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*SAINT JOSEPH SEMINARY AND HIGH SCHOOL
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Special Committee *RESEARCH REPORT*

Neocolonialism in Africa: Addressing the Economic Dependence and
Political Exploitation of African Nations.

Definitions

Neocolonialism:

Neocolonialism is when countries or corporations exert control over another country by using economic, political, cultural, or other pressures. The goal of neocolonialism is to gain power over weaker countries without using direct military rule, avoiding global accountability.¹

Green minerals:

Green minerals are resources crucial for technological advancement of green energy technology and are often extracted from African countries, most notably iron, chromium and copper.²

Development loans:

Development loans are loans that are given by a country or a corporation to help build up another country's infrastructure and economy. The idea was that these projects (like a new power dam) would create new wealth, which would then be used to pay back the loans.³

Bailout loans:

Bailout loans are emergency loans given by a country or a corporation to help weaker countries pay off the interest on their original loans, but not without certain conditions to ensure they get their money back.⁴

First world countries:

First world countries are democratic, highly industrialised nations with high GDPs, stable economies and governments, having a high standard of living.⁵

Economic dependence:

Economic dependence is a scenario where a country's economy, an organisation or an individual relies on an outside source for financial support, trade or resources. As a result, they become vulnerable to outside influence.⁶

Katanga:

Katanga is a resource-rich region in the southeastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. While it is no longer an official administrative "province," the name Katanga is still used to refer to the entire region.⁷

Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs):

SAPs are economic policies that were launched by the World Bank and the IMF.⁸

"Françafrique":

"Françafrique" is a French term used to describe France's unofficial and shadowy influence on its former colonies in sub-Saharan Africa.⁹

¹ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/neocolonialism>

² <https://www.unsw.edu.au/newsroom/news/2025/04/five-things-you-need-to-know-about-green-minerals>

³ <https://www.un.org/en/desa/development-financing>

⁴ <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/bailout>

⁵ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/first%20world>

⁶ <https://fiveable.me/key-terms/ap-hug/economic-dependency>

⁷ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Katanga-historical-state-Africa>

⁸ <https://archive.unescwa.org/structural-adjustment-programmes>

⁹ <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780191828836.001.0001/acref-9780191828836-e-139>

Military Juntas:

A military junta is a government run by a committee of military leaders who have seized power.¹⁰

Defence pact:

A defence pact is an agreement by states with one another promising aid in the situation of a military attack on any of the agreeing states.¹¹

CFA Franc:

The CFA Franc is a colonial currency created by France in 1945 for its African territories to tie their economy to the French treasury.¹²

Background

After the wave of decolonisation in the 20th century, a lot of African nations gained political independence. However, this didn't end foreign interference with internal affairs; direct colonial rule was almost completely abolished and replaced with neocolonialism, a mechanism of indirect control exerted by a powerful state over supposedly independent countries through economic, political, and cultural pressures.¹³ Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of Ghana after gaining independence, was the first to acknowledge this problem. According to his definition: "neo-colonialism warns us of the potential regressive impact of unregulated forms of aid, trade and foreign direct investment in relation to poverty reduction and wellbeing in African countries."¹⁴

Developing African nations needed loans from organisations like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to help develop lacking fields, such as education centres and healthcare institutions. Additionally, the colonial economies were designed only to extract raw minerals and resources in the first place through forced labour systems like slavery and indentured servitude, which meant they had no industrial base to support the local economy, as well as a very weak tax system that made it hard to accumulate capital. The primary tool used to exert this control was economic dependence. Newly independent nations needed economic assistance to build the necessary infrastructure, such as schools, hospitals, and roads. They received development loans from institutions like the World Bank and the IMF to achieve those goals.

When global economic problems like "the oil crisis" hit in the 1970s-1980s, the development loans became unpayable, forcing African nations to request "bailout loans" to pay for the interest on the original loans. This created a "debt trap" that was used by powerful states to influence the diplomatic and political decisions of weak African nations, or for personal interest. For example, at independence in 1975, Mozambique was the world's biggest cashew producer, and cashews were the most important export as well. Mozambique was still under Portuguese colonial rule. Following the 16-year Civil War in Portugal to overthrow dictator Antonio de Oliveira Salazar to reach independence, production dropped. The World Bank saw this as an opportunity to gain influence, so the state cashew company was broken up and sold off in 1994-95. Because Mozambique was under an estimated 400 million USD in loans around that time, "the World Bank demanded the liberalisation of the raw cashew trade. This meant reducing the export tax on raw nuts, even though all those involved - the industry, the

¹⁰ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/military-junta>

¹¹ <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/defence-pact>

¹² <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/cfa-franc>

¹³ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/neocolonialism>

¹⁴ <https://mirror.explodie.org/nkrumah.pdf>

traders in raw nuts, and the government - had agreed on a 26 per cent export tax, designed to encourage domestic processing. Under World Bank pressure, the tax came down to 20 and then to 14 per cent, a level which allowed traders selling raw nuts to India to compete with the local processing plants.”¹⁵ The World Bank then claimed that liberalisation would improve the prices paid to farmers; but upon further research, it was proven that it benefited the wealthy traders, not the poor African farmers.

One important case is the conditions of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) where extensive evidence from studies shows that Belgian control has not yet ended after decolonization. By 1960, the Belgian mining giant controlled 70% of the Congolese economy and was the world’s largest producer of cobalt and copper. Even after the independence of the DRC in 1960, it continued to extract minerals and actively exerted control. However, it is not the Belgian government itself but a corporation: Union Minière du Haut-Katanga (UMHK). When the DRC gained independence under Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba, who wanted to nationalise resources, the UMHK effectively “hired” the resource-rich province of Katanga to declare that it was not a part of the DRC. This was not a random movement, but a funded step by the UMHK, backed by Belgian soldiers. This stripped the central Congolese government of the vast majority of its revenue, designed to make the new state fail instantly.¹⁶

Afterwards, the prime minister stated that independence is meaningless without economic independence, and threatened to invite the USSR if the West didn’t help with expelling Belgian soldiers, making him a “threat” during the Cold War to Belgium and the CIA. Belgian authorities later directed Lumumba’s transfer to the state of Katanga, knowing he would be killed by his enemies there. A Belgian execution squad commanded by a Belgian captain supervised his torture and execution by firing squad. To hide the evidence, a Belgian police commissioner, Gerard Soete, later dug up the body, hacked it to pieces, and dissolved it in sulfuric acid. In 2002, the Belgian government officially admitted to taking part in the operation and apologised for its role.¹⁷

Treaties and Organisations

The World Bank:

The World Bank is an international organisation comprising 189 countries that provides loans, grants, and technical assistance to help reduce poverty and promote development.¹⁸

The International Monetary Fund (IMF):

“The IMF is an organisation of 189 member countries that works to foster global monetary cooperation, secure financial stability, facilitate international trade, promote high employment and sustainable economic growth, and reduce poverty around the world.”¹⁹

Union Minière du Haut-Katanga (UMHK)/ Umicore:

Umicore, previously known as the UMHK, is a Belgian-French materials technology company based in Belgium. Previously, it was a mining company that took part in the operations done in the DRC.²⁰

¹⁵ [Stanford study](#)

¹⁶ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Democratic-Republic-of-the-Congo/Economy>

¹⁷ <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Patrice-Lumumba>

¹⁸ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/World-Bank>

¹⁹ [IMF](#)

²⁰ <https://www.umicore.com/en/>

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The African Union (AU):

The African Union is a continental unit comprising 55 states that make up the countries of the African Continent. It aims to improve unity and solidarity amongst African countries, and to get rid of the remaining aftereffects of colonisation and apartheid.²¹

The Alliance of Sahel States (AES):

The AES is a bloc formed by Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger that acts as a defence pact between all countries.

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AFCTA):

The AFCTA is an effort made by the African Union to create a single market for services and goods across Africa. It aspires to eliminate tariffs and other trade barriers to boost African trade, promote regional values, and encourage economic growth, job creation, and industrialisation.²²

Belt and Road Initiative (BRI):

“The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is China’s main international cooperation and economic strategy. The BRI is also known as the “One Belt One Road” (OBOR), the “Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-century Maritime Silk Road” or just the “New Silk Road.”²³

General Assembly resolution, (1960), 1514 (XV)

The topic of “Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples” states the following:

1. “Any attempt aimed at the partial or total disruption of the national unity and the territorial integrity of a country is incompatible with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.”²⁴
2. “Inadequacy of political, economic, social or educational preparedness should never serve as a pretext for delaying independence.”²⁵

²¹ <https://au.int/en/overview>

²² <https://initiatives.weforum.org/forum-friends-of-the-african-continental-free-trade-area/home>

²³ [The BRI](#)

²⁴ [UN Resolution\(1\)](#)

²⁵ [UN resolution\(2\)](#)

Current situation

African nations are still fighting economic and political control from powerful nations, but the actors are changing, and debt traps now include new players like China and private corporations, not just the IMF or the World Bank. Recently, a new scramble has been underway for Africa's "green minerals" such as cobalt and lithium, which are needed for essential technology. In response, African countries are pushing back by banning the export of their raw resources, demanding that processing factories be built in Africa instead of taking resources from Africa, then creating and selling the goods somewhere else, and trying to increase trade among themselves to build their own wealth.²⁶

Additionally, in the Sahel, military coups in Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and others have been dismantling the Françafrique system, through which France held lasting economic and military influence on the condition of said countries in the Sahel. The new military juntas have forced all French troops out, shut down French media, and expelled French ambassadors. This created a new power slot that was immediately filled by Russia, which provides military support to these states. Lastly, the three countries mentioned above have formed their own bloc that acts as a mutual defence pact: the Alliance of Sahel States (AES).²⁷

In addition, neocolonialism has been causing fragmentation wars across Africa due to the scramble and lack of mineral resources; external countries and corporations need good and oil, consequently they funnel weapons and money to their clients within those vulnerable African countries causing civil and fragmentation wars. For example, in Sudan currently the main party that holds most of the gold reserves and oil is the Rapid Support Force (RSF), countries take advantage of that by selling weapons and ammunition in exchange for gold and oil, fuelling the war further. Not only that, foreign companies in gold and oil prefer stable access to resources, but they often negotiate with whichever faction controls the mine, this creates a reason for the two sides to hold territory at all costs and to continue fighting, because war is more profitable than peace.²⁸

²⁶ <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/africa-china-relations-2025/>

²⁷ <http://bbc.com/news/world-africa-66406137>

²⁸ <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/the-role-of-gold-in-the-sudanese-war-207364>

Critical events and timeline

1945	France's Establishment of the CFA Franc.
1957	Ghana gains independence, and its first president, Kwame Nkrumah, begins warning people about what could happen to Africa.
1960	"The year of Africa" at this time, most African nations gained independence. Although France signs agreements that allow it to keep military bases in these independent territories.
1965	Kwame Nkrumah publishes his book, Neo-Colonialism, the Last Stage of Imperialism, giving the concept its name.
1970s	Newly independent states take out "development loans" from institutions like the World Bank and the IMF to build modern infrastructure.
Early 1980s	An economic crisis hits, oil prices skyrocket, and global interest rates rise, making the initial loans almost unpayable.
Mid-1980s	The World Bank and the IMF offer "bailout loans" to pay off the interest on the development loans.
1990s	SAPs started taking effect across Africa, dismantling state-operated industries as well as opening African markets to foreign countries and corporations.
2000s	China begins its "go out" policy, rapidly increasing their investments in Africa.
2013	China launches the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), standardising the model all across Africa, which leads to new accusations of debt-traps.
2018	The AFTCA is signed, a major step in tackling neocolonialism.
2020s	A wave of anti-French coups sweeps the Sahel. These new militaries reject the old "Françafrique" system, expelling French troops, and Russia sweeps in to take influence.

Questions to consider :

- How should countries approach the problem of neocolonialism in Africa?
- How can we ensure that the chosen method won't simply transfer power to another country?
- What measures can be taken to grow the economies of African countries?
- How can we ensure that African countries aren't exploited due to their dependence on developed countries?
- What is your country doing to help tackle the problem?
- Is your country suffering from neocolonialism? If it is, what is it doing to solve that problem?
- How can we prevent neocolonialism in the future?
- Should state actors and non-state actors that exercised neocolonialism over weak countries in Africa be held accountable? If so, what kind of consequences should these actors receive?
- How do we combat the issue in the Sahel?

Relevant media

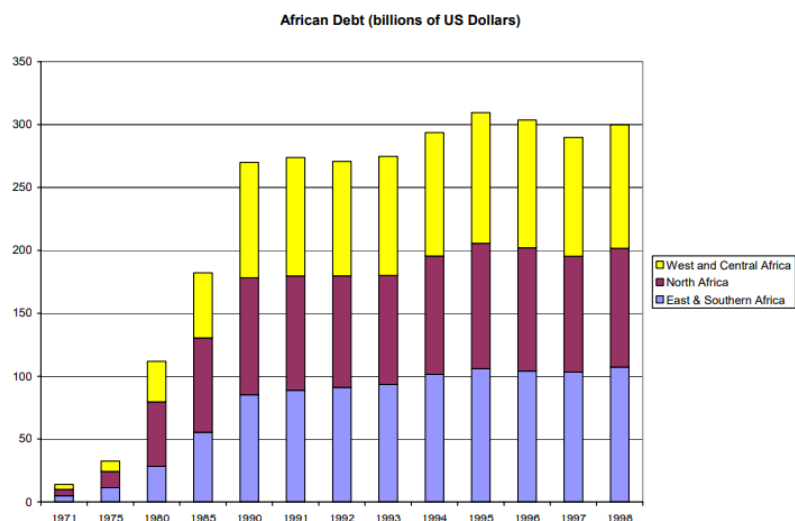
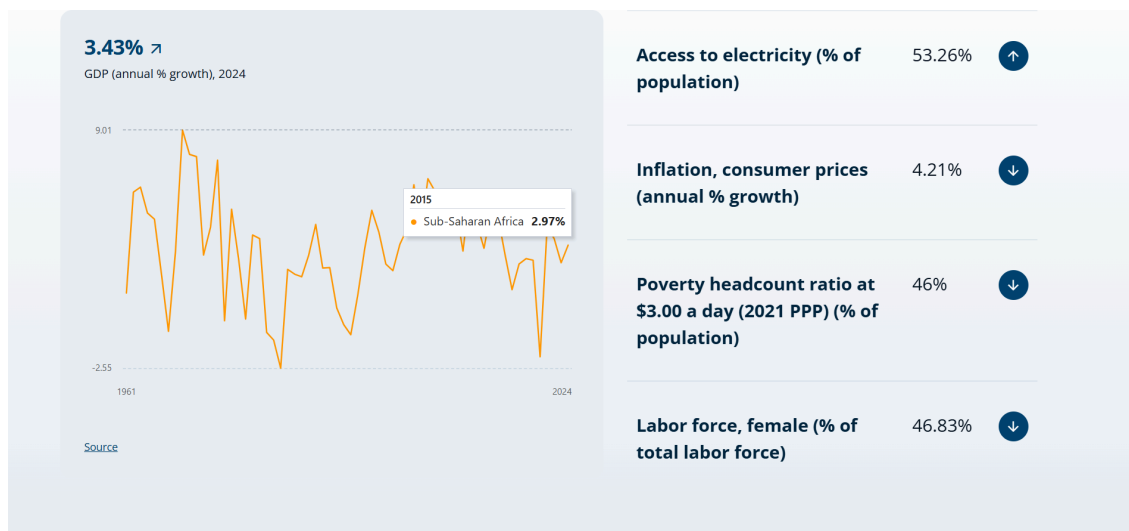


Fig 1. Growth of Debt In African countries (source: Based on World bank Global Development Finance*, 2000)

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Videos :

- [What is Neocolonialism?](#)
- [How France \(Still\) Controls Africa](#)
- [Russian Neocolonialism: How Africa Funds the War in Ukraine](#)
- [What Are The Effects Of Neocolonialism In Africa? - African Roots And Routes](#)
- [Is the Sahel the most dangerous place on Earth? - BBC World Service](#)
- [A look at France's diminishing presence in the Sahel region](#)

Helpful resources:

- [Countries' economies](#) - a look at your country's economy
- [Stanford study - Neo-Colonialism In Africa](#) - a helpful study that tackles the issue of neocolonialism
- [The Challenges of Combating Neocolonialism in Africa](#) - Why is it hard to combat it?
- [Useful blog](#) - Includes history and the origin of neocolonialism
- [A deeper dive](#) - Dives deeper into the topic.
- [Corporations](#) - Explains how corporations engage in politics.
- [Neocolonialism](#) - Very detailed research from experts on the matter.
- [Neocolonialism is holding Africa back from true independence](#) - Talks about the consequences of neocolonialism in African countries.
- [The effects of neocolonialism on Africa's development](#) - Talks about how neocolonialism affects African development.

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