



Global Realities and the Future of African Studies

By

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Africa

54 countries

2nd largest and **2nd** most populous continent after Asia.

30.37km²: **3 times** the size of the USA, and UK is only **0.8%** the size of Africa.

1.4 billion people and **16%** of the world's human population.

Over **3000** ethnic groups, **2100** different languages and a variety of religions: This shows that Africa is rich in its diversity of ethnic groups, languages, and cultures.



Africa Projections

By **2050**, Africa's population would have doubled and by **2100AD** 1 in 3 people on earth will be of African descent.

By **2100**, Africa, and especially sub-Saharan Africa, will be home to about half of the youths in the world.

As present, about **70%** of Africa's population is under **30 years** and if they are empowered and motivated, they could propel the continent to tremendous levels of holistic and sustainable development.

Otherwise, the continent would be faced with levels and dimensions of unemployment, poverty, and violent conflicts worse than what we are experiencing at present, and with grievous global implications.

Africa and the Present (Global) Reality

- Very-well behind the rest of the world's economy with the quality of life of millions of Africans being nasty, brutish and short, borrowing Thomas Hobbes's expression
- Nonetheless, Africa is still very important within the global context:
 - Has **16-17.5%** of the global human population, about **30%** of the world's mineral reserves, **8%** of the world's natural gas, **2%** of the world's oil reserves, **40%** of the world's gold and about **90%** of its chromium and platinum reserves.
 - Also has the largest reserves of cobalt, diamonds, platinum, and uranium in the world. The continent holds **65%** of the world's arable land and **10%** of the planet's internal renewable fresh water source.

Sad African Global Reality

Other parts of the world seem to benefit more from the resources of Africa than Africa and Africans.

This is largely due to unsustainable use and high loss of resources through diverse forms of corruption and illegal activities.


This further puts Africa and Africans at a disadvantage in a world that is becoming increasingly defined by an increase in racism, radical nationalisms, terrorism, infringements of human rights, and rising poverty levels.

This exacerbates a generalised sense of communal and individual vulnerability that is unparalleled in Africa.

Hence, Africa is portrayed in most foreign media, across the world, as, arguably, the riskiest and the most violent-conflict endemic zone.



**Let's keep
Hope
Alive!**

- **Nonetheless, there is still a lot of optimism about Africa and hope for Africans.**
 - **Akinwumi A. Adesina, President, ADB emphasised five priority areas to transform the lives of Africans and establish the African continent on a sure path towards sustainable development, as defined by UNs in its SDGs.**
 - **These five priority areas are to:**
 - ✓ **Illuminate and Electrify Africa;**
 - ✓ **Feed Africa;**
 - ✓ **Industrialize Africa;**
 - ✓ **Integrate Africa; and in the final analysis**
 - ✓ **Improve the Quality of Life for the People of Africa.**
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The African Challenge

Efforts to sustainably develop Africa have been marginally successful, being fraught with debilitating challenges.

To change this narrative, there is the advice not to unconditionally follow the messages (counsel) of non-African leaders and institutions.

This is because the recommendations offered do not always end up working in Africa.

Hence, the question for African Studies is:

How can or should African Studies respond to the needs and challenges of Africa today in ways that will guarantee a sustainably prosperous future for Africa and Africans?

A viable answer to this question must begin with a clarification of what African Studies is and should be.

What is African Studies?

- research, teaching and publishing on the African experience from the vantage of a multiplicity and interdependence of disciplines.
- Explain the nuances and vicissitudes of African life on the continent and in the diaspora, and now especially within the context of prevailing transformations in the global arena
- Interrogates Africa and Africans on virtually all disciplinary fronts and across all the domains of the African life: economic, political, cultural, social, scientific and technological.
- Objectively interrogate and accurately present the heritage of African peoples, their experiences in the present, and their aspirations for the future.

African Studies

- To be relevant and responsive to the contemporary African condition, scholars in African Studies/Africanist must understand the transformations the continent has undergone and the diverse factors within and outside Africa that motivated them to condition and define the African reality today
- These factors must be carefully examined and understood in all their multifarious dimension to arrive a comprehensive understanding of Africa and the African condition today.
- They include diverse historical, social, cultural, economic, political, financial, geographical, geological, environmental, scientific, technological, ethnic, religious factors, and other factors.
- They are described as the constant DNA of the African region, i.e., what defines the African space and experience today (<https://atalayar.com/en/content/africa-expectations-and-reality>).

African Studies

Provides a platform for Africans, both within the continent and in the diaspora to tell their own stories, interrogate their own realities, and seek to resolve their problems from their own vantage positions as Africans.

As the saying goes, he that wears the shoes know where it pinches. Of course, this does not preclude the contributions of non-Africans to the study of African studies.

- **Interrogate the place of Africa and Africans in the global context, historically` and contemporaneously (Alpers and Roberts 2002), and Africa's own contribution to the global pool of intellection.**
- **It provide an opportunity to understand the world from an African-informed perspective. The aim is not just to understand ourselves; it is also to present knowledge about us as Africans to the rest of the world from our own perspective.**
- **Emphasize the place of Africa in and how it does and should relate with the rest of the world, and vice versa.**
- **Provide access to the history of humankind, especially through, for instance, some of the earliest archaeological discoveries of human development found in Africa.**
- **Provides vital information on the foundation and nature of the diverse socio-economic and socio-political dynamics at play in the global arena. It, for example, provides insights into the foundation of the economic growth of the Western countries that participated in the trans-Atlantic slave trade, and the colonization of Africa, especially how the profits made from the trans-Atlantic slave trade and other exploitative commercial activities in Africa jumpstarted the industrial revolution.**
- **Offers a more comprehensive understanding of how African immigrants enrich the American culture and those of the Caribbeans, for example.**

African Studies: in the Global Context...

In addition,

An objective engagement in African Studies, must motivate Africans in contemporary times to ensure that all their engagements with the rest of the world are no longer lopsided in favour of others but also of optimal advantage to Africa and Africans.

Important Emphasis

- Engagement in African Studies should straddle three interrelated phases that must be treated as a continuum: a focus on the past, the present and the future of Africa and Africans, both on the continent and in the diaspora.
- This is because an objective engagement with the past is requisite for an adequate understanding of the nature, challenges, prospects, and reason why the present condition of Africa and Africans is as it is.
- Such study provides information on who Africans are and how they came to be who and where they are today.
- Likewise, a proper interrogation and comprehension of the contemporary African situation in all its overlapping dimensions (social, cultural, political, economic, legal, scientific, technological, etc) informs the kind of projections and plans that could be plausibly made for the future, especially with respect to the quest for stability, social order, peace and prosperity in Africa and for Africans.

History of African Studies

Lies in the anthropological, ethnological, and ethnographical studies carried out by early European explorers, missionaries, traders, and colonialists in Africa.

These intellectual enterprises were Western oriented, being designed, not for the benefit of Africa and Africans, but for the consumption and benefit of the Europeans and the realization of their diverse intellectual, economic, political other agenda.

... founded on a misconception and misperception of Africa and African epitomized in the Hegelian (wrong) construction of Africa as unhistorical and undeveloped, and Africans as devoid of morality, religions and political constitution.

Nationalist movements and quest for independence in different African states...

- Led to efforts to deconstruct the European imperialist ideas and wrong conceptualisations of Africa and Africans by providing data-based evidence from the perspectives of Africans concerning the African reality, experiences, challenges, and prospects.
- An important thrust of this effort is to distinguish how Africa and Africans are perceived from how they truly are.
- Thus began the effort to provide a solid intellectual foundation to decolonise African Studies, reject and undermine the inferiority complex of the African man which is borne out of the centuries of denigration, exploitation, debasement, and gross dehumanisation that Europe foisted on Africa via the media of slavery and colonialism, and reconstruct African Studies, based on the realities, experiences and expectations of Africans.
- It was spearheaded by African nationalist leaders such as Nnamdi Azikwe, Kwame Nkrumah, Leopold Senghor and African intellectuals such as Kenneth Dike, Ade Ajayi, Adu Boahen, Ali Mazrui, Djibril Tamsir in the 1960s.
- Of course, such Western, non-African scholars as Thomas Hodgkin, Basil Davidson and Walter Rodney also participated in the deconstructive and reconstructive processes of African Studies.

The following has been the traditional scope of African Studies:

Traditional Cultures and Social Institutions

Social Change and the Development of New Institutions

Religion in (Tropical) Africa

Economic Studies in Africa

Political Science in African Studies

Legal Studies in the African field

The Range of Historical Studies

Research and Teaching in African Linguistics

The Study of Arts in African Studies

The Natural Sciences in African Studies

Problem of Funding African Studies

- **Funding African Studies research largely depends on aids and grants received from outside Africa.**
- **Consequently, research in African Studies is largely determined by the interests of donor agencies than those of Africa and Africans**
- **Funding requirement narrow research activities and interests in African Studies to what would be the most likely to attract grant money. Thus, the research, discourses, and narratives in African studies, tend to reflect more of foreign than of African interests and views.**
- **To change this trend, funding for research in African Studies must also be provided from within Africa and from those institutions and agencies that have genuine concerns for the resolution of African challenges.**
- **Hence, African Studies scholars/Africanists, in this regard have a responsibility to make a case for funding for African and Africa-oriented research.**
- **A good way of doing this is to write proposals that will aim at the resolution of the pressing African problems in today's globalized world.**

African Studies: Moving Forward

At the First International Congress of Africanists held between 11 and 18 December 1962 at the University of Ghana, Accra, Kwame Nkrumah stated that the thrusts of African Studies should be to:

- ✓ Facilitate Africa's recovery and reawakening.
- ✓ Find out the truth about Africa and proclaim it to the world
- ✓ Interrogate Africa's common problems and proffer viable solutions to them using African indigenous knowledge systems and other applicable options.
- ✓ Examine how African studies could be advanced through the participation of scholars from diverse disciplines relevant to an understanding of African culture and the contemporary African reality
- ✓ Identify and source for the resources vital for Africa's development
- ✓ Facilitate unity and socio-economic and socio-political cooperation among African countries towards sustainable development in Africa.

Nkurumah's position in the 1960's ...

- Is consistent with the recent gravitation of African Studies towards development studies with special focus on African developmental challenges within the context of global realities deploying the multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches.
- This is the way to go as it is imperative for Africanists to devote their skills and learning towards the resolution of the problems and challenges confronting Africa today and position the continent for a lofty future.
- This is consistent with the challenge laden in the statement by Marx that **“The philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways,”** . **“The point, however, is to change it.”**
- **Thus, within the context of African Studies, the thrust of research and teaching should not just be about the pursuit of truth and knowledge about Africa and Africans but to address the multifarious and rather debilitating social, political, economic, and other challenges that hinder sustainable development and the much-desired peace and stability in Africa.**

In the pursuit of sustainable development in Africa

- **Science and technology are identified as key factors**
- **Previous efforts to borrow or transfer science and technology have not fully yielded desired results.**
- **This is because they thrive only within appropriate socio-cultural contexts, mindsets and attitudes.**
- **Scholars in African Studies need to grapple with the question of how to stimulate the development of science and technology in Africa.**
- **The diverse socio-cultural, socio-economic, and socio-political factors that have implications on the development of science and technology in Africa need to be interrogated and systematically reviewed and aligned to engender the development of (homegrown) science and technology on the continent.**
- **This is an issue that has been subjected to analysis by African philosophers such as Kwasi Wiredu and Godwin Sogolo.**

Other Issues that Should be of Concern to scholars in African Studies

Arbitrary Divisions/Mergers of the African Peoples

- To facilitate unity and socio-economic and socio-political cooperation among African countries, which is requisite for the much-desired In the sustainable development in contemporary Africa, the separation of the continent of Africa into two racialised regions: sub-Saharan Africa and North Africa need to be addressed.
- The implication of this division on the unity and prospects of sustainable development in Africa needs to be carefully interrogated and viable recommendations made for the proper integration and unification of Africa in ways that will enhance security, prosperity and other elements of sustainable development in Africa. The same applies to the division among the Anglophone, Francophone and Arabophone Africa.
- Also, the arbitrary partitioning of the African continent into so-called nation-states between 1870 and 1914 by Western European colonial imperialists for a more effective exploitation of the African rich natural and human resources has negative implications that lingers on till date.
- These artificial divisions and mergers ruptured historical affiliations and relationships and to a great extent underpin the diverse identity-based violent conflicts that have been ravaging Africa for long and stand as a major obstacle on the path of unity and sustainable development in Africa.
- It is needful for Africanists to deploy appropriate multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches to interrogate this unfortunate fact of history and proffer viable ways to mitigate its lingering negative implications in contemporary Africa.

Who is an African?

- The question is not as straightforward as it seems.
- Africans come in different colours due to several factors that include interracial reproduction.
- Besides, the continent is far from being culturally homogenous. Hence, culture cannot be used to define who an African is.
- Diverse people in the diaspora, who never set foot on the continent identify themselves to be Africans, and to this extent, the discourse on who is an African has implications on the interface between African Studies and Africana Studies,
- What the foregoing point at is the fact that people who call themselves or are called Africans are quite dispersed, geographically, genetically, and culturally.
- This makes the all-important task of defining who an African is to be quite challenging. Nonetheless, it is one of the issues that Africanists/scholars in African Studies need to interrogate closely, arrive a viable position on and seek to propagate that sense of African identity among all Africans on the continent and in the diaspora.
- Also, worthy of interrogation is the widespread Darwinian perception of Africans as occupying the lowest position in the evolutionary hierarchy. Sadly, many Africans seem to have accepted this denigrated perception of who they are. This idea needs to be examined in terms of its origin, justification, and objective approaches to be adopted to undermine it.

What is African?

- Providing an answer to this question might be quite challenging because many things that are indigenous to Africa have been altered, over the years, from their original indigenous forms to totally new and different forms. Yet, scholars in African Studies should take on the challenge to sift through all the transformations the African people and the continent have undergone to locate those core identity markers that define and underpin the Africanness of Africans.
- In this quest, it is easy to succumb to the temptation to blame the experiences of slavery and colonisation, and other elements of imperial domination for distorting and defacing the original Africanness of the African people.
- But we must remind ourselves that the only constant feature in life in change in line with the position of Heraclitus, an ancient philosopher, that everything in life/nature is in a constant flux. Without the incursive and disruptive influence of the West, through slavery, colonisation, and all other forms of exploitative activities on the continent, it is unlikely that the African pristine identity markers would have remained unchanged. In truth, globally, all societies are constantly going through transformations, both consciously and deliberately, and unconsciously and inadvertently, and those in Africa are no exceptions.
- Thus, one of the tasks that African Studies scholars must grapple with is that of distinguishing pristine African identity markers that have persisted, the new forms that have evolved, those that have been imposed or imbibed from external sources over the years, and reconcile all these to construct viable African identity markers on which a viable sense of African identity that will be effective and empower Africans to contend successfully with the exigencies of life within the context of prevailing global realities.

Some Other Broad Questions of Interest

- How best to conduct research in and teaching of African Studies?
- Should scholars in African Studies strive to attain some level of competence in the methodologies of diverse disciplines or should they rely on collaborative activities with scholars across disciplines as need arises?
- In what ways should the various centres for the study of Africa domiciled in various countries in different parts of the world collaborate in their common enterprise, what should be the goal of such collaboration, what should be the TORs of such collaboration, and how best should such collaboration be coordinated?
- What kind of expertise, resources and facilities are required for an adequate study of African Studies and an operational centre of institute of African Studies, and what are the strategies to be adopted to ensure that these needs are met?

In the final analysis

The primary thrust of all activities in African Studies should be to arrive at the truth about Africa and Africans, and deploy such knowledge towards actualising sustainable development first on the African continent and in the world at large.

Sustainable development, of course must be accounted for, in terms of the enhanced wellbeing of the people of and in Africa, and of course the rest of the world.

Closing Remarks

The future of Africa and Africans is in the hands of Africans.

If we truly want, by the collective will and efforts of Africans, we can build the kind of Africa that we will all be proud of and happy to live in.

African Studies and Africanists have an important role to play in this quest; and this is a clarion call for us all to rise to the occasion.

**I thank you all for
your kind
attention!**

