

CONTENDING PERSPECTIVES ON REPARATION PAYMENT AND THE WAY FORWARD FOR AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

This paper examined the clamour for reparations; it maintained that the demand for reparations in Africa stems from a long history of colonial exploitation, slavery and systemic economic deprivation. It argues that reparations are necessary to address the lingering effects of historical injustices. Various forms of reparations have been proposed, which include financial payments, institutional development, debt relief, and formal apologies. The paper acknowledges major concerns, including the complexity of determining fair compensation, the identification of multiple global actors involved after several years, structural economic imbalance, and governance deficiencies that persist in many African nations today. The study adopts a qualitative analytical methodology and utilises the historical method of data collection based on textual content analysis. Findings indicate that in spite of concerted efforts made globally for African Reparations, there exists an overt lack of pinpointable evidence yet to prove that the African slave traders are willing to make formal atonement for their sins. The paper adopts the Dependency Theory, which posits that the underdevelopment of Africa, for instance, was the result of historical economic exploitation, colonialism, and neo-colonialism, in which core nations exerted economic and political control over peripheral nations (such as Africa). The study, however, questions whether external compensation is the most effective means of achieving economic and social progress. By analysing historical precedents and contemporary strategies, this study explores alternative pathways for strengthening Africa's economic and political development. Ultimately, it seeks to reframe the conversation on reparation by advocating for self-driven development initiatives as the cornerstone of the African future, while acknowledging the devastating effects of slavery and colonialism. The study recommends, among others, internal policy reforms, strategic self-reliance, resource control, and the intelligent use of local resources for development, which might be the salvation of Africa.

Keywords: African Development, African Reparation, Restitution, Resource Control

Introduction

The clamour for reparations for Africa and its descendants has gained renewed global momentum in the 21st century, emerging as a significant part of the discourse on historical injustice, racial equality, and post-colonial redress. Reparations refer to the call for compensatory justice for the transatlantic slave trade, colonialism, economic exploitation, and systemic racism that devastated the continent and its diasporic communities. Thus, centuries of exploitation have left indelible scars on the continent's social, economic, and political fabric, necessitating a comprehensive approach to restitution.¹

The demand for reparations is rooted in the historical atrocities committed against African people, particularly through the transatlantic slave trade and colonial rule. Between the 15th and 19th centuries, millions of Africans were forcibly removed from their homelands, subjected to inhumane conditions, and exploited for labour in the Americas and Europe.² This large-scale displacement and dehumanisation not only decimated African societies but also deprived the continent of human capital that could have driven internal development.

The Berlin Conference of 1884-85 formalised European colonisation of Africa, ushering in decades of economic plunder and political subjugation. Colonial powers extracted raw materials, imposed exploitative labour systems, and dismantled traditional governance structures. The resultant underdevelopment of African economies and institutions has had lasting repercussions, manifesting in poverty, conflict, and dependency.³ Scholars like Walter Rodney have emphasised that Africa was deliberately underdeveloped by European imperialists for their gain—a thesis that forms a critical foundation for reparation claims.

¹ A. L. Araujo, *Reparations for Slavery and the Slave Trade: A Transnational and Comparative History*. (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), p. 48.

² W. Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. (Dares Salaam: Bogle-L'Uouverture Publications, 1972), p.161

³ S. Amin, *Unequal Development: An Essay on the Social Formations of Peripheral Capitalism*. (Zaria: Monthly Review Press, 1976), p.61.

The moral and philosophical rationale for reparations lies in the principles of justice, restitution, and accountability. According to principles of restorative justice, those who have been wronged are entitled to redress, which may take the form of an apology, compensation, or institutional reform.⁴ Reparation is not merely about financial compensation but about acknowledging harm, accepting responsively, and taking concrete actions to rectify historical injustices. Prominent African leaders and intellectuals have long championed the reparation cause. Kwame Nkrumah, in his Pan-African vision, viewed reparations as part of the struggle for total liberation and sovereignty⁵. The Abuja Proclamation of 1993, signed during the First Pan-African Conference on Reparations, declared that the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism were crimes against humanity and called on Western nations to engage in reparative justice.⁶ This paper examines the historical and philosophical rationale and the current dimensions of the clamour for African reparation, highlighting the enduring impacts of historical wrongs and the evolving strategies for justice.

The call for African reparations has been a longstanding issue, with advocates arguing that historical injustices, such as slavery, Colonial exploitation and systemic resource extraction have left lasting socio-economic scars on the continent. However, a dissenting perspective questions the effectiveness and practicality of reparations in addressing Africa's development challenges. One major concern is the complexity of determining fair compensation. Colonialism and slavery involved multiple global actors over centuries, making it difficult to identify responsible parties and quantify damages.

This raises the question of whether financial restitution can genuinely remedy structural economic imbalances and governance deficiencies that persist in many African nations today.

⁴R. L. Brooks. *Atonement and Forgiveness: A New Model for Black Reparations*. (California: University of California Press, 2004), p.146

⁵ V. Shepherd, *The Reparations Movement: Caribbean and Global Perspectives*. (London: Ian Randle Publishers, 2020), p.36.

⁶ A. L. Araujo, *Reparations for Slavery and the Slave Trade: A Transnational and Comparative History*. (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), p.46.

Another issue is the risk of dependency and misallocation of funds. Critics argue that external compensation may create a reliance on former colonial powers rather than fostering self-sufficiency. There are also concerns that, if granted, financial reparations may not reach the communities most affected due to corruption and governance inefficiencies. Example can be drawn from the Abacha's loot in Nigeria, which was repatriated in many and relooked by highly placed government officials, thereby compelling some countries in 2020 after facilitating return of \$311 million (Three hundred and eleven million dollars) to insist in deployment if said amount solely to the completion of the rehabilitation of the Lagos - Ibadan Expressway, the Abuja - Kano Expressway, as well as completion of the second Niger Bridge construction project. Furthermore, some scholars emphasize that internal reforms, rather than reparations, hold the key to Africa's progress. Strengthening education, industrialisation, and good, responsive governance could yield greater sustainable benefits than financial restitution. Thus, given the complexities inherent in the quest for reparation, the paper seeks to explore alternative pathways for Africa's economic and political empowerment, taking into account contemporary African socio-economic and political dynamics and the challenges of development.

The Way Forward for African Development

The question one needs to ask at this juncture is not whether it is possible for Africa to come out of the wood in terms of development or otherwise, but, whether the African leaders can become more intentionally determined to confront all the factors that have collaborated for several decades to hinder or bedevil every concerted effort whether conscious or inadvertent geared towards achieving social-economic and political emancipation.

The question may sound rhetorical, but those who still believe in Africa's growth and development have the following strategies to apply if Africa is to move forward. Strengthening Governance and Institutions: This is key to Africa's progress towards sustainable development. Africa must ensure that the current trend, whereby individuals or citizens of the nation are seen to be stronger than the institution, is reversed; and the three arms of government are allowed to operate mutually exclusive. For Africa to move forward, priority must be given to investing in renewable energy and infrastructure, diversifying economies through industrialisation, and

ensuring peace and security at the national and regional levels. It will be critical to include youth and women's empowerment in the new trajectory because they represent the bulk of the population, the strength, the electorate, and the workforce. Digitalisation and technological investment will undoubtedly accelerate national development and promote inclusivity, as well as the use of local resources, to achieve the much-desired export-based economy.

Education has been variously described as the bedrock of development and advancement in different spheres of life. African nations must adhere to the United Nations (UN) quota on educational budgets, which reflects the premium the Western world places on education and other allied skills acquisition, especially for the women and the youths of Africa. Job creation is very important because of its domino effect on other segments of society. The tendency is that employment can reduce the spate of youth restiveness, poverty, redundancy and a host of other social ills in the society, leading to peace, stability and a prosperous future.

Another important area that African governments, as a matter of urgency, must pay greater attention to is corruption. The African government has over several decades now, been unable to match its words with concrete actions; African leaders seem to lack the political will needed to confront the hydra-headed monster called "corruption". As a result, many have attributed the spate of violence manifesting in scales that are unbelievably beyond comprehension to the spiral growth in corruption, bad governance and visionless leadership. This is one area where African leaders must invest their energy, resources, time, and attention to ensure that the right solutions are proffered. Arguably, a combination of these approaches can help build resilient economies, stabilise institutions, restore confidence in government, promote peace and stability in the system, and, above all, guarantee the much-needed development in Africa.

The Clamour for African Reparation: Historical Injustice and the Global Demand for Redress

The demand for African reparations, restitution, and compensation for historical injustices committed during slavery, colonialism, and imperialism has intensified over the decades, driven by both African and diasporic voices. The movement seeks justice for centuries of exploitation

that distorted African development, sovereignty, and cultural identity.⁷ Across the African continent and its global diaspora, the call for reparations has intensified, drawing attention to the long-standing injustices of slavery, colonialism, and systemic racial discrimination. These historical crimes have had enduring effects on Africa's socio-economic development, cultural identity, and global standing. The clamour for African reparation is not solely about financial compensation it is a moral, political, and legal demand for acknowledgment, accountability, and redress for centuries of exploitation and oppression⁸

Historically, the transatlantic slave trade, one of the most horrific chapters in human history, saw the forced removal of over 12 million Africans to the Americas between the 15th and 19th centuries. This system of chattel slavery dehumanized Africans and generated immense wealth for European colonial powers and American slave owners, leaving African societies devastated and underdeveloped.⁹ Walter Rodney further emphasised that this systematic extraction of human capital and wealth was a deliberate strategy that disrupted indigenous systems and extracted raw materials through forced labour and coercion. Colonial rulers, notably Britain, France, Belgium and Portugal built their national economies on the exploitation of Africans, while offering little in return in terms of infrastructure, education, or healthcare for the colonised.¹⁰ These historical crimes were not isolated events; they laid the foundation for persistent global inequalities. Post-colonial African states continue to struggle with the legacy of imposed economic structures, political instability, and external dependency, which are direct outcomes of colonial misrule and exploitation.

The moral argument for reparations is rooted in the principles of justice and accountability. Reparations, in this context, are measures taken to rectify the enduring harms caused by historical injustices. As the United Nations Durban Declaration of 2001 stated, the transatlantic slave trade

⁷ A. Bombay, K. Matheson, and H. Anisman. "The Intergenerational Effects of Indian Residential Schools: Implications for the Concept of Historical Trauma" *Transcultural Psychiatry* 51, No. 3 (2014): 320–338

⁸ E. Barkan, *The Guilt of Nations: Restitution and Negotiating Historical Injustices*. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2000), p.127.

⁹ W Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. (Dares Salaam: Bogle-L'Uvouverte Publications, 1972), p.163.

¹⁰ S. Amin, *Unequal Development: An Essay on the Social Formations of Peripheral Capitalism*. (Zaria: Monthly Review Press, 1976), p.17.

and colonialism are crimes against humanity, warranting reparative measures. The legal precedent for reparations is found in various international human rights instruments and historical cases. For example, Germany paid reparations to Israel for the Holocaust, and Japanese-Americans received compensation for their internment during World War II. These precedents show that reparations are both morally justifiable and legally actionable.

Ironically, critics argue that current generations should not be held responsible for their ancestors' crimes. Yet, many institutions and governments continue to benefit from the wealth accrued through these injustices. According to Olusoga, many British financial institutions and universities were built on the profits of slavery and colonialism. Without redress, these institutions remain complicit in the continuation of structural inequality¹¹.

Historical Context of Relaration Claims: Study Of Countries Around The World:

Empirical research provides valuable insight into the practical effects and feasibility, and social outcomes of reparative initiatives across different contexts. These studies help ground the moral and legal arguments in measurable evidence. Historical evidence from South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission and its associated reparations programs indicates that acknowledgement and compensation correlated with improved mental health outcomes for survivors¹²

A study by Gibson on South Africa showed that truth-telling and reparations promoted increased civic trust, especially when combined with formal apologies and institutional reform. Similar outcomes were noted in post-war Germany, where compensation to the Holocaust survivors and institutional accountability helped rebuild Jewish trust in the German state.¹³ In Canada, post-settlement evaluations of compensation to indigenous communities showed improved educational and psychological outcomes among youth.¹⁴

¹¹ D. Olusoga, *Black and British: A Forgotten History*. Lagos: Pan Macmillan, 2020, p.93

¹² B. Hamber, and R. A. Wilson. "Symbolic Closure through Memory, Reparation and Revenge in Post-Conflict Societies." *Journal of Human Rights* 1, no. 1 (2002): 35–53.

¹³ A. Bombay, Kimberly Matheson, and Hymie Anisman. "The Intergenerational Effects of Indian Residential Schools: Implications for the Concept of Historical Trauma." *Transcultural Psychiatry* 51, no. 3 (2014): 320–338.

¹⁴ D. Olusoga, *Black and British: A Forgotten History*. Lagos: Pan Macmillan, 2020, p.93.

Research into reparations by the Japanese government for WWII internment of Japanese Americans showed that well-structured, transparent programs can restore dignity and promote national healing.¹⁵ Evaluations of U.S. municipal reparation efforts, such as those in Evanston, Illinois demonstrates that reparations at the local level can be administered effectively with community involvement and clear eligibility criteria.¹⁶ This evidence supports the potential of reparations to foster economic justice, societal reconciliation, and improved well-being when designed thoughtfully and administered transparently, indicating that reparations are not only a matter of historical redress but also a pragmatic tool for correcting structural inequalities.

Furthermore, CARICOM (Caribbean Community and Common Market) launched its Reparations Commission in 2013 to seek reparatory justice for the victims of slavery and indigenous genocide from former colonial powers, particularly Britain, France, Spain, Portugal, and the Netherlands. The commission's *Ten Point Plan for Reparatory Justice* outlines a comprehensive agenda, including:

- (a) A Formal Apology: This will enhance the healing process for victims and the descendants of the enslaved; a sincere formal apology by the government of Europe.
- (b) Repatriation: A reparation program must be established and all available channels of international law and diplomacy used to resettle those persons who wish to return.
- (c) Indigenous People's Development Program: The government of Europe committed genocide upon the native Caribbean population, and those who survived were removed from the region. There exists an urgent need to resettle the indigenous people.
- (d) Cultural Institution: Community institutions such as museums and research centres should be developed in the Caribbean as a system through which their experience can be scientifically told.
- (e) Public Health Crisis: Europeans have a responsibility to participate in the alleviation of the

¹⁵ D. K. Nagata, *Legacy of Injustice: Exploring the Cross-Generational Impact of the Japanese American Internment*. Plenum Press, 1993.

¹⁶ B. Hamber, and R. A. Wilson. "Symbolic Closure through Memory, Reparation and Revenge in Post-Conflict Societies." *Journal of Human Rights* 1, no. 1 (2002): pp.35–53.

health disaster caused by the tragic human legacy of slavery and colonialization in the Caribbean.

- (f) Illiteracy Eradication: At the end of the European colonial period, some 70 Percent of blacks in British Colonies were believed to be functionally illiterate in the 1960s. Therefore, the European government has a duty to participate in the Elforsk to correct this anomaly.
- (g) African Knowledge Program: A program of action is required to build bridges of belonging, such as cultural tours, political interactions, and more. in order to neutralise the void created by slave voyages.
- (h) Psychological Rehabilitation: The transatlantic slave trade and slavery inflicted massive psychological trauma upon African descendant populations. This much is evident daily in the Caribbean. Only a reparatory justice approach to truth and educational exposure can begin the process of healing and repair designed to bring together the fragmented community.
- (i) Technology Transfer: This system was designed to extract maximum value from the region and to enable maximum wealth accumulation in Europe. Therefore, technology transfer and science sharing for development must be a part of the ten-point agenda.
- (j) Debt cancellation: Caribbean government inherited a massive crisis of community poverty; as a result, the government still engage in the business of cleaning up the colonial mess. Therefore, support for the payment of domestic debt and cancellation of international debt are necessary reparatory actions.

Led by historian Sir Hilary Beckles, CARICOM argues that the Caribbean's economic underdevelopment is a direct legacy of centuries of exploitation. The Commission has garnered support from academic institutions and global advocacy organisations. Also in Africa, between 1904 and 1908. German colonial forces carried out a genocide against the Herero and Nama peoples in present-day Namibia, where over 75,000 people were killed. In 2021, Germany formally acknowledged this atrocity as genocide and committed over €1.1 billion in aid over 30 years, framed as a gesture of reconciliation rather than direct reparations. While the agreement marked a diplomatic breakthrough, critics argue it falls short of justice. Namibian groups, particularly descendants of the affected communities, continue to call for direct compensation and

a more substantial acknowledgement of historical crimes.

Further looking at Japanese-American internment reparation, evidence indicates that during World War II, over 120,000 Japanese Americans were forcibly relocated and interned in camps across the United States. In 1988, the United States government passed the Civil Liberties Act, which formally apologised and granted \$20.000 in compensation to each surviving internee. This case is often cited as a model for successful reparative justice. It included public apologies, financial compensation, and education campaigns to prevent future violations. The success of this effort is frequently referenced in broader debates over slavery reparations in the United States.¹⁷ For the countries mentioned above, reparations took multiple forms, ranging from direct financial payments to symbolic gestures such as official apologies, which serve different functions and address various dimensions of historical injustice.

Furthermore, these measures codify reparative responsibilities and create enforceable pathways for redress. The diversity of reparation forms reflects the multiplicity of harms suffered. Reparations are not a one-size-fits-all solution. So, effective redress depends on combining multiple forms of material, symbolic, institutional, and cultural. Successful reparations must be holistic, addressing both the historical roots and ongoing manifestations of injustice.

Forms of Reparation in Africa: Beyond Financial Compensation

Reparations for African historical injustice can take various forms, beyond monetary payments. Satisfaction of symbolic reparations involves measures like formal state apologies, memorials, and days of remembrance, serve to acknowledge the past and honour victims. Material reparations may include debt relief, infrastructure investment, access to education, and health services targeted at historically marginalized communities.¹⁸ While monetary compensation is often viewed as the most direct form of reparation, it is not sufficient in addressing the complex and multidimensional legacies of slavery, colonialism, and systemic racism. Thus, a comprehensive and inclusive approach to reparations may further consider several interconnected forms, including restitution,

¹⁷ O. Taiwo, *How Colonialism Preempted Modernity in Africa*. (Indiana University Press, 2010), p. 129.

¹⁸ H. Nicola. *War and Rape: Law, Memory and Justice*. London: Routledge, 2009, p.216

rehabilitation, and guarantees of non-repetition. Here is a breakdown of the different forms of reparations listed above: Restitution involves restoring the victim to their pre-violation condition. In other words, it means restoring stolen property or artefacts to the owners, or restoring a people's legal rights. Rehabilitation focuses on providing the necessary support and services to help victims recover from the physical, psychological and social consequences of the violation. This may be in the form of legal and human right protections, community rehabilitation, education, vocational training, and spiritual healing, among others.¹⁹

Guarantee of non-repetition represents measures aimed at preventing future violations by addressing the root causes of the harm. This can be achieved through law or policy reforms, the strengthening of democratic institutions, and the promotion of transparency, accountability and a culture of human dignity. Against this background, reparations for Africa must be multidimensional, addressing not only the economic but also the cultural, educational, legal and psychological damages wrought by historical injustice.²⁰ True reparation, therefore, involves restoring what was lost, affirming dignity, and creating systems that prevent the repetition of such atrocities. By embracing a holistic view of reparations, the global community can move from mere rhetoric to meaningful justice.

The challenges for African Reparations

The demand for reparations for Africa has been a long-standing debate, driven by historical injustices such as slavery, colonial exploitation, and economic marginalisation. While proponents argue that financial compensation is necessary to redress past wrongs. Several significant challenges hinder the implementation of reparations for African nations.²¹ One major challenge is determining fair compensation. Quantifying the economic losses suffered over centuries and identifying responsible parties poses difficulties.²² Different colonial powers and institutions

¹⁹ D. Roger. *Prisoners without Trial: Japanese Americans in World War II*. Boston: Hill and Wang, 1993, 138

²⁰ S. Manali. "Decolonization and the Politics of Reparations in the Global South." *Third World Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (2019): 237–254.

²¹ E. Posner and A. Vermeule. "Reparations for Slavery and Other Historical Injustices." *Columbia Law Review* 103, no. 3 (2003): 689–748.

²² D. G. Pablo, ed. *The Handbook of Reparations*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 48.

contributed to Africa's exploitation, making accountability complex. Additionally, assessing the appropriate form of reparations, whether financial, infrastructural, or diplomatic, remains contested.

Another challenge is the risk of dependency and misallocation of funds. Some critics argue that reparations could reinforce reliance on external support rather than fostering self-sustained economic development. Concerns about corruption and poor governance also raise questions about whether funds would reach the communities most affected. Legal and diplomatic hurdles further complicate reparations. Many former colonial powers resist financial compensation, often citing international laws or political opposition. Negotiating reparations on a global scale requires extensive diplomatic efforts and consensus among African nations. While reparations can address historical grievances, overcoming these challenges requires strategic planning, effective governance, and economic policies that ensure Africa's sustainable growth and independence.

Strategies to Strengthen the Clamour for Reparations

Overcoming the barriers to effective reparations requires a multifaceted strategy involving legal innovation, political advocacy, and international cooperation, and grassroots mobilization. Other strategies to offer pathways to strengthen and sustain reparation efforts globally include establishing legal precedents, political lobbying and legislative actions, an economic framework for reparations, public education and historical truth-telling, international solidarity and cooperation, inclusion of grassroots and community-led initiatives, framing reparation as restorative justice, leveraging digital advocacy and technology, and encouraging constitutional accountability, among others.

Evidence abounds that strengthening reparations efforts involves more than financial compensation. It demands a systemic transformation in how societies remember, address, and redress historical injustice²³. By combining legal action, public engagement, institutional accountability, and international collaboration, reparation can move from a contentious debate to a concrete reality. Successful reparations not only recognise past harm, but they also lay the foundation for a more just, equitable, and reconciled future.

²³ J. Zimmerer, *The First Genocide of the Twentieth Century: The Herero and Nama Genocide*. (Boston: Little, Brown & Co, 2011), p.49.

Conclusion

While the global movement for African reparations has gained significant moral, political, and intellectual traction, along with dissenting perspectives, raise critical questions about its practicality, focus, and long-term impact. Critics argue that the emphasis on historical compensation may divert attention from urgent contemporary challenges such as corruption, poor governance, and internal mismanagement that continue to hinder African development. Others question the logistical feasibility of reparations, how compensation should be quantified, to whom it should be paid, and how to ensure fair distribution.

Furthermore, there is concern that reparation rhetoric may foster a dependency mindset, in which African progress is overly tied to restitution from former colonial powers rather than to internal reform and innovation. From this view, while acknowledging the devastating legacy of slavery and colonialism is essential, the path forward for Africa lies in self-determined development strategies, regional cooperation, and structural transformation. In essence, the balancing game does not necessarily reject the historical basis for reparations but cautions against an overreliance on external redress as the cornerstone of Africa's future. Instead, it advocates for a balanced approach that challenges, combines historical justice with contemporary challenges, accountability, and visionary leadership within the continent.

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