context, with the specific modalities of international cooperation that include the games of influence of the powers already mentioned. The political orders of established and emerging powers do not converge solely in favour of authoritarianism and the government of the rich. At a systemic level, the framework of constraints is one of the re-feudalisation of the world under the grip of neo-liberal capitalism. Indebtedness compels African countries to abdicate or to cede whole swathes of their sovereignty, depriving them *ipso facto* of the capacity to meet the social and economic demands of citizens. The poverty and hunger that ensue lead citizens to renounce freedom in order to give priority to minimal subsistence and security, which also explains the authoritarian temptation. This renunciation releases leaders from their obligations of accountability and allows them to reinforce predation, in collusion with international partners, including organised crime.

These two vicious circles, historical and systemic, illustrate the need for new democratic reforms in contemporary Africa: the problems that must be resolved in order to be able to undertake the reforms are also those that the reforms themselves will have to resolve. In other words, the obstacles to putting democratic solutions and safeguards in place are also, in large measure, the very problems that durable reforms will have to solve.

Faced with this monumental challenge, the detail of the diagnosis of the bottlenecks may be summarised in a single strong idea: **Africa is going through a crisis of institutional translation of the democratic promise.** The first problem therefore concerns the depreciation and discrediting of democracy through the gap between democratic aspiration and institutional experience. The models inherited from earlier reforms have often reduced democracy to the vote, to parties, to constitutional texts, to alternations and to visible procedures, while the concrete life of populations remains marked by insecurity, corruption, unemployment, precariousness, the remoteness of public services, the marginalisation of young people and women, and the fragility of the link between rulers and ruled. The current crisis bears, then, on the very substance of democracy: its capacity to produce a just order, real protection, useful speech, accountability, and shared dignity and a shared future. The fact that 66 per cent of Africans state that they prefer democracy indicates a profound, durable and majority political demand.

This datum invalidates the discourses that claim there is a fundamental incompatibility between African cultures and the democratic principle. The peoples wish to be governed with justice. They aspire to a democracy that produces tangible effects: security in streets and villages, access to water, schools, health, employment, land, credit, housing, accessible justice, and a respectful administration. When these goods remain out of

reach, democracy loses its social density. It keeps its name, its rites and its deadlines, but it ceases to produce trust. The citizen may continue to prefer democracy in principle while doubting the institutions that bear it. This contradiction nourishes a dangerous climate: attachment to the democratic ideal, fatigue with its ordinary forms, and a heightened openness to rupture solutions.

A second problem lies in the retreat of institutional democracy in fact. The shift from 22 to 15 African countries classified among electoral or liberal democracies over the last decade gives a simple measure of the movement under way. This retreat means that the presence of elections, parties, electoral commissions, parliaments or constitutional courts hardly suffices to guarantee democratic reality. Regimes may retain the vocabulary of democracy while reducing the equity of the political game, capturing oversight bodies, weakening countervailing powers, instrumentalising procedures, locking down access to the media and to institutions, and turning constitutional revisions into instruments for the seizure of executive power. The gravest danger comes from the confusion of meaning that sets in when ruling regimes keep the appearances and the vocabulary of democracy while emptying the promise of its content. There is, plainly, a usurpation; and in time, distrust comes to target less this or that leader than the pseudo-democratic arrangement itself, which, moreover, is already the beginning of a solution – an incentive and an aspiration to authentically democratic reforms.

A third problem lies at the junction of security, justice and legitimacy and reveals the inadequacy of reforms and of the effectiveness of the security sector and related capacity domains. The deterioration of security – which has registered an average regional decline of 5 points over the last decade – gives the democratic crisis an immediate dimension. A citizen who lives in fear, who travels dangerous roads, who suffers urban insecurity, communal violence, armed predation, abuses by the security forces or the absence of recourse, judges power on the basis of its capacity to protect. The State may proclaim principles, organise elections, produce five-year development plans and deliver speeches; legitimacy is built first in the experience of security and protection. When security recedes and justice appears inaccessible, slow, costly or dependent, populations seek other guarantees: vigilante groups, private protections, local chiefs, religious authorities, clientelist networks, armed actors, and military solutions.

A fourth bottleneck concerns the retreat of participation, estimated at −4.5 over the recent period. This retreat shows that civic space is contracting at the very moment when African societies are becoming younger, more urban, more connected and more demanding. Participation weakens when associations are kept under surveillance; when demonstrations are seen above all under the angle of disorder and dealt with by the means of repression; when independent media are stifled; when oppositions are treated as enemies; when the speech of women, young people, producers, neighbourhoods, villages and communities remains decorative. Yet endogenous African democracy rests on an inverse conviction: public speech is a resource of government. The palaver, testimony, mediation, the council, community deliberation and the evaluation of office-holders show that organised speech can pacify conflict, establish social truth, correct decisions and maintain the bond. The contraction of participation is equivalent to a loss of collective intelligence. Where speech circulates poorly, anger circulates faster.

A fifth bottleneck appears in the figure of 53 per cent of Africans willing to accept a military takeover in cases of abuse by elected leaders. This figure expresses less a stable adherence to military government than a warning addressed to civilian institutions. Citizens accept democracy when it remains tied to justice, order, integrity and protection. When they perceive elected officials as abusers, predators, indifferent or untouchable, they may transfer their trust towards force. This openness to a military recourse stems from a rupture of accountability. It indicates that periodic elections no longer suffice to contain the demand for sanction. Societies expect regular mechanisms of evaluation, public judgement, correction, suspension and recall. African traditions of evaluating chiefs, of withdrawing trust and of community oversight may here nourish contemporary institutions. They would make it possible to bring sanction back into the democratic order, instead of leaving it to the street, the barracks or insurrection.

A sixth challenge concerns demographic, urban and digital pressure. With more than 1.5 billion inhabitants in 2024, a projection of 2.5 billion in 2050 and an urbanisation set to exceed 60 per cent, African States will face massive demand for services, jobs, infrastructure, mobility, security, education, water, sanitation, health and proximity justice. Legitimacy will be played out increasingly in cities, peripheries, markets, working-class neighbourhoods, migration corridors, border spaces and weakened rural territories. To this pressure must be added the digital divide: with 38 per cent of internet users, more than a third of the continent's population is entering connected citizenship, while another segment remains exposed to administrative, informational and economic exclusion. Digital tools may accelerate transparency, remedy, payments, civil registration, access to information and citizen oversight. They may also reinforce inequalities, manipulations, disinformation and the dominance of groups already connected. Reform will have to treat the digital as a tool of territorial equity and administrative justice, while maintaining face-to-face connections for distant populations.

In sum, the contemporary bottlenecks reveal one and the same crisis of democratic substance. The African democracy that is to be refounded must respond, in a single movement, to the challenges of legitimacy, security, justice, participation, accountability, employment, digital inclusion, the place of young people and women, rural and urban dignity, and access to the means of existence. Taken in isolation, these problems feed scattered sectoral programmes. Thought together, they trace the heart of a refoundation: making democracy a power of protection, of truth, of production, of control and of transmission. This implies overcoming the great structuring obstacle that is corruption. The diagnosis then leads to the question of the resources capable of sustaining such a transformation.

1.3 Sources and resources for reforms and new endogenous models

Where and how are the resources adequate to the reforms and to the construction of new endogenous models to be found? The answer lies in African political traditions, in the contemporary forms of social creativity, and in the invention of an institutional and popular sovereignty that is rooted. By endogenous one must indeed understand two great families of sources and resources of institutional and democratic creativity. The first comprises African political traditions and practices from which it is possible to extract restorative and adaptive innovations to meet the needs identified by the diagnosis. The second comprises the institutional, social, intellectual, economic, artistic,

community and digital creativities produced by Africans today – already useful or potentially transformative for the democratic renewal of the continent.

Endogeneity refers to a lucid institutional sovereignty, capable of recognising what African societies have produced of enduring value, of assessing its present relevance, of extracting its operative principles, and then of converting these into rules, procedures, institutions, guarantees and public habits. This approach begins with one's own assets before calibrating external contributions. It asks: **what resources do we already possess?** Which local practices deserve adaptation? Which African forms of speech, truth, consensus, sanction, validation, mediation, transmission and protection can build democracy beyond the impasses of partisan competition alone? Which contemporary innovations may serve a substantive democracy built from within? The initial reversal consists in thinking Africa through its available capacities, its institutional reserves and its collective intelligences.

The deepest endogenous resources are to be found, first of all, in an African conception of power marked by the refusal of monopoly, of sovereign isolation and of the private appropriation of authority. In these models, no one decides alone. Power is shared, circulates, is discussed, verified, corrected, and is placed within chains of obligations, consultations, validations, counterweights and responsibilities. This polyarchy, or radical polycracy, forms a political rationality in which a just decision emerges from the confrontation of speech, the test of testimonies, the progressive consent of the groups concerned, and verification by the elders, peers, lineages, age-classes, moral authorities and communities. Power here engages the administration of human beings, the equilibrium of the living, the peace of the group, the continuity of generations and the preservation of the commons. This conception makes it possible to think democracy beyond the formal separation of powers: by multiplying the sites of limitation, mediation, truth, revision, recall, evaluation and sanction, and by rebuilding institutions around circles of competence, community anchorages, social guarantees, territorial mediations and living countervailing powers.

The palaver, often reduced to a folkloric image, deserves to be restored to its bearing as a political technology for the mobilisation of collective intelligence. It is a method for pooling perceptions, confronting narratives, identifying wrongs, working out compromises, evaluating persons, reintegrating differences and transforming conflict within a shared social horizon. In the palaver, speech is ordered, situated, responsible. It engages memory, name, lineage, reputation and at times the peace of those whom the speaker represents. It transforms conflict into social knowledge and reveals democracy as a method of inquiry, for it obliges the parties to set out the facts, hear witnesses, accept mediators, acknowledge wrongs and seek an outcome that preserves the community in its quest for justice and truth. This resource may inspire mechanisms of political dialogue, pre-electoral mediation, constitutional consultation, land-tenure management, community reparation and the prevention of violence. It corrects the failings of partisan confrontation by substituting for it social deliberation. As a cardinal locus of democratic communicative rationality, the palaver may become an institutional principle: any serious decision affecting a community would gain from passing through public or semi-public cycles of discussion, objection, clarification, testimony and validation.

In the same order of proposals, voting by testimony and the absolute universal suffrage present in various African traditions constitute major resources for emerging from the crisis of electoral confidence and from the various syndromes of elections without democracy. Endogenous African voting, when it rests on testimony, exceeds the arithmetical expression of an individual preference. It becomes an act of social truth. It supposes that one says why such-and-such a leader merits trust. One looks neither at the proofs the leader has given nor at the promises he or she verbally makes, but at what proofs and promises public and private observation discerns from the leader's everyday lived practice and morality, what is his or her relation to common truth and the common law, what services he or she renders to the collective, what are his or her commitments and partis pris, and what capacities he or she possesses to protect, feed, arbitrate, pacify, unite, defend or develop.

Counter-testimonies, objections, reputations put to the test and the verification of merit make of the election something other than a choice: a trial of trust which one undergoes before the entire community of the living, without having to stand as a candidate or campaign. In many African cultures, the village chief was thus elected by testimony bearing on his conformity with the criteria of a good chief, by absolute universal suffrage, with all village inhabitants gathered and entitled to a voice in the testimony, including children. This logic may nourish public hearings, community forums, territorialised debates, verifiable commitments, integrity checks, popular recalls and periodic evaluations of elected officials. It also makes it possible to reconsider, for the future and futurist democracy, the key concept of absolute universal suffrage. Every member of the body politic is an elector, including children, women, elders, social juniors, dependants and future generations, through family, lineage, educational or community mediations capable of inscribing the continuity and the future of the living within decision-making, thus correcting the presentist biases of electoral democracy in favour of long-range sustainability.

To these resources is added sociocracy, a fertile organisational matrix for the African democracies that are to be refounded. It rests on self-organisation, sharing, multi-scalar decision by consent, the equivalence of organisational methods at different levels, cooperation between semi-autonomous circles, and the assignment of roles after deep deliberation on the competences required. Its interest lies in displacing politics from the sole field of competition for power. Where partisan systems concentrate energies on confrontation, conquest and the conservation of positions, sociocracy concentrates them on common objectives, responsibilities, competences and cohesion. It allows institutions to be conceived in which villages, neighbourhoods, communes, regions, professional bodies, age-classes, women's associations, youth organisations, moral authorities and productive communities act in circles endowed with their own responsibilities, linked through coordination and consent. It makes possible a democracy of levels that optimises subsidiarity: the decision is made closest to those concerned, then rises when the matter exceeds the local scale. The best government is conducted closest to the communities governed, with less distance, less opacity and less unnecessary verticality.

African traditional societies are often what one may call phylocracies, or governments organised on the basis of lineages, families, clans, villages and successive federations, with autonomy, interdependence and coordination. This organisation may inspire a profoundly decentralised territorial democracy in the sense of a multi-scalar self-

government of constituted communities. Family democracy forms its elementary level and the guarantor of the deepest anchorage of a democratic ethos of civilisational reach. The family then becomes a political school, a place for transmitting speech, responsibility, obligation, care, respect and the sense of the common. In the face of the contemporary crisis of citizenship, this resource calls upon us to begin from the concrete sites where individuals are formed, to purify them of their injustices, exclusions, patriarchal or gerontocratic abuses, and then to articulate them with equality, dignity, freedom and protection. Communities then become sites of active citizenship. As a consequence, deliberation, decision-making, election, responsibility, representation, protection and sharing are organised as bases of socialisation from the household onwards, then between households, branches of a lineage, families of a clan, villages and the higher levels at which the federative principle takes hold.

The principles of organisation and decision-making acquired and practised within the family and at various levels of proximity may readily be replicated at higher levels, up to the federal and confederal scales. African traditional societies built models of consociational democracy, so termed because they combine the consensus and association of the various components of their heterogeneous, multinational and multi-ethnic social fabric in order to distribute power equitably and at times proportionately, avoiding competition so as to ensure cohesion. The operating principle here is, of course, subsidiarity, resting on a combination of direct democracy at the local and regional levels and representative government at the federal or confederal levels.

A historical example is the Kanem-Bornu Empire. Born around Lake Chad and extending at its height across the heart of the Sahelo-Saharan zone, and although not an exemplary democracy at the central level, it had ingredients that allowed it to give Africa its longest historical experience of combining institutional stability and economic development, over a period of more than a thousand years (from its founding around the year 800 to its conquest in 1893 by Rabih az-Zubayr, who devastated it with an extremely brutal slave-based regime, to which European colonisation would put an end). The institutional system of Kanem-Bornu combined central power, court elites, ethnic and local chiefs, and sedentary and nomadic populations. Chiefs of fiefdoms could be integrated into the capital, while local or regional decisions remained largely entrusted to ethnic or community authorities. This method made possible control, military service, taxation and the integration of diverse populations, while preserving the local mediations indispensable to everyday governability. The cohesion and stability of the whole rested on the articulation between a strong centre, recognised peripheries endowed with formal prerogatives, respected local powers and shared obligations. It is a potential source of inspiration for the elaboration of future African models.

To gain a sense of what African consociational phylodemocracies might look like, one may consider the modern example which is the only one in the West that Africa might emulate while preserving and strengthening its own identity-signature and exploiting the full economic and symbolic potential of its rich cultural diversity: the Swiss model. In order to allow all its components to live together as a multinational State with four communities and four national languages recognised by the Constitution (German, French, Italian, Romansh) and great religious diversity (Catholics, Protestants, Muslims, atheists and others), Switzerland applies a form of consociational democracy. This developed as a fabric of alliances transformed into a confederation of States, leading to the present federal State, which defines the competences of the Confederation on the

basis of popular rights and the legal and political recognition of all its components. Its operating principle is an organisation of institutions that reconciles and preserves the characteristics of each community, alongside a direct, near-daily democracy which, combined with representative democracy at the federal level, ensures the durability of the system of concordance. To this end, the federative organising principle consists in a sharing of power across three political levels: 2,131 communes distributed across 26 cantons or federated states forming the Confederation.

In the Swiss political regime, the people vote more often on issues than for parties or candidates. Popular votes (*votations populaires*), in which the people pronounce directly on specific matters of public life, are held three or four times a year, while elections of the people's representatives are held every four years. Switzerland may then rightly claim that few are the countries in which the people have so many participation rights. As a notable local specificity, in cantons such as Appenzell Innerrhoden and Glarus, a traditional mode of election known as *Landsgemeinde* (Country Assembly – that is, a physical gathering of the entire body of electors) survives. Voters (aged 18 and over) vote by show of hands in the main square of the chief town during cantonal votes and elections. Approximately one-fifth of communes have a communal parliament with legislative powers. Each canton has its own constitution, parliament, government and courts. In conformity with the principle of subsidiarity, communes and cantons are strongly autonomous and have wide-ranging powers and competences, with the Confederation taking on only those tasks delegated to it by the communes and cantons.

At the central level, members of the Swiss Parliament (the Federal Assembly) are elected by the people and themselves elect the government of the Confederation. This government is in fact a Federal Council made up of a college of seven members (Federal Councillors) elected by Parliament – that is, drawn from the various parties having obtained the largest number of votes in the parliamentary elections. The federal councillors govern by consensus, a model known as concordance democracy. One may legitimately project that, drawing on traditions such as absolute universal suffrage, phylodemocracy, voting by argued testimony and many others, Africans could build systems that are still more democratic.

Ascetic countervailing powers constitute, for their part, a major resource for rebuilding public ethics. In several African traditions, holders of forms of knowledge, sages, initiates, ascetics, moral or spiritual authorities – because they were reputed to have mastered the desire for accumulation – limited the influence of possessions on collective decision-making. They rarely held executive power, but they were sources, arbiters, correctors or ultimate judges when the equilibrium of the collective was threatened. The activation of this resource would call for prudence, in order to avoid political occultism, religious capture, abuses of prestige or the irresponsible government of invisible authorities, in places where the old ways of life and allegiances have been corrupted within African societies. The principle nonetheless remains valid, since democracy is weakened when money, predation, ostentatious consumption, control of public procurement and material power become the principal criteria of social recognition and of access to responsibilities. Reforms will have to restore institutions of integrity that place power under the gaze of impartial, credible, controllable and publicly responsible authorities. Integrity councils, mediation colleges, authorities of memory, citizen observatories, mechanisms for the withdrawal of trust and civic rites of accountability

can render abuse illegal, socially dishonourable and broadly unacceptable from childhood onwards and at the very level of primary socialisation.

Endogenous resources also make it possible to envisage the democratisation of the economy. Several African traditions offer here powerful principles: population census-taking, periodic inventories of resources, universal land coverage, solidarity-based access to work and housing, rotating savings and credit associations, rotating associations of service-loan and savings, community work, the right to subsistence, hospitality towards the stranger or the destitute passer-by, commons of medicinal plants, and the open transmission of forms of knowledge and know-how. These practices call for contemporary translations: participatory social cadastres, community development banks, productive cooperatives, minimum land guarantees, local solidarity-based work programmes, houses of knowledge, ecological commons, intergenerational funds, access to credit for young people and women, and community food security. The principle is captured in a single formula: no democracy can claim stability if it is founded on mass precariousness, the abandonment of territories, consumerist dependence and economic exclusion. Democratising institutions also requires democratising the capacities to live, produce, transmit and participate in the common wealth. Resource-portfolio approaches will allow these materials to be ordered for the construction of new systems and models to be tested, on the understanding that development – economic as well as institutional – is a learning process equipped with mechanisms of control and trajectory adjustment.

Part 2 – Solutions and recommendations

This section outlines recommendations and examples of reforms to be carried out, with indications regarding methods and objectives for building endogenous models of democracy. Not exhaustive, they are intended to be enriched or adapted in order to be translated into concrete arrangements. The principle is that **African democracies must be reformed and endogenised** in order to guarantee a minimum of order, security and durable stability through the rule of law, since no planning, regulation, redistribution or durable protection can hold without this foundation. Reform is needed in order to ensure integral human security: spatial, food, health, economic, social and cultural security. Reform is further needed to give back to citizens, social actors, communities and local collectivities a minimum of autonomy, of political breathing-space, of capacity for proposal and of formal self-government, after more than a century of authoritarian centralism that has at times rendered the State dangerous in the eyes of populations and favoured the abusive privatisation of powers and common goods. This is the means of preventing the future conflicts that risk pitting the impoverished masses, struggling for the satisfaction of basic life needs, against rulers and oligarchies struggling for the accumulation of the means of predation and the protection of family fortunes built on the abusive privatisation of common goods.

2.1 Reforming the principles of governing States and societies

The most fundamental reform to be carried out is a reform of principle, of perspective and of method. It precedes constitutions, electoral laws, administrative organigrams, oversight arrangements and sectoral programmes, for it touches the very way in which African States and societies think about themselves, evaluate themselves, project themselves and decide to act. It is a matter of **transformational shifts, such as moving**

from a deficit-driven capacity development to an Asset-Based Capacity Development (ABCD). The conduct of African affairs is too often constructed from a deficit lens. Faced with any challenge, one begins by identifying what is lacking, what stands in the way of attaining dominant models. The consequence is the systematic resort to aid, borrowing, foreign expertise or institutional importation. This way of thinking compromises decisional sovereignty and structures the maintenance of needs rather than their satisfaction.

The endogenist reform consists in a revolution of perspective and of approach. **For each challenge, each crisis and each ambition, the governmental reflex must shift from the question "what are we lacking in order to succeed?" to "what do we already possess in order to succeed according to our own purposes?"** The second rule of the method is the cartographic inventory of sources, resources and assets bearing both immediate solutions and durable transformation. Seven categories of own-assets may be catalogued in each collective, society and State.

1. **Human assets:** the human resources and capital, including the skills, talents, forms of knowledge, know-how and passions of each of the individual or collective residents.
2. **Social capital:** citizen associations, including the volunteer groups, clubs and networks that bring citizens together.
3. **Institutions** as a whole, including local ones such as schools, libraries, museums, non-profit organisations and, of course, government agencies.
4. **Physical spaces and assets:** parks, vacant lots, buildings and infrastructure.
5. **Economic assets:** local businesses, the purchasing power of consumers and exchange systems on various scales, fixed assets, financial resources, exploitable material and immaterial resources, and so forth.
6. **History, patrimonies and matrimonies:** not only national and local history, but everything that forms the cultural identity and values of the collective, to which one must add the histories of personal and collective successes that arouse emulation and confidence in the possibility of succeeding.
7. **Connections:** all existing networks and the prospects of creativity and productivity that may flow from connecting the first six types of assets in various combinations.

This shift would firmly reinstall autonomy at the heart of public action and would restore to persons, families, villages, towns, local authorities, regions, States and the pan-African space the awareness of their powers of action. It is in this way that self-government acquires a concrete methodological basis. Organised knowledge of the scale of mobilisable resources already orients the definition of the coordinates of an ordered, effective and optimal mobilisation. It installs a discipline of sovereignty that breaks the principal vicious circle gripping Africa: debt; abandonment of sovereignty; impoverishment; renunciation of freedom and democracy in favour of daily bread; fire-sale of resources and the commons to address emergencies; debt and even more abdication of sovereignty. Endogenist discipline reduces distractions and refocuses attention on the essential questions: What do we already have? What do we know how to do? Who can contribute? Which dormant capacity must we awaken? Only then are external resources and partnerships sought, in proportionate complements, to achieve simultaneously the attainment of specific objectives and the general deepening of sovereignty.

Building education and training systems that develop democratic competences according to the Asset-Based Capacity Development approach. Education plays a central role here. Citizens must be trained, from the family through to the school, then the firm or the administration and diplomacy, to consider practices that perpetuate matrix problems as incompatible with the common life. This also implies the permanent inventory of these problems and the education of a sensibility that renders them unbearable and that psychologically, morally, legally and politically criminalises the commission of acts that perpetuate them. If a society identifies the seizure of land, of public goods, of sovereign functions and prerogatives, of natural resources and of opportunities as a matrix of violence, education must make anti-seizure an inviolable civic principle that all the vital forces and all the spaces of the society must defeat at all costs through internal assets. The same principle applies when corruption is identified as destructive of trust; when laziness, ostentatious and unproductive consumption and contempt for work are identified as obstacles to prosperity; when ethno-fascist or supremacist ventures are identified as poisons against living together; and so on. The endogenist school aims to rehabilitate effort, cooperation, the apprenticeship of know-how, technical creativity, collective service and social innovation in the resolution of problems and disputes.

Institutionalising decision-making schemas of the ABCD type. For any problem or project: inventory the own-assets; identify the matrix problems; organise the deliberation of the affected communities; establish the available forms of knowledge; formulate the options; assess the social, ecological, cultural and intergenerational effects; verify the mobilisable internal resources; solicit external contributions only after this verification; institute public monitoring; and provide for correction and sanction. By following this schema, the African State can become a producer of methods, an experimenter of models, an organiser of intelligences, a protector of resources and a guarantor of transmissions. Reforming institutions requires first reforming the way one thinks about power, wealth, success, decision-making, development, the protection of the commons and sovereignty.

Building high-performing research systems for the identification, study and modelling of endogenous assets that may be mobilised for the resolution of matrix problems, as well as for the running of contextualised simulations of endogenous models.

2.2 Reforms of powers, institutions and procedures

The second major orientation concerns the reform of powers, institutions and procedures. It starts from a simple observation: African States will gain little by correcting at the margins the inherited apparatuses, the formal constitutions, the electoral laws, the administrative organigrams or the partisan equilibria, if the culture of power and the structure of exclusive interests remain unchanged. We must take up afresh and re-learn the distribution of power, its sites of exercise, its modes of validation, its counterweights, its mechanisms of evaluation, its sanctions and its links with real communities. Traditional African systems offer here major resources, since they have experimented with forms of sharing, composition, mediation and equilibrium adapted to heterogeneous societies. They show that power can be strong without monopoly, central without absolutism, hierarchical while remaining attentive to communities, localised without separatism, and distributed without disorder.

At the level of socio-political systems, reforms must lead to the adoption of consociational democracy models indispensable to cohesion, stability, justice, equity and productivity in Africa's heterogeneous societies. A composite body politic governs itself durably through mutual recognition, the sharing of responsibilities and the inclusion of representative groups, rather than through the total victory of one segment over the others. In African States, marked by strong lineage, clan, ethnic, religious, territorial or generational allegiances, the arithmetical rule of the majority becomes an instrument of domination that structurally produces frustrations and marginalisations. Consociational models offer another rationality: sharing power among the various segments and levels in order to preserve the collective; proportioning responsibilities in order to reduce capture; and recognising for minorities rights of veto or of reorientation in order to protect them. This amounts to guaranteeing degrees of cultural or territorial autonomy as far-reaching as possible, so that political unity may welcome cultural diversity and may balance the relations between State power and social power, between legality and legitimacy.

Africa should also **model and experiment with systems combining direct and indirect democracy as appropriate, within or outside consociational models.** The choice should be for the systematic recourse to direct democracy at the local level and at every level possible, with recourse to the representative option only where the direct option is materially impossible. This would help to prevent representative confiscation, where elected officials speak in the name of populations without any living link to them, and where the popular will is invoked without mediation or examination of consequences.

Building phylodemocracies, or lineage democracies, adapted to Africa's segmentary societies. The aim here is to reform society by instituting models in which the practice of democracy is everyday and runs from the private to the public, beginning with the family, the lineage, the clan and the village or locality, in order to seed the higher levels and to irrigate them with the traditions and convictions of democratic integrity and performance. This would help to absorb the manifest syndrome of an abstract, administrative and electoral construction of citizenship, generalising the mutual recognition of institutions and citizens, and favouring the pursuit of democratic distinction.

To build endogenous democratic models, one must **adopt procedures for the consensual identification of priorities.** Imported systems systematically entrust the definition of priorities to party programmes, government plans, donor agendas and the like. An endogenous democracy will add to these procedures of popular definition of the most important problems. Each village, commune, town, region, professional sector or national community might **regularly organise popular diagnostic assemblies** in which populations identify matrix problems, rank them, deliberate, and set the thresholds for resolution. These priorities would then enter local programmes and the performance contracts of office-holders and their teams.

Among reforms in direct contact with living practices, **reinventing, adapting and systematising the traditional democratic model of periodic public evaluation of leaders, decision-makers, administrators and managers at every level.** Several African societies knew, and still practise, the periodic judgement of the chief, and even of the king. This practice should become an annual civic trial, a direct public hearing of accountability, of confrontation between commitments and results, with as sole

jurisdiction the whole of the people, and with the heart of the procedure resting on contradictory testimonies. The procedural details should be redefined adaptively in reference to traditions and taking account of practical requirements, of truth and of justice, with the constitutional anchoring of verdicts compliant with human rights. This format, which is at once a recall referendum and a trial, should be able to rule sovereignly so as to include or exclude "regicide" as appropriate, and on a provisional basis. Such civic trials would consolidate accountability, render government and management visible and high in integrity, reducing impunity, strengthening trust and favouring the rotation of governing personnel. The aim will be to make the rendering of accounts a regular, powerful and inescapable democratic rite.

The reform of powers and institutions also calls for **the imperative establishment of federalisation, or of an equivalent and very far-reaching decentralisation, of the systems of socio-political organisation. The principle of subsidiarity must become inviolable:** the higher level intervenes only when the lower level delegates to it, the Swiss model being, as has been mentioned (1.3 above), the closest in the West to what African patrimonial resources suggest in this respect. This architecture brings decision-making closer to places of life, reduces bureaucracy, restores local responsibility and entrusts each problem to the level most apt to deal with it. Table 1 schematises the prospects of subsidiarity in demophylocracy.

Level	Priority competence	Principle of intervention by the higher level
Person	Responsibility, dignity, civic duty, work, truth	Protection of fundamental rights
Family	Formation, primary solidarity, transmission, prevention of conflicts	Support when the rights of a member are threatened
Lineage / clan	Mediation, memory, belonging, collective protection	Intervention in cases of internal conflict or abuse of authority
Village / neighbourhood	Palaver, local priorities, neighbourhood security, the commons	Communal support where resources are insufficient
Commune	Local public services, development, land, civil registration	Regional support where capacity is exceeded
Region	Territorial coordination, infrastructure, fiscal equalisation, cultures	State intervention for sovereign functions or major arbitration
State	Constitution, general security, justice, currency, rights, national balance	Pan-African cooperation on transnational challenges
Africa	Peace, collective security, mobility, large markets, continental commons	Continental subsidiarity and strategic mutualisation

Table 1: **Application of subsidiarity in phylodemocracy**

Procedural reforms must **enshrine not only the participation of age-classes, social juniors, women and young people, but their access to responsibilities.** Several African systems organised responsibilities by generations, age-cycles, initiations, rotations or functional specialisations. This resource may reduce the durable capture of responsibilities by the same elites or the andro-gerontocratic excesses (the rule of older males) which have ended up forming a debilitating patriarchal mortgage on the life of African States and societies. Reforms must imperatively ensure that women and young

people, who form the natural majorities, no longer remain merely electors, militants, demonstrators or objects of public policy, but become governors and co-governors. This bias in favour of these majorities must be institutionalised everywhere, in coherence with the other principles and coordinates of the endogenous models.

Moral authorities and social countervailing powers – such as the self-instigating ordeal-judges, the ascetic countervailing powers that impose impartiality, or the learned societies that embody the courage of scientific truth – must also enter the reformed architecture. Democracy lives through formal institutions, but also through moral and social norms, mediators, guardians of memory, figures of probity, communities of knowledge, trade unions, professional organisations, women of peace, elders, young innovators, artists, educators, religious figures, researchers and producers. Recognised, framed, pluralised, made transparent and linked to public procedures, these forces may sit on ethics councils, mediation commissions, citizen juries, integrity observatories, peace councils, colleges of testimony or consultative chambers. Their role would be to recall principles, to alert to abuses, to facilitate compromises, to protect the weak and to contribute to the periodic civic trials.

The reforms of powers, institutions and procedures must construct a political order in which power is shared, controlled, evaluated, localised, reversible and oriented towards service. It is the peoples who govern, and all prerogatives that can be exercised at the level of lower bodies of direct democracy must be exercised at that level, rising to higher levels only in cases of revocable delegation from below. The chief, the elected official, the minister, the mayor, the governor, the administrative official, the public manager, the traditional chief, the magistrate, the security chief or the head of a public enterprise must appear as holders of an office placed under a contract of trust. Endogenous democracy connects authority, recognises levels, restores popular sovereignty and everyday self-government, makes the State closer, transforms the living principles of tradition into constitutional guarantees, and surrounds the election with deliberation, testimony, evaluation, recall and mediation. It organises diversity so as to make of it a force of stability, and opens the way to a democracy of circles, of levels, of mediations, of counterweights and of responsible communities.

2.3 Reforming electoral systems: absolute universal suffrage, justified voting and intergenerational responsibility

The reform of electoral systems occupies a central place in the endogenous democratic refoundation, given that elections focus democratic habits and hopes, social distrust, communal rivalry, competition for resources, fear of exclusion and the temptation of violence. The arrangements inherited from liberal democracies have often reduced the vote to a periodic selection between candidates or parties. Yet several African political traditions endow political choice with a richer scope: argued choice, public testimony, evaluation of qualities, recognition of merit, verification of integrity, search for consensus, inclusion of lineages, representation of generations and sanction of office-holders. Electoral reform must therefore take up the question at its root: what does it mean to elect, who belongs to the body politic, what does the vote validate, by what mechanisms can we prevent the election from becoming a war of blocs, a market of loyalties or a rite of legitimation for already-captured powers? The objective is to transform the election into an act of political truth, of social responsibility and of intergenerational projection.

A first reform might consist in **adopting, as the electoral model of indirect democracy, the ranked-choice ballot (preferential voting), by which voters rank candidates in order of preference.** This arrangement produces an election with several instantaneous rounds, prevents victories based on a relative plurality, gives weight to minority opinions without turning them into wasted votes, and obliges each candidate to seek the secondary or tertiary esteem of voters from other camps. In heterogeneous societies, marked by territorial, ethnic, religious, linguistic, generational or partisan affiliations, this mechanism reduces the zero-sum logic in which the winner takes everything and the losers necessarily lose everything. Candidates and parties, wishing to become the second or third choice of several groups, will of necessity have to be courteous, open and consensus-seeking. They will have to speak to several circles, give guarantees, build bridges and appear an acceptable recourse beyond their initial base, as well as an asset for coalitions. The result is a competition that is less binary, less polarised, less brutal and less hospitable to discourses of hatred, since victory depends more on a capacity for broadening than on the aggressive mobilisation of a closed bloc. This type of ballot would help to cure several maladies of African partisan systems: the inability to form coalitions, chronic deficits of trust, and the violent maximalism of those in power as well as of oppositions, in an atmosphere where, if power is lost, there is fear of never being able to return to it.

In direct democracy, preferential voting in the choice of representatives must be reinterpreted from African traditions in the spirit of voting argued by testimony, which must prevail at the local level where direct democracy is practised. As indicated (1.3 above), in many of Africa's numerous traditions, the election of the village chief, for example, took place at a general assembly of the whole village in which everyone, including children, had the right and even the duty to speak for or against by giving testimony based on their observations. Choosing a leader within such a framework comes down to saying what one knows of the person: their qualities, their courage, their sense of the common, their experience, their capacity to protect, to pacify, to mobilise, to share, as well as the services they have rendered, but also their faults, their abuses, their inadequacies or the dangers they might represent. The vote is an act of social knowledge, an exercise in the search for truth and a jurisdiction that makes of democracy at once a way of life and a method of inquiry for the free self-imposition of truth and justice on the collective that gives itself leaders. This traditional vote said less "I prefer" than "I testify". An electoral reform inspired by this logic would have ballots preceded by territorial forums, public hearing sessions, proximity debates, programmatic and moral confrontations, the publication of commitments and the evaluation of records of service. The election would thus emerge from quarrels of persons to return to issues, evidence, services rendered, demonstrated capacities and argued trust.

Reforms could also institute absolute universal suffrage, in which the electoral body is constituted by the population as a whole at every level and in every ballot, whether direct or representative. The question of absolute direct universal suffrage deserves a prudent yet firm formulation. Ordinary universal suffrage conceives the electoral body from the standpoint of the isolated adult. This conception has carried major progress, but it remains marked by a presentist bias: it leaves out of decision-making those who will suffer longest the effects of collective choices – children, rising generations and future generations in particular. An endogenous African democracy may open a more inclusive path. Absolute direct universal suffrage means that any person

affected by public decisions belongs to the body politic, in so far as they are protected by the community, linked to common resources and engaged in the continuity of the collective. Children are the first addressees of decisions on schooling, health, debt, the environment, security, the city, food, languages, culture, the digital domain, land and the commons. Their presence in the demos must receive an institutional translation.

This translation may **pass through family, lineage or community-supervised voting. Children, very elderly persons under guardianship, dependants and persons durably incapable of expressing an autonomous electoral will would be integrated into the electoral body through mediation**. Responsible adults would vote on their behalf as trustees of a representational responsibility, with clear guarantees: declaration of family or lineage responsibility, compulsory civic education, strict supervision of proxies, avenues of contestation in cases of abuse, protection against the buying of family votes, community audits and the pluralisation of mediations where the interests of the child are at risk. Children and adolescents capable of discernment – that is, of testimony and of argumentation regarding candidates and options – should gain access to personal voting, with civic training and adapted procedures. This system aims at intergenerational justice, and not at an electoral rent granted to heads of family. It compels adults to decide also in the name of those who are to come.

Compulsory voting might complete this architecture. An endogenous democracy thinks the person within a social body; the vote then becomes both a right and a duty towards the community. Massive abstention creates a truncated democracy, where organised minorities, money, clienteles, party machines and disciplined groups can speak in the name of a silent people. Compulsory voting should be accompanied by material facilities: nearby polling stations, suitable days, advance or mobile voting, secured proxies, mechanisms for displaced, sick, elderly or distant persons, recognition of the blank vote, and the possibility of a motivated refusal where the political offering appears insufficient. It must also respond to electoral fatigue through legible calendars, the grouping of certain consultations, clear public information, and regular moments of accountability. Compulsory voting yields its effects when it becomes a useful, monitored, verified vote, capable of sanctioning and of redirecting.

The reform must also enshrine **the obligatory recourse to a referendum for any modification of the Constitution.** The Constitution forms the fundamental pact of the body politic; it belongs to the people before it belongs to elected officials, governments or parliamentary majorities. Any modification affecting mandates, conditions of eligibility, the organisation of powers, fundamental rights, the form of the State, electoral authorities or judicial guarantees should receive direct popular validation. The referendum itself should be preceded by constitutional palavers: public debates, local assemblies, translations into national languages, hearings of experts and of communities, periods of maturation, publication of the arguments for and against, protection of opponents and citizen observation. This obligation protects the common pact against opportunistic revisions, the corruption of legislators and the seizure of executive power.

The option of elections without candidates also deserves a place in the reforms, especially for local, community, consultative, ethical and professional functions. This method inverts the logic of declared competition. The community begins by defining the function, its requirements, the competences required, the moral qualities needed,

the risks attached to the office and the expectations of the group. Names then emerge through discussion, testimony, observation, recognition by peers and progressive consent. The person chosen receives an office instead of triumphing over adversaries. This procedure reduces personalisation, narcissistic ambition and the publicising of the self; it shifts collective energy towards competence, service, cohesion and recognition by others. It is suited to bodies of mediation, integrity councils, citizen juries, youth councils, women's colleges, professional chambers and oversight authorities.

Voting by consent complements this logic. As a vote, or a stage of the validation of a vote, without candidates or parties, it clarifies the disqualifying objections to the decision, or specifies whether the group may proceed with recognised reservations. In societies traversed by strong fault lines, this model pacifies decision-making, since it requires that oppositions be heard, that proposals be modified, that flagged risks be integrated, and that space be made for collective prudence. It might serve for the choice of mediators, for projects affecting the commons, for local plans, for educational reforms, for community conventions, peace pacts and development priorities. It breaks with the winner-takes-all mentality and teaches us to decide without humiliating, to settle without excluding, to advance without stifling diversity. Table 2 summarises the options for electoral reform alongside the solutions they bring.

Endogenist electoral instrument	Problem addressed	Expected democratic effect
Preferential voting / ranked-choice ballot	Minority victories, polarisation, zero-sum game	Aggregated majority, moderation, broadened coalitions
Voting argued by testimony	Clientelist voting, choice without verification, empty personalisation	Public justification, control of merit, social truth
Absolute direct universal suffrage	Exclusion of children and presentist bias	Intergenerational justice, full inclusion of the body politic
Family and lineage-supervised voting	Electoral incapacity of dependants	Responsible representation of children and vulnerable persons
Compulsory voting	Abstention, civic fatigue, capture by mobilised minorities	General participation, equality of civic duty
Election without candidates	Narcissistic competition, quarrels of persons	Consent, competence, cohesion, collective intelligence
Compulsory constitutional referendum	Constitutional capture, corruption of legislators	Popular sovereignty over fundamental rules
Popular recall	Impunity between elections	Continuous control, democratic sanction, active responsibility

Table 2: **Endogenist models for the reform of electoral systems**

In sum, the reform of electoral systems will have to transform African elections into an institution of cohesion, of truth, of responsibility and of intergenerational justice. Preferential voting reduces minority victories and the brutality of confrontations. Argued voting restores justification. Absolute direct universal suffrage inscribes every person within the body politic, including children, through family, lineage or

community-supervised mediations. Compulsory voting recalls that popular sovereignty also engages a duty. The constitutional referendum protects the fundamental pact. Election without candidates and consent-based voting return to certain offices their meaning of service. Popular recall prevents impunity. Together, these reforms reinscribe the vote within a political civilisation of speech, testimony, merit, transmission and collective responsibility.

2.4 Economic and social reforms

Democratic reforms must reach beyond powers, institutions, procedures and electoral systems to grasp their material and human foundation: the economy and society as systems and as lived experience. The point is to correct and transcend liberal democracy, whose inevitable failure derives from the fact of a political democracy backed onto an oligarchic, predatory or deeply unequal economy that leaves decision-making in the hands of the rich while structurally allowing the rich to become richer and more powerful, and the poor still poorer, more numerous and powerless, with no voice in the conduct of collectives – and ultimately in their own lives. **The African democracy to be built must guarantee the broadest public freedoms together with the most advanced forms of socio-economic access, in order to make those freedoms both practicable and inviolable: land, work, solidarity-based credit, housing, subsistence, forms of knowledge, tools, networks of mutual aid, the commons, and productive capacities.**

Africa has, in this respect, important traditional resources. **To reform the continent and build endogenous models for the democratisation of the economy and society, it suffices to reactivate, systematise and formalise – by adapting them – the solidarity-based economic practices that remain, for the most part, alive in those African societies that retain traditional survivals.** Most traditional societies have known arrangements which, despite their internal inequalities, dominations and hierarchies, protected recognised members of the community from absolute destitution, especially in rural settings. Among these arrangements, institutions and solidarity practices were the following:

1. **Inviolability of the commons:** the land, of which it was the symbol, was often a community common, of intergenerational responsibility, a support of subsistence and an element of the continuity of the group. Parts could be used or even partly held for the needs of life, ceded according to uncontested procedures, but the parts of the land that remained common were inalienable. The commons belonged to the ancestors, to the community of the living and to future generations, and consequently no one could alienate them, capture them or arbitrarily cede them. Society had been able to render this inconceivable in the collective imagination.
2. **Universal land coverage:** every child of the village had a right to land – generally lineage land – to build a house and to grow their food.
3. **Universal access to work,** through rotating associations of service-loan and savings, or through other forms of collective and solidarity-based work (ploughing, building of dwellings and so on).
4. **Universal access to solidarity investment funds:** any adult capable of and willing to work could join a rotating savings and credit association.
5. **Criminalisation of laziness:** various societies treated laziness as an offence justifying penal-style sanctions in cases of recalcitrance towards programmes of socio-economic reintegration.

The endogenous economic and social reform must systematise these practices and bring out their democratic principle: no member of the collective should remain outside the elementary means of living, producing and participating. Table 3 sets out a summary.

Principle of economic democracy	Mobilisable endogenous resource	Possible contemporary translation
Universal land coverage and universal access to the means of existence	Lineage land, the commons, rights of subsistence	Minimum land guarantees, social cadastres, community land banks
Solidarity-based access to work	Collective work, field associations, village mutual aid	Productive cooperatives, local production brigades, community work programmes
Access to credit	Rotating savings and credit associations	Community banks, rotating funds, supervised productive micro-investment
Dignified housing	Collective construction, voluntary mobilisation	Local housing funds, solidarity worksites, improved local materials
Transmission of know-how	Family apprenticeships, crafts, inherited trades	Community trade schools, territorial labels, modernised journeyman training
Protection of the commons	Lands, forests, waters, plants, places of memory	Local ecological governance, protected commons, community management rights
Social recognition of merit	Work, wisdom, service, probity	Civic distinctions, public rites of recognition, a moral economy of integrity

Table 3: **Reforms aimed at the democratisation of the economy and society**

The endogenist democratic reform of the economy and society can draw on traditional practices to construct co-productive alternatives within African economies, with international entrepreneurial partners, situated between the solidarity economy and the knowledge economy. The challenge is to cross and adapt three regimes of value: endogenous traditional forms of knowledge, scientific and technological forms of knowledge imported or developed in partnership, and cooperative organisation.

The reforms aimed at the construction of new African productive democratic economies must enshrine, as a pivot, the establishment of programmes and strategies such as industradition. This consists in the systematisation and technological upgrading of the industrial exploitation of Africa's material and immaterial traditions. It appears as the most promising reservoir of general growth and manufacturing development through the building of value chains in agri-food, agro-pharmaceuticals and agro-cosmetics, leather, adornment and clothing, as well as the traditional heroic literature that constitutes the most promising raw material for the image industry.

To support local democracy with a commensurable yet extensible economic fabric, industradition-style programmes should be instituted within the framework of "one village, one product" programmes. A medicinal plant, a fabric, a preservation technique, a local material, an architectural form, an agroecological practice, a music, an artisan tool or a transformation technique can become sources of prosperity, on condition that communities are protected against dispossession by intermediaries, outside firms or predatory elites. Economic democracy must protect collective rights over forms of knowledge, organise the benefits, encourage cooperatives, create community innovation funds, support territorialised universities, and place laboratories at the service of producers.

In fine, endogenous democracy appears as the model of a productive, solidarity-based, sober, rooted and protective society. It recognises that political freedom requires material foundations; that civic dignity requires means of existence; that participation presupposes time, security and capacities; that equality before the vote remains fragile when the economy enshrines inequality before land, credit, work, housing and forms of knowledge; that intergenerational justice must contain the appetites of the present; that social recognition must honour contribution rather than opaque money. To reform economically and socially is to democratise life itself: work, land, knowledge, subsistence, honour, production, mutual aid, the relation to the living and transmission.

Conclusion: From institutional reform to an African democratic civilisation

The urgency and the opportunity of endogenous democratic reforms and models now stand as an evident truth confirmed by the available diagnoses, by the work of African and international centres of reflection, by the alerts of continental institutions, by governance data, by citizen demands and by the concrete experiences of societies. Africa will not be able to respond to current crises through mere surface adjustments. The bottlenecks are too deep, too intertwined, and too entrenched in the ways of governing, producing, distributing, recognising, sanctioning and transmitting to be absorbed through new measures of guile or of pure form.

The proposed reforms open a path of strong autonomy because they begin from the continent's own capacities, from its traditions of speech, mediation, consensus, sharing of power, oversight of authorities, productive solidarity, protection of the commons and intergenerational transmission. They would make it possible to address together the structural and conjunctural problems too often dealt with separately: development conceived as a process of collective learning, the management and prevention of conflicts, durable stability, the rebuilding of the channels of social mobility, the effective guarantee of the rule of law, human, territorial, food, health, cultural and economic securities, the accountability of leaders, the restoration of trust, the relaunching of productive work, the protection of the living, and the inscription of future generations within the choices of the present.

The continent already has considerable resources for carrying through this transformation: communities, families, lineages, local authorities, women, young people, producers, moral authorities, universities, diasporas, local forms of knowledge, solidarity economies, digital innovations, and pan-African frameworks. The challenge is to inventory, organise, correct, adapt and institute them. Africa cannot move from the image of the *hopeless continent* to real emergence, and then to the construction of the

Africa we want, without far-reaching reforms touching the principles of government, powers, electoral systems, the economy, society and the imaginaries of success.

We must escape the illusion that growth, elections, imported institutions or external partnerships will suffice to produce sovereignty, justice, prosperity and cohesion. The moment requires us to dare to engage truly, methodically and durably the endogenous creativities and patrimonies as levers of multilocal continental reconstruction. It is on this condition that reform will cease to be an administrative promise and will become an African power of civilisation, of stability, of dignity and of transmission.

To close on the question of how, the reforms must take their full measure as a total social phenomenon. They must be carried by actors, social coalitions, grassroots organisations and situated communities, so that they unfold from below as much as from above. Lastly, the necessary financial, technical and human resources will have to be mobilised, primarily endogenous (international partners contributing only by stepping back in terms of visibility). Strategies for measuring and covering costs will have to be conceived in such a way that the reforms are imposed not as expenditures, but as investments in sovereignty, sustainability, collective survival and civilisational rebirth.

03

How can digital technologies strengthen material security and uphold the rule of law?

Macaire Eyenga

Executive summary

This chapter examines the role of digital technologies in the strengthening of material security and the rule of law in Africa. Africa faces major and interdependent challenges. Despite notable progress, the continent remains confronted with a significant lag in internet access, compounded by sharp territorial and social inequalities. Where access exists, it is too often threatened by censorship and restrictions imposed by authoritarian regimes. At the same time, social networks have become spaces conducive to cybercrime, disinformation and breaches of fundamental rights. To this must be added the persistent malfunctions of digital public infrastructure (DPI), whose inefficiency hampers the delivery of public services, limits the development of the digital economy and restricts effective access to rights. The chronic weakness of scientific research and technological education, the heightened vulnerability of African economies in the face of climate change, and the crucial issues raised by artificial intelligence (AI) and digital sovereignty complete this demanding picture. Faced with these challenges, this chapter defends a strong conviction. Digital technologies can be a decisive lever for transforming the continent for the better. They can democratise the functioning of public administrations, smooth and secure economic transactions, allow ethical and transparent management of mass data, and support the development of robust regulatory frameworks. They also offer concrete solutions to the fundamental problems of agriculture, health, education and the reduction of social inequalities. The chapter proceeds through a series of recommendations, ranked in order of priority and urgency. The most fundamental of these calls for advocacy in favour of the constitutional enshrinement of the digital rights and duties of citizens.

Introduction

Can digital technologies make the rule of law effective in Africa, and on what conditions? Can they guarantee real material security for all, beyond a few privileges? A large part of life in Africa now unfolds within what is termed the "digital world"[2]. Some use it to communicate, to share, to make themselves known, to defend ideas or to develop communities. Others use it to create, to code and to build the tools and services that increasingly support our daily lives. The technologies that populate this world have become essential to the organisation of society. They influence the way public services, businesses and the scientific community function, as African experiences in the

2 Bourdeau, M., and Marchand, S. 2015. « Comprendre le monde numérique : Entretien avec Paul Mathias », Cahiers philosophiques, 141(2), 130–138. https://doi.org/10.3917/caph.141.0130.

digitalisation of voting[3], urban surveillance[4] and the identification of populations[5] attest. It is henceforth difficult to imagine our society without this digital world. In education, for example, learning passes increasingly through digital tools, while administrations are developing digital platforms to facilitate access to services[6]. In the financial domain, technologies are transforming the way transactions take place and the way money is used. Transactions are now carried out through telecommunications services that link mobile phone numbers to electronic wallets[7]. This movement intensified in the early 2000s with the arrival of what were then called the new information and communication technologies (ICT) – mobile phones, tablets, and so on[8]. At the time, the scale of the revolution under way was not fully appreciated. Today, these transformations are real and are redefining our ways of living.

In 2024, the Innovation Foundation for Democracy organised a workshop entitled *L'École de l'Activisme* ("The School of Activism"), during the Praia Residency (Cabo Verde), in which the participants drew up a stocktaking of contemporary practices of collective mobilisation. The workshop sought to deepen the reflection on the possibilities of putting digital technologies at the service of a substantive democracy in Africa. Six fields of mobilisation received particular attention: technologies for mobilisation and the struggle against injustice; technologies in the service of the improvement, democratisation and oversight of public services, of government and of parliamentary action; technologies for the defence and protection of citizens' rights and of activism; digital technologies in the service of the State and their critique by citizens; the mobilisation of digital content for the constitution of an African collective memory; and the diffusion of technological tools (smartphones, computers, the internet, and so on) in the service of the empowerment of social actors. These different subjects remain structuring in the analysis of the links between "digital technologies" and "democracy".

As Africa digitalises[9], political and socio-economic concerns continue to weigh on the lives of citizens. The first concerns the need for the "rule of law": a system in which all actors, including those who govern, are subject to the law. A system in which powers are separated (legislative, executive, judicial) and in which the fundamental rights and freedoms of citizens are guaranteed[10]. With a few exceptions, many Africans still live under regimes that refuse to submit to laws. In these countries, there is often neither equality before the law nor effective separation of powers, and consequently no real independence of the judiciary. Fundamental rights and freedoms are not always

3 Passanti, Cecilia. 2025. Les infrastructures numériques du vote en Afrique. Biométrie, machines à voter et marchands de démocratie au Kenya et au Sénégal. Sociologie. Université Paris Cité. tel-05149369. See also Eyenga, Georges Macaire. 2023. « Technicisation des registres de vote et participation matérielle au Cameroun », Réseaux, 2023/5, no. 241, pp. 239–273.

4 Eyenga, Georges Macaire. 2021. « Les nouveaux yeux de l'État ? L'introduction de la télésurveillance dans l'espace public à Yaoundé », Cahiers d'études africaines, 2021/4, no. 244, pp. 753–776.

5 Breckenridge, Keith. 2014. Biometric State: The Global Politics of Identification and Surveillance in South Africa, 1850 to the Present. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

6 African Union. 2020. The Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa 2020–2030. https://au.int/en/documents/20200518/digital-transformation-strategy-africa-2020-2030.

7 Ettiboua, Angui. 2021. Mobile money en Afrique : Enjeux et stratégies de développement. Sainte-Luce-sur-Loire: Éditions Amalthée.

8 Nyamnjoh, Francis B. 2005. Africa's Media, Democracy and the Politics of Belonging. London: Zed Books.

9 Huet, Jean-Michel. 2017. Le digital en Afrique : Les cinq sauts numériques. Paris: Éditions Michel Lafon.

10 Redor, Marie-Joëlle. 1992. De l'État légal à l'État de droit. L'évolution des conceptions de la doctrine publiciste française (1879–1914). Paris: Economica.

protected, administrative acts do not always respect the law, and access to justice remains limited. In other words, the lives of citizens are weakened by governments that prioritise the conservation of power at the expense of law and equity[11]. A question remains here. What is to be done when one finds oneself the hostage of a locked-down system that resorts to repression and threats to stifle democracy? The second concern relates to socio-economic development. Many reports note that thousands of Africans are unemployed and struggle to find a job that would allow them to escape material precariousness. While a minority gain access to jobs in the public sector or in formal companies, and a part of the population emigrates towards the countries of the North, a large majority – women in particular – continue to depend on small informal economic activities, which offer neither stability nor durable prospects[12].

Faced with these two concerns, Africans are turning increasingly towards the digital world, which has become for them a new space of opportunity and emancipation. Digital is thus credited with offering the possibility of a democratic renewal and of a better respect for the rule of law, while opening up prospects of greater economic autonomy and an improvement in living conditions[13]. On the political plane, digital tools facilitate access to information, redefine the terrains of citizen participation, of collective mobilisation and of the expression of opinions. At times, they reinforce the responsibility of governments, as observed with arrangements for citizen monitoring of parliamentary life[14]. On the entrepreneurial plane, the digital world offers individuals access to new markets. Online commerce, mobile financial services and platforms for self-employed work offer new economic opportunities capable of strengthening a more stable and durable material security. In this sense, they make it possible to escape dependence, to gain greater freedom of choice and expression, and to emancipate oneself from constraining material conditions[15]. In this way, the digital world, beyond being a space of capital, also becomes an essential space of life. It is a place in which significant social and economic transformations are unfolding, and which offers new ways of taking part in civic life. It contributes in fine to building a future with more secure and more prosperous conditions of life and production[16].

This chapter sets out how digital technologies can strengthen the rule of law and material security, without minimising the associated risks and stakes. It analyses the present challenges linked to technologies and their essential role in the management of major public issues. Above all, it offers recommendations for making digital technologies a true engine of progress in Africa. It results from several collaborations bringing together representatives of civil society, experts, professionals and scientists from across the continent, through discussion forums, webinars and field-based work conducted over almost four years on Africa's technology landscapes.

11 Ndiaye, Ousmane. 2025. L'Afrique contre la démocratie : Mythes, déni et péril. Paris: Éditions Riveneuve.

12 International Labour Organization. 2024. Global Employment Trends for Youth 2024: Decent Work, Brighter Futures. Geneva: International Labour Office. https://www.ilo.org/publications/major-publications/global-employment-trends-youth-2024.

13 Mabi, Clément. 2024. « Mettre les technologies à "leur juste place" ? », RESET, 13. http://journals.openedition.org/reset/5008.

14 Ebuteli. 2024. Talatala : des nouvelles fonctionnalités pour renforcer la transparence et la redevabilité à l'Assemblée nationale congolaise. Briefing note, 23 October. https://www.ebuteli.org/publications/notes/talatala-des-nouvelles-fonctionnalites-pour-renforcer-la-transparence-et-la-redevabilite-a-l-assemblee-nationale-congolaise.

15 Sen, Amartya. 1999. Development as Freedom. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

16 Mbembe, Achille. 2020. Brutalisme. Paris: La Découverte.

1. Current challenges

Whereas many Africans had seen in the advent of ICT, and of the internet in particular, a means of creating spaces of mobilisation – whether to denounce public policies, to contest political power or to defend various causes – the evolution of the digital world over recent years has above all aroused fears, even disillusionment[17].

The first observation concerns underdevelopment and inequalities in internet access. In Africa, only around 40 per cent of the population is connected, with sharp inequalities between urban and rural areas. In the latter, the connection rate is almost twice as low. Even in covered areas, access remains difficult. Connection costs are rising, and mobile operators often apply tariffing systems that are scarcely transparent. Users thus struggle to know how much they are really paying to be connected and whether the price corresponds to the service received. The absence of coverage in some regions, combined with high tariffs in others, excludes a portion of the population – in particular the most precarious. This impedes their integration into the digital economy and their access to information. Yet a large part of useful resources – educational, economic or social – is now available online. Not having access to it creates a significant gap with the rest of the world and limits the possibilities of emancipation. Another major issue concerns dependence on connectivity infrastructures. African governments still struggle to take full hold of these questions and to engage genuine debates on them. Internet access via low Earth orbit (LEO) satellites can certainly diversify connectivity options and improve the connection for some users, but it also raises important questions of sovereignty and technological dependence[18].

A second observation concerns online censorship. More or less everywhere on the continent, with attention paid to countries such as Ethiopia, Egypt, Sudan, Rwanda, Cameroon, Uganda and Tanzania[19], governments have put in place forms of internet control that materialise as political intervention in the online space. Activists' pages on social networks are deleted or blocked. At times, the internet is shut down[20] during major political events, justified by a desire to preserve public order or, to put it plainly, to silence dissonant voices. Users of social networks in these countries – often journalists or whistle-blowers – are now summoned, even prosecuted, for remarks critical of those in power, of the political class, or for the simple denunciation of public policies.

An issue linked to online censorship is that of the regulation of harmful practices. What happens on the internet is at times risky, even grave. Acts of cybercrime do exist and must be regulated. So it is with the phenomenon of fake news, which seeks to misinform users and to distort reality, with all the risks that this entails. Yet alongside such practices, which may be considered offences, one also observes that forms of political contestation are little tolerated. In some cases, cybercrime laws are used to

17 Morozov, Evgeny. 2011. The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom. New York: PublicAffairs.

18 Eyenga, Georges Macaire. 2025. "Satellite Internet and the Disruption of Telecommunications Infrastructures in Cameroon." Social Studies of Science, published online 26 December. https://doi.org/10.1177/03063127251395006.

19 See the 2025 statistics in the Global Expression Report: https://www.globalexpressionreport.org/regions-subsaharan-africa; see also Freedom House, "Internet Freedom in Africa Improved in 2024", press release, 16 October 2024, https://freedomhouse.org/article/fotn-2024-africa-release.

20 See Paradigm Initiative, "Press release: Internet shutdowns in Africa double since 2016", 25 September 2025, https://paradigmhq.org/press-release-internet-shutdowns-in-africa-double-since-2016/.

serve political interests. More generally, the censorship of content, the control of online presence and restrictions on freedom of expression are taking on a worrying scale[21]. This occurs through agreements, often little known to the general public, between governments and the major social-network platforms. In this context, the internet no longer appears as the space of freedom that was imagined in the early 2000s[22]. It is moreover argued that the internet was never a simple technical invention, but the product of collaborations and tensions between American military and governmental institutions, universities, telecommunications firms, standardisation bodies and even end-users[23].

The third observation concerns the malfunctions of digital public infrastructure. These infrastructures are referred to as *Digital Public Infrastructure* (DPI) and constitute a privileged field of intervention and innovation for governments and businesses alike. In Africa, governments have launched programmes for the digitalisation of public services. Online platforms have been put in place to enable, for example, payments, identification and the exchange of data[24]. On paper, these initiatives aim to simplify procedures for the citizen-user and to save time. But in practice, with some geographical differences, they do not always work and often clog already-burdensome bureaucratic procedures with a new layer of complexity. Many users report frequent bugs, unavailable websites, errors in the processing of payments, or security problems such as hacking and data leaks. When a problem arises, it is often difficult to reach a customer-service line or to obtain a swift response. These difficulties become critical when the digital channel is the only option for accessing a service. In some cases, a platform that is down completely blocks access to an essential document such as a certificate or an administrative receipt. The consequences are significant: an inability to register for an examination, to apply for a job or to finalise an urgent procedure. Moreover, the proper functioning of these DPIs depends on the availability of basic infrastructures that are not always guaranteed across the territory. Access to electricity, for example, remains a determining factor. In many regions, power cuts are frequent, sometimes daily. Without electricity, it becomes impossible to charge a phone, to use a computer, or even to connect to the internet. These constraints heavily penalise populations, particularly the most vulnerable. They generate a sense of frustration, even of nostalgia for older modes of operation in which services were accessible in person, with direct human interactions[25].

The fourth observation concerns the difficulties faced today by young digital entrepreneurs[26]. Alongside countries such as Kenya, Nigeria, Egypt and South Africa, where the financing of entrepreneurship has developed, it remains very inadequate in

21 Frère, Marie-Soleil. 2016. « Censure de l'information en Afrique subsaharienne francophone : la censure dans les régimes semi-autoritaires », in Les censures dans le monde, ed. Laurent Martin. Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, pp. 341–356.

22 Turner, Fred. 2012. Aux sources de l'utopie numérique : De la contre-culture à la cyberculture, Stewart Brand, un homme d'influence, trans. Laurent Vannini. Caen: C&F Éditions.

23 Abbate, Janet. 1999. Inventing the Internet. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

24 Sang, Diana, Jane Munga, and Nanjira Sambuli. 2025. "Digital Public Infrastructure: A Practical Approach for Africa." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2025/02/digital-public-infrastructure-a-practical-approach-for-africa.

25 Eyenga, Georges Macaire. 2023. "Digitalisation versus droits humains et éthique?", AOC Media, 25 September. https://aoc.media/analyse/2023/09/25/digitalisation-versus-droits-humains-et-ethique/.

26 Umeadi, Chika. 2018. "Foresight Africa Viewpoint: African Entrepreneurship in Technology: Challenges and Opportunities in 2018." Brookings Institution, 31 January.

many countries. The early stages of start-up development are particularly demanding, with strong dependence on foreign investors, often unstable, and a shortage of local investors. In this context, many young entrepreneurs, especially outside the major technology hubs, take on average two years to obtain their first round of funding. They must often rely on their own savings or on the support of their immediate circle. This situation is all the more difficult given that the infrastructures mentioned above remain inadequate. Other obstacles further complicate their journey. The regulatory framework is often fragmented or even non-existent, with different rules from one country to another regarding data, payments or taxation. This makes it difficult to expand businesses across the continent, despite the ambitions of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Added to this is a shortage of technical skills, linked notably to the brain drain towards Europe, Canada and the United States. African markets are also fragmented by the diversity of languages and currencies and by users' still-limited trust, in particular owing to the risks of fraud. Local start-ups must compete with global digital actors that command considerable financial and technological resources. Furthermore, the high costs of importing technological equipment constitute an additional brake. Under such conditions, young digital entrepreneurs, and women entrepreneurs in particular, often spend more time overcoming everyday constraints than innovating, despite real progress observed in some regions[27].

A fifth observation: scientific research and technological education are largely neglected on the continent. Only a few countries, such as South Africa, accord them significant funding, while many others display persistent disinterest. There is thus a limited number of high-level research programmes carried by African laboratories devoted to scientific and technological innovation. Researchers in the sciences and technologies are still too rarely involved in reform projects linked to the digitalisation of administrations. The consequence of this situation is that the real, sometimes sensitive, issues raised by these projects often remain insufficiently identified, owing to a lack of critical scrutiny and technological foresight. This dynamic is also explained by the fact that, in many reform projects, administrations increasingly choose to resort to "turnkey" solutions through public–private partnerships (PPPs) with foreign technology providers, at the expense of local expertise. The same observation extends to the educational system, particularly with regard to the place accorded to digital training. Yet the development of the digital world requires citizens to acquire skills suited to a digitalised economy. These skills are still lacking, with the result that many citizens find themselves at a disadvantage in this environment and struggle to draw advantage from the opportunities on offer.

A sixth challenge concerns the growing impact of climate change on the economy of African societies. Across many regions of the continent, climate disturbances are profoundly disrupting economic activities that rest largely on natural resources and rain-fed agriculture. The irregularity of rainfall, prolonged droughts and sudden floods are causing massive losses of crops and livestock, weakening the incomes of millions of farming entrepreneurs, with implications for food insecurity. In regions such as the Sahel, farmers are now forced to sow several times in a single season because of unpredictable rains followed by long periods of drought. This climate instability

27 Salamzadeh, Aidin, Léo-Paul Dana, Javad Ghaffari Feyzabadi, Morteza Hadizadeh, and Haleh Eslahi Fatmesari. 2024. "Digital Technology as a Disentangling Force for Women Entrepreneurs", World 5(2), 346–364. https://doi.org/10.3390/world5020019.

affects not only rural economies but also all the economic chains linked to production, transport and food supply. Faced with these transformations, digital technologies are becoming a major strategic stake in strengthening the economic resilience of African societies. Early-warning systems, digital platforms for weather forecasting, satellite data and precision-agriculture devices offer new capacities for anticipation, adaptation and reduction of the economic losses linked to climatic hazards.

A final major observation concerns the question of artificial intelligence (AI) and, more broadly, the digital sovereignty of the continent in the face of the dominance of the major global technology firms – Google, Amazon, Meta, Apple and Microsoft. While AI is rapidly transforming the sectors of education, health, security, agriculture and public administration, the majority of the digital infrastructures, data platforms, cloud services and algorithmic models used in Africa remain controlled from outside the continent. This dependence creates considerable risks of technological non-mastery, of capture of strategic African data, and of durable economic dependence. In several African countries, public administrations, banks, universities and even security systems today store their data on foreign digital infrastructures, without genuine local control over the conditions of exploitation, storage or use of this information. While the debate on this is intensifying in Europe, it unfortunately struggles to take hold in Africa. Added to this is the risk that AI systems reproduce cultural, linguistic and social biases ill-suited to African realities, for want of locally produced data sufficiently integrated into their design. The challenge then becomes a twofold one: to develop African capacities for technological production, and to build a true digital sovereignty capable of guaranteeing mastery over the infrastructures, data and AI systems that will structure the economies and powers of tomorrow.

2. The importance of technologies

A significant part of global economic growth rests on digital technologies[28]. Yet it must be noted that the countries in which this dynamic is most visible are generally those that have managed to make the rule of law a concrete reality. As a rule, these countries display better economic and social development, and more effective long-term public policies. Conversely, when the rule of law weakens – under the effect of generalised corruption, of a judiciary dependent on power or of legal insecurity – development slows. Political decisions then become more predatory or ineffective, which durably impedes growth and citizens' trust. In this context, technologies play a decisive role. When mastered, they may contribute, with some exceptions, to making the rule of law and material security more concrete and measurable.

In this regard, technology in public administrations (GovTech)[29] constitutes a powerful lever for strengthening transparency, accountability and trust. It serves in particular to combat corruption, judicial delays, inequalities of access to law and electoral fraud, and to address major contemporary public problems. For example, technologies such as blockchain and smart contracts secure land registers by rendering them tamper-proof. Blockchain-based systems could be used to secure voting systems, to track

28 Mbembe, Achille. 2023. La communauté terrestre. Paris: La Découverte.

29 Bandyopadhyay, Sruti, and Juan Pablo Guerrero Amparan. 2025. « Comment les GovTech réinventent la lutte contre la corruption », World Bank Blog (Opinions), 27 March. https://blogs.worldbank.org/fr/voices/govtech-reinventent-lutte-contre-corruption.

government expenditure and to guarantee the integrity of public registers. In the field of payments, Africa has established itself as a pioneering space thanks to the massive development of mobile money, which enables millions of people to carry out financial transactions without a conventional bank account. In the health sector, digital technologies facilitate the rise of remote care, online medical consultations and even the use of drones to deliver medicines or blood units to remote areas. In agriculture, digital platforms allow producers to access weather forecasts, market price information and technical advice in real time, in order to improve yields and better anticipate climatic risks. These innovations show that digital technologies today constitute strategic levers for responding to the structural challenges of the continent. Thus, by responding to essential needs of populations, these technologies acquire a true social utility and contribute, at the same time, to giving concrete meaning back to the idea of progress.

Technologies offer innovative possibilities for the management of public data. AI and big data make it possible to produce actionable insights from large datasets relating to democracy in Africa. By analysing public-opinion trends, activity on social networks and public policies, decision-makers could obtain valuable information to inform evidence-based policy-making and advocacy efforts. AI also allows for better analysis of disputes and a more efficient organisation of hearings. E-justice platforms and open-data initiatives facilitate free access to case law and thereby help reduce citizens' lack of legal information. Moreover, the establishment of a sovereign digital identity helps in the fight against identity theft and favours the inclusion of unbanked populations. The impact of these technologies may be assessed using concrete indicators, such as the reduction of case-processing times, the evolution of the level of perceived corruption, or the rankings of international organisations.

Of course, these innovations are not without risks. They raise important questions, particularly with regard to algorithmic bias and the protection of privacy. Some of these issues are now addressed by regulatory frameworks (with many limitations), such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), as well as by arrangements known as regulatory sandboxes. The latter allow firms to test innovations (fintech, AI and so on) in a supervised and temporarily relaxed environment. In the world of learning, trainers complain increasingly that learners use generative AI to have their assignments written for them. This complaint must be taken seriously, since it is now acknowledged in the techno-scientific world that the permanent recourse to generative AI unteaches learners to think for themselves, standardises thought and language, and thereby risks ruining human creativity and freedom of thought.

As regards agricultural challenges, it is established that our societies are very fragile and that a few days without food would suffice for the social order to deteriorate rapidly. It is thus considered that there is no stable rule of law without food security, and that food security is more than ever threatened by the global context of climate change and geopolitical uncertainty, which jeopardise global flows of raw materials and agricultural produce. In this context, advances in AI applied to the living world nonetheless constitute an immense hope for securing a sustainable local agricultural productivity. In France, the inter-institutional research consortium PRECURSOR[30] is

30 With thanks to Mikaël Lucas of the Institut de recherche pour le développement (IRD) for sharing this innovative scientific initiative on the importance of technologies in agronomy and its connection with the rule of law and material security. See the PRECURSOR

developing AI methods to better understand how the genes of plants are regulated. The aim is to analyse the way these genes control the growth of plants and their adaptation to the environment. A better understanding of these mechanisms then makes it possible to improve crops – for example, by selecting better varieties, using genetic-modification techniques, or putting in place more suitable and sustainable agricultural practices.

In the same perspective, the development and diffusion of mass-sequencing technologies since the 2010s have transformed research in many fields, including genomics, medicine and the environmental sciences. These technologies have made possible major advances in matters of health, food, justice and the protection of the environment. In medicine, for example, they make possible the identification of certain cancers, but they also played a central role during the Covid-19 pandemic, by enabling the very rapid analysis of the virus and the design, in record time, of prototype messenger-RNA vaccines adapted to its evolution. Beyond the medical field, these technologies also contribute to strengthening food security by helping to identify resistance genes in plants, useful in the face of climate change and disease. They also make it possible to monitor antibiotic resistance more closely within a global "One Health" approach, linking data from the environment, livestock and hospitals to better adapt public-health policies. They offer a finer understanding of biodiversity, not only by identifying the species present in an environment, but also by assessing their adaptive capacity and resilience in the face of future change. Sequencing through these technologies has thus profoundly improved our knowledge of the living world and helps to better orient public decision-making[31].

It is essential today to move from a context marked by inequalities of access to technologies to a model in which technologies generate concrete benefits – green economic growth, the improvement of public services, financial inclusion, transparency and innovation. This means that it is not enough to provide access to technologies. Such access must also translate into positive, real, measurable and durable effects, both for individuals and for societies. Some mechanisms already help to make this ambition possible. In the area of financial inclusion, fintech is developing rapidly and is becoming increasingly common, including in rural areas. In the education and health sectors, innovations such as edtech and healthtech are being deployed almost everywhere. On the production side, the Internet of Things (IoT) and AI are beginning to transform agriculture and emerging industries in Africa. On the entrepreneurial plane, there is a multiplication of digital incubators and open-innovation initiatives, which contribute to the emergence of a true platform economy. Strong action is nevertheless needed if the full potential of these technologies is to be genuinely placed at the service of the rule of law and material security.

project: https://digitbio.hub.inrae.fr/thematiques/predire/consortium-precursor-2024-2025.

31 With thanks to François Sabot of the Institut de recherche pour le développement (IRD) for sharing this innovative scientific initiative concerning what mass-sequencing technologies make possible in health, food and the environment.

3. Recommendations for a continental digital strategy

3.1 Constitutionally enshrining the digital rights and duties of citizens

African States would gain by constitutionally enshrining digital rights and duties so as to guarantee a stable, coherent and protective legal framework in the face of the rapid transformation of societies by technologies. Such a constitutional enshrinement would make it possible explicitly to recognise fundamental rights linked to the digital environment, including the right to the protection of personal data, the right to privacy, the right to equitable access to digital services, and the right to algorithmic transparency. It would also establish clear duties for public and private actors, regarding the security of systems, non-discrimination by algorithms and responsibility in the processing of data. The digital duties of citizens, for their part, consist in adopting a responsible use of technologies, in respecting the privacy and the data of others, and in contributing to the security of digital spaces by avoiding fraudulent or malicious behaviour. They also imply a critical use of information, in order to limit disinformation and to preserve the quality of online public debate. By inscribing these principles at the constitutional level, States would strengthen the hierarchy of norms and ensure durable protection against the potential drifts linked to emerging technologies. This approach would thus contribute to consolidating the digital rule of law, to strengthening citizens' trust in institutions and to framing in a democratic manner the transformations brought about by AI and data infrastructures.

3.2 Establishing a framework for digital ethics and cybersecurity

African countries must imperatively put in place a robust ethical and cybersecurity framework so as to secure the development and use of digital technologies. Concretely, this implies the adoption of a national AI law, inspired by the model of the EU AI Act, that imposes strict obligations on designers and users of AI, guarantees the transparency of algorithms, limits discriminatory bias and frames the use of sensitive data. Following the same logic, the State must introduce national cybersecurity standards based on ISO 27001 for public institutions and private operators, in order to secure critical digital infrastructures and prevent malicious intrusions. This dual framework – legal and normative – constitutes a basis for strengthening the trust of populations in digital services while supporting technological innovation in a responsible manner. For this framework to be truly effective, it must be supported by transparent governance and rigorous oversight mechanisms. The authorities must allocate a sufficient budget for the training of cybersecurity experts, the upgrading of public information systems and citizen sensitisation to good digital practices. The protection of digital infrastructures must be conceived as an extension of material security. It must be ensured that hospitals, schools, water networks and public services are not vulnerable to cyber-attacks. By combining ethical regulation, cybersecurity and State control, African countries can build a secure and inclusive digital environment capable of supporting sustainable development.

3.3 Investing in secure and sovereign connectivity infrastructures

African countries must, as a priority, invest massively in critical connectivity infrastructures so as to strengthen both their digital sovereignty and the material security of their populations. This implies that they must develop mastery over the

physical layers (submarine cables, satellites and data centres) and the software layers (operating systems, cloud, and so on). Following the "last mile" logic, the deployment of fibre optic and 5G to at least 100 per cent of urban areas and 80 per cent of rural areas constitutes a strategic imperative for narrowing the digital divide and supporting inclusive economic development. These investments must be planned within the framework of public decisions clearly framed by the rule of law, with transparent calls for tender, rigorous oversight of private operators and the establishment of regulations guaranteeing equitable access to services. The aim is to create a resilient network capable of supporting essential services such as connected health, distance education and public-security systems, while limiting vulnerabilities to cyber-attacks or technical failures. Moreover, these initiatives must be accompanied by a strategy for the physical and institutional securing of infrastructures. Fibre-optic cabling and 5G antennas now represent critical assets whose protection is a direct State responsibility. The aim is to prevent sabotage, intrusions or appropriation by foreign actors that could compromise national security. Investments must therefore integrate strict standards of security and cybersecurity, as well as mechanisms for regular maintenance, while being associated with local training to guarantee the upkeep and the sovereign management of networks.

3.4 Rethinking the material chains of digital technologies in Africa

It is also necessary to rethink the modes of production, recycling and re-use of computing materials, breaking with the current model founded on intensive extraction and conflict-driven dynamics. By way of example, the conflicts in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo are inscribed in part within logics of control of territories rich in strategic resources, such as cobalt, the extraction of which feeds the global digital-technology industry, in particular the production of mobile phones. Taking this material and geopolitical dimension into account is essential to thinking through an African activism of technologies, information and infrastructure. Such activism must articulate, within a single analysis, the issues of industrial extraction and political destabilisation, recognising their imbrication in the configuration of contemporary democracies. Reflection on the materials used in digital devices must thus open the way to alternative modes of production that are more sustainable and politically responsible.

3.5 Promoting digital technologies that are open, ethical and respectful of citizens' data

Computing tools, and the actors who produce them, must respect this fundamental imperative of sustainability so that technologies are truly placed at the service of democracy. In this regard, the free-software movement, since the 1970s, has worked out several essential principles, including respect for privacy and net neutrality, which entail responsible practices in the sharing of citizens' data. In the same spirit, the open-data movement, applied to public services, advocates that the substantial volumes of data produced by governments be made accessible not only to public institutions but also to citizens, researchers and civil society. Such openness allows the redistribution of capacities for analysis, calculation and innovation, by giving citizens themselves the possibility of mobilising these data to produce knowledge and to contribute, from the bottom up, to improving collective living conditions.

3.6 Launching a massive programme of digital training

African countries should implement a massive programme of training in digital technologies, in order to train several thousand people, making digital literacy a fundamental skill on a par with reading, writing and arithmetic. This strategic orientation aims at strengthening both the technological sovereignty of States and the economic resilience of populations. The training should cover a broad spectrum of skills – from software development and data analysis to AI and cybersecurity – while integrating modules devoted to digital ethics and the protection of data. Their implementation would gain by drawing on partnerships between universities, research centres and public and private technology actors, both local and international, in order to ensure the quality of content and its adequacy to the needs of the labour market. Experiences in several contexts moreover show that such policies can produce significant effects on youth employment and local innovation, where they are properly funded and evaluated.

In this perspective, the programme must be integrated into a national strategy of digital development that is legally framed, with substantial public financing and a rigorous arrangement for monitoring and evaluation by independent institutions. The securing of training arrangements – particularly through reliable connectivity infrastructures and robust digital platforms – is also a central issue in guaranteeing pedagogical continuity and the protection of learners' data.

Digital tools may also assist in the construction of the rule of law through digital training. It thus appears equally necessary to rethink the contents of education on digital technologies and on democracy. This implies the production of accessible pedagogical resources, such as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), including didactic modules on democratic principles, translated into national languages so as to favour their appropriation by populations. This approach should also valorise African democratic experiences by bringing to light local practices and historical or contemporary figures of the defence of liberties, in particular through web series and web documentaries devoted to the "democratic heroes" of the continent. The activities of the Innovation Foundation for Democracy around the MOOC "Towards a Substantive Democracy", launched in 2025, constitute a good example to follow and to intensify. They form part of the Foundation's effort to build an online learning ecosystem comprising selected courses, webinars and pedagogical materials, in order to enable individuals and communities to engage more effectively in democracy.

3.7 Establishing a National Digital Council

The creation of a National Digital Council, attached directly to the highest level of the State, constitutes a strategic lever for coordinating digital transformation and for ensuring that public policies are inscribed within a logic of inclusive and sustainable development. By bringing together technical and scientific experts, local elected officials, representatives of the public and private sectors, and members of civil society, the council acts as a central consultative and decisional organ, capable of defining clear orientations on cybersecurity, the regulation of platforms, the protection of personal data and the extension of access to digital technologies. Its attachment to the apex of the State confers on it a legitimacy and an institutional authority that allow it to overcome administrative compartmentalisations and to ensure that digital initiatives

are aligned with the objectives of governance and the rule of law. The National Digital Council can become an engine of innovation and social inclusion. By steering flagship projects such as the deployment of high-speed internet in rural areas, support for local start-ups or training in digital skills, it contributes directly to improving the material conditions of populations (see "The Agora", below). Furthermore, it serves as a platform for anticipating and regulating the risks linked to emerging technologies, and for ensuring a balance between innovation, security and the protection of citizens' rights.

3.8 Strengthening national AI strategies

Although the African Union adopted a Continental AI Strategy in 2024, it is crucial that each African country draw up or update its own national AI strategy, taking account of local specificities and of the rapid evolution of technology. While some countries[32] have already initiated national AI strategies, these must be revised regularly so as to integrate emerging innovations such as advanced machine learning, mass data analysis and generative AI systems. Such a strategy should include clear objectives in matters of talent training, applied research and international partnerships. It should ensure that technological development contributes to national priorities such as employment, smart agriculture, digital health and urban security. Continuous adaptation is essential if public policies are not to remain out of step with available technological capacities, and to guarantee that countries can take advantage of the opportunities offered by AI while minimising the risks linked to digital sovereignty. This national AI strategy must be supported by a coherent and robust digital policy. This implies the adoption of framework laws to regulate the use of data, the protection of privacy, cybersecurity and the ethics of AI, and to favour at the same time local innovation. It also implies adopting a governance of AI that does not degrade the citizen interface. These countries should also allocate a budget dedicated to this digital policy, representing at least 1 per cent of GDP, in order to finance digital infrastructures, research centres and training programmes. Concrete examples exist of countries such as Côte d'Ivoire and Cameroon planning to invest in digital innovation centres and AI training initiatives for young people, while others have launched national plans for the development of AI applied to public services and to industry. By combining an updated national strategy with a solid legal and financial framework, African countries can create an autonomous and competitive digital ecosystem, capable of meeting global technological challenges.

3.9 Adopting tools of governance: Knowledge Graphs, FAIR data, explainable AI

The first of these tools is Knowledge Graphs, which strengthen the transparency and accountability of public decisions by integrating heterogeneous data within interoperable and traceable architectures. By facilitating the documentation and audit of decisional processes, they improve institutional transparency and the oversight capacity of citizens and of independent authorities alike. Their deployment within strategic national public-data infrastructures thus appears as a priority. The second tool rests on the adoption of the FAIR principles (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable), which favour the local mastery, valorisation and re-use of nationally produced data. By reducing information asymmetries and strengthening informational

32 See South Africa, Algeria, Benin, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Mauritania, Namibia, Rwanda, Senegal, Zambia, etc.

sovereignty, these principles contribute to public decision-making that is more equitable and more autonomous. Thirdly, explainable AI constitutes an essential lever for strengthening the legitimacy of automated public decisions. By making algorithmic decisions comprehensible and justifiable – particularly when coupled with knowledge graphs – it favours citizens' trust and the contestability of administrative decisions. Lastly, the strengthening of the digital rule of law requires a robust normative framework of data governance. Founded on traceability, open standards and adapted legal guarantees, such a framework makes it possible to frame the uses of data, to prevent abuses and to protect fundamental rights in the digital environment[33].

3.10 Establishing a national KPI dashboard and the Substantive Democracy Index

The establishment of an annual national dashboard of ten key performance indicators (KPIs) constitutes a concrete measure for evaluating the effectiveness of public policies aimed at consolidating the rule of law and improving the living conditions of populations. By bringing together indicators such as the rate of internet penetration, the corruption index, the share of GDP linked to digital activity, or access to education and digital health services, this dashboard makes it possible to obtain a synthetic but precise view of the progress made. It serves as a monitoring tool for political decision-makers and as an instrument of transparency that offers citizens and oversight institutions the possibility of measuring the concrete impact of reforms on governance and quality of life. Beyond its monitoring function, the dashboard favours a strategic approach to digital transformation and to the strengthening of institutions. By regularly comparing results against precise objectives, governments may adjust their policies, identify the sectors in which additional investments are needed, and prioritise the actions that generate direct socio-economic returns. For example, a low rate of internet penetration combined with a still-marginal digital GDP would signal the need to deploy more infrastructures and digital training. The arrangement thus becomes a decision-support tool, promoting a culture of governance based on data and effectiveness. As a complement to this tool, it would be useful to institute a barometer of substantive democracy (*Substantive Democracy Index*). This barometer would be an instrument for evaluating the health of democratic systems in Africa. It would go beyond the mere measurement of electoral processes and would allow the depth of democracy to be examined on the basis of indicators yet to be constructed.

3.11 Generalising universal digital identity

African countries must generalise digital identity for all their citizens, in line with the United Nations principle of *Leave No One Behind* (LNOB). A universal digital identity would help to secure access to essential public services and reduce the risks of fraud and identity theft. Concretely, this implies the deployment of secure and interoperable platforms, the issuing of reliable digital cards or identifiers, and the establishment of robust biometric or cryptographic procedures to guarantee the authenticity of data. Practical examples exist of digitalisation of population registers which show that a well-designed digital identity facilitates citizen and financial inclusion. The generalisation of

33 With thanks to Pierre Larmande, Director of Research at the IRD (France), UMR DIADE, for sharing this argument concerning instruments of governance such as Knowledge Graphs, FAIR data and explainable AI, and their mobilisation for the strengthening of the rule of law.

digital identity must be supported by a solid legal framework guaranteeing respect for privacy, the protection of personal data and non-discrimination, in conformity with the principles of the rule of law. Governments must allocate a dedicated budget to fund the digital identification infrastructure, the training of personnel and the sensitisation of populations. It is also essential to support local African firms working in identification, often smaller than transnational actors. Their capacities must be valorised and supported, particularly in the construction of a sovereign identification infrastructure. This would, moreover, allow for the development of national databases hosted on national territory and placed under the control of national ministerial authorities.

3.12 Building winning technological alliances

African countries would gain by multiplying their digital influence through the conclusion of strategic international partnerships, beginning with membership of the Digital Public Goods Alliance – a platform that promotes the open sharing of essential digital technologies and software solutions for sustainable development. Such membership would allow States to access tested digital tools, to benefit from good practices in matters of security and interoperability, and to contribute to a global ecosystem of public digital goods. Concretely, this would translate into the integration of open-source educational platforms, connected health systems or e-government solutions directly into local public policies, with the assurance that these tools respect ethical standards. Membership of such an alliance opens the way to synergies with other actors and favours rapid innovation. In the same logic, African countries must conclude bilateral agreements with technological leaders that have made digital governance a pillar of the modern State. These partnerships may extend from the co-creation of digital public platforms to the training of specialised talents and the transfer of technological know-how. This could translate into joint programmes for secure digital identities, smart cities or inclusive financial services, adapted to local realities.

3.13 Deploying sectoral regulatory sandboxes for digital innovation

African countries must, without delay, launch three targeted regulatory sandboxes – in fintech, judicial AI and the valorisation of public data – in order to stimulate innovation while guaranteeing respect for the rule of law and the protection of citizens. Regulatory sandboxes are experimental arrangements set up by regulatory authorities to enable firms to test innovations within a controlled framework, with rules temporarily adapted but under public supervision. In the field of fintech, a sandbox would facilitate the development of inclusive financial services such as mobile payments or microcredit, while limiting the risks of fraud and financial exclusion. For judicial AI, a regulatory space would make it possible to test predictive-analysis tools and the automation of procedures, and to ensure that these systems respect the principles of transparency, fairness and non-discrimination. As regards public data, a sandbox would offer a secure framework in which to mobilise governmental information, to favour innovation in public services while protecting citizens' privacy and preserving the digital sovereignty of States. The implementation of these sandboxes must be accompanied by strict governance and clear mechanisms of oversight and evaluation. Public authorities must define precise criteria for access, monitoring and validation of experimental projects, with regular reports on economic, social and legal impacts. Such oversight ensures that innovation does not come at the expense of the material and

legal security of populations, but contributes to strengthening the rule of law. These regulatory spaces, moreover, must be integrated within a broader national strategy of digital transition, with dedicated budgets, public–private partnerships and training programmes for local experts.

3.14 Creating a sovereign digital fund to finance innovation

African countries should urgently create – along somewhat similar lines to what the *African Guarantee Fund* is doing – a sovereign digital fund dedicated to the support of deeptech start-ups, with initial resources of several thousand dollars per selected project or initiative. This fund would serve to finance innovations in areas such as AI, robotics, cybersecurity, IoT and quantum technologies, and would guarantee that investments remain under national control and contribute to digital sovereignty. Concretely, the fund could support the prototyping of new technologies, the acquisition of specialised equipment, the training of local talents and participation in incubation and acceleration programmes. To maximise the fund's effectiveness, its governance must be transparent, with independent expert committees responsible for selecting projects according to clear criteria of technological feasibility, economic impact and data security. A share of the resources could be devoted to collaborative projects between local start-ups and public or academic institutions, in order to strengthen the national deeptech ecosystem and to favour the transfer of skills. The fund should also be designed as a long-term instrument, with precise monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to measure the return on investment in terms of job creation and socio-economic development. Such an approach guarantees that deeptech start-ups become pillars of a sovereign and durable technological development on the continent.

3.15 Promoting a pan-African Digital Agora

Africa stands out for its capacity for innovation in digital technologies of government. Whether in matters of public statistics, civil registration, electoral technologies or platforms for monitoring public action, the continent appears as a laboratory of experimentation, several of whose solutions are now being taken up internationally. In some sectors, one witnesses true *leapfrogging* – that is, rapid leaps that differ from the classic pathways observed in other contexts. From this point, a question arises: how to respect international standards while developing one's own approach to digital? Beyond national strategies of digital transformation, it is essential to strengthen the capacities for innovation already present in Africa and to orient them towards a broader reform of digital models. This passes notably through the promotion of arrangements for citizen participation in the design and evaluation of technologies. Innovation must concern not only technical tools but also the processes through which citizens, experts, researchers, administrations and civil society participate in their elaboration. Initiatives such as those carried by the Innovation Foundation for Democracy already show the importance of these hybrid spaces of dialogue.

It is thus recommended that each major institutional project linked to digital technologies be accompanied, from its conception, by a structured arrangement of democratic participation. These spaces of discussion make it possible to gather criticism, to identify risks and to improve solutions on a continuous basis. They play an essential role in ensuring that technologies genuinely respond to social needs. This is the whole work of translating technologies into context. Translation also calls for

singular social choices, for strong political postures and for the invention of new cultures. In this process, the human and social sciences (HSS) occupy a central place. They make it possible to identify the actors concerned, including those often excluded from the processes of innovation, and to construct spaces of dialogue between citizens, administrations and technical experts. They thus act as mediators between institutions and society, by rendering visible the social, political and cultural issues linked to digital technologies. This approach nonetheless presupposes adapting the rhythms of technological innovation. The aim is to build a digital domain that is more progressive, more reflective and more attentive to social realities, rather than a model guided solely by the speed of the market or by the technological race. This may help to define an African pathway of digital innovation, founded on the balance between inclusion, sovereignty and innovation.

Concretely, the doors must be opened to researchers so that they may provide ethnographic analyses and descriptions of what is at stake during the development and adoption of digital tools and of State infrastructures, such as e-government sites. The critical gaze of researchers makes it possible to bring to light the implications of technological choices, by inscribing them as full elements of democratic life and of the quality of life in society. Moreover, citizens must be able to understand the choices relating, for example, to voting machines, the historical conditions of their development, the international relations they imply, and the modalities of collaboration between the State and public and private providers of technologies. They must be able to take part in the deliberation on the choice of public infrastructures. Indeed, democratic deliberation cannot be limited to the selection of political representatives; it must extend to the very architecture of the arrangements that structure public action.

Lastly, this dynamic must be articulated with other strategic priorities, in particular the valorisation of natural resources, the reform of political institutions and the strengthening of international cooperation. It may also translate concretely into the financing of AI projects for local languages, the development of national internet service providers covering rural areas, and the creation of public *fablabs* to support local innovation. The aim, then, is to build durable arrangements of listening, critique and co-construction of technologies. The Innovation Foundation for Democracy can play an important role in structuring and accompanying these initiatives.

04

Women, democracy and the transformation of power relations

Awa Diop

Summary

This chapter brings to light the **structural, historical and multidimensional character of gender inequalities in Africa**, which affect essential domains such as education, employment, health, political participation and access to rights. Although women sometimes occupied important positions before colonisation, historical transformations – colonisation in particular – reinforced durable patriarchal systems. Today, these inequalities still manifest themselves in heavy economic precariousness (notably within the informal sector), limited access to essential resources and services, and heightened exposure to violence. Despite some advances – particularly in matters of political representation – these gains remain insufficient owing to the persistence of social norms and to a lack of effective action by public institutions.

The text underlines the **limits of African democracies**, which are often reduced to a formal dimension (elections, institutions) without guaranteeing real equality among citizens. There is a substantial gap between the rights inscribed in laws and their concrete application – a gap that prevents women from exercising genuine power. This situation is compounded by contexts of crisis (conflicts, poverty), by cultural and religious resistances, and by the rise of anti-gender movements. Violence, intimidation and obstacles to political participation likewise contribute to the marginalisation of women, revealing an incomplete democracy that is unable to transform power relations in any deep way.

Faced with these observations, the chapter proposes **rethinking democracy from the standpoint of women**, by building a feminist democracy that is more inclusive and more substantial. This implies not only strengthening the rights and protection of women, but also transforming the social, political and economic structures that produce inequalities. The recommendations stress the need for legal reforms, gender-sensitive public policies and adequate funding, as well as the central role of feminist mobilisations and social alliances. Ultimately, promoting the rights of women appears as an essential condition for building societies that are more just, more egalitarian and genuinely democratic.

General introduction

The gender inequalities at work in contemporary African societies remain multiform and systemic, with deeply interconnected and cumulative implications. They appear principally in the economic, educational, political and cultural domains. Country by country, certain singularities emerge that reflect specific historical and social contexts, but several trends are common across the continent. They include imbalances in education, in literacy, in access to employment and to land, and in access to sexual

and reproductive health services, as well as discriminatory legal arrangements that contribute to the reproduction of inequalities over time.

To understand these inequalities, they must be placed within a historical perspective. Before colonisation, women often occupied central positions in the economy and in society, sometimes wielding political power and influence over social rules – particularly in some matrilineal societies. The colonial period profoundly altered these equilibria by imposing patriarchal structures of European inspiration, which reduced the place of women in several domains. After independence, equality-promoting policies were put in place, yet inequalities persist, showing that they are at once durable and capable of evolving under the effect of social, economic and political transformations.

These inequalities depend at once on the political choices of States and on social and cultural norms. Their reduction therefore constitutes a major issue for public policy, particularly in States that lay claim to the rule of law and that have undertaken international commitments on equality, without always applying them fully.

In this context, the effective protection of the rights of women – particularly in the face of systemic violence – becomes an important indicator of democratic quality. The gap between the democratic principles proclaimed and the reality lived by women calls for a rethinking of how democratic systems function. The aim is to integrate fully the rights, experiences and demands of women into political life, in order to build more inclusive forms of democracy. This leads to a question concerning the capacity of women to transform power relations and to imagine democratic models that are more equitable and durable.

Part 1 – Findings, issues and challenges

1.1 Gender inequalities: a durable structural problem

Gender inequalities, deeply anchored in institutional factors and nourished by century-long traditions, represent a major obstacle to the flourishing of women and to their full participation in socio-economic development. Their entrenchment in the socio-cultural context contributes, for example, to a situation in which the violence suffered by women, and certain discriminatory practices, are tolerated, justified and rendered banal.

This social tolerance of violence and discrimination does not stem solely from cultural dynamics: it is also linked to forms of inaction, or partial response, on the part of public institutions, which contribute to its reproduction. These forms of violence are multiform and form a continuum, the chain of which reinforces women's vulnerability across several domains. As regards employment, women very widely find themselves in informal jobs: nearly 90 per cent of women in employment in sub-Saharan Africa work in the informal sector[34]. This exposes them to precariousness and to a lack of social protection, while widening income gaps between women and men. Indeed, equal pay is not yet a settled matter, particularly within the informal economy, "where the income gap may reach 20 to 30 per cent between men and women, as is the case in countries such

34 FAO, AWARD and University of Greenwich. 2025. La situation des femmes dans les systèmes agro-alimentaires d'Afrique subsaharienne.

as Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal and Guinea-Bissau"[35] (United Nations, 2025). Moreover, women have limited access to the means of production, to land ownership and to credit.

Concerning essential social services, imbalances inherent in social, economic and legal systems persist between women and men with respect to education, health and justice. In the field of education, for example, school enrolment rates for girls have certainly seen significant progress in several countries – including Ghana, Rwanda and Senegal – but illiteracy remains a concern for women. UNESCO[36] notes in this regard that, in sub-Saharan Africa in 2023, 38 per cent of women aged 15 and over are illiterate, against 25 per cent of men. Yet literacy is considered essential to ensuring access to employment and engagement in economic, social and political life. As regards health, African women still face difficulties of access to quality care, particularly to sexual and reproductive health services. By way of example, in 2017, "approximately 58 million African women of reproductive age presented unmet needs for modern contraception"[37]. In addition, in 2023, around 70 per cent of global maternal deaths occurred in sub-Saharan Africa (World Health Organization, April 2025).

With respect to the effectiveness of fundamental rights, asymmetries persist: legal arrangements that contain gender inequalities are slow to be reformed, and laws protecting women against violence are weakly applied.

In the field of political participation, women are under-represented in parliaments, local governments, executive offices and political parties. According to the 2024 Africa Barometer, "women represent only one quarter of the 13,057 parliamentarians in Africa, with 26 per cent in lower chambers and 21 per cent in upper chambers of Parliament"[38] (Barometer, PPF, 2024). This situation is explained by a persistent masculinisation of political functions and indeed of political leadership. Women often gain access only with difficulty to the leadership of political parties and to the funding required for these parties' operation. The political space (violence, the format of electoral systems, and so on) operates with logics that are often unfavourable to women. Nonetheless, countries such as Rwanda, South Africa, Ethiopia and Senegal bear witness to progress made in women's representation in parliaments. These countries display rates of 61.25 per cent, 46.35 per cent, 38.76 per cent and 41.82 per cent, respectively[39].

Furthermore, institutional, physical, sexual, psychological and cultural forms of violence remain recurrent and form part of women's daily lives. Femicides, domestic violence and marital rape are not inscribed within a real arrangement of prevention, sanction and redress; they are treated as items of news, as *faits divers*. The absence of explicit recognition of femicide in the criminal law of a country such as Senegal, for example, reflects a difficulty in qualifying, sanctioning and preventing such violence. In South Africa, where the State had displayed reticence, violence against women was finally declared a "natural disaster" in view of the risks it generates for

35 United Nations. 2025. L'inégalité salariale en Afrique de l'Ouest : un défi persistant et des solutions à explorer.

36 UNESCO. 2023. Observatoire des inégalités.

37 Guttmacher Institute. 2017. Vue d'ensemble : investir dans la contraception et la santé maternelle et néonatale en Afrique, Fact Sheet.

38 International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA). 2024. Africa Barometer, second edition.

39 Olivier Noudjalbaye Dedingar. 2024. Afrique : participation mitigée des femmes en politique.

the security of women and girls. At the same time, Senegal and Kenya are recording rising rates of femicide.

This institutional banalisation tends to marginalise such acts and to minimise their gravity, even though they constitute serious violations of human rights and of the dignity of women and girls. Furthermore, the obstacles observed in the adoption of legal reforms favourable to gender equality do not always stem from strictly legal constraints; they often arise from political choices, influenced by social reactions – particularly those of moral entrepreneurs – and by the desire to preserve certain political balances. While States have levers that allow them to make the legal framework evolve – whether the revision of the *Code de la famille* (Family Code), the criminalisation of femicide or the regulation of medicalised abortion – they do not always activate them, as the example of Senegal illustrates: the State there tends to consult, even to anticipate, the position of intermediary actors, in particular religious authorities, even before formulating a public stance on questions such as medicalised abortion or the reform of the *Code de la famille*.

Yet many African countries, during the 1990s, entered a vast movement of democratisation through the opening up to political pluralism, institutional overhaul and the consolidation of governance and the rule of law, in a context marked by the end of the Cold War and international pressures in favour of democracy. This dynamic of democratisation, combined with the growing influence of international organisations sensitive to the question of gender equality, has contributed to the establishment of policies favourable to gender equality (laws on parity and electoral quotas), as well as to the progressive inscription of these issues in national public agendas.

In the immediate aftermath of independence, political configurations were often characterised by single-party or even authoritarian regimes that strongly limited the possibilities of political participation, particularly for women. Women found themselves marginalised in decisional spheres and assigned to traditional roles, most often confined to social or community functions little recognised politically. In this context, the action of women's movements played a determining role: it contributed to shifting the terms of debate by carrying women's demands into the public space and by giving impetus to political and legal reforms. By rendering visible matters long relegated to the private sphere, these mobilisations made it possible to inscribe them as genuine political issues.

If democratisation does not, in itself, guarantee the effectiveness of the principle of gender equality, democratic regimes can nonetheless create conditions favourable to political and legal advances aimed at improving the condition of women. They open spaces of participation, mobilisation and advocacy. Conversely, authoritarian contexts, or those marked by conflict, tend to weaken further the situation of women, and may even call their rights into question, by restricting public freedoms and by exacerbating already-existing vulnerabilities, as noted above.

1.2 Formal democracy "ineffective" in the fight against gender inequalities?

To attend to what democracy is in African States is to discover a considerable gap between the principles expected of a State governed by the rule of law and the reality of public policies – particularly with regard to taking account of women's rights and concerns. This gap is not merely conjunctural: it is structural, rooted in deep social, political and cultural interactions. To analyse these gaps is to analyse

the dichotomy between a formal democracy and a substantive democracy. The first refers to elections and democratic institutions, to freedom of expression and to formal representation, whereas the second refers to equitable participation, to the protection of rights, and to the dignity of all citizens. This distinction is not merely a theoretical framework: it makes it possible to throw light on the concrete limits of contemporary democratic systems.

Indeed, in many contexts, democracy functions principally as a set of procedures and institutions, without producing the social transformations expected in matters of equality. A substantive democracy implies, beyond electoral and institutional mechanisms, an effective redistribution of power, of resources and of capacities to act. It supposes that rights are not merely recognised, but truly accessible, mobilisable and protected in citizens' daily lives. Yet gender inequalities show precisely that this condition is far from being met.

In this framework, the persistence of inequalities between women and men cannot be interpreted as a mere lag or as a one-off dysfunction. It reveals deep structures that limit the reach of democratic arrangements. Social norms, gender hierarchies, informal power relations and political resistances contribute to restricting the effectiveness of rights, even where they are formally guaranteed. Thus women may be present in institutions, may benefit from rights inscribed in legal texts and may take part in electoral processes, without thereby possessing real transformative power. This situation brings to light a form of disjuncture between formal inclusion and effective participation, which constitutes one of the principal challenges of contemporary democracies. To question democracy from the standpoint of gender inequalities is therefore to pose a central question: to what extent are political systems capable of transforming the power relations that structure societies? So long as that transformation is not undertaken, democracy remains incomplete, since it does not manage to guarantee real equality among citizens.

- A difficult integration of gender-equality issues in countries in situations of crisis

It appears that some social and political contexts show a limited engagement in building gender-sensitive public policies and in envisaging democratic reforms in this direction – not solely from absence of will, but also because of strong structural constraints linked to instability, institutional fragility and the prioritisation of emergency responses. Among these countries, one may cite Mali, South Sudan, the Central African Republic, Somalia, Chad and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which are subject to crisis contexts that limit the functioning of public services, access to justice and to health care, the equitable application of the law and the protection of citizens – thus weakening the capacity of States to guarantee fundamental rights, including those of women.

For example, in South Sudan, GDP per capita[40] stands at around USD 488; in Somalia, USD 813; and in Mali, USD 1,301 – illustrating extremely constrained budgetary room for manoeuvre. These trends suggest that public resources are directed more towards social emergencies than towards structural reforms, particularly in contexts where security, economic survival and the management of humanitarian crises mobilise the

40 International Monetary Fund (IMF). 2026. GDP per capita in Africa.

bulk of State capacity. This prioritisation of emergencies, however, also tends to relegate gender-equality issues to second place, even though crisis situations heighten women's vulnerabilities and render these issues all the more critical.

- Tensions between traditional social norms and contemporary aspirations to equality

The resistance of public policies noted in contexts such as Senegal, Guinea, Niger or Mali does not reflect an absence of awareness of inequalities; it reveals, rather, complex trade-offs between social norms and political imperatives, in a context where States have to deal with influential social actors. This tension sets conservative social norms against contemporary requirements linked to the principles of equality.

Issues linked to women's rights are frequently perceived as alien to the local context, carried by educated elites – a perception that contributes to delegitimising them by associating them with external influences. In Senegal, the law on parity, although a notable advance, still meets opposition from certain religious milieus. In Guinea, the law on female genital mutilation faces social resistance linked to its association with cultural identity. In Niger, proposals to raise the legal age of marriage have not yet met with broad acceptance, on account of deeply embedded social and economic logics. In Mali, the 2009 reform of the family code provoked religious counter-mobilisations, showing the capacity of these actors to weigh upon reforms.

- A flawed conception of democracy

To this is added a reductive and at times flawed conception of democracy, which works against certain categories of the population – young people, stigmatised groups and women – by excluding them in fact from the spheres of participation and visibility. Indeed, taking a position on political issues and engaging in public activism particularly expose women.

In West Africa, political activists and civil-society activists suffer digital violence aimed at disqualifying them from public debate. In Kenya, young women are subjected to harassment, online abuse and at times physical violence, particularly when they take part in leadership processes or in civic life; in such contexts, violence becomes a true political tool of exclusion. In Nigeria, the women activists of the "BringBackOurGirls" movement faced campaigns of demonisation and public discrediting. In such contexts, State inaction can reinforce strategies for the exclusion and "silencing" of women in the public space, by allowing forms of intimidation to develop that limit their participation. This confirms the persistence of a formal democracy, little concerned with effectively combating gender-based discrimination.

- Texts out of step with international commitments, or unapplied

Public policies remain largely silent on crucial issues affecting women. Among these concerns, one may refer to national laws often out of step with international commitments in several countries such as Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire. The 2003 Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (the Maputo Protocol) may be cited as an example to illustrate a non-effectiveness of a legal provision with real implications for women's sexual and reproductive rights. Although ratified by countries such as Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire, its real application

still meets institutional and cultural resistance. The major reluctance is linked to its Article 14, which commits States parties to taking all appropriate measures to protect "the reproductive rights of women, particularly by authorising medicalised abortion in cases of sexual assault, rape, incest, and where the pregnancy endangers the mental and physical health of the mother or the life of the mother and of the foetus".

- Failing States, more active other actors

If States have the role of ensuring the effectiveness of the rights of women and their security, in practice we observe that this role of protection and promotion of women's rights is often assumed in priority by other actors. Indeed, States initiate national policies on priority questions such as gender equality, but these often suffer from a lack of clear vision and durable solutions. Alongside them, international organisations engaged in human rights and gender justice provide technical expertise and financial support, but their capacity for action is at times reduced by the fact of being foreign entities, particularly when matters are sensitive or framed by religious norms (medicalised abortion, rules of succession, polygamy, the family code, the wearing of the veil, and so on). Civil society organisations, for their part, benefit from strong proximity with communities, but their capacity for proposal is often constrained by a lack of funding and by limits to the scale of their deployment.

- The decisive role of women's mobilisations, although still little legitimised

These dynamics show the relevance of the existence of public mobilisations in favour of women's rights. They follow a logic of guaranteeing the fundamental conditions of citizenship; beyond the defence of women's rights, the dynamic mobilised contributes to completing and deepening democracy itself. To make space for these mobilisations is also to open up and to secure public spaces for women mobilised on causes essential to the survival of democracy. Nonetheless, feminist mobilisations struggle to establish their legitimacy with both communities and States. Activists engaged in the defence of women's rights face a recurrent critique that questions their legitimacy and the rootedness of their struggles: do they really speak in the name of all African women? This question reflects a social construction of public speech in which certain voices may be disqualified on the grounds that they would be disconnected from popular realities. Yet women who speak out often draw on lived experiences shared by many other women, even where the latter do not express themselves publicly.

- Limits to women's engagement and the plurality of levels of consciousness

The fact that some women – particularly the less educated or the most marginalised – do not engage in these struggles does not signify the absence of problems, but rather the existence of social, economic and cultural constraints that limit their engagement in defence of these causes, or even their participation in public debate. The idea of a plurality of levels of consciousness must be accepted: some women may be engaged in the struggle for strategic interests, while others have internalised norms that limit their rights. Yet every society needs voices to denounce injustices and to set transformations in motion. Educated and engaged women do no harm by speaking out; on the contrary, they play an essential role in placing on the agenda questions often "silenced". Self-flagellation – discrediting one's own practices on the grounds of a putative non-representativeness – weakens feminist mobilisations and delays progress.

- The rise of anti-gender oppositions

These struggles share discursive spaces with detractors who embody counter-mobilisations and frame arguments that oppose women's rights, and even the principles of equality. The continent is witnessing a progression of anti-rights, anti-gender and anti-feminist movements, which appears to be intensifying in recent years, as well as the emergence of more restrictive legislation in some countries such as Kenya, Uganda, Nigeria and the countries of the Sahel.

The arguments carried by these movements are principally relayed by Muslim preachers, evangelical movements and moral entrepreneurs. They often mobilise a sexist and anti-rights perspective with regard to women and other marginalised groups. Anti-gender movements appear to structure their discourse around the protection of the family, the rejection of Western hegemony, the defence of "African values" and the protection of children. These movements, moreover, contribute to a narrowing of the spaces of struggle while reinforcing gender ascriptions, particularly those concerning women – submission, docility or dependence on men. In parallel, the attributes of domination, even of an "oppressive" masculinity, are valorised and legitimised by these discourses. We note that, in some contexts, this anti-gender dynamic also appears to be carried or relayed by State institutions. The reference here is to laws and to public discourses that contribute to legitimising narratives that target marginalised categories and designate them as "populations at risk" or "enemies" of society (Mbembe, 2016).

Placing on the public agenda issues linked to gender, to feminist struggle or to the promotion of human rights thus becomes more difficult in some African contexts. This trend is reinforced where anti-gender movements possess real power. These movements do not stem from isolated or strictly national dynamics; they form part of a "glocalised" movement, increasingly structured, with which defenders of human rights must contend.

1.3 The intensification of crises and the weakening of democracies

Patterns of imbalance observed at the global level have specific effects on women's rights. The first victims of these situations are women and vulnerabilised groups, who suffer disproportionately the reinforcement of gender inequalities, the violation of their rights, retaliatory sexual violence, forced displacement and so on – reflecting heightened exposure to crises owing to their structural position in societies.

Indeed, advances in the improvement of the condition of women coexist today with contexts of socio-political tension, of the calling into question of women's rights, and of human-rights violations. From this point of view, these tensions are not gender-neutral. Without creating inequalities, they tend to reveal and to accentuate them. Moments of imbalance build upon a pre-existing situation marked by unequal social relations between the sexes, by a climate of impunity, by the banalisation of violence against certain groups, by unequal access to resources, and by contexts in which human rights are not respected.

First, owing to their strong presence in the informal sector – particularly in Africa – the disturbances linked to rising food prices and to difficulties of supply in domestic markets, generated by global crises, are strongly felt by women and their families. The

burdens linked to family organisation and to caring tasks for dependants intensify, making more difficult the economic possibilities of delegation and of recourse to domestic help, and thereby reinforcing women's invisible workload and limiting their economic autonomy.

Second, these global precariousnesses tend to intensify the "de-prioritisation", in national policies, of issues linked to gender equality and to the condition of women, in favour of other matters perceived as more urgent or more structuring (food security, health emergencies, security) – which weakens the continuity of public policies in favour of equality.

Lastly, during periods of conflict, power relations between women and men manifest themselves more brutally, giving way to the assumed expression of misogynistic or homophobic practices. This situation is made possible by the weakening, indeed the temporary erasure, of mechanisms of control and of public justice. In such contexts, women's bodies are often instrumentalised as a weapon of war. By way of illustration, the cases of abductions and collective rape in the centre-north of Burkina Faso aim to assert domination and the submission of women, and to express a form of *virilisme*. To this are added strategies for the sterilisation of women's bodies through the deliberate transmission of HIV or other forms of extreme sexual violence. Furthermore, refugee and displaced-person situations particularly expose women and girls to heightened risks of violence and sexual exploitation.

The vulnerabilities thus produced are reinforced for women, who are more exposed to bodily insecurity and to the occurrence of sexual violence. In another register, they are also affected by global dynamics of public policy. For example, the United States policy known as the "Global Gag Rule" restricts the intervention of NGOs funded by US funds in matters of abortion and contraception. The implications of this policy go beyond the United States itself, the United States being a key funder in this field. They concern principally developing countries and directly affect the health and reproductive rights of women. The countries most affected are mainly situated in sub-Saharan Africa – including Mozambique, Senegal, Zambia, Uganda, Nigeria, Tanzania, Ethiopia and Kenya. These States, often fragile in respect of their health systems and dependent on international aid, see their capacities for action further constrained. This policy illustrates a form of geopolitics of the body: female bodies become spaces of regulation, control and projection of political choices, of moral injunctions and of power relations on an international scale.

1.4 Towards a feminist democracy: reconfiguring power relations

It is in a context characterised by democratic failings and tenacious patriarchal structures that a transformation of power relations must be conceived, with the hypothesis of a democracy starting from women. In other words: what can women bring to democracies so that these may serve their interests, but also, more broadly, the common interest and the concerns of the greatest number, in societies traversed by sharp social and political inequalities? This question also invites consideration of the influence of women's power to act on the transformation of power relations, not only through their participation but also through their capacity to redefine public priorities. This change of perspective opens up the possibility of another configuration, in which

women cease to be witnesses of democratic reforms and become actors of a real political transformation (Tripp, 2015).

It thus appears necessary to interrogate the place of women within democracies and to think the latter from women's experiences and perspectives. The aim is not solely to grant them a place within democratic institutions, but to consider the way in which they may contribute to reconfiguring the very modalities of conceiving and practising democracy, by questioning its purposes, its instruments and its concrete effects on populations. To address the question of women's transformative capacity allows us to identify several issues concerning the way democracies seize upon women's concerns and protect their rights, beyond declarations of principle. It also invites us to question the capacity of women to exercise influence in political arenas, particularly when they reach these arenas by mobilising different assets, but also the structural limits that constrain their real power of action.

The presence of female voices is decisive within these spaces, in so far as it makes it possible to bring new visions of democratic debate from specific experiential data. Taking these voices into account acts as a corrective on two counts: on the one hand, it renders visible structural inequalities often passed over in silence; on the other, it contributes to making democracy itself more complete and more inclusive, by bringing political norms closer to lived realities. Through the prism of *matrimoine* (matrimony – the female counterpart to *patrimoine*), the aim will also be to integrate within political priorities a recognition of women's contributions, past and present, to the trajectories of African societies, and of the forms of knowledge and practices often rendered invisible – in order to rebalance historical and political narratives.

How are political priorities to be transformed towards a feminist perspective, particularly in matters of reproductive health, the fight against sexual violence and legal reforms favourable to equality? To what extent is it possible to reinvent the democratic imaginary by stepping outside the logics of authority, domination and virility, in order to valorise principles such as *care*, cooperation and mediation, still largely marginalised within institutional frameworks? By what means can women's concerns be "de-singularised" so as to be inscribed within a more collective understanding of issues, and to be recognised as central questions of social justice?

This dynamic refers to the idea of a feminist democracy – that is, a democracy that integrates the principles of feminist ideals, particularly in matters of gender equality and of representation in decision-making bodies. It moves beyond the framework of a formal democracy in order to promote real equality among citizens and to address the structural inequalities that traverse contemporary societies, by articulating the transformation of institutions with the transformation of social relations. It also accords decisive importance to the singular experiences of women – such as reproductive activities or sexist violence – by integrating them fully into the elaboration of public policies, and not as peripheral issues. Its end is the advent of a democracy that is more inclusive, more effective and more anchored in social realities.

The idea of a feminist democracy also entails the integration of healing justice into the heart of public policies. This approach seeks to take account of the traumas suffered by women beyond legal or medical responses alone. The point is to address well-being and healing as political questions, linked to the social, economic and security conditions

in which women live. This implies devising frameworks that allow women to confront the harms suffered, while interrogating the effects of insecurity, stigmatisation and repression on their physical, mental and social health. This perspective also questions the way in which States may intervene to control or marginalise certain identities, as well as the limits of exclusively medicalised responses, which may reproduce institutional power relations.

Reparative justice also integrates a memorial dimension, particularly through the recognition of the violence suffered by women during the colonial period. The point is for States to recognise that African women were separated from their children and suffered sexual violence, in order to inscribe these realities within a political and collective memory and to contribute to a symbolic and historical reparation.

The idea of reparative justice is also closely linked to the well-being of activists, often constrained by a lack of time and economic resources, in contexts where patriarchal culture does not valorise the possibility for women to take care of themselves. In collective imaginaries, these issues of care and well-being remain little legitimate. To make these dimensions accessible, States must therefore integrate within their policies on combating violence against women the recognition and formalisation of healing practices, including those drawn from endogenous forms of knowledge and technique, so as not to limit the response to institutional approaches alone.

In sum, rethinking democracy from women's perspectives, and promoting new practices that support active citizenship, requires the building of a more just society in which the specific concerns of each group are taken into account. This implies two complementary levels of action. On the one hand, a deconstruction of the patriarchal order that subordinates women and structures social, economic and legal practices. On the other, a renewal of the way in which States prioritise public action – making it more integrated, more adaptive and subject to regular evaluations capable of measuring concretely the effects on gender inequalities. A democracy thought from women thus integrates issues linked to the effective responsibility of States, to institutional reforms, to the promotion of women's power to act, to the protection of their participation in the public space, and to the renewal of narratives concerning their social, economic and political capacities.

Part 2 – Strategic recommendations

Addressed to political decision-makers

Recap of the major findings

- States that show limits in the exercise of their responsibilities to protect all citizens, in particular women and vulnerabilised groups.
- A shortfall of public financial resources and of organisational capacities devoted durably to the question of equality between the sexes.
- A weak will on the part of States in the effective application of regional and international commitments and in the conduct of institutional reforms.
- A still-insufficient engagement on the part of States in conducting public policies that are just, inclusive and genuinely transformative.
- A persistent difficulty for women to weigh durably upon power relations, despite their growing presence in some political, social and institutional spaces.

- An absence of structured and regular dialogue between States and feminist organisations.
- A public proliferation of hate speech targeting women, vulnerabilised categories or themes such as feminism and gender justice.
- Public narratives carried about feminism and gender equality often counter-productive. For example, feminist issues are still misunderstood by part of the communities, since they are at times presented as foreign to local social realities.

Recap of the central issues

- Strengthen the political responsibility of States by leading them to assume fully their obligations as regards the protection of women's rights, particularly in the fight against sexual and gender-based violence and in guaranteeing a life free from violence, coercion and fear.
- Accelerate legal and institutional reforms in the political, economic and social spheres, as well as the overhaul of public policies, in order to achieve an inclusive participation that is bearer of the transformation of power relations. These reforms must promote an effective redistribution of power, of resources and of capacities to act, in the service of gender equality. It is also important to think the involvement of the private sphere within the logic of transforming power relations: beyond public and political spaces, the transformation of power relations within the private sphere can contribute to a more general and durable transformation. The two spheres remain interlocked if we wish to analyse how patterns of power shift from one space to another.
- Develop the exercise of a global and real influence by women on the transformation of African societies towards greater justice and equity.
- Improve women's capacity for proposal vis-à-vis political decision-makers, so that they may better represent women's concerns while articulating them with the collective interest, up to the highest level – particularly when they reach strategic positions.
- Strengthen the mechanisms for combating censorship, digital violence, intimidation and disqualification of female and male citizens, or of movements, in the public sphere.
- Transform the production of imaginaries about women, their place in all spheres of public life and feminist causes, in order to render communities more sensitive to issues of equality, of inclusion and to the central role of women in the transformation of African societies. This may help create communities more receptive to questions of gender equality, capable of supporting the transformation of power relations.

2.1 Putting in place coercive measures vis-à-vis States

To this end, it is necessary publicly and broadly to denounce those African States that do not effectively respect their international and regional commitments[41] on women's

41 To illustrate these commitments, the example of Senegal may be cited. Senegal has ratified various international and regional instruments relating to the rights of women (political, civil and socio-cultural rights): (i) the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the principal reference instrument on women's rights, adopted in 1979 by the international community and ratified by Senegal in 1985; (ii) the Optional Protocol to CEDAW, ratified by Senegal in 2002; (iii) the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, ratified in 1982; (iv) the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (the Maputo Protocol), ratified on 1 December 2004; (v) the Solemn Declaration of African Union Heads of State on

rights. Such a measure also concerns States that do not prioritise the allocation of significant budgets to initiatives relating to equality between women and men, since the citizens of developed countries should no longer be financing African struggles. This is pertinent in a global context in which humanitarian aid is increasingly politicised. To this end, States should be ranked according to the measures taken – and the democratic reforms accomplished – to reduce gender inequalities, in particular sexual and gender-based violence. This is a powerful means of pressure and of reward.

More specifically, it will be a matter of:

- **Coordinating the establishment of public-policy accountability mechanisms** that make it possible to monitor and evaluate State initiatives in matters of combating sexual and gender-based violence, or in matters of institutional and legal reforms.
- **Acting on chains of responsibility at the local level**, by sanctioning public institutions that fall short of their responsibilities in combating sexual and gender-based violence, or in applying measures adopted.
- **Putting in place legal resources** that enable women's-rights organisations to denounce and to contest public action when it marginalises women's priorities.
- **Creating budget lines dedicated** specifically to the "gender equality" priority.
- **Allocating funds** to feminist civil society.
- **Finding solutions to the administrative precariousness** of civil-society organisations, particularly women's and feminist organisations, in order to enable them to exist fully in the spheres of demand-making and of action.

2.2 Supporting legal and institutional reforms that better protect women by guaranteeing them a fulfilling life

The desired reforms speak to the need to render certain laws – such as that on parity – more operative, and to harmonise certain national legal texts with international commitments. They also take account of corrections to be made to codified legislative texts, such as the Family Code, which at times contain a reproduction of gender inequalities. More precisely, it will be a matter of:

- **Ensuring the application** of the Maputo Protocol.
- **Engaging reforms** of the Family Code in those countries where it still presents gender inequalities.
- **Correcting the gaps** in the text of the African Union "Convention on Ending Violence against Women and Girls", particularly by foregrounding the responsibility of States and by specifying the types of violence.
- **Creating bodies for monitoring parity** charged with verifying the level of conformity of institutions and meaningful public participation, particularly for women and other marginalised groups. With these arrangements, actions are to be foreseen in cases of non-compliance.
- **Creating a feminist observatory** within national assemblies, composed principally of parliamentarians, gender experts and civil-society actors. It would be charged

Gender Equality of 2004; and (vi) the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, adopted in 2007, together with the ECOWAS Supplementary Act on Equality of Rights between Women and Men, adopted in 2015.

with evaluating laws, making legislative proposals, and conducting gender audits of public policies.

2.3 Refounding public policies in light of gender-specific concerns

First, this overhaul would accord a central place to the specific needs of women within State initiatives. It will take into consideration the establishment of structured mechanisms for preventing, sanctioning and redressing violence against women. These mechanisms would offer psychological and legal support to survivors and would facilitate their reconstruction and their effective access to justice.

Next, rendering public policies sensitive to the question of equality between the sexes is a way of considering that the private is also political. Indeed, the private sphere operates on power relations, and what unfolds within it (family management, the sharing of domestic tasks, sexuality, marital physical violence, marital rape, couple relations, and so on) cannot be dissociated from the public sphere (the State, work, politics, laws, and so on). The private sphere must be taken as a key element of political analysis, with the idea that the practices unfolding within it result from the prevalence of collective structures linked to patriarchy, to socio-cultural norms and to legal rules. The private must thus be fully integrated into the production of public policies.

Lastly, supporting the envisaged overhaul also touches upon women's real participation in the spaces in which public action is shaped, and in the definition of national priorities. In sum, this transformation will render gender-equality policies more operative, accompanying them with clear directives on gender mainstreaming. This must include strong measures to ensure the effective application of measures adopted at every level, but also the training of the human resources that embody State institutions, in order to guarantee a coherent and durable implementation of public policies.

This recommendation will principally aim to:

- **Treat gender-based violence as an issue of public governance**, and not solely as a social problem.
- **Establish a mechanism for the recognition of unpaid care work** as an essential contribution to the functioning of economies.
- Strengthen and render operational, in a perspective of healing justice, **the platforms for the care of survivors of violence.**

2.4 Promoting a holistic empowerment of women

By guaranteeing women and girls political, economic and social justice, it becomes possible to articulate coherently the political, economic and socio-cultural dimensions, in order to achieve a real and durable transformation of power relations.

This recommendation will more specifically attach itself to:

- **Strengthening measures to facilitate women's access to essential resources** (education, economic resources, forms of knowledge, networks), by lifting the structural obstacles that limit their autonomy and their capacity to act.
- **Improving the level of gender sensitivity of institutional actors** in order to achieve inclusive organisational cultures, capable not only of integrating women but also of guaranteeing their progression and professional flourishing.

2.5 Establishing intentional, intersectional and power-aware alliances

The establishment of alliances at different scales can render visible the collective dimension of the causes defended and show how respect for women's rights is a lever of stability, social cohesion and sustainable development. It is important that these alliances prioritise security, trust and the sharing of power, rather than extractive partnerships that are often unbalanced and unsustainable.

More specifically, it will be a matter of:

- **Establishing alliances with feminist organisations** so that they may inform and orient the public authorities precisely on women's concerns.
- **Involving feminist organisations**, including those locally and community-rooted, **in the elaboration of public policies**, in order to guarantee their relevance, their legitimacy and their effectiveness.

2.6 Guaranteeing public spaces that are safe and participatory

States must guarantee the existence of spaces conducive to the expression of all ideas. This makes it possible to draw attention to mechanisms of censorship, demonisation or disqualification of certain positions in public debate. The security of public spaces is also linked to the capacity of public authorities to condemn the abuses expressed within them and to protect the persons affected. We make this observation in a context where anti-rights / anti-feminist movements appear to enjoy greater legitimacy in accessing spaces of public debate, and to benefit from particular protection – in contrast with other activists such as feminists. It will be a matter of:

- **Firmly condemning anti-gender movements** in respect of hateful, sexist, misogynistic and homophobic remarks. Bodies will be put in place charged with reporting such forms of discursive violence, including those unfolding in digital spaces.
- **Protecting civic space and the persons who take part in public debate**, particularly where stigmatised themes are concerned.
- **Putting in place specific protection mechanisms** for feminist activists, by guaranteeing that they are protected against retaliation of all kinds (physical, verbal, digital).

2.7 Renewing the discourse on gender and reinforcing the work of changing narratives

This work will make it possible to deconstruct the presumption of incompetence associated with women and the devaluation of their roles in the great struggles in the history of African societies. The final aim is to recognise women's experiences in the making of African history and to give a different image of women and of the present

causes they defend. This change of narratives can also draw on the *matrimoine* and the documentation of women's trajectories. It also concerns digital spaces: in a world where narratives are daily contested online, feminist actors must therefore actively take part in the production of discourse by contesting harmful norms. The specific actions will relate to:

- **Rendering visible in public spaces female figures** who have accomplished important things for their countries (street names, names of major squares, the building of monuments).
- **Recognising the violence inflicted on women during colonisation** through the establishment of a memorial.
- **Introducing into curricula courses on feminist physical education**.
- Integrating **matrimony** into school programmes.

Addressed to feminist mobilisations

2.8 Supporting feminist alliances for durable and inclusive reforms

- **Strengthening the links between community groups and formal advocacy spaces:** beyond established feminists, there are associations working on specific questions (climate justice, ecology, the defence of threatened territories, and so on) that can enrich advocacy and contribute to the "de-singularisation" of the causes defended. The adoption of these alliances allows, from an intersectional perspective, the broadening of public demands to encompass the various situations and lived experiences of women.
- **Strengthening intergenerational feminist alliances**: this implies a recognition of the contributions of each generation while avoiding setting them in opposition. The trajectory of feminist movements should be apprehended through the metaphor of the wave: rather than seeing them as movements that succeed and erase one another, they should be seen as a continuous chain in which the most recent can gain greater scope thanks to the gains of those that preceded it.
- **Including in the agendas of established feminists the concerns of women from vulnerabilised groups**: feminist agendas are not always sensitive to the specific concerns of women on the margins, even though these women experience situations of violence and of violations of their fundamental rights (access to health, housing, education, and so on) that are not unveiled publicly because of stigmatisation.
- **Identifying within government, the media, religious circles and the private sector actors engaged towards reforms favourable to women and to marginalised groups**. These actors may be supporters in advocacy strategies and in collective mobilisations. Their engagement also helps to facilitate the community appropriation of the questions defended.
- **Building alliances and sharing strategies across borders to counter regressive continental tendencies**. The definition of common strategies is pertinent because African feminists are often active around the same issues, and the detractors they face adopt the same logics of action.

2.9 Developing feminist strategies to be more audible in the public space

- **Initiating a digital resistance relating to the narration** of the characteristics of a just and inclusive society. This means occupying digital spaces and organising moments of riposte in times of crisis, particularly when activists are targeted by criticism and disqualifying arrangements.
- **Encouraging the emergence of new feminist voices,** including those in radicalised postures. The internal critique of movements at times tends to operate a Manichaean ranking of causes and of activists. Yet the plurality of ideas and of repertoires of action is also a decisive element in the constitution of inclusive and open movements.
- **Identifying as allies women who have reached institutions** – parliaments, ministerial posts, political parties – so that they may support political action and advocacy that is at once political and community-based.

2.10 Building a long-term common strategic programme

- **Synchronising feminist organisations** within a single movement so as better to exert pressure. The diversity of feminist organisations may produce a dispersion of demands to be carried before policy-makers.
- **Investing in long-term common programming** with priority objectives.

Conclusion

In order to achieve a real democracy, focused on the lived experiences and daily concerns of communities without distinction, ruptures are necessary. These ruptures presuppose moving beyond institutional adjustments to engage profound structural transformations. They principally concern two levels: on the one hand, the deconstruction of the patriarchal order that subordinates women, that is anchored in religious dogmas and that continues to exert a determining influence on the economy, on laws and on social practices. On the other hand, States must renew the way in which they prioritise public action; this must be more integrated, more adaptive and subject to recurrent evaluations capable of measuring concretely its effects on inequalities.

The transformation envisaged in terms of the sexual division of positions of power engages State powers, women's-rights activists and communities, as well as the clarification and effectiveness of their respective responsibilities. Ultimately, the rights of women remain a question that does not concern only singular interests. Indeed, to promote respect for women's rights is to work in favour of equality, of human rights and of the dignity of persons. The non-respect of the rights of women, or of other vulnerabilised groups, constitutes a form of endangerment of the global legal framework, by weakening the very principles of the rule of law.

Likewise, when women and girls gain access to sexual and reproductive rights, to protection from the violence they suffer, and to secure conditions of life, education, health and the stability of families and of societies as a whole improve. The specific concerns of women therefore require political and social responses, since they constitute societal questions whose handling falls upon a multiplicity of actors, upon institutions and upon political arbitration – and not solely upon the individual responsibility of women.

05

Towards the re-solidarisation of the world: An African praxis of international solidarities

Nadine Machikou and Cecelia Lynch

Summary

International solidarity, conceived as the expression of a universal kinship, is supposed to represent a bond between peoples and societies. Yet, having been built on unequal power relations, and having often served political, economic or strategic interests at the expense of genuine mutual aid, its meaning and legitimacy are today in crisis.

Northern countries are reducing or redefining their aid, as is illustrated by the dismantling of one major reference agency and the cuts to others' funding. The question of the future of solidarity is posed at a moment when two critiques are eroding its foundations: on the one side, that of a neo-liberal international aid judged ineffective and dehumanising; on the other, a growing demand for autonomy and sovereignty in Africa. Yet both approaches tend to neglect the agency of populations.

In this context, the waning of international solidarity may also present an opportunity. It opens the way to a re-valorisation of African relational dynamics that are often rendered invisible, but which are nonetheless old, robust and effective. These forms of solidarity, resting on mutual aid, reciprocity and community organisation, could — in a world in crisis — be the seedbed for a re-solidarisation of the world.

The text therefore proposes to rethink solidarity in depth, along several axes.

First, it is necessary to redefine solidarity as a relation of equality and interdependence, essential for collective survival. It must not be a mere conditional or interested form of help, but a common engagement founded on shared responsibility and respect for the living.

Second, an often-ignored reality must be acknowledged: historically, Africa has contributed substantially to the wealth of the rest of the world, through the exploitation of its resources, its peoples and its forms of knowledge. Indeed, current financial flows show that more wealth leaves the continent than it receives. This calls into question the idea of an Africa dependent on aid.

It is also important to understand how certain situations of dependence have been constructed. The example of Haiti shows how mechanisms such as debt can durably enclose a country in misery, despite its sovereignty, while enriching its creditors.

In this perspective, international aid should be reconceived as a form of reparative justice. The point would no longer be to "give", but to repair historical injustices linked

to slavery, colonisation and exploitation. Recent international initiatives are, indeed, opening the way to such recognition.

Furthermore, it is essential to valorise the capacities for solidarity proper to African societies. Whether through rural community practices, rotating savings groups (tontines), cooperatives or networks of mutual aid, these systems display a strong capacity for organisation, often more horizontal and better suited to African realities. Yet they are frequently appropriated or distorted by international aid actors.

Lastly, dignity must become the central principle of any solidarity relationship. Inspired notably by *ubuntu* philosophy, this approach insists on respect, reciprocity and shared humanity. Solidarity must no longer humiliate or dominate, but must strengthen persons and communities.

Rethinking international solidarity therefore entails a profound transformation: a shift from an unequal model, often imposed from outside, toward a just relationship grounded in societal realities and based on reparation, reciprocity, and dignity.

Introduction

International solidarity is the materialisation, for better and for worse, of universal kinship. To think its future is to invest critically in the terms and forms of vital interdependence among societies, and to think the arrangements, forums and arenas in which its dispensation is concretised. The aim is to think its vitality (in what way does it respond to the essential needs that safeguard dignity) but also its viability (is it capable of reproducing and perpetuating itself)[42] — both today compromised by the asymmetry of power at the heart of how solidarity has been historically constructed and distributed. In a broken and ever more fractured world, this mutual dependence is not only that of human beings; it extends to the entirety of the living, through an awareness of the way in which the actors (those who dispense and those who receive) of solidarity form a complex interweaving.

Indeed, one of the privileged territories for the expression of global and planetary malaise is the prevailing geopolitical fragmentation and the dissociation from the other (and indeed from oneself) and from the living, the current decade constituting a hinge in this global existential crisis of relation. The norms and institutions of international solidarity have progressively become the nodal points of unbinding. Although the movement of de-solidarisation of the world — made of the abdication of responsibility towards the other — is structural and incremental, the crisis of neo-liberal cooperation in favour of a certain "national interest" is, with varying intensities, articulated with a geopolitical fragmentation and the intervention of new actors (China, Russia, Brazil, Turkey, the Gulf countries[43], and so on). It takes dramatic forms by inscribing itself within all the critical issues of our time — security, ecology, socio-economic and financial.

42 From the Latin solidus, solidarité carries a foundational character, attaching itself to an idea of solidity, of support.

43 For the most part, these new actors intervene very unequally to the north and to the south of the Sahara.

Ruptures of engagement have multiplied in matters of humanitarian and/or development aid (notably France, England, Germany), the most spectacular being the dismantling of the United States agency USAID in 2025. While several Northern countries reoriented their budgetary and geopolitical priorities well before, the progressive retreat — or redefinition — of official development assistance is profoundly reconfiguring the relations between States, donor organisations and African societies (and not only African ones). Long governed by an unequal global order, the practical and symbolic market of international solidarity has been the subject, for many years, of a decolonial critique. Ever more demanding, this critique interrogates the semantics and the structure of the solidarity relation as an invasive and permanent space of subalternisation. The rise, from 2020 onwards, of a neo-sovereigntist movement around a rejection of African dependence and a continental self-determination weaves itself into a critique nourished by the quest for a greater sovereignty, while being reactionary, often liberal-sovereigntist, nationalist and protectionist. But, like neo-liberal aid, both leave aside the perspectives and real needs of African communities in the name of the "national interest".

The encounter between these two critiques requires, however, that we rethink and envisage the movement of de-solidarisation of the world as an opportunity. Indeed, while this disengagement may weaken some essential social sectors, in a world where relations are increasingly less multiform and multilateral, this dynamic also opens the possibility of a refocusing on endogenous dynamisms and transversal solidarities, which remain powerful even though they are often rendered invisible beneath these neo-liberal and reactionary cycles. Many of them have either been suppressed or ignored by post-colonial authorities on the one hand, and by the partners of the humanitarian "industry" on the other.

Source of practical and symbolic discomfort and of profound trauma, these imperial modalities are marked by relationalities rooted in dynamics of power, in colonial histories and in hierarchical relations whose reproduction must be rethought and subverted. They are today in crisis not only of meaning but also of means, and the impasse they face appears inextricable, making international aid a space of ontological impoverishment of humanity: a crisis of definition, of structuring, of distribution, of governance, of operationalisation[44]. In this sense, the re-solidarisation of the world passes through a set of counter-hegemonic gestures that augment and do not diminish life and dignity (diminishing through the thingification or inferiorisation of recipients in the name of an essentially accountancy-driven reason). It can be founded on endogenous doctrines and practices in order to disrupt the bureaucracy of present aid in favour of a community of life and of destiny — a solidarity of mutual dignification. The capacity to augment dignity passes through the effective and concomitant articulation of the requirement of vitality (solidarity in support of a dignified life for all) and of viability (solidarity capable of perpetuating itself under conditions of ethical, economic and political sustainability).

The inalienable substance of solidarity is the existence of a relation. From the outset, the consultations posed the following question: at this stage, *between France and Africa, is*

44 Severino, J.-M. 2025. The Big Beautiful Policy, Fondation pour les études et recherches sur le développement international, Politique de développement, Working Paper 360, October.

one needed? The self-evidence and necessity of a relation, in a context of hardening and banalisation of ideological tendencies of withdrawal upon oneself (the rightward and nationalisation drift of political societies), deserve to be (re-)questioned. Beyond ancient historical, socio-economic, political and cosmological links (and others besides), their interweaving derives from a general condition of a solidarity of interests, rendering rupture between the parties involved unthinkable. Yet these relations have never been thought or practised within an egalitarian configuration. It is precisely there that the problem of the Africa–France relation arises: it can be viable, in a logic of shared benefit and interest, only if it is rethought on a solid and sustainable basis, bearer of respect, energy and hope.

This chapter intends to promote new ethical and practical paths for re-creating relations of solidarity between Africa and France (and beyond). The various interviews with actors of African civil society made it possible to identify an ontological malaise surrounding this "relation", as well as the living and powerful possibilities of a new doctrine of equitable solidarity and of the *en-commun* (the in-common), grounded in sharing, mutual initiative-taking and shared responsibility. They were accompanied by a denunciation of the neo-liberal and extractivist brutalism, source of an unprecedented political and moral failure of the initiatives labelled as aid or solidarity towards the continent. On the question of the possibility of an equitable Africa–France relation, the present chapter responds firmly in the affirmative and proposes to make explicit its terms, springs and conditions in a general exercise of re-problematisation from below[45].

From this flow six essential propositions on the basis of which the solidarity relation may be re-problematised and reformulated with a view to viable bonds for the future, beginning now. The aim is to overcome the fear of what could easily be interpreted as a loss of power, of control, of framing — terminological and paradigmatic — by governmental actors and institutions on each side, on the one hand; and by societies and communities among themselves, on the other.

Recommendation 1: Recognising the urgency of establishing a relationship grounded in equitable solidarity and the commons

In the era of conditional solidarity and of transactional diplomacy against a backdrop of the preservation of interests (qualified and quantified, for instance, in critical minerals, in the capacity to organise or facilitate migratory border-making, immediate security, and so on), a space of the commons, or of a community of interests, is necessary. This space of the commons rest on an ethic of responsibility — in the face of a future threatened by global collapse — and brings one to feel oneself, in an *ubuntu* spirit, the guarantor of a general equilibrium of life, and of a reciprocal existence dependent upon mutual identification and common assistance. Its sustainability depends upon a network of existential interdependences extended to the whole of humanity and the living, in support of the most elementary forms of life. Solidarity must thus be conceived as an ontological principle that links all forms of life to one another — Africa, as the privileged reservoir of the living, being on the front line of its preservation.

45 This chapter of the white paper is the product of in-depth interviews with representatives of civil-society organisations, including the CIHA collective (Critical Investigations into Humanitarianism in Africa), the Social Change Factory, and the Gates collective; with economists, with collectives of pan-Africanist intellectuals, and with grassroots groups across the continent.

To re-solidarise the world can be envisaged only in terms of the passage from the capacity of international solidarity to impoverish and diminish life (in the name of interests and of neo-liberal reason) to its potential to augment life by founding it upon bonds of dignity. It is inseparable from processes of maintaining and repairing life, with, as a condition of its endurance, the capacity to enter into bond. The precariousness that calls it forth is also a marker of a wealth (known or hidden, beyond the disposal of critical minerals and other natural resources) for Africa as for France and for the rest of the world. Solidarity is thus not, properly speaking, empathy, benevolence and compassion, but a precondition for the survival of an earthly community marked, mutually and concomitantly, by both wealth and deficiency. It is on this account that one of the collectives consulted (the bearer of the *Manifeste*) suggests requalifying solidarity as equity[46]. What Africa and France can draw from a (re-)visiting of *ubuntu* philosophy is that to extend a hand to the other as a prolongation of one's own humanity (in support or in request) can collectively assure one's own survival.

This ontological link makes the re-solidarisation of the world an imperative that the recent evolution of the grammar and of the structure of international solidarity policies cannot take in hand. We are indeed witnessing an across-the-board mobilisation of approaches: "win–win", "mutual interests", "national interest", "investments" cloaked in a green attenuation ("solidarity-based and sustainable investments"), "return on investment", and so on. This movement is inscribed at the intersection of a financial and accountancy-driven reason whose requirements range from the qualification of solidarity needs to the dehumanisation of the mechanisms for sorting recipients and the increasing complication of accountability instruments. On the other side, some governments little concerned with internal and external accountability have engaged in a predatory and prodigal way in the rentier commercialisation of the suffering of their own citizens, and in the systematic diversion of the resources allocated to it. Responsibility-taking and respect for the requirements of sound management is a condition not simply to be prescribed from outside, but to be built from within and also to be reactivated through an endogenous (re-)capacitation of African societies[47], in the name of a duty of vigilance over those who govern.

To re-problematise international solidarity in terms of greater horizontality may take place from the observation that it rests upon an ontological condition of respectful interdependence, inviting us to go beyond ourselves in the name of common global causes such as the climate crisis, food security, health, or the circulation of forms of knowledge.

46 Cf. Manifeste 2026, written by a collective of pan-Africanist intellectuals.

47 Some economists' work shows that endogenous capacities were destroyed from the colonial period onwards, then rehabilitated during the post-colonial period, before being dismantled in the 1990s in the wake of the structural adjustment programmes imposed by the Washington Consensus.

Recommendation 2: Recognising African societies as the principal "donors" in a historically unequal relation

Despite the widely held perception of Franco–African relations (and, more broadly, of relations between the global North and Africa) as marked by an enterprise of development of Africa by France and the North, much research has brought to light a very different history of the structural processes and of their inequitable and devastating character for African societies. Whether one looks to the work of Walter Rodney from 1972 onwards[48], followed by the memorable Thabo Mbeki report of 2015, or to a body of decolonial work and of bilateral and multilateral reports — notably from the United Nations — the extractivist foundations of development systems have emptied (and continue to empty) the continent of its human and material resources for the greater profit of wealthy countries (cf. the chapter on minerals in this white paper).

The Mbeki report stated unequivocally that "Africa is in reality a net creditor to the rest of the world", despite the budgets in favour of "development" that have flowed to the continent, and that more than USD 50 billion leaves the continent's coffers annually through illicit channels and mechanisms. A coalition of movements for global justice concluded in 2017 that, while Africa received USD 19 billion annually in the form of development aid, more than three times that sum — USD 68 billion — was leaving the continent in the form of extraction. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), in its 2020 report on the economic development of the continent, estimates that the amount of illicit capital leaving Africa annually is USD 88.6 billion, representing 3.7 per cent of its GDP. On humanitarian terrain, ActionAid's 2025 report provides detailed indications on this enterprise of extraction, concluding once again that "whatever the measure, the debts of rich countries to low-income countries are greater than the sum of the external debts of those countries"[49].

This historical tendency has long been analysed by the luminous Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, who called for a paradigmatic rupture in the analysis of "aid" to Africa. For him, it is Africa that gives to the West, and the West that has received so much from Africa for centuries — its peoples, its resources, its cultures and its languages[50]. Such a reversal of perspective affirms that the advancement and development of many Western countries was made possible only on the condition of a pre-emption of the unpaid labour of Africans reduced to slavery and a capture of resources pillaged from the continent, as Walter Rodney demonstrated as early as 1972. Given this state of affairs, relations founded on offers and programmes seeking to "develop" Africa, while keeping a grip on resources and on subjugated political regimes, ring hollow. It is also why the commonly advanced stereotypes according to which aid to Africa creates its "dependence" are equally erroneous. Western wealth was already correlative to a hold on African labour and resources. Today, beyond the ceaselessly reproduced extraction (with some nuances), many banks are also dependent on the servicing of African debt for their

48 Walter Rodney. 1972 (2009 edition). How Europe Underdeveloped Africa. Panaf Publishing.

49 AU/ECA Conference of Ministers of Finance, Planning, and Economic Development. 2015. Illicit Financial Flows, https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/40545-doc-IFFs_REPORT.pdf; Honest Accounts 2017, https://www.globaljustice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/honest_accounts_2017_web_final_updated.pdf; UNCTAD 2020, https://unctad.org/news/africa-could-gain-89-billion-annually-curbing-illicit-financial-flows; ActionAid. 2025. Who Owes Whom? https://actionaid.org/sites/default/files/publications/.

50 Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. 2009. Something Torn and New: An African Renaissance. Basic Books.

reserves; and at the central level, the monetary subjugation of part of Africa rests on the instrument of the operations account housed at the Banque de France. By contrast, the world of humanitarian aid in Western hands — non-governmental organisations, international organisations, various associations — depends on State donors for its very existence (which puts it in peril within a movement of dismantling the neo-liberal aid structure). The irony of seeing "dependence" as a characteristic only of African societies should be obvious, given that it covers an entire aid industry made of large and small Western hands.

This history also explains why, during interviews with civil-society groups, the critique of Franco–African relations was constantly acerbic, accompanied by great scepticism as to the real will of these partners to integrate the knowledge and perspectives of African civil society into equitable solidarities. The participants recognise that we are now at a crucial turning point in Franco–African relations. While some interlocutors showed themselves keen to seize the possibilities offered by this turn, others described the present situation as "a reflection of a potential passage from the bad — a neo-liberal, unequal model of relationality that masks an extractive economy beneath a humanitarian veneer; to the worst — a model of brute extraction (social, economic, political), with no humanitarian dressing to disguise it". It is also marked by what African economists describe as "voluntary servitude" on the part of African governments vis-à-vis an extractivist history that is dispossessing them, sometimes with their complicity.

Re-framing is not simply a matter of changing terminology, but a powerful historical occasion for advancing epistemic, ethical, legal and institutional justice. Such a re-framing requires retracing the processes by which Franco–African relations have become so intensely unequal. What is at stake is the dignity of persons and of peoples, mortgaged by strong endogenous and exogenous constraints.

Recommendation 3: Drawing on the Haitian case to trace the emergence of the humanitarian trap

From where does the demand for solidarity arise? How are the conditions of its necessity forged? The example of Haiti is striking on this point. In May 2022, an investigation by the New York Times revisited the question of the reparations paid by Haiti to France, in compensation for the prejudice caused by the first victorious slave revolt of the modern world[51]. This country, whose situation is in many respects comparable to that of other African countries, is a tracer of the way in which a fragile or failed State is fabricated — caught durably in the trap of humanitarian aid. Endemic poverty, violence and corruption form its backdrop, woven from 1804, the year of its proclamation of independence. The descendants of slaves were ordered, in 1825 under threat of bombardment, to pay a "ransom" by indemnifying the former slaveholders and their heirs to the tune of 150 million French francs, payable in five annual instalments and exclusively borrowed from French banks.

The exercise of quantifying the sums actually transferred to France led a team of journalists to undertake 13 months of archival work across three continents and made

51 Eric Nagourney. 2022. "6 takeaways from the reparations paid by Haiti to France." The New York Times, 22 May.

it possible to establish the existence of a double debt paid over 64 years. A total of USD 560 million was subtracted from the country's development resources and transferred to France. Fifteen economists show that these payments cost between USD 21 billion and USD 115 billion in lost economic growth for the country (the equivalent of eight times the size of Haiti's economy in 2020); something which Thomas Piketty, one of the economists consulted, describes as "neo-colonialism by debt ... (which) totally disrupted the process of State-building". In this process of predation, French and American banks enriched themselves while erasing all traces. This debt, which was to become double, served to indemnify former French slaveholders, rentiers of slavery and colonialism, while continuing to contract structural debts with major French banks. During the First World War, the United States occupied the country from 1915 onwards and imposed a new loan, which would in turn enrich the National City Bank. President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who demanded reparations in 2003, was discredited and driven from power a year later through an operation orchestrated jointly by the United States and France. One sees here how imperialist plunder enriching slave-trading bourgeoisies reproduces its effects and its grip on the political plane.

This Haitian example may call for a general inventory in a context of a neo-sovereigntist tendency, with a clear-out spirit, in many of the former French colonies on the continent. It may extend to the denunciation of indebtedness as a mechanism of subordination of States and societies. Under such conditions, debt cannot be converted in any way whatsoever. Various devices have been tried — collective action clauses, rescheduling of maturities, reductions of interest rates, reductions of nominal value, conversion into investments (along the lines of the *Contrat de désendettement et de développement*, the French mechanism for converting debt into development projects, sometimes far removed from Africa's overall financing needs and creating a new dependence in terms of technical assistance, and so on) — or development aid in the form of donations and grants.

Furthermore, aid, in a post-development logic, must organise its own finitude[52]. Debt must be purely and simply abolished, and an audit of the general conditions of indebtedness would make it possible to sort legitimate debts from those that are merely opaque mechanisms of dispossession within a configuration of systemic colonialism or post-colonial prevarication. The conditions marking the economic links between France and Niger (one of the poorest countries on the planet) regarding the exploitation of uranium have brought scandals to light ("Uraniumgate"[53]) that have since been denounced by the military junta in power as the expression of a "colonial pillage"[54], as it has turned towards Russia and Iran. What would the trajectories of African societies have been if they had not been subjected (and continue often to be so, very intensively, with the arrival of new actors) to extractivist processes of unprecedented brutality, both from the outside and from fundamentally predatory post-colonial elites? This inventory can and must be made in order to rebuild a universe of possibilities.

52 Collectif d'organisation, Manifeste, 2026.

53 Mathieu Olivier. 2017. "Areva, le Niger et l'affaire de l'« Uraniumgate »". Jeune Afrique, 28 March.

54 Abdou Rahmane Diallo. "Niger: La rupture avec Orano ouvre un front judiciaire explosif autour de l'uranium." Le Journal du pays.

Recommendation 4: Requalifying aid as a modality of reparative justice

It was demonstrated above (Recommendation 2) that the recognition of African societies as "donors" remains a distant horizon, despite its urgency, while, under Recommendation 3, investigative research can bring to light precise trajectories of impoverishment of societies calling for an intense corrective investment. Taken together, they lay the foundations of the recognition of the necessity of a reparative justice.

Whether the matter concerns equity or equality, whether it is posed in terms of an act due, solidarity — and aid, which is one of its modalities — has given rise to a substantial body of work in terms of requalification. All performances of humiliation that have too often characterised "aid" must be rejected — on the part of NGOs and INGOs as much as of donor States. The idea of the dispensation of solidarity as an act of justice may find anchorage in the window of opportunity opened by the United Nations General Assembly's recent adoption of a resolution carried by Ghana. The resolution qualifies as the **"gravest crime against humanity"** the trans-Atlantic trade in Africans who, between 1500 and 1800, were captured, sold and reduced to slavery in numbers ranging from 12 to 15 million (with an estimate of nearly two million deaths during the crossing). Adopted on 25 March 2026 by 123 votes in favour, three against (the United States, Israel, Argentina) and 52 abstentions — including many European countries, France notably, and the United Kingdom — this evolution from a commemorative claim to a normative act opening the way to reparative justice is unexpected. The resolution opens up the possibility of material, financial and moral reparations and of acts of formal repentance (symbolic recognition, restitution of cultural goods, development aid in Africa and the Caribbean). Decades earlier, at an international conference held at the Sorbonne from 11 to 13 March 1998 in homage to Édouard Glissant, a round table entitled "From Slavery to the All-World" bringing together Glissant, Patrick Chamoiseau and Wole Soyinka[55] made it possible to address the unspoken weight bearing on the possibility of repairing what Chamoiseau had described as a "dreadful attack". The historical shock of slavery is the source of a collective trauma, of a durable agony and of an undeniable harm whose reparation may be inscribed within the requalification of development aid.

This campaign for reparation has been translated into a continental claim, since the African Union made "reparative justice" the official theme of the year 2025. The French abstention at the United Nations vote, a few weeks before the celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Loi Taubira, is an ambiguous and embarrassing signal — akin to a memorial recognition without consequences. The indignity of the slave trade and the dehumanisation it founds constitute wounds ceaselessly reactivated for millions of Africans and Afro-descendants. The same applies to the American objection, which rested on a denunciation of a "cynical instrumentalisation of historical injustices as a means of pressure to reallocate modern resources to persons and nations with a distant kinship to the historical victims"[56]. A space for reinvention remains: the establishment of a reparation fund offers France — which profited economically from this trade and from colonisation — the possibility of engaging concrete acts of reparation and of restitution.

55 Cf. Jacques Chevrier (ed.). 2000. Poétiques d'Édouard Glissant. Paris: Presses de l'université de Paris-Sorbonne.

56 Remarks made during the debate by Dan Negrea, US Ambassador to the United Nations, who furthermore "does not recognise any legal right to reparations for historical injustices that were not unlawful under international law at the time they were committed".

Following the example of the Netherlands, France can offer official apologies for the consequences of the crimes of slavery and of colonisation, in a movement of broadening of the Loi Taubira, by taking on the question of reparations and by giving concrete form to the agenda of restitution of cultural goods. Structural inequalities between the North and the South, racial discriminations, infrastructural lag, chronic indebtedness and neo/post-colonial declassement thus call not for "development aid" but for reparation and restitution.

This event therefore opens a window for the re-problematisation of solidarity from new framings, allowing the matrices of international solidarity to be qualified in different terms. This re-framing must be capable of being envisaged within the perimeter of a justice that repairs, restores and dignifies. To pass from a political and moral injunction to a prerogative of societies articulated upon a well-defined harm presupposes the establishment of bodies capable of translating these issues into concrete legal terms accessible to communities (in particular those whose having been marked by the slave trade, and continuing to bear its sequelae, has been established). The complexity of criminal incrimination (of the descendants of slave traders, accompanied by a possible individual reparation for the descendants of slaves) reinforces the relevance of political reparations in favour of societies. It must be noted that, to date, direct (and at times individual) reparations following various crimes — notably genocide and crimes against humanity such as slavery — have targeted Western and white categories.

Recommendation 5: Rehabilitating the entirety of endogenous capacities of solidarity

Each party to the Africa–France relation must recognise a principal lesson of African ethics: he or she who is rich today may not be so tomorrow, and vice versa, happiness and misfortune being circular. This wisdom brings us back to the importance of reciprocal obligations and of just relations that avoid all intentional or paternalistic practices of humiliation, both for France and for African countries vis-à-vis their nationals.

Re-solidarisation also requires taking on board specific positionalities anchored in concrete territories. In the face of trials, African communities, societies and nations have always come to one another's assistance in very varied forms but essentially on a basis of horizontality and/or reciprocity. Such is the case, for example, in the rural space, of persons belonging to a clan, a peer circle, a village or a generational cohort, who gather to undertake quickly and effectively works such as building a house or cultivating a field (*Sourga* among the Fulani; *Limpaï* among the Toupouri; *Manjong* among the Nso or *Chii* among the Bamoun in Cameroon; *Tool-u-larba* — the Wednesday field — *Daa'ira* or *Santaane* among the Wolof; *Nyakinyua* among the Kikuyu of Kenya). These activities sometimes take the form of a celebration of the commons, rhythmed by song and dance and ending in a collective meal. The pooling of efforts; productivity superior to the sum of individual efforts in peak periods (sowing or harvest); but also the formation and consolidation of a space of belonging.

Solidarity has also taken more institutionalised forms: rotating savings groups (tontines); cooperatives — productive, marketing, savings-and-credit, and so on; village development committees ensuring solidarity between rural and urban people brought together to lead together actions of economic, social, cultural or cultic reach for a territory in a context of State disengagement (*Kîhiû Mwîrî* among the Kikuyu, for

example). Communities organise themselves to take charge of their needs in various infrastructures, sometimes soliciting exogenous technical or financial assistance. Solidarity also constructs a space of mutual foresight and forethought. According to a powerful metaphor that prescribes mutual aid on the day of misfortune (*"When your neighbour's hut is burning, hurry to help him put out the fire, lest it spread to your own"*, an Ivorian proverb), mutual aid rests on a principle of mutual dependences anchored in broad ramifications, making it possible to take charge of the risks and uncertainties of life.

At the same time, the neo-liberal logic of humanitarian aid has succeeded in insinuating itself even into these ethics and practices. NGOs and international NGOs, for instance, often appropriate, by reconditioning them, the successes of communities into their own aid programmes (calling them tontines, microfinance, and so on), albeit in a much less durable fashion, as economists have shown[57]. They also use accounts of mutual aid by populations for purposes of humanitarian marketing, instead of recognising the hard work and engagement of African communities — dispossessing them of their agency and of the control they exercise over their own narratives. This has often led grassroots organisations to invest in the production of alternative narratives, faced as they are with this predation on the part of donors. Even under such conditions of predation, African mutual-aid movements, both rural and urban, remain powerful. The recent drastic cuts in funding programmes nonetheless represent a challenge that they are painfully attempting to overcome. To reconfigure aid as reparative justice would allow them to flourish and to reach their full potential in dignity.

In an open and pragmatic regime of close kin, the security of our neighbour ensures part of our own. This solidarity has long been minimised or simply passed over in silence, as the episode of the explosion of Lake Nyos in Cameroon shows (a natural disaster that caused the death of more than 1,800 persons in 1986). A few accounts present the policy of assistance as a space of influence and as "support for the display of means belonging only to countries at the head of the pack. France (…) wishes to show its capacity to deploy them from one continent to another, to the four corners of its former empire. In August 1986, the catastrophe of Lake Nyos would give it the occasion to use these means in its African zone of influence. Official communiqués would closely associate the relief efforts with the French military presence in central Africa (Chad, the Central African Republic, Gabon), this humanitarian vocation coming opportunely to compensate, in part, for the criticisms formulated against its real role, according to some — that is, contributing to the maintenance in power of regimes that are little democratic"[58]. Contrary to all tactical use of catastrophe (for example the "disaster passport"[59]), Zaire, under the leadership of President Mobutu, swiftly sent medical teams to assist the survivors, alongside financial aid; the same was true of Nigeria. For its part, Gabon delivered a cheque of 100 million CFA francs to President Paul Biya[60].

57 Cilas Kemedjio and Cecelia Lynch (eds.). 2024. Who Gives to Whom? Reframing Africa in the Humanitarian Imaginary. Palgrave Macmillan; Christian Castellanet, Philippe Coquart, Gilles Lainé and Kako Nubukpo. Une histoire de la coopération franco-africaine : entre ombres et lumières. Paris: Karthala, forthcoming, June 2026.

58 Lepointe, R. 1994. "Désastres naturels et diplomatie." Politique étrangère, 59(4), p. 1089.

59 Ibid., p. 1096.

60 UN. 1986. "Cameroun — Émanations de gaz toxique volcanique, août 1986. UNDRO Situation Reports 1–8", 26 August – 2 September. https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/cameroun-emanations-de-gaz-toxique-volcanique-aout-1986-undro-rapports-de-situation.

Africans assist one another in a less ostentatious way and without conditionality (notably without conditions of accountability). At the time of the earthquake that struck Morocco in 2023, Algeria — which had nonetheless broken its diplomatic relations with the country over the question of Western Sahara — hastened to open its airspace to the passage of aircraft and to offer its aid (alas, refused). This bears witness to the principle of a bond of solidarity maintained or (re-)activated in the face of the misfortune of the other, whoever he or she may be. At the level of community policies, the African Solidarity Initiative is an instrument for the mobilisation and reinforcement of support for post-conflict reconstruction and development in Africa. This intra-African mutual support, although functional, is also discreet, eschewing the ostentation of performances of humiliation.

The rehabilitation and the celebration of the proper capacities of solidarity are an essential element in favour of the dignification of societies.

Recommendation 6: Dignification as foundation and horizon of a respectful and relational solidarity

What ethical framework is capable of supporting the reactivation of new solidarity-based relationalities, founded on respect, on responsibility and, above all, on a humanity that makes room for all its human beings? What political utopia in the face of the crisis of solidarity, in order to have it not merely *in common* but also and above all *in sharing*? Re-solidarisation rests upon a regime of the commons (as opposed to a regime of appropriation and of production of humiliation), whereas de-solidarisation is the source of an ontological impoverishment inaugurated by the sequelae of acts of aid or of giving not infused with respect for the ultimate value inherent in all members of the human family. The encounter of dignity and solidarity may be read in the relational philosophy of *ubuntu* (***"You are, therefore I am"***), which African proverbs constantly take up:

> **"One is not rich because one has much, but because one gives much."** *(Senufo proverb)*
> **"Alone, we go faster. Together, we go further."** *(Mossi proverb)*
> **"He who shares his meal never ends up eating crumbs."** *(Yoruba proverb)*
> **"The neighbour's son is also your son."** *(Akan proverb)*
> **"The Earth is not an inheritance from our parents, but a loan from our children."** *(Mossi proverb)*

A return to the history of Franco–African relations after the Second World War brings to light important perspectives of solidarity founded on dignity from which we may draw inspiration today. Consider, for example, the work of Siba N'Zatioula Grovogui, which highlights the way in which the "évolués" worked to insert dignity at the heart of relations with the metropole. Furthermore, after independence, the principal interest was to forge a post-colonial pan-African doctrine placing the public sector at the service of the provision of educational and health infrastructures at the scale of society[61].

61 Siba N. Grovogui. 2006. Beyond Eurocentrism and Anarchy: Memories of International Order and Institutions. New York: Palgrave; Christian Castellanet, Philippe Coquart, Gilles Lainé and Kako Nubukpo. Une histoire de la coopération franco-africaine : entre ombres et lumières. Paris: Karthala, forthcoming, June 2026.

Today, Afro-feminist and decolonial examples abound with practices of dignified solidarity[62]. The answer does not lie in a brutal abolition of "aid" in favour of such solidarities, but in a true paradigm shift seeking to conceive them (by making place and decisional power for societies themselves) so as to determine their content and to orient them towards the pursuit of their flourishing. At the domestic level, as a condition and bond of political daily life, the demand for dignity should not give rise to a brutal repression but should, on the contrary, inspire public approaches to the endogenous dignification of societies.

Conclusion

Drawing on multi-situated conversations, the present chapter of the white paper highlights the implications of the necessary shift towards an African re-solidarisation of the world. This re-solidarisation is intended as the domestication of a discursive and organic disorder animating the actors, institutions and instruments of solidarity (humanitarian discourse; post-1990 globalist discourse; technocratic discourse on the obligation to help; anthropological discourse on the capacity and the "revenge of contexts" and societies[63]; decolonial discourse, and so on). An ethical and practical change presupposes repatriating and supporting the solidarities that organise themselves in everyday political life, at the scale of African societies; rethinking alternative furrows of cooperation with agents from outside in terms of reparation and restitution; and inventing, within this dynamic of resistance and of ethical reconfiguration, innovative instruments of re-solidarisation. Between the collective capacity to respond with dignity, everywhere, to vital needs, and the capacity to guarantee the durability of solidarity arrangements, the African paths drawn by civil-society contributions constitute a credible response in the face of an ever more costly global collapse.

This chapter is grounded in long-standing scientific collaboration by the authors in Cameroon, in Senegal and in Europe, as well as in consultations carried out between March and April 2026, alongside the other sources presented above. These consultations were also enriched by various contributions made during the preparatory webinar dedicated to the theme on 16 April 2026.

62 Sylvia Tamale. 2020. Decolonization and Afro-Feminism. Daraja Press; Global Africa, les relations humanitaires et la réinvention de l'avenir de l'Afrique, special issue, 2025, https://www.globalafricasciences.org/issues/issue-12/.

63 Olivier de Sardan, J.-P. 2021. La revanche des contextes : des mésaventures en ingénierie sociale en Afrique et au-delà. Karthala, 480 p.

06

Democratising maternal and child health in Africa: A strategic investment for the future

Zohreen Badruddin

Executive summary

In a context of growing geopolitical and economic pressures, political will and the funding devoted to global development are becoming increasingly scarce. The consequences are particularly visible in the field of maternal and child health in Africa, where the progress made in reducing mortality has slowed and where disparities deprive the most vulnerable of access to essential resources. Despite significant improvements since 1990, sub-Saharan Africa still has the highest rate off maternal and child deaths in the world, the majority of which would nonetheless be preventable. This picture is shaped by deep structural barriers: limited financial and geographical access to care; uneven quality of health services; under-investment in data and technology systems; and persistent socio-economic inequalities. And the cost of inaction is rising rapidly.

This white paper argues that the democratisation of maternal and child health – that is, the guarantee of equitable, universal and quality access to care – must become a priority at the international and national levels. It proposes an integrated, systems-based approach grounded in four strategic pillars: the broadening of universal health coverage; the strengthening of integrated and quality systems of care, with priority accorded to community health-care delivery; the use of data, technology and innovation to improve the quality of services; and the taking into account of the broader determinants of health to ensure durable improvements in quality of life. At the heart of this transformation lies a renewal of political commitment and the mobilisation of domestic resources by African governments, in order to reduce dependence on external aid and to build resilient and self-sufficient health systems. This chapter positions maternal and child health as a strategic, profitable and unifying investment for strengthening human capital, resilience and long-term economic development – so that the next generation may not only survive but flourish.

Part 1 – Context, trends and challenges

The international development community is going through a period of remarkable tensions: political and economic crises, climate shocks, competition from other funding priorities. In this context, interest in international cooperation is decreasing, even though the situation calls for greater concertation and coordination. In times of crisis, nations and organisations tend to focus on what seems most immediate and most familiar to them.

It is precisely in such contexts – where funding is becoming scarcer, where political will tilts towards protectionism and where domestic preoccupations come to the fore – that there is an imperative, both rational and moral, to ensure that concessional funding and solidarity are used in the most effective manner. Limited resources must be put to the service of the greatest possible positive impact, for the greatest number. To put it simply: when times are hard, it matters more than ever to redirect our energy, our attention and our resources towards what best supports our long-term economic and social well-being. This reasoning brings us to one of the most profitable and unifying investments there is: the health and well-being of our children.

An overview of the state of maternal and child health in Africa

Maternal and child health is one of the clearest indicators of a population's well-being. On the African continent, the data present a complex picture: the conditions of development and the potential well-being of a child vary depending on where the child is born. According to the World Health Organization[64], the reduction of under-five child mortality is one of the great successes of recent history: sub-Saharan Africa moved from 179 deaths per 1,000 live births[65] among children under five in 1990 to 71 deaths in 2024. This figure does not, however, reflect the variations within the continent: in 2024, 116 children died per 1,000 live births in Nigeria, against 11 in Cabo Verde. According to UNICEF[66], around 58 per cent of the 4.9 million children who died before the age of five worldwide in 2024 were living in Africa, and the continent is set to remain the deadliest for children until 2055. A comparison of the infant mortality rate for the different African regions against other regions of the world is shown in Figure 1 below.

64 World Health Organization. 2022. "Child Mortality and Causes of Death". https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/themes/topics/topic-details/GHO/child-mortality-and-causes-of-death.

65 World Bank. 2021. "Mortality Rate, Under-5 (per 1,000 Live Births) – Sub-Saharan Africa". https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.DYN.MORT?locations=ZG.

66 UNICEF Data. 17 March 2026. "Levels and Trends in Child Mortality". https://data.unicef.org/resources/levels-and-trends-in-child-mortality-2025/.

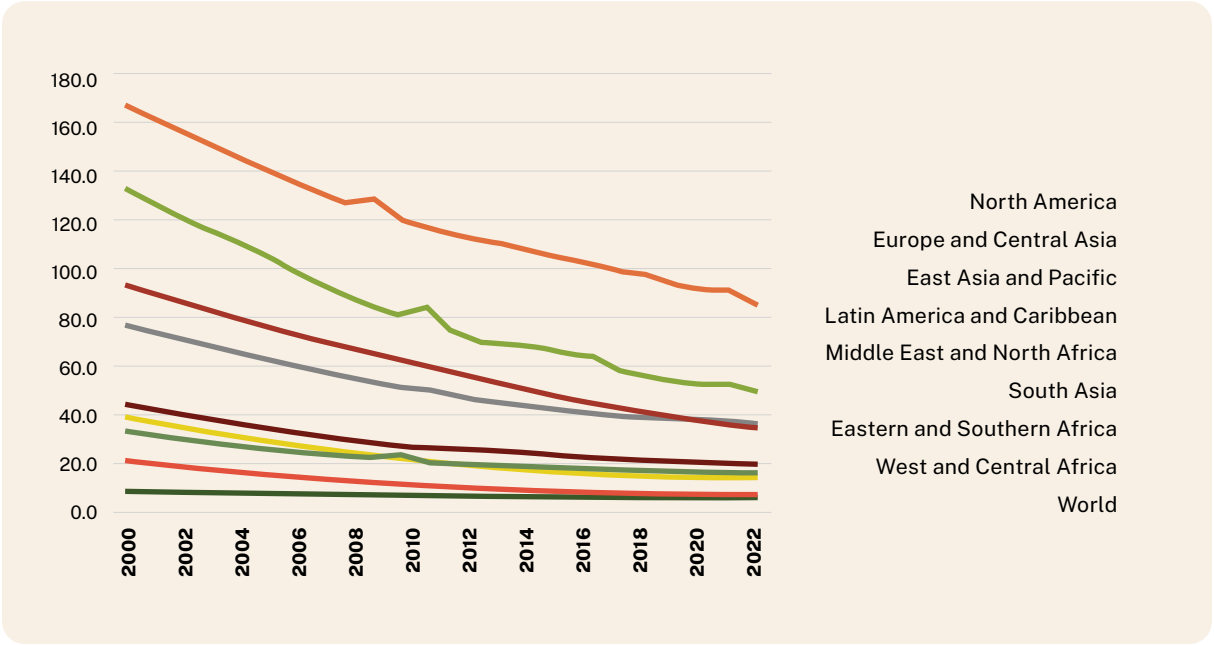


Figure 1: Under-five mortality rate, by region and globally, 2000–2023 (UNICEF, 2025).

Maternal mortality follows a similar trend. In sub-Saharan Africa, around 1,004 mothers died per 100,000 live births[67] in 1990; this figure is now reduced to 448 maternal deaths in 2023. Here too, the disparities are striking: 990 mothers died per 100,000 live births in Nigeria, against 40 in Cabo Verde in 2023. According to the WHO[68], these maternal deaths in sub-Saharan Africa represent 70 per cent of the global total. Furthermore, the majority of progress on infant and maternal mortality was achieved before 2010, and the advances have considerably slowed over the past decade.

However, focusing on mortality rates alone does not give a complete picture of a child's health conditions. While a child reaching the milestone of his or her fifth birthday is an important marker of survival into adulthood, his or her quality of life after birth is just as decisive. A worrying trend in child poverty reveals that, while sub-Saharan Africa is home to less than a quarter of the world's children, it concentrates more than 75 per cent[69] of the children living in poverty globally. Of these, 311 million live in extreme poverty. Partly because of the substantially higher birth rate in sub-Saharan Africa[70], the proportion of children living in extreme poverty in the region has scarcely changed between 2014 and 2024, hovering around 52 per cent. UNICEF tracks the rates of children living in severe deprivation-based poverty in low- and middle-income countries, defining as such children suffering significant deprivations in any one of the following domains: education, health, housing, nutrition, sanitation and/or water. The highest

67 World Bank. "Maternal Mortality Ratio (Modelled Estimate, per 100,000 Live Births) – Sub-Saharan Africa". https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.STA.MMRT?locations=ZG.

68 World Health Organization. 7 April 2025. "Trends in Maternal Mortality 2000 to 2023: Estimates by WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, World Bank Group and UNDESA/Population Division". https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240108462.

69 UNICEF Innocenti. 20 November 2025. "The State of the World's Children 2025". https://www.unicef.org/reports/state-of-worlds-children/2025.

70 UNICEF. 2017. "Children in Africa". https://data.unicef.org/resources/children-in-africa-child-survival-brochure/.

rates of severe poverty, as for monetary poverty, are concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa, as illustrated in Figure 2 below.

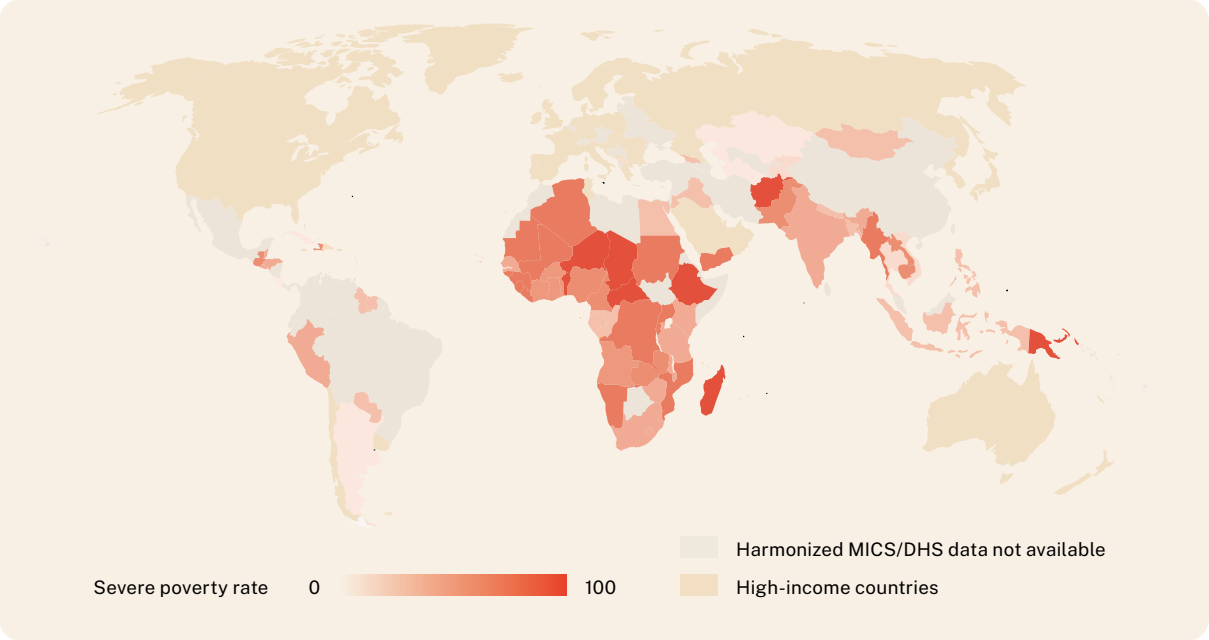


Figure 2: Severe poverty rate among children in low- and middle-income countries (UNICEF, 2023).

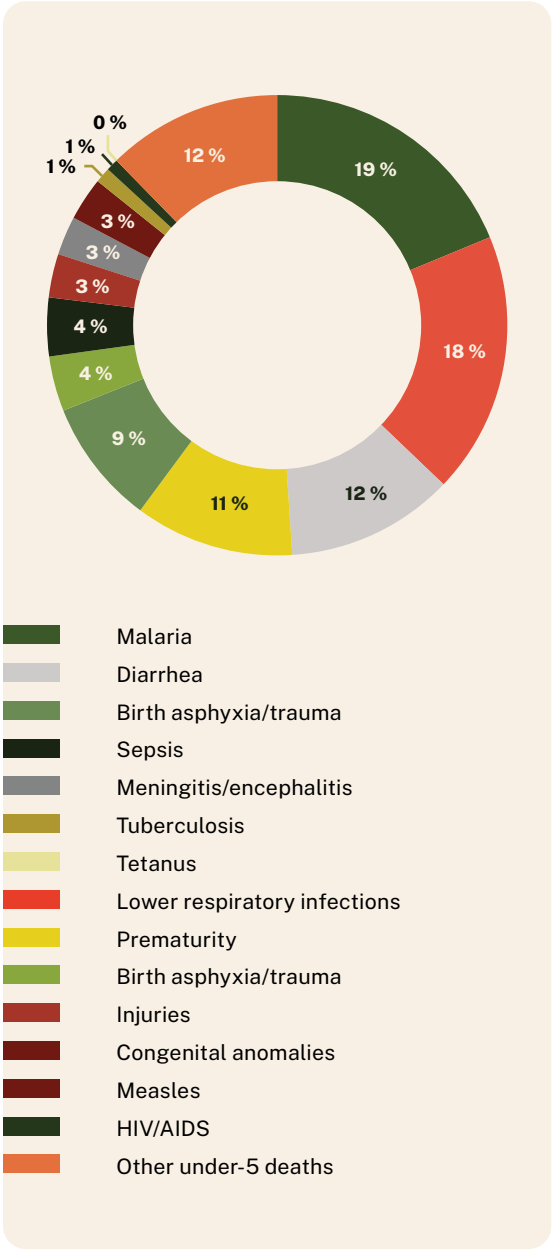
Malnutrition represents a considerable challenge on the continent, all the more so because it weakens a child's immune system and increases his or her risk of dying from common diseases[71]. While the proportion of children affected by stunting and wasting has decreased in sub-Saharan Africa[72], too many children are still affected by malnutrition. By some estimates, up to 60 per cent of children under five in the region suffer from anaemia[73] – a situation aggravated by life in contexts of poverty or conflict, as well as by the impact of climate change and the volatility of food prices.

Taken together, these factors show that the African continent bears a disproportionate share of maternal and child deaths in the world, even though the majority of these deaths are preventable and treatable. The principal causes of death among children under five are essentially infectious diseases (notably 19 per cent linked to malaria, 18 per cent to lower respiratory tract infections and 12 per cent to diarrhoea) and neonatal complications (notably 11 per cent linked to prematurity and 9 per cent to asphyxia and birth trauma), according to data from the United Nations Inter-agency Group for

71 UNICEF. 2024. "Progress in Reducing Child Deaths Slows as 4.9 Million Children under Five Die in 2024". https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/progress-reducing-child-deaths-slows-49-million-children-under-five-die-2024.

72 Adeyemi, Rasheed A., et al. 2019. "Joint Spatial Mapping of Childhood Anemia and Malnutrition in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Cross-Sectional Study of Small-Scale Geographical Disparities." African Health Sciences, 19(3), pp. 2692–2712. https://doi.org/10.4314/ahs.v19i3.45.

73 Lemoine, A., and P. Tounian. 2020. "Childhood Anemia and Iron Deficiency in Sub-Saharan Africa – Risk Factors and Prevention: A Review." Archives de Pédiatrie, 27(8), pp. 490–496. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.arcped.2020.08.004.



Child Mortality Estimation[74], illustrated in Figure 3 opposite[75].

Figure 3: Principal causes of death among children under five (UNICEF, 2025).

Although considerable progress has been made in matters of maternal and child health and well-being over recent decades, with a 60 per cent increase in child survival worldwide[76] since 1990, these advances are slowing. As families have benefited from high-impact measures such as vaccines and bednets, the most easily deployed interventions have already been put in place: the mothers and children who still do not have access to quality care are also those most difficult to reach.

Around 25 per cent of children worldwide are born in fragile and conflict-affected situations, but these children are three times more likely[77] to die before their fifth birthday than those born elsewhere. This means that the children and families who most need access to quality care are also those who disproportionately live in poverty, in humanitarian or fragile contexts, in rural areas, with less electricity[78] or drinking water[79], at greater risk of climate-related disruptions, or facing migratory and displacement pressures, or a combination of these factors. Children are, moreover, particularly vulnerable to climate-related risks: floods, extreme heat, pollution, and the cascade effects on malaria, dengue and other diseases. In 2023, UNICEF[80] classified the children of 48 out of 49 African countries

74 "Levels & Trends in Child Mortality Report 2025". 2026. https://www.ispcan.org/mp-files/levels-trends-in-child-mortality-2025-report.pdf.

75 Kitamura, Tomomi, et al. 2025. "Maternal, Newborn and Child Health." UNICEF. https://data.unicef.org/resources/maternal-newborn-and-child-health-regional-snapshot-2025.

76 "Levels & Trends in Child Mortality Report 2025". 2026. https://www.ispcan.org/mp-files/levels-trends-in-child-mortality-2025-report.pdf.

77 Ibid.

78 Wand, Handan, et al. 2025. "Preventing Child Mortality in Sub-Saharan Africa (2015–2023): Direct and Indirect Risk Factors, Maternal, Environmental, and Socioeconomic Characteristics." Vulnerable Children and Youth Studies, pp. 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1080/17450128.2025.2535363.

79 Viguera Ester, Pablo, et al. 2011. "Factors Associated to Infant Mortality in Sub-Saharan Africa." Journal of Public Health in Africa, 2(2), p. 27. https://doi.org/10.4081/jphia.2011.e27.

80 UN News. 1 September 2023. "African Children Bearing the Brunt of Climate Change Impacts". https://news.un.org/en/

as being at medium-high, high or extremely high risk regarding the impacts of climate change in terms of exposure or vulnerability – a category covering 98 per cent of the continent's child population. The geographical distribution for the overall populations is shown in Figure 4 opposite[81].

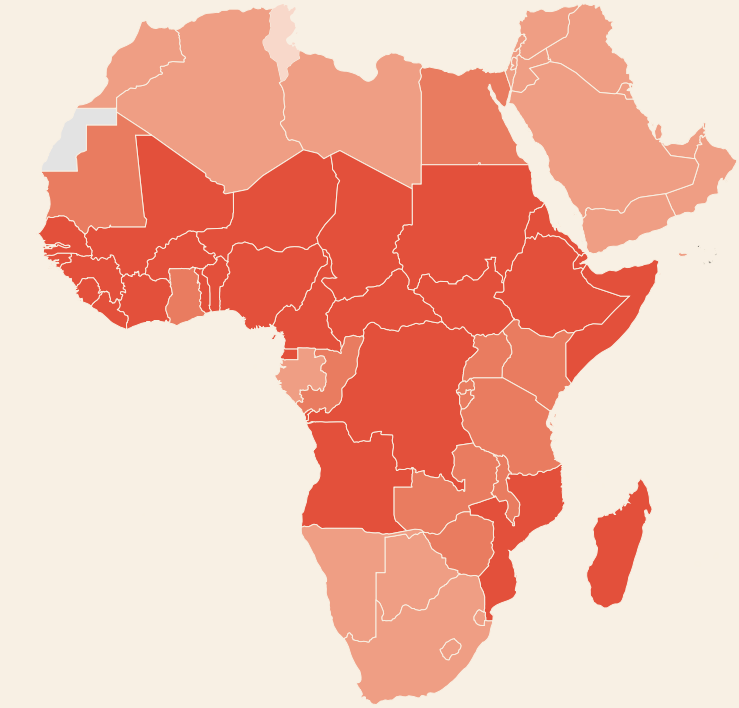


Figure 4: Children's exposure and vulnerability to climate change (UNICEF, 2023).

This picture is further aggravated by the recent reductions in official development assistance from several countries. The most significant is the complete closure of USAID in early 2025, but the cuts to discretionary funding are not limited to the US agency. According to UNICEF estimates, around 27.3 million[82] children under five could die by 2030 if no progress is made to improve child survival. By way of comparison, *The Lancet* estimates that more than 30 million[83] deaths of children under five were averted over 21 years of USAID's history, principally through reductions in deaths linked to HIV/AIDS, malaria, nutritional deficiencies and neglected tropical diseases, especially in African countries. Yet forecasting models indicate that the USAID cuts could lead to up to 5.4 million additional deaths of children under five by 2030. This brings to light the fact that, at a moment when international attention to maternal and child health needs more than ever to be accelerated, we are moving backwards, in step with a flagging political will and discretionary funding, to the detriment of the children already most at risk.

story/2023/09/1140312.

81 Kitamura, Tomomi, et al. 2025. "Maternal, Newborn and Child Health." UNICEF. https://data.unicef.org/resources/maternal-newborn-and-child-health-regional-snapshot-2025.

82 "Levels & Trends in Child Mortality Report 2025". 2026. https://www.ispcan.org/mp-files/levels-trends-in-child-mortality-2025-report.pdf.

83 da Silva, Andrea Ferreira, et al. February 2026. "Impact of Two Decades of Humanitarian and Development Assistance and the Projected Mortality Consequences of Current Defunding to 2030: Retrospective Evaluation and Forecasting Analysis." The Lancet Global Health. https://doi.org/10.1016/s2214-109x(26)00008-2.

The rising birth rate on the continent further complicates these trends. Africa is set to have a child population of one billion[84] by 2055, surpassing all other continents, and sub-Saharan Africa already records more births than any other region of the world. Without concerted investment and sustained governmental attention, the trends described above will affect a growing number of children in Africa. Furthermore, already-limited health resources will come under even greater pressure as more mothers give birth and more children require care. As things stand, around 40 per cent of the births projected on the continent by 2030 will not be assisted by a qualified health professional[85]. The African continent will need to train around 6.1 million health professionals[86] over the same period in order to attain the WHO minimum standards and to reach around 60 per cent of universal health coverage. Taken together, these statistics bear witness to the exorbitant cost of inaction that the African continent will pay if maternal and child health is not recognised and supported without delay as a national and international priority.

Obstacles to equitable maternal and child health

1. Obstacles linked to financial and geographical access

Effective and cost-effective interventions to improve maternal and child health are well established. To determine which interventions are required, however, and how to adapt them to the needs of a target population, it is useful to set out the various obstacles that children and their families face in matters of coverage of quality care. The first set of challenges concerns access to care, both financial and geographical. The majority of countries do not have a robust public health system, and financial barriers – particularly the high out-of-pocket costs borne by patients – can constitute an impediment to access to health services. Pre-Covid-19 data from 2019 indicate that these financial costs weighed on 200 million people in Africa, of whom 150 million[87] were tipped into poverty as a result of the cost of care. This situation results from the low levels of public health expenditure, Africa displaying the lowest health spending per capita in the world[88], in part owing to the many financial pressures that governments face outside the health sector. This has led to many essential elements of health care being financed by official development assistance, displacing investment priorities from local needs towards what the international aid community is prepared to fund. The result has been an under-investment in neglected tropical diseases[89], even though more than a billion people worldwide suffer from them. Another consequence of this dependence is the immediate uncertainty and disruption caused by abrupt changes in external funding, as illustrated

84 UNICEF. 2017. “Children in Africa”. https://data.unicef.org/resources/children-in-africa-child-survival-brochure/.

85 Ibid.

86 Holt, Tania, and Ying Sunny Sun. 4 November 2024. “Overcoming Sub-Saharan Africa's Health Workforce Paradox.” McKinsey & Company. https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/social-sector/our-insights/overcoming-sub-saharan-africas-health-workforce-paradox.

87 WHO Regional Office for Africa. 2024. “UHC Day: High Health-Care Costs in Africa Continue to Push over 150 Million into Poverty: New WHO Report”. https://www.afro.who.int/news/uhc-day-high-health-care-costs-africa-continue-push-over-150-million-poverty-new-who-report.

88 World Bank. 2024. “Challenges and Opportunities in Africa's Health Sector”. https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/75b7a7306a5eb1adb3fc93683ffe55b9-0360012024/original/Challenges-and-0Opportunities-in-Africas-Health-Sector-090424-jp.pdf.

89 World Health Organization. 14 November 2021. “Neglected Tropical Diseases”. https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/neglected-tropical-diseases.

by the USAID cuts in 2025. One of the suspended American projects was PEPFAR, which enabled 20 million Africans living with HIV to receive life-saving medicines and screening. Over the year since the project's suspension and subsequent cancellation, an estimated 17,000 children with HIV[90] have died. This alarming figure, drawn from a single project over a single year, illustrates how many lives depend on external funding that may be interrupted at any moment, without a clear domestic financial alternative having been put in place in Africa.

The second obstacle to access is geographical: it concerns the difficulty of reaching health establishments, particularly in rural and underserved areas where infrastructure is limited. Around 10 to 15 per cent of the population[91] in sub-Saharan Africa lives more than three hours from the nearest health facility. The lack of transport and the opportunity cost – giving up a day of work or childcare for a medical consultation – can constitute additional obstacles, compounded by the need for repeated and scheduled visits, for example for neonatal tests or vaccination visits. This distance, together with the costs associated with it, leads many families to turn to forms of traditional or community care, more accessible locally. These forms of care, however, cover a very wide range of services, including informal care that may be provided by persons potentially little trained in the most recent techniques, lacking the necessary equipment or the referral procedures that would enable them to flag an emergency or to organise an adequate response. This also means that families tend to defer medical consultations until they become absolutely necessary, thereby reducing the probability of preventive or early interventions[92]. Another geographical obstacle linked to access to care for mothers and children lies in the weakness of "last-mile" distribution and gaps in supply chains, particularly for resources that must be administered on a precise schedule, conserved at a specific temperature or that have an expiry date. The inability to deliver effectively vaccines and medicines that must be conserved below a certain temperature leads to the degradation or the loss of efficacy of many products. This problem is amplified by the fact that 95 per cent of pharmaceutical active ingredients and 70 per cent of medicines used in Africa[93] are imported from abroad rather than produced locally, leaving African health systems vulnerable to global economic shocks and to disruptions in supply chains.

2. Obstacles linked to the quality of care

Beyond the difficulties of access to care, mothers and children come up against a deeper problem: the quality of available care. This problem begins with systemic inefficiencies, where poor delivery of health services[94] and vertical programming

90 PEPFAR Impact Tracker. 2025. https://pepfar.impactcounter.com/.

91 Florio, Pietro, et al. 1 November 2023. "Estimating Geographic Access to Healthcare Facilities in Sub-Saharan Africa by Degree of Urbanisation." Applied Geography, 160, pp. 103–118. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apgeog.2023.103118.

92 World Bank. 2024. "Challenges and Opportunities in Africa's Health Sector". https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/75b7a7306a5eb1adb3fc93683ffe55b9-0360012024/original/Challenges-and-0Opportunities-in-Africas-Health-Sector-090424-jp.pdf.

93 PATH. 2025. "Unitaid Announces Two New Flagship Investments to Boost Regional Manufacturing of Diagnostics and Medicines in Africa". https://www.path.org/our-impact/media-center/unitaid-announces-two-new-flagship-investments-to-boost-regional-manufacturing-of-diagnostics-and-medicines-in-africa/.

94 Oleribe, Obinna E., et al. 6 November 2019. "Identifying Key Challenges Facing Healthcare Systems in Africa and Potential Solutions." International Journal of General Medicine, 12(1), pp. 395–403. https://doi.org/10.2147/IJGM.S223882.

often lead to multiple, fragmented points of entry into the system of care. For example, vaccinations, nutritional screenings and prenatal consultations may not take place in the same location or with the same health professionals. This generates inefficiencies and redundancies: mothers and children seeking care are required to attend several centres at different times for different health needs. This problem is further complicated by a lack of information: families often learn that they must attend a different clinic only once they have already arrived. Worse still, the lack of integration means that these interventions and resources do not always communicate with one another, with the consequence that families seeking care may not be properly oriented for follow-up or other needs. This is particularly true in rural areas where families depend on community health workers and where the lack of integration between community care and primary care prevents timely access to the latter. At the national level, tensions also exist between donor-funded health programmes and national health priorities, limiting the capacity of African governments to invest in and to scale up relevant and life-saving interventions[95] in a sustainable manner.

Another challenge in matters of quality is the shortage of qualified health professionals to meet demand, particularly in rural communities and for more technical specialities such as obstetrician–gynaecologists and midwives. Africa has only 3 per cent of the global health workforce[96], a situation aggravated by the brain drain caused by qualified health professionals emigrating to countries where salaries and working conditions are better. Conversely, around one in three health professionals in sub-Saharan Africa is also unemployed, often because of budgetary constraints[97]. The capacity to train and retain qualified health professionals is a pressing need in many African countries, particularly for community health workers, who form the backbone of rural health care. Around 70 per cent of these community health workers are young women, many of whom are unpaid for their work[98]. The lack of training and support for health professionals also extends to deficient leadership and management in the health sector, where the poor management of limited resources, poor integration and corruption[99] degrade the delivery of care, reduce the satisfaction of staff and patients, and lead to poorer health outcomes.

3. Obstacles linked to data, technology and innovation

Given the lack of health infrastructure and resources described above, it is clear that many health systems in Africa cannot make optimal use of the available digital health tools – such as electronic medical records, real-time monitoring of care delivery, or innovative tools such as mobile technologies and artificial intelligence (AI) for diagnostics or continuity of care – that would improve access to quality care, particularly in rural communities[100]. Reliance on paper patient records limits a health

95 PMNCH. 18 September 2025. “A New Era for Africa's Leadership: Driving Health Sovereignty, Financing, and Equity.” WHO. https://www.pmnch.who.int/news-and-events/news/item/18-09-2025-a-new-era-for-africa-s-leadership-driving-health-sovereignty-financing-and-equity.

96 Ibid.

97 Holt, Tania, and Ying Sunny Sun. 4 November 2024. “Overcoming Sub-Saharan Africa's Health Workforce Paradox.” McKinsey & Company. https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/social-sector/our-insights/overcoming-sub-saharan-africas-health-workforce-paradox.

98 Ibid.

99 Oleribe, Obinna E., et al. 6 November 2019. “Identifying Key Challenges Facing Healthcare Systems in Africa and Potential Solutions.” International Journal of General Medicine, 12(1), pp. 395–403. https://doi.org/10.2147/IJGM.S223882.

100 Agyei, Eunice, and Emmanuel Kumah. 20 June 2024. “Navigating the Complex Terrain of Healthcare Systems in Sub-Saharan

establishment's capacity to follow a patient over time, particularly when the patient changes provider or when an establishment closes. The absence of digital systems also prevents the health system from carrying out real-time surveillance or learning from cases as they unfold, in order to improve the training of health workers and to ensure continuous quality improvement. At the population level, this lack of digital data also limits the capacity to nourish research and accountability, hampering the documentation and the lessons needed to improve practices and to adapt and scale up health programmes at the regional or national level. Investment in data, innovation and technology is therefore essential to improving both access to and the quality of maternal and child health care.

4. Socio-economic determinants of health

The democratisation of health care for mothers and children necessarily passes through the recognition that socio-economic conditions constitute an essential component of access to quality care. The persistent inequities in access to care according to income and to the level of education will not be resolved without broader investments in improving the quality of life of African families. This is all the more important because investments in the health sector cannot be made effectively in isolation. Increasing funding for prenatal consultations is useful, but will not respond to all of a family's difficulties if the family also cannot afford a healthy diet. Around 75 per cent of children in sub-Saharan Africa suffer from food poverty, including 32 per cent in severe food poverty[101]. Likewise, reducing the financial cost and the opportunity cost of access to care is useful, but its impact remains limited if governments do not also broaden households' access to drinking water and sanitation services[102] that prevent epidemics. To obtain durable improvements in maternal and child health in Africa, these various determinants of unequal access must be addressed at their source, in order to improve care-seeking behaviours and the long-term impact for mothers and children.

Part 2 – Strategic solutions and recommendations

When political will and discretionary funding are lacking, it is useful to recall the political declarations to which countries have already subscribed regarding the importance of advancing maternal and child health in Africa. The first is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted in 1989, which recognises the inalienable rights of the child to survive, to flourish and to be protected from harm. This is taken up in Goal 3[103] of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted in 2015. SDG target 3.2 specifically aims to end preventable deaths of newborns and children under five and to reduce infant mortality rates. The sub-targets also include reducing maternal and premature mortality, guaranteeing universal access to sexual and reproductive health services, strengthening the training and

Africa: Challenges and Opportunities for Progress." Discover Health Systems, 3(1). https://doi.org/10.1007/s44250-024-00108-3.

101 World Bank. 2024. "Challenges and Opportunities in Africa's Health Sector". https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/75b7a7306a5eb1adb3fc93683ffe55b9-0360012024/original/Challenges-and-0Opportunities-in-Africas-Health-Sector-090424-jp.pdf.

102 Child Health Task Force. 2023. "Children Are Our Future: Keeping a Focus on Child Survival". https://www.childhealthtaskforce.org/resources/guide/2024/children-are-our-future-keeping-focus-child-survival.

103 United Nations. 2025. "Goal 3 – Ensure Healthy Lives and Promote Well-Being for All at All Ages". https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal3#targets_and_indicators.

retention of health professionals, and ensuring national vaccination coverage for various childhood diseases.

Specific to the African continent, the Abuja Declaration[104], signed in 2001, underlines the role of poverty, of poor nutritional conditions and of underdevelopment in the increase of health vulnerability, particularly for the millions of African children who have died of preventable infectious diseases. It also recognises governments' commitments to devote at least 15 per cent of their annual budgets to the improvement of the health sector – a promise that most governments have yet to honour. All these documents underline the national responsibility of governments to place maternal and child health as a national priority grounded in rights and anchored in global commitments. Thus the first recommendation, in order genuinely to democratise maternal and child health, is to reaffirm the political commitment and national ownership of this essential subject – particularly by devoting substantial domestic financing to it rather than relying on external funding. This also implies a national and regional ownership of domestic health systems, ensuring alignment among national development plans, budgets and accountability processes, so that the health priorities particular to each country and region are achieved.

2.1 Democratising maternal and child health in Africa

2.1.1 Improving financial and geographical access to health care

To address the multiple challenges linked to financial and geographical access to maternal and child health care set out in Part 1, the political will and engagement of governments are of paramount importance. As provided for in the commitments mentioned above, governments are in agreement, in principle, that quality public health care constitutes a right and a national priority; yet few have devoted the necessary financial resources to it. Out-of-pocket costs being a deterrent for most African families, the next recommendation is for governments to **draw up and implement costed health plans[105] and to engage in financial reforms to mobilise the national resources106 required to fund them.** This implies that governments recognise that these reforms – particularly when they require broadening the tax base or rate for the general population – are unlikely to be popular, but are necessary in order to reduce dependence on foreign aid funds which, as has been shown, may be cut without notice. Essential services for maternal and child health – prenatal care and delivery, vaccinations and nutrition – must be funded from domestic resources, as they are too important for economic growth and development to risk being disrupted or to depend on external financing. Governments should also seek **innovative financing mechanisms[107],** including blended finance models and public–private partnerships where these align with health priorities defined at the national level. For Africa specifically, governments

104 African Union. 2001. Abuja Declaration on HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Other Related Infectious Diseases. https://au.int/sites/default/files/pages/32894-file-2001-abuja-declaration.pdf.

105 Child Health Task Force. 2023. "Children Are Our Future: Keeping a Focus on Child Survival". https://www.childhealthtaskforce.org/resources/guide/2024/children-are-our-future-keeping-focus-child-survival.

106 Amref Health Africa. 12 December 2025. "Output Paper – Global Health Architecture Reform – Africa Regional Dialogue". https://www.amref.org/download/output-paper-global-health-architecture-reform-africa-regional-dialogue/.

107 Agyei, Eunice, and Emmanuel Kumah. 20 June 2024. "Navigating the Complex Terrain of Healthcare Systems in Sub-Saharan Africa: Challenges and Opportunities for Progress." Discover Health Systems, 3(1). https://doi.org/10.1007/s44250-024-00108-3.

may work together to increase their bargaining power and to take advantage of economies of scale, including through processes such as the African Pooled Procurement Mechanism[108], to import strategically the health equipment and medicines required from abroad, while waiting for them to be produced on the continent.

Case Study 1 – Universal financial access as a foundation (Rwanda)

In the aftermath of the 1994 genocide, Rwanda faced a collapsed health system and a life expectancy of around **25 years**. Reforms focused on broadening access through **Community-Based Health Insurance (CBHI)**, along with investments in infrastructure, human resources and service delivery. High out-of-pocket costs and unequal access had limited the use of maternal and child health services.

Life expectancy rose to **around 69 years by 2020**. Under-five mortality fell from **196 per 1,000 live births (2000) to 45 (2020)**. Facility-based deliveries rose from **26 per cent to 98 per cent**, and maternal mortality declined significantly. These outcomes reflect both improved access and stronger system performance.

Key lesson: Removing financial barriers through universal health coverage is a high-impact entry point for rapidly improving maternal and child health outcomes.

Challenges remain in matters of **financing sustainability** and **low public health expenditure**. Inefficiencies in the system, staffing shortages and gaps in data continue to affect performance, highlighting the need for **continuous system optimisation and digital integration**.

Alongside financial reforms, governments must orient their renewed political will towards the **creation or expansion of universal health coverage mechanisms** at the country scale and integrate existing care provision, including community care, into this system. This not only allows citizens to see the impact of their tax revenues in a positive way and to reduce their out-of-pocket costs, but also ensures continuity of the care already provided to the population. This is all the more important because universal health coverage can succeed only on condition that it reaches and includes the largest possible part of the population, and that – to improve health outcomes for mothers and children – it is able to reach the most vulnerable families, often those most hampered by the financial and geographical access barriers described in Part 1. Case Study 1 illustrates the example of Rwanda, which has put in place a Community-Based Health Insurance scheme and which has seen remarkable outcomes in matters of coverage and improvement of national health indicators, particularly for maternal and child health, over recent decades.

Beyond improving financial access through universal health coverage, governments must also **expand community-based care and focus on last-mile service delivery** to support the most rural and vulnerable populations. These community programmes must be institutionalised and extended to offer more comprehensive and more frequent care at the household level, with adequate remuneration and training. This community-

108 PMNCH. 18 September 2025. “A New Era for Africa's Leadership.” WHO. https://www.pmnch.who.int/news-and-events/news/item/18-09-2025-a-new-era-for-africa-s-leadership-driving-health-sovereignty-financing-and-equity.

based care offer will reduce the financial cost and the opportunity cost for families and will increase the diffusion of information and resources in a culturally appropriate and trustworthy manner. For this to function effectively, **community care must have a clear referral system** connected to the national public health system, so that sensitive cases and emergencies are dealt with effectively and in a timely manner. These measures also have the advantage of strengthening local and community organisations, including the training and the autonomy of the young women who represent a disproportionately large share of community health workers. Case Study 2 illustrates how household-level screening for childhood tuberculosis in Uganda and Cameroon has led to improved case detection while reducing the cost to households, highlighting the effectiveness of home-based care delivery.

Case Study 2 – Household-level care (CONTACT) (Uganda and Cameroon)

Childhood tuberculosis remains under-diagnosed, with only 40 per cent of estimated cases detected worldwide. Facility-based screening is limited by costs, access barriers and low uptake of preventive treatment. The CONTACT project tested a community-based model in Uganda and Cameroon.

Screening coverage rose from **47 per cent to 82 per cent** (compared with the facility-based model). Initiation of preventive treatment rose from **62 per cent to 80 per cent**, and completion rose from **77 per cent to 93 per cent**. Costs to households fell from **USD 63 to USD 3 (Cameroon)** and also decreased in Uganda.

Key lesson: Household-level care delivery considerably improves coverage, adherence and affordability for vulnerable populations.

Sustainability depends on incentives, supervision and the integration of community health workers into national systems. The financing of these components remains a major challenge.

2.1.2 Improving access to integrated and quality health care

Beyond reducing barriers to access, it is equally important to work simultaneously on improving the quality of care available for mothers and children. For rural and vulnerable families who are not yet in the habit, or in a position, of attending public health establishments, the quality of care is the decisive factor that will determine whether they return for follow-up visits or continued care. The most effective way of achieving this is to **strengthen the integration of maternal and neonatal primary health-care systems at the country scale**[109], integrating community-level care into primary health-care establishments and into regional or national health infrastructure. This implies investing in a common, harmonised platform for reception, documentation, care delivery and referrals, in order to guarantee better coordination and better continuity of care, whatever the patient's point of entry. This step is essential to ensuring that patients are not lost, refused or delayed in their care between different systems, and avoids the creation of parallel health systems, instead reinforcing

109 UNICEF. 2025. "Every Woman, Every Newborn, Everywhere and Child Survival Action in West and Central Africa". https://www.unicef.org/wca/media/11736/file/EWENE-Report.pdf.pdf.

the national system effectively. It also implies increased investment in health infrastructure[110], including equipment and personnel, in order to respond to the number of patients who will access care, not only today but taking into account future increases linked to growing trust, demand for care and projected demographic growth. Case Study 3 shows how simultaneous investments across the health sector were successfully made in Kenya and Tanzania to improve the quality of care delivered.

Case Study 3 – Systemic integration for reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health (Kenya and Tanzania)

From 2016 to 2021, regions of Kenya and Tanzania faced high maternal and child mortality, fragile infrastructure and low service uptake. The AQCESS and IMPACT programmes implemented integrated interventions at community, facility and system levels.

More than 450 health workers were trained and **more than 580 community health volunteers** were supported. In Tanzania, **more than 200,000 community members** were reached. Skilled birth attendance and prenatal-care coverage increased, while facility readiness for emergency obstetric care and infection prevention improved. The quality of local data and vaccination coverage also significantly progressed.

Key lesson: Simultaneous investment in infrastructure, human resources and community engagement produces measurable improvements in service utilisation, quality and systemic effectiveness.

Persistent constraints include staffing shortages, infrastructure gaps and external shocks (e.g. Covid-19). Durable impact depends on continued investment in systems, supply chains and governance capacity.

The current shortage of qualified health professionals must be addressed by **increasing the number of trained professionals, including community health workers, and improving their working conditions and remuneration prospects** so as to encourage them to continue practising in African countries[111] rather than emigrating abroad or moving into the private sector[112]. Skilled birth attendants are an example of an intervention with an outsized impact on improving neonatal and maternal survival, but these professionals are often in short supply. Engaging community health workers is also indispensable for maternal and child health, where they constitute a lifeline in cases of emergency. For these community-based services to extend their role beyond emergencies, they must be integrated into national systems[113] and can provide support in situations where mothers themselves are young or are minors and may not be familiar

110 Oleribe, Obinna E., et al. 6 November 2019. “Identifying Key Challenges Facing Healthcare Systems in Africa and Potential Solutions.” International Journal of General Medicine, 12(1), pp. 395–403. https://doi.org/10.2147/IJGM.S223882.

111 PMNCH. 18 September 2025. “A New Era for Africa's Leadership.” WHO. https://www.pmnch.who.int/news-and-events/news/item/18-09-2025-a-new-era-for-africa-s-leadership-driving-health-sovereignty-financing-and-equity.

112 Oleribe, Obinna E., et al. 6 November 2019. “Identifying Key Challenges Facing Healthcare Systems in Africa and Potential Solutions.” International Journal of General Medicine, 12(1), pp. 395–403. https://doi.org/10.2147/IJGM.S223882.

113 UNICEF. 2025. “Every Woman, Every Newborn, Everywhere and Child Survival Action in West and Central Africa”. https://www.unicef.org/wca/media/11736/file/EWENE-Report.pdf.pdf.

with the health system, and therefore reluctant to engage with it. Case Study 4 shows the benefits of improved multi-level coordination in Malawi.

Case Study 4 – Multi-level coordination linking communities and systems (Malawi)

In Balaka District, Malawi, maternal health outcomes are limited by a **high rate of adolescent pregnancy (41.8 per cent)**, low early uptake of prenatal care **(26 per cent in the first trimester)** and infrastructure gaps. The Kitawanda project integrates interventions at community, facility and district levels.

The project used **51 mobile clinics** to reach **more than 140 women** with integrated services. No maternal deaths were recorded during the reporting period, and the rate of completion of prenatal care reached its **highest level since the project began**.

Key lesson: Coordinating community engagement with facility and district systems improves early uptake and continuity of maternal health services.

Challenges include limited infrastructure, persistent social norms that delay care-seeking and inadequate youth-friendly services. Scaling up the project requires continued investment and behaviour-change interventions.

Another step towards improving the use of health services is to **optimise care delivery at every point of contact with the mother and child**. The more information a family has about the services it should access, and the fewer health visits this requires, the more costs – financial or otherwise – are reduced, which increases use of these services. For example, modifications to vaccination schedules have been considered in order to administer the largest possible number of immunisations, including booster doses, in the smallest number of visits. It goes without saying that if a mother must bring her newborn to a clinic several times in the year and pay separately at each visit, the probability that a visit or a vaccine is missed is higher. This can be further improved if the mother's postnatal visits take place on the same schedule and at the same establishment[114], rather than through independent and siloed health programmes. This integration will also be useful for the health establishment, since it allows providers to plan vaccinations or other necessary medicines more effectively and to anticipate orders and cold-storage capacities. Case Study 5 demonstrates the impact of the simultaneous screening for HIV, syphilis and hepatitis B in The Gambia and Burkina Faso, which made it possible to improve treatment and coverage.

Case Study 5 – Integration of maternal health services (TRI-MOM) (The Gambia and Burkina Faso)

In West Africa, HIV, syphilis and hepatitis B are prevalent among pregnant women, with low coverage of preventive services owing to the vertical fragmentation of programmes and to out-of-pocket costs, particularly for hepatitis B. The TRI-MOM project introduced an integrated approach in 8 maternity wards.

114 UNICEF. 2025. "Every Woman, Every Newborn, Everywhere and Child Survival Action in West and Central Africa". https://www.unicef.org/wca/media/11736/file/EWENE-Report.pdf.pdf.

More than 4,000 women in Burkina Faso and more than 12,000 in The Gambia were screened, with **acceptance rates above 95 per cent.** The prevalence of infections was **9.5 per cent** (Burkina Faso) and **4.9 per cent** (The Gambia). Treatment coverage exceeded **90 per cent for all three infections,** considerably improving the prevention of mother-to-child transmission.

Key lesson: Integrating several disease-specific interventions into a single maternal-care pathway considerably increases coverage, effectiveness and treatment uptake.

Integration requires reorganisation of the health system, training of personnel and coordination, which can be resource-intensive. Variations in implementation between sites and weaker integration of non-HIV services highlight the need for stronger systemic alignment and sustained policy support.

Quality interventions aimed at reducing the principal causes of maternal and child death are not difficult to identify. For the great majority of the deaths cited in Part 1, solutions exist, but their supply and timely distribution are lacking, particularly for the most vulnerable families. For example, the essential medicines for treating malaria, pneumonia and diarrhoea cost less than one dollar per dose[115]. These interventions must be monitored, scaled up and made durable across the continent in order to improve the equitable provision of quality care to these families.

2.1.3 Improving the use of data, technology and innovation in health care

The next step towards the democratisation of maternal and child health care will be for African health-care providers to become **leaders in the implementation of data systems, new technologies and innovative health solutions** in order to create independent, sustainable and shock-resilient health systems. Although many tools already exist, the move to an integrated public health system will involve the adoption of certain protocols and procedures of data documentation that will allow health-system managers better to understand and resolve persistent challenges. For example, the systematic use of electronic medical records and digital files will allow patients to travel with their medical history[116] and will facilitate access to telemedicine applications. It will also allow health professionals to monitor and predict health incidents and epidemics before they become uncontrollable. These harmonised platforms will favour interoperability and reduce the time required to train personnel when they change establishments, as well as the time needed to document and to access the data necessary for real-time decision-making. Another advantage of these data systems is the **collection and exploitation of hospital and population data** to improve diagnostics and service delivery, strengthening the link between medical research and policies and practices. Where data are collected within a perspective of non-punitive learning and of strengthening transparency, the entire health system gains in performance. Case Study 6 shows an example of the establishment of maternal death audits in Mali and Senegal

115 Kitamura, Tomomi, et al. 2025. “Maternal, Newborn and Child Health.” UNICEF. https://data.unicef.org/resources/maternal-newborn-and-child-health-regional-snapshot-2025.

116 Agyei, Eunice, and Emmanuel Kumah. 20 June 2024. “Navigating the Complex Terrain of Healthcare Systems in Sub-Saharan Africa: Challenges and Opportunities for Progress.” Discover Health Systems, 3(1). https://doi.org/10.1007/s44250-024-00108-3.

– a low-cost approach that has improved outcomes in terms of maternal and neonatal mortality in the targeted hospitals.

Case Study 6 – Anchoring continuous quality improvement in establishments (Mali and Senegal)

Maternal and neonatal mortality in sub-Saharan Africa remains high owing to **poor quality of care in referral hospitals**. The QUARITE trial implemented **maternal death audits in 46 hospitals** in Mali and Senegal.

Maternal mortality fell by **a further 15 per cent in intervention hospitals, with a 35 per cent greater reduction in district hospitals**. Neonatal mortality in the first 24 hours decreased. Improvements were observed in the management of major complications such as **pre-eclampsia, haemorrhage and sepsis**.

Key lesson: Anchoring mechanisms of continuous quality improvement within establishments significantly reduces maternal and neonatal mortality at low cost (less than 1 per cent of hospital budgets).

Effective implementation requires strong leadership, reliable data and a non-punitive culture, which can be difficult to maintain. Institutionalisation depends on policy alignment and on long-term capacity-building.

Data and technology can be used not only for mechanisms of continuous quality improvement, but will also support the maintenance of clinical procedures and protocols and will make it possible to better target underserved populations. This lays the foundations for the use of data and technology to monitor the use of equipment, the examinations prescribed and the treatments administered. A system capable of monitoring and forecasting vaccination schedules, epidemics and prenatal and postnatal visits can also provide accurate data on the quantities of medical products that a hospital or clinic should order, and can help to ensure their use before expiry. This information may be used to produce more essential medicines and vaccines in factories in Africa, to meet local demand and to encourage a more autonomous[117] and equitable health system, with the ultimate aim of exporting these medical products internationally[118]. The use of technology may be expanded to increase opportunities for digital training[119] in some areas and at introductory levels, in order to better sensitise and train medical students.

Better use of data and technology will also enable the African health system to be at the cutting edge of innovation by producing and testing next-generation medicines specifically adapted to recent evolutions of viral strains and designed for the African patient. Another area being explored is the use of AI-assisted analytical and diagnostic

117 Amref Health Africa. 12 December 2025. “Output Paper – Global Health Architecture Reform – Africa Regional Dialogue”. https://www.amref.org/download/output-paper-global-health-architecture-reform-africa-regional-dialogue/.

118 PATH. 2025. “Unitaid Announces Two New Flagship Investments to Boost Regional Manufacturing of Diagnostics and Medicines in Africa”. https://www.path.org/our-impact/media-center/unitaid-announces-two-new-flagship-investments-to-boost-regional-manufacturing-of-diagnostics-and-medicines-in-africa/.

119 Holt, Tania, and Ying Sunny Sun. 4 November 2024. “Overcoming Sub-Saharan Africa's Health Workforce Paradox.” McKinsey & Company. https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/social-sector/our-insights/overcoming-sub-saharan-africas-health-workforce-paradox.

tools[120] to better manage the demand for care, patient feedback and referrals, and to support screening in rural contexts where, for example, ultrasound machines or MRI scanners cannot be transported, but where pregnant women still need prenatal visits and examinations.

2.1.4 Taking into account the socio-economic determinants of health

Lastly, it is important to keep in mind the full range of interventions that would improve access to quality care for mothers and children across Africa, and to underline that these recommendations cannot be implemented in isolation but must rather be implemented within **a holistic, rights-based approach to maternal and child health.** It is essential to address the various barriers to equitable, quality care through a multi-dimensional and contextualised approach, since many are interconnected and constitute preventable obstacles to maternal and child health. For example, environmental interventions are necessary to improve access to water and sanitation services, which will also reduce a child's risk of contracting diarrhoea[121] or malaria. Providing pregnant women with fortified foods or nutritional supplements[122] will reduce the probability of a child being born with a low birth weight and will diminish his or her risks of developing stunting or wasting. **Broader interventions aimed at improving quality of life must also be implemented**, since it is well documented that a child not living in poverty, having an educated mother, and benefiting from social and community-development policies, has better survival outcomes[123] and a better chance of reaching his or her full developmental potential – which is the ultimate objective.

Conclusion

To conclude, the question of the democratisation of maternal and child health care in Africa is a dense and complex subject, with multiple interconnected elements and statistics that are at once inspiring and worrying – particularly when these data represent the lives of millions of children. To build resilient, sustainable and quality health systems in Africa, many stakeholders must subscribe to the considerable importance and the benefits of long-term investment in this field. Each country will have its own singular challenges, and no single investment will suffice to correct the full set of gaps. The data show us that remarkable progress is possible in relatively short periods; they also indicate that the quick and accessible solutions have already been implemented, and that substantial work of depth remains necessary in order to reach the most disadvantaged and the most vulnerable populations.

Africa's potential is immeasurable: if African governments can mobilise the political will and the domestic financing necessary to take back control of their public health systems and to inscribe this investment in the long term – including in the face of future shocks –

120 Holt, Tania, and Ying Sunny Sun. 4 November 2024. "Overcoming Sub-Saharan Africa's Health Workforce Paradox." McKinsey & Company. https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/social-sector/our-insights/overcoming-sub-saharan-africas-health-workforce-paradox.

121 Child Health Task Force. 2023. "Children Are Our Future: Keeping a Focus on Child Survival". https://www.childhealthtaskforce.org/resources/guide/2024/children-are-our-future-keeping-focus-child-survival.

122 UNICEF Innocenti. 20 November 2025. "The State of the World's Children 2025". https://www.unicef.org/reports/state-of-worlds-children/2025.

123 Child Health Task Force. 2023. "Children Are Our Future: Keeping a Focus on Child Survival". https://www.childhealthtaskforce.org/resources/guide/2024/children-are-our-future-keeping-focus-child-survival.

in order to provide essential maternal and child health services to their populations, the next generation of Africans will be well placed not only to survive but to flourish. With a substantial and growing young population, this will place many African countries in a good position to enjoy a dynamic, engaged and productive workforce, strengthening at once the continent's economic growth and development and its autonomy.

To achieve this, African governments must improve the offer of accessible and quality care, principally by closing financial deficits and by responding to the challenge of vast geographical extent. Fortunately, the foundations of the best way to respond to this have already been laid through the delivery of community-based health care. With a focus on maternal and child health, prioritising the integration and harmonisation of existing health systems and investing in better training and better support for health workers in order to reach the African population wherever it lives will lead directly to improvements in maternal and child mortality and in overall quality of life. Addressing supply-chain challenges and investing in African production of the medical materials necessary for health not only protects against international shocks, but also constitutes a revenue-generating sector for the African economy, which will eventually supply vital materials to the rest of the world. All of this starts from the vision of maternal and child health as a long-term strategic economic and social investment; the cost of inaction is too high and will require a coordinated political engagement, country-led and sustained over time, in order to create the best conditions for the next generation.

This vision aligns perfectly with the Child Priority Framework initiative of the Paris Peace Forum, which seeks to create an international, multi-stakeholder coalition to strengthen public-policy solutions around a central theme: children represent the most profitable and unifying investment for long-term global stability and prosperity. For stakeholders who recognise the importance of investing in maternal and child health in Africa, the CPF offers a compelling investment case and a unifying agenda that links the democratisation of the African health sector to large-scale interventions that will accelerate progress and the well-being of our future generations on the international scale.

60 propositions in the service of African futures

1. African minerals and the nature-based economy in the service of community autonomy and security

How to transform Africa's resources into a lever of autonomy, security and sustainable value

1.1 Change the doctrine of project evaluation.
1.2 Reposition negotiation at the actual level of economic power.
1.3 Make local value creation a trajectory of productive and regional capacities.
1.4 Move natural capital out of its status as an adjustment variable.
1.5 Make local communities a centre of gravity in resource governance.
1.6 Replace uncertain compensation with enforceable territorial pacts.
1.7 Make traceability a tool of public governance.
1.8 Build an integrated public capacity commensurate with the resource.

2. How to reform institutions and build endogenous democratic models?

How to regain the historical initiative, reform institutions and build a peaceful, prosperous and innovative African democratic civilisation, on the basis of endogenous models inspired by ancestral traditions and contemporary creativities?

> *Promote an endogenist reform of the principles, methods and coordinates of governing States and societies, aimed at absorbing extraversion and State–society conflicts.*

2.1 Promote strategic political-economy models that, in the manner of Asset-Based Capacity Development (*Développement Capacitaire Basé sur les Actifs Propres*, DCBAP), draw first and foremost on the capacities, sources, resources, know-how and inheritances of African cultures and societies themselves.

> *Reform powers, institutions and procedures, in order to refound the State on the traditional African polyarchic principle that no one ever decides alone for the common good.*

2.2 Promote new models that replace competition with democratic consensus and association, sharing power effectively for the productive coexistence of all the components of Africa's heterogeneous societies.
2.3 Promote a new federative spirit, resting on practices of subsidiarity and on a combination of direct and representative democracy capable of making African communities into building peoples at every level.

> *Reform electoral systems.*

2.4 Pacify elections and render them productive, with models that conform to traditional African electoral principles capable of guaranteeing the benefits of the vote to the entire population.
2.5 Experiment with endogenous, integrative electoral models wherever possible.

> *Reform economies and societies.*

2.6 Make democracy an intimate and everyday reality — a spirit, a way of living, and a method for seeking and guaranteeing truth, justice, peace and reconciliation at every level.
2.7 Democratise the economy, the management of the commons and the means of meeting basic needs and of investing (land, credit and labour rooted in solidarity); upgrade traditional industrial know-how technologically.
2.8 Build endogenist educational systems to support the whole and to guarantee intergenerational justice.

3. How can digital technologies strengthen material security and uphold the rule of law?

3.1 Constitutionally enshrine the digital rights and duties of citizens.
3.2 Establish a framework for digital ethics and cybersecurity.
3.3 Invest in secure and sovereign connectivity infrastructures.
3.4 Rethink the material chains of digital technologies in Africa.
3.5 Promote digital technologies that are open, ethical and respectful of citizens' data.
3.6 Launch a massive programme of digital training.
3.7 Establish a National Digital Council.
3.8 Strengthen national AI strategies.
3.9 Adopt tools of governance: Knowledge Graphs, FAIR data, explainable AI.
3.10 Establish a national KPI dashboard and the *Substantive Democracy Index*.
3.11 Generalise universal digital identity.
3.12 Build winning technological alliances.
3.13 Deploy sectoral regulatory *sandboxes* for digital innovation.
3.14 Create a sovereign digital fund to finance innovation.
3.15 Support a pan-African Digital Agora.

4. Women, democracy and the transformation of power relations

4.1 Put in place coercive measures vis-à-vis States.

> *(Public-policy accountability mechanisms; sanction within chains of responsibility; legal resources for women; dedicated budget lines; funds for feminist civil society; solutions to the administrative precariousness of women's and feminist civil-society organisations.)*

4.2 Support legal and institutional reforms that better protect women by guaranteeing them a fulfilling life.

> *(Application of the Maputo Protocol; reforms of the Family Code; correction of the gaps in the African Union "Convention on Ending Violence against Women and Girls"; bodies for monitoring parity; a feminist observatory.)*

4.3 Refound public policies in light of gender-specific concerns.

> *(Gender-based violence treated as an issue of public governance; a mechanism for recognising unpaid care work; platforms for the care of survivors of violence.)*

4.4 Promote a holistic empowerment of women.

> *(Measures to facilitate women's access to resources; the level of gender sensitivity of institutional actors.)*

4.5 Establish intentional, intersectional and power-aware alliances.

> *(Alliances with feminist organisations; involving them in the elaboration of public policies.)*

4.6 Guarantee public spaces that are safe and participatory.

> *(Firm condemnation of anti-gender movements for hateful, sexist, misogynistic and homophobic remarks; protection of civic space; specific protection mechanisms for feminist activists.)*

4.7 Renew the discourse on gender and reinforce the work of changing narratives.

> *(Female figures in public spaces; recognition of the violence inflicted on women during colonisation; courses on feminist physical education; matrimoine in school programmes.)*

4.8 Support feminist alliances for durable and inclusive reforms.
4.9 Develop feminist strategies to be more audible in the public space.
4.10 Build a long-term strategic programme.

5. The future of international solidarity

Towards the re-solidarisation of the world: an African praxis of international solidarities

5.1 Recognise the urgency of a relation grounded in equitable solidarity and in the commons.
5.2 Recognise African societies as the principal "donors" in a historically unequal relation.
5.3 Draw on the Haitian path to retrace the formation of the humanitarian trap.
5.4 Requalify aid as a modality of reparative justice.
5.5 Rehabilitate the entirety of endogenous capacities of solidarity.
5.6 Make dignification the foundation and the horizon of a respectful and relational solidarity.

6. Improving maternal and child health: democratising maternal and child health in Africa

6.1 Reaffirm the political commitment and national ownership of this essential subject — particularly by devoting substantial domestic financing to it rather than depending on external funding.

Improving financial and geographical access to health care

6.2 Draw up and implement costed health plans, and adopt financial reforms to mobilise the national resources required to fund them.
6.3 Continue the search for innovative financing mechanisms.
6.4 Create or extend universal health coverage mechanisms.
6.5 Expand community-based health care and focus on last-mile service delivery.
6.6 Develop, for community-based care, a clear referral system connected to the national public health system.

Improving access to integrated and quality health care

6.7 Strengthen the integration of maternal and neonatal primary health-care systems at the national scale.
6.8 Increase the number of trained professionals, including community health workers, while improving their working conditions and remuneration prospects.
6.9 Optimise care delivery at every point of contact with the mother and child.

Improving the use of data, technology and innovation in health care

6.10 Enable African health-care providers to become leaders in the implementation of data systems, the use of new technologies and the adoption of innovative solutions, in order to create independent, sustainable and shock-resilient health systems.
6.11 Collect and exploit data at hospital and population levels in order to improve diagnostics and the delivery of services, while strengthening the link between medical research, policy and practice.

Taking into account the socio-economic determinants of health

6.12 Adopt a holistic, rights-based approach to maternal and child health.
6.13 Implement broader interventions aimed at improving quality of life.

Glossary

Adaptation: Principle and process of change through the introduction of institutional models imported from outside or from the past, within the framework of the reform of States and societies. The borrowed ideas, practices, processes or institutions are not introduced in their original forms, but with modifications enabling them to take root in the local institutional culture so as to respond to its dynamics and to satisfy its needs, including those of evolution. To succeed, reforms incorporating exogenous or ancestral models must be carried out by a society exercising full control over its transformations – aware that, for transplants, grafts or "travelling models" such as democracy, human rights or the rule of law to take root in African societies, they must become compatible with local notions anchored in culture and historical memory. A principle of experimental institutional blending then imposes itself, corresponding sometimes to syncretism, sometimes to hybridisation, or more precisely to a *translative adaptation* that uses borrowings as stimuli – rather than enduring them as straitjackets – and retranslates them for the up-to-date needs of the entity to be reformed. African reforms must orient borrowings from the past, from ancestral traditions or from outside in this direction. The imperative of translative adaptation reveals the reasons for the failure of liberal democracy, which has been claimed to apply as is, without adaptation, leading to its failure or even to its becoming inevitably counterproductive – and a factor of intractable conflicts and institutional confusions.

Capabilities *(Capabilités)*: Effective freedoms both to imagine the optimal good life and to have access to the means of bringing it about. The set of real capacities that allow individuals and collectives to choose, to act, to produce, to take part, to protect themselves and to live with dignity. Democratic reform does not aim at formal rights, but at the concrete means of exercising them.

Commons *(Communs)*: Material or immaterial resources considered as belonging to a community, to past, present and future generations. They may include land, water, forests, natural resources, forms of knowledge, languages, memories, patrimonies – or institutions themselves, especially those of solidarity. The effectiveness of democracy depends substantially on their resolute and unimpeachable protection against capture, seizure, abusive privatisation and predation.

Consensualist countervailing powers *(Contre-pouvoirs consensualistes)*: Social, moral, political or institutional mechanisms that limit the abuse of power without necessarily passing through partisan confrontation. They may take the form of councils, assemblies, moral authorities, community mediations, recall procedures, public hearings or citizen oversight, agreed and accepted by all through consensus rather than through electoral competition.

Crisis of institutional translation *(Crise de traduction institutionnelle)*: The gap between the democratic promise and its concrete experience by populations. It appears when institutions proclaim popular sovereignty, the rule of law or

participation, but fail to produce sufficient security, justice, services, accountability and everyday dignity.

Consociational democracy *(Démocratie consociative)*: A democratic model combining association and consensus across the social and anthropological components of the body politic. It is conceived for societies deeply divided by ethnic, religious, linguistic, regional or community cleavages. Also referred to as concordance democracy, it rests on the sharing of power among the principal segments of society, proportional representation, the autonomy of groups and mechanisms for the protection of minorities. This model produces institutions adapted to heterogeneous societies, where it must organise cooperation, mutual recognition, the prevention of exclusions and shared access to responsibilities – through coalitions, federation and subsidiarity – rather than the sole majority victory of one side.

Endogenous democracy *(Démocratie endogène)*: A democratic model built from the historical, social, cultural, economic and institutional resources proper to societies – and in particular from their ancestral inheritances – without rejecting the universal principles of freedom, equality, the rule of law and accountability. It seeks a democracy that is rooted, appropriate, effective, culturally sustainable and therefore truly durable.

Liberal democracy *(Démocratie libérale)*: A political model centred on competitive elections, individual freedoms, the separation of powers, partisan pluralism and the rule of law within the framework of the capitalist State. It has remained unable to produce social justice, security, popular sovereignty and the protection of the commons in Africa. Now sliding globally towards the government of the rich, its expansion and that of the neo-liberal economy are imposing a re-feudalisation of the world, including in its Euro-American cradle.

Substantive democracy *(Démocratie substantive)*: Although this concept is still being elaborated, in a first approximation a substantive democracy is a democracy that is not limited to procedures, elections and formal institutions, but that concerns every domain and produces effects of optimal deepening: real security, accessible justice, material dignity, protection of the weak, access to services, accountability of leaders and continuous citizen participation. It is an outlook in which democracy – constituting the very conception of the world, of the living and of their protection – is anchored in the spirit, the family and education, and is established at once as a way of life, a worldview, a method of inquiry and a quest for truth and justice in the service of the multiplicative upkeep of the commons, the increase of capabilities, and the deepening of generalised care.

Endogeneity *(Endogénéité)*: The principle according to which reforms must start from the internal or own capacities of societies – from their forms of knowledge, practices, memories, forms of organisation, solidarities and living institutions. Endogeneity does not signify closure to the world, but a priority given to self-reference, appropriation and adaptation.

Extraversion *(Extraversion)*: The dependence of institutions, economies, elites or public policies on external resources, models, financing, norms and validations. It is the dominant principle and practice that has presided over the establishment of African elites and institutions, and explains in large part the inadequacy and ineffectiveness

of African institutions, as well as the bottlenecks of African societies in the cultural dissonance it provokes.

Government of command *(Gouvernement de commandement)*: A form of administration inherited from colonisation, founded on vertical order, coercion, centralisation, obedience and distance between rulers and ruled. It stands opposed to the more deliberative, mediating, community-based and democratic forms of government.

Hyper-decentralisation *(Hyper-décentralisation)*: Federative institutional organisation granting very wide autonomy to local, territorial or community levels. It seeks to return decision-making to citizens, to reduce violent competition for central power, and to multiply the sites of production, innovation and democratic oversight. It is enacted through the principles of subsidiarity and bottom-up delegation, where the broadest possible powers are devolved to the lower levels of government and management; the higher levels deal only with questions that the lower levels cannot manage or that they delegate to them.

Industradition *(Industradition)*: The systematisation and technological upgrading of the industrial exploitation of material and immaterial traditions. It is a strategy of endogenous acceleration of structural transformation aimed at constituting, as a pivot of manufacturing development, the building of five families of industradition value chains: agri-food, agro-pharmaceuticals, agro-cosmetics, leather–textile–clothing–adornment, and the exploitation of the heroism of traditional literature in the new creative and cultural industries.

Restorative and adaptive innovation *(Innovation restauratrice et adaptative)*: An approach consisting in retrieving certain old political resources – the palaver, consensus, mediation, the control of chiefs, productive solidarities – in order to transform, correct and adapt them to contemporary institutions, societies and needs. It does not restore the past as it was; it extracts operative principles from it and seeks to restore African sovereignty at various scales by innovating.

Intergenerational justice *(Justice intergénérationnelle)*: The principle that present decisions must not only take account of the rights, needs and interests of future generations, but must concern themselves with being just and protective towards them. It concerns notably land, natural resources, public debts, institutions, the environment, forms of knowledge and all the commons. Alongside this distributive version of intergenerational justice – which it is recommended that future African reforms privilege – a *rectificatory* intergenerational justice should also be considered. The latter generally concerns material or symbolic reparations exigible in the name of harms caused by past generations, for instance the slave trades or structural exclusion where the descendants of victims of past injustices count among the most politically or economically disadvantaged.

Matrimonies *(Matrimoines)*: Inheritances transmitted, carried, protected or produced by women – often rendered invisible by the classical notion of patrimony. The term makes it possible to integrate women's forms of knowledge, the economies of care, social mediations, practices of transmission and the forms of solidarity carried by women.

Palaver *(Palabre)*: An institution of organised speech, mediation, social inquiry, confrontation of narratives and the search for accord. In the chapter, the palaver is not a folkloric image; it is a political technology of deliberation, pacification, social truth and reparation. It participates in a certain epistemological, political and jurisdictional innovation in substantive democracy.

Phylocracy, phylodemocracy *(Phylocratie, phylodémocratie)*: Notions formed from phylè, which refers to the group, the lineage, kinship, the tribe or a community of belonging. In the chapter, the term designates the mode of organisation of society – of representation and of power – based on the natural foundational groups of society: families, lineages, clans, ethnic groups and so on. The sense proposed here aims precisely to refuse the freezing of belongings or the transformation of power into community capture. Phylocracy is first of all a concept that describes the canonical organisation of the lineage-based societies typical in Africa. It becomes an exceptional institutional resource when it makes it possible to ensure that the nation, citizenship and democracy are not abstract notions, and that rights and capacities apply not only to the individual but to the various dimensions of African sociocracy. In this model, not only every person, but every family, every lineage, every clan, every ethnic group, every village must be recognised, listened to, represented, protected and rendered productive within the democratic system. The model seeks to ensure that segmentary groups and their interactions become sites of solidarity, mediation, representation, accountability and optimal productivity. Phylodemocracy is a modelling concept that projects substantive democracy onto a phylocracy that cares for and heals society by tending to the social fabric through the family, beginning there the inculcation, exercise, delegation and expansion of the democratic spirit, power and productivity that will irrigate the higher levels.

Plutocracy *(Ploutocratie)*: Government dominated by the rich or by the most powerful economic interests. The notion serves to critique the drift of formal democracies when money, rent, corruption or private interests capture institutions and public decisions.

Radical polyarchy *(Polyarchie radicale)*: The principle that no one ever decides alone on what engages the community. Power is distributed, controlled, discussed, corrected and submitted to several instances of validation. It makes it possible to think a denser democracy than the mere formal separation of powers. Every decision is submitted to deliberation, testimony and collective evaluation. Every decision is an occasion for the mobilisation of collective intelligence.

Accountability *(Redevabilité)*: The obligation imposed upon governing officials, elected representatives, administrations and office-holders to render account for their decisions, their results, their resources and their failings. It supposes information, oversight, sanction, correction and at times recall.

Generalised care *(Soin généralisé)*: A political principle according to which institutions must protect life, persons, communities, the commons and future generations. It widens the idea of government beyond the administration of laws to include the upkeep of the vitality of collectives and of the environment that sustains their life – that is, protection, reparation, solidarity and the preservation of the living.

Subsidiarity *(Subsidiarité)*: The principle that decisions must be taken at the level closest to citizens, with each higher echelon intervening only where the lower level cannot act effectively. It serves to prevent unnecessary centralisation, the concentration of powers and their drifts. It seeks to strengthen local self-government, to ensure that citizens have the maximum possible power, and to reduce the attractiveness and the temptation of authoritarianism at higher levels. Given the traumatic character of colonial command and the recalcitrance of post-colonial dictatorships in Africa, the most adequate model for healing institutions and imaginaries appears to be a *bottom-up subsidiarity*, whereby the lower levels delegate to the higher levels what they cannot manage or govern themselves, and the higher levels can only intervene at the request of the lower levels.

Absolute universal suffrage *(Suffrage universel absolu)*: The maximum extension of political participation to the whole of the population, including children, through supervised family and lineage voting. The model's purpose is to introduce intergenerational justice into decision-making.

Ranked-choice voting *(Vote à choix classé)*: An electoral system in which voters rank candidates or options in order of preference. It is more economical, achieving in a single round what would otherwise take several. It pacifies and civilises voting by reducing polarisation and negative campaigns. It compels candidates and parties to be conciliatory and non-violent if they wish to be considered as a second choice beyond their bases. It introduces a culture of coalitions and ensures that the collective emerges more united from the ballot, with elected officials more legitimate. It favours broader majorities, while avoiding the zero-sum game in which winners take all and losers lose all. It is an electoral model capable of producing very advanced and high-performing democracies, especially when combined with subsidiarity within consociational systems.

Voting by testimony *(Vote par témoignages)*: A procedure of selection or evaluation in use in many traditional African systems of direct democracy. The community judges a person to be elected or a public-policy option according to its merits, evaluated and confirmed or not through lived experience shared in the form of testimonies. As far as the vote is concerned, it takes place by testimony under direct universal suffrage, by the entire population of the village. Even children have a voice in the testimonies on the candidate, regarding his or her conduct, services rendered, morality, capacity to bring people together, to protect and to serve the common. The vote then ceases to be a mere addition of unargued individual preferences and becomes a public test of trust that institutes democracy as a way of life and a method of inquiry and of research, in order to guarantee the primacy of truth and justice. The vote becomes civilising in the noblest sense, preserving the moral health of society. This practice could very advantageously be tested in the construction of African democratic models of bottom-up subsidiarity combining direct and indirect democracy, ensuring that only sound, upright and capable persons can govern at the representative level, while peoples and collectives directly exercise power on a daily basis.

ANNEX: SOURCES OF STATISTICS AND OTHER KEY DATA

Statistic or data point	Sources	Notes on usage
66 per cent of Africans prefer democracy to any other regime	Afrobarometer, 2024	Phrasing as: "according to the Afrobarometer surveys conducted in 39 countries" (calculation of percentages from four categories).
Support for democracy has fallen by 7 points over the recent decade	Afrobarometer, 2024	Analysis of the supply and demand of democracy.
Rejection of military rule has fallen by 11 points	Afrobarometer, 2024	
53 per cent of Africans would accept a military takeover if elected officials abuse power	Afrobarometer, 2024	
Only 45 per cent think their country is largely democratic	Afrobarometer, 2024	
37 per cent are satisfied with the functioning of democracy in their country	Afrobarometer, 2024	
The number of electoral or liberal democracies in Africa has fallen from 22 to 15 over the last decade	Resnick & Signé, 2026, drawing on Our World in Data / V-Dem	Phrasing: "the number of electoral or liberal democracies in the region has fallen from 22 to 15 over the last decade".
A 5-point decline in security	Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2024	More precise phrasing: "the IIAG Security & Safety indicator declines by 5.0 points between 2014 and 2023".
A 4.5-point decline in participation	Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2024	More precise phrasing: "the Participation indicator declines by 4.5 points between 2014 and 2023".
A 2.8-point decline in rights	Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2024	
A 1.4-point decline in accountability and transparency	Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2024	
Africa has more than 1.5 billion inhabitants in 2024	Sinha & Getachew, 2024	UNECA notes that Africa's population grew from 283 million in 1960 to more than 1.5 billion in 2024.
The African population is expected to reach approximately 2.5 billion in 2050	Sinha & Getachew, 2024	
Demographic increase of 63 per cent between 2024 and 2050	Sinha & Getachew, 2024	

Statistic or data point	Sources	Notes on usage
38 per cent internet users in Africa in 2024	International Telecommunication Union, 2025	Phrasing: “in 2024, 38 per cent of the African population used the internet, against 68 per cent globally”.
Africa is the region of the world with the lowest rate of internet use	International Telecommunication Union, 2025	
National rates of internet use in Africa range from 11 per cent to 87 per cent	International Telecommunication Union, 2025	
Three Swiss political levels: Confederation, cantons, communes	Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, Présence Suisse, 2024	Official Swiss sources.
2,131 or 2,110 Swiss communes	Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, Présence Suisse, 2024	Note: the number of communes varies by year owing to communal mergers. The current source indicates 2,110 communes.
Landsgemeinde in Glarus and Appenzell Innerrhoden	Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, Présence Suisse, 2024	
Kanem-Bornu, an empire of more than a thousand years – Africa's longest State experience after antiquity	Barkindo, 1984; Hiribarren, 2016	Hiribarren, Barkindo and UNESCO’s General History of Africa describe an empire present for more than 1,000 years in the Lake Chad basin.
Political and institutional reform cycles of 25–30 years (including 1960–1990 and 1991–2020)	Author's analytical periodisation	

BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

Governance and diagnostic data

Afrobarometer. (2024). *African Insights 2024: Democracy at Risk – The People's View*.

Balandier, Georges. (1967). *Anthropologie politique*. Presses universitaires de France.

Barkindo, Bawuro Mubi. (1984). "The early states of the Central Sudan: Kanem, Borno and some of their neighbours to c. 1500." In Djibril Tamsir Niane (ed.), *General history of Africa, IV: Africa from the twelfth to the sixteenth century*. UNESCO.

Biem, Jean Eudes. (2026). *Stocktaking of works on democracy in Africa*. Innovation Foundation for Democracy.

Mo Ibrahim Foundation. (2024). *2024 Ibrahim Index of African Governance: Index report*.

International Telecommunication Union. (2024). *Measuring digital development: Facts and figures 2024*. International Telecommunication Union.

African Union. (2007). *African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance*.

African Union. (2015). *Agenda 2063: The Africa we want. African Union*.

African political traditions, pre-colonial States and endogenous resources

Biem, Jean Eudes. (2026). *Cartographic repertory of Africa's endogenous democratic traditions, Volume I*. Éditions du CERDOTOLA.

Fortes, Meyer, & Evans-Pritchard, Edward Evan. (eds.). (1940). *African political systems*. Oxford University Press.

Hountondji, Paulin Jidenu. (ed.). (1994). *Endogenous knowledge: Research trails*. CODESRIA.

Ki-Zerbo, Joseph. (2003). *À quand l'Afrique ? Conversations with René Holenstein*. Éditions de l'Aube.

Mamdani, Mahmood. (1996). *Citizen and subject: Contemporary Africa and the legacy of late colonialism*. Princeton University Press.

Mbembe, Achille. (2020). *La Communauté terrestre*. La Découverte.

Vansina, Jan. (1990). *Paths in the rainforests: Toward a history of political tradition in equatorial Africa*. University of Wisconsin Press.

Wiredu, Kwasi. (1995). “Democracy and consensus in African traditional politics: A plea for a non-party polity.” *The Centennial Review*, 39(1), 53–64.

Democracy, institutions, the commons and endogenous development

Ake, Claude. (1996). *Democracy and development in Africa*. Brookings Institution Press.

Binam Bikoï, Charles, & Biem, Jean Eudes. (2020). *Industradition of Africa: or the time of traditions for the industrialisation and emergence of the black continent*. Éditions du CERDOTOLA.

Kretzmann, John Patrick, & McKnight, John L. (1993). *Building communities from the inside out: A path toward finding and mobilizing a community’s assets*. Asset-Based Community Development Institute, Northwestern University.

Lijphart, Arend. (1977). *Democracy in plural societies: A comparative exploration*. Yale University Press.

Ostrom, Elinor Claire. (1990). *Governing the commons: The evolution of institutions for collective action*. Cambridge University Press.

Reilly, Benjamin. (2001). Democracy in divided societies: *Electoral engineering for conflict management*. Cambridge University Press.

Sarr, Felwine. (2016). *Afrotopia*. Philippe Rey.

Sen, Amartya Kumar. (1999). *Development as freedom*. Alfred A. Knopf.

Wall, John. (2022). *Give children the vote: On democratizing democracy*. Bloomsbury Academic.

The future of international solidarity

Castellanet, Christian, Philippe Coquart, Gilles Lainé and Kako Nubukpo. *Une histoire de la coopération franco-africaine : entre ombres et lumières*. Paris: Karthala, forthcoming, June 2026.

Global Africa, les relations humanitaires et la réinvention de l’avenir de l’Afrique, special issue including contributions by Cilas Kemedjio, Wangui wa Goro, Akosua Adomako Ampofo, Cyprian Nanji, Olawale Akinrinde, Jacqueline Sawadogo et al., Jean Balime Tiéwendé, Yvan Hyannick Obah, and Ibrahima Mohamadou. No. 12, 2025: https://www.globalafricasciences.org/issues/issue-12/.

Kemedjio, C., & C. Lynch (eds.). 2024. *Who Gives to Whom? Reframing Africa in the Humanitarian Imaginary*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Machikou, N. 2021. “Liaison et déliaison compassionnelle. L’Afrique au cœur du souci du monde.” In *L’État inachevé – Mélanges en l’honneur du professeur Koffi Ahadzi-Nonou*. Poitiers: Presses universitaires juridiques de Poitiers.

Machikou, N. 2024. “Un monde abîmé comme occasion épistémique : quel engagement pour le chercheur dans la cité ?” *SociologieS*, Débats, 13 June.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o. 2009. *Something Torn and New: An African Renaissance*. New York: Basic Books.

Nubukpo, K. (ed.), Martial Ze Belinga, Bruno Tinel, Demba Moussa Dembele. 2016. *Sortir l’Afrique de la servitude monétaire. À qui profite le franc CFA ?* Paris: La Dispute, 243 pp.

Nubukpo, K. 2024. *L’Afrique et le reste du monde, de la dépendance à la souveraineté*. Paris: Éditions Jacob, 208 pp.

Nubukpo, K. 2022. *Une solution pour l’Afrique : du néoprotectionnisme aux biens communs*. Paris: Éditions Jacob.

Olivier de Sardan, J.-P. 2021. *La revanche des contextes : des mésaventures en ingénierie sociale en Afrique et au-delà*. Karthala, 480 pp.

Opongo, Elias O. 2026. *Decolonizing NGO Peacebuilding and Liberal Peace Agenda in Northern Uganda*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Severino, Jean-Michel and Jean-Louis Bianco. 2001. *Un autre monde est possible*. Fondation Jean-Jaurès.

Severino, Jean-Michel and Jérémy Hajdenberg. 2016. *Entreprenante Afrique*. Paris: Odile Jacob.

Severino, Jean-Michel. 2025. *The Big Beautiful Policy*. Fondation pour les études et recherches sur le développement international, Politique de développement, Working Paper 360, October.

Tamale, Sylvia. 2020. *Decolonization and Afro-Feminism*. Daraja Press.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Chapter – Loïc Rakotoarisoa

Dr Ketakandriana Rafitoson, Malagasy political scientist, anti-corruption activist and human-rights defender; Vice-Chair of Transparency International and Executive Director of the Resource Justice Network / Publish What You Pay.

Dr Symphorien Ongolo, political scientist, research fellow at the Institut de recherche pour le développement (IRD), specialist in dynamics of power, globalisation and natural-resource governance in Africa.

Clémence Contensou, Policy Manager, Transition Minerals at the Paris Peace Forum; former Francophone Africa and MENA adviser to the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), with experience in the governance of the extractive sector.

Dr Anouchka Sooriamoorthy, philosophy practitioner, lecturer and trainer; founder of In The Chaos World, a consultancy dedicated to the development of critical thinking and philosophy in the world of work.

Eliezer Majambu, Ph.D, lecturer-researcher / Associate Professor at the Université officielle de Mbujimayi in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, specialist in natural-resource governance, forestry policies and environmental issues in central Africa.

Dr Ianjatiana Randrianandrasana, Doctor of Law from Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, Lecturer at the Université d'Antsiranana, instructor at the Université catholique de Madagascar, specialist in environmental law and the protection of nature in Madagascar.

Jérémy Mapangou-Mapangou, Gabonese environmental jurist, associated with Muyissi Environnement, engaged on questions of forestry governance, environmental law and the monitoring of natural-resource exploitation practices.

Chapter – Jean Eudes Biem

With the participation of: Alain-Fleury Ekorong (scientific secretariat), Philomène Stéphanie Tatapong Beyala (assistant).

And the contributions or critiques of: Charles Binam Bikoi, Sarah Marniesse, Viviane Ondoua Biwole, Nadeige Laure Ngo Nlend, Mohamadou Mountaga Diallo, Zakaria Ousman Ramadan, Akogla Kossi Mawouli, Mehdi Alioua and Augustin Denis Samnick.

Chapter – Macaire Eyenga

Cecilia Passanti (*Centre of African Studies, Copenhagen University, Denmark*), Johannes Machiya (*Wits University, South Africa*), and Mariama Diallo (*Université numérique Cheikh Hamidou Kane, Senegal*), with whom we worked to enrich this chapter. Part of the reflections presented in this text also draws on the contributions gathered during a webinar of the "Strength of societies" programme, organised by the Foundation and devoted to the theme "How can digital technologies strengthen material security and uphold the rule of law?", held on 7 April 2026. The writing of this chapter was further enriched by the contributions of researchers from the Institut de recherche pour le développement (IRD), notably Mikaël Lucas, Pierre Larmande and François Sabot. We also thank Lilou Sciortino Monaco for her support in mobilising and connecting these experts.

Chapter – Awa Diop

Sénégal	Côte d'Ivoire	Kenya
Amy Sakho, lawyer and feminist activist.	**Nathalie Kouakou,** President of the NGO Vivre sans violences.	**Beatrice Kwamboka,** Programme Coordinator at Badili Africa.
Fatou Sow, sociologist and feminist activist.	**Carelle Laetitia Goli,** feminist activist, President of the Organisation pour la réflexion et l'action féministe.	**Maureen Odera,** programme coordinator at the Heinrich Böll Foundation Nairobi.
Alice Djiba, journalist, programme officer at the Heinrich Böll Foundation.	**Tenin Traoré,** feminist activist, coordinator of the Alliance Féministe.	**Diana Gichengo,** Executive Director of The Institute for Social Accountability (TISA), pan-African feminist.
Maïmouna Ndoye, Gender and Feminist Approaches Reference at Equipop.	**De Laure Nesmon Pie,** journalist, feminist activist, specialist in inclusive governance, founder of Opinion Eclairée and Media Citoyen.	**Rachael Mwikali Mueni,** co-founder and coordinator of the Coalition for Grassroots Human Rights Defenders.
Diabou Bessane, Senegalese journalist, director and producer.	**Lisi Yao,** member of the Network of Women Web Activists Against Hate Speech.	
Awa Fall Diop, feminist activist, gender expert.	**Debora Tebily,** independent feminist.	
Ndeye Fatou Tounkara, feminist activist, President of Sénégal Actions Féministes.		
Sokhna Rosalie Ndiaye, political sociologist; lecturer-researcher at the Université Rose Dieng France-Sénégal in Dakar.		
Ndeye Rokhaya Diagne, researcher in political science; postdoctoral researcher at the Université Rose Dieng France-Sénégal in Dakar.		
Saliou Ngom, political scientist–sociologist, researcher at IFAN.		
Selly Ba, human-rights activist, feminist activist, gender expert.		
Coumba Touré, feminist activist, storyteller, editor and Chair of the Board of the TrustAfrica Foundation and ACI Baobab.		
Diali Dia, lawyer, project officer at Médicos del Mundo.		
Aïda Diagne, President of the Association Femmes Engagées.		

Chapter – Nadine Machikou and Cecelia Lynch

List of persons consulted:

- Cilas Kemedjio
- Toussaint Kafarhire Murhula, S.J.
- Akosua Adomako Ampofo
- Elias Opongo, S.J.
- Albert Billy Bangirana
- Saturnin Modeste Agramako
- Amy Gilmore
- Jean-Michel Severino
- Kako Nubukpo
- Arame Guêye
- Imen Mellaz
- Randianina Radilofe
- Onja Harison
- Aïssatou Sy-Wonyu
- Anami Daudi Toure
- Dorcus Mutisya

Chapter – Zoreen Badruddin

With research contributions from: Aga Khan Health Services, Amref Health Africa, Gates Foundation, Institut de recherche pour le développement (IRD), Paris Peace Forum.

pavillon de la création et de l'innovation sociale

INNOVATION FOUNDATION FOR DEMOCRACY

Innovation Foundation for Democracy

Fifth Floor, University Corner
University of the Witwatersrand
Johannesburg 2050
South Africa