

Neocolonial Realities of Western Aid in Africa during 21st Century

ABSTRACT

This article explores the neocolonial dynamics of Western aid to Africa in the 21st century, analyzing its historical origins, contemporary mechanisms, and socio-economic impacts. Despite the formal end of colonial rule, African nations remain entrenched in dependency systems that mirror colonial exploitation. Structural adjustment programs compelled by international financial institutions have exacerbated economic subjugation, undermined sovereignty, and facilitated resource extraction to benefit Western corporations. Western aid often imposes cultural norms and values, weakening indigenous knowledge systems and traditions. Through detailed analyses and case studies of nations such as Congo, Angola, Mozambique, Sudan, and Nigeria, the study identifies recurring patterns of elite capture and systemic corruption that divert aid benefits away from the broader population. In Congo, for instance, resource exploitation has driven persistent conflict and poverty. Angola and Mozambique have faced similar dynamics, with foreign interference fueling civil unrest and resource-driven inequalities. In Sudan, neocolonial pressures have exacerbated internal conflicts and hindered political stability. Nigeria, despite its vast oil wealth, illustrates the paradox of resource abundance coexisting with widespread poverty and infrastructure decay, highlighting the structural deficiencies imposed by neocolonial frameworks. Findings reveal that Western aid mechanisms perpetuate underdevelopment, stifling sustainable growth and local agency while maintaining a dependency cycle. The article decolonized approach to aid, centered on equitable partnerships, African-led development strategies, and transformative practices that prioritize local needs and self-reliance. By addressing these systemic challenges, Africa progress toward sovereignty, inclusivity, and sustainable development beyond the shadow of neocolonialism.

Keywords: Neocolonialism, Economic exploitation, Political instability, Economic dependency, Underdevelopment, Sovereignty, Sustainable development

1. INTRODUCTION

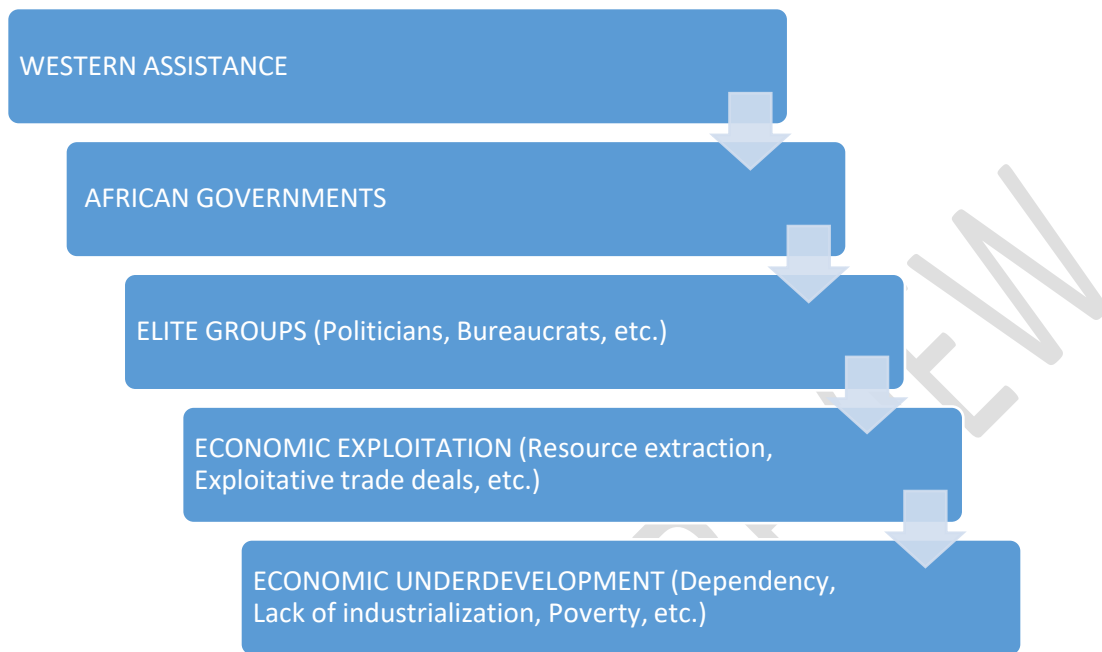
Neocolonialism is generally viewed or can be said to be an advancement of capitalism that makes it possible for capitalist powers both businesses and nations to rule over subject countries indirectly, through the activities of global capitalism, as opposed to through direct domination [1]. Neocolonialism, a term coined by Kwame Nkrumah, refers to the subtle continuation of colonial power dynamics even after formal independence [2]. In the complex landscape of international aid and development, the assistance

provided by Western countries to African nations has been a subject of scrutiny and debate. While ostensibly aimed at fostering economic growth, poverty alleviation, and sustainable development, these aid programs often carry historical echoes of colonialism. Africa's colonial past, marked by European powers carving up the continent, exploiting its resources, and imposing their cultural, economic, and political systems, still reverberates today [3]. The legacy of colonization left African countries with fractured identities, economic dependencies, and unequal power relations. Neocolonial tendencies emerge when aid is tied to economic conditions that benefit Western corporations or when it reinforces African countries' reliance on Western markets. Structural adjustment programs, imposed by international financial institutions, have often led to austerity measures, privatization, and reduced state sovereignty. Western aid often comes with cultural strings attached, promoting Western values, norms, and ideologies. Educational programs, media, and development projects subtly shape African societies, sometimes undermining local traditions and knowledge. The West's interest in Africa's natural resources remains strong. Aid can serve as a cover for resource extraction, perpetuating a cycle of exploitation [4]. Hence, this paper seeks to decipher Western aid to Africa through a neocolonial lens, examining the socioeconomic realities and their effects.

2. THE NOTION OF NEO-COLONIALISM

Neo-colonialism refers to the practice by which wealthy or powerful nations indirectly maintain control over less developed or formerly colonized regions [2]. Unlike traditional colonialism, where a nation directly establishes control over a territory and its people, neo-colonialism operates through economic, political, cultural, and technological means. This concept gained prominence in the mid-20th century as many countries gained independence from colonial powers, only to find themselves subject to various forms of domination by more powerful nations or multinational corporations [2]. This is strengthened by continuing to pull at the tail of the former colonizer to ascertain the former colony's present and future involvement in the global economy and politics. One argument put out was that neo-colonialism is visible during certain periods of a country's development when the previous colonial rulers still have an impact on or define the "culture area" and act as the only authoritative source of positive cultural references for the emerging nation [5].

Fig. 1. Chart of Western assistance to Africa



Source: Authors' Compilation

Fig 1 above illustrates how Western assistance, while intended to support development, can sometimes reinforce neocolonial structures and contribute to economic exploitation and underdevelopment in African countries.

- **Western Assistance:** This represents financial aid, loans, grants, or development projects provided by Western countries or international organizations to African nations.
- **African Governments:** These are the recipient countries' governments that receive the assistance. However, due to corruption, mismanagement, or other factors, the aid may not always reach its intended beneficiaries effectively.
- **Elite Groups:** Within African countries, there are often elite groups comprising politicians, bureaucrats, and business interests that benefit disproportionately from the aid through corruption, nepotism, or favorable business deals.
- **Economic Exploitation:** This stage represents how Western assistance may inadvertently contribute to neocolonial exploitation, such as through resource extraction contracts, unequal trade agreements, or other forms of economic exploitation by both Western and local elites.
- **Economic Underdevelopment:** As a result of the exploitation and mismanagement, the overall economy of the African country may suffer. This can lead to a cycle of dependency, lack of industrialization, persistent poverty, and underdevelopment, perpetuating the need for continued Western assistance.

Onuegbu [1] argued that the relationship between a former colonizer and her freed colonies is thus perpetuated by neo-colonialism, which offers a superstructure with enticing economic relations and the potential to further exploit and extract the latter's economic resources, primarily through the provision of capital, the accumulation of profit, and the expansion of her home economy from the exploitative gains under the pretense of operating through an internationally competitive market. Neo-colonialism was imposed on Africa, but it was not possible without already-existing transferred structures, internal collaborators, and partners who are accountable for enjoying the advantages and privileges of positions of power and trust in return for an enduring partnership that does not ensure the ability to grow and advance outside of a predetermined and negotiated process. Following his assessment of the colonial economy and the rise of neocolonialism in Africa as a result of the continent's economic underdevelopment and subordination, Walter Rodney made the following claim:

"The integration of African economies into the developed capitalist economies' structural framework is done in a way that is detrimental to Africa and perpetuates its reliance on the major capitalist nations." [6]

One of the traits of underdevelopment is, in fact, structural dependence; undeveloped nations are dependent on the capitalist economies of their cities; it is also true that metropolises are reliant on the wealth of the exploited regions of the world [1]. This is both a possible cause of imperialist/capitalist system weakness and a source of their strength. Due to their greater technological sophistication, the capitalist nations were part of the imperialist system that chose the course of change [7]. Because of this, a country that was once colonized cannot progress unless it successfully breaks free from the cycle of exploitation and dependence.

3. AFRICAN NEO-COLONIALISM

Aamir [8] observes that during the 'New Imperialism' era (1833–1914), commonly referred to as the 'Scramble for Africa,' the majority of the African continent was invaded, colonized, and divided among seven Western European nations. While only 10% of Africa was under European control in 1870, this figure surged to approximately 90% by 1914, with Ethiopia and Liberia remaining the sole countries retaining full sovereignty. Regulating European colonization and trade in Africa, the Berlin Conference of 1884 is considered a symbol of the "scramble". The Scramble was sparked by the intense political rivalry that existed between the European empires in the latter part of the 19th century [9]. Furthermore, he reported that direct authority replaced "informal imperialism" in the later 19th century, which consisted of military might and economic domination.

Walter Rodney was a well-known historian, political activist, and scholar from Guyana who is most remembered for his important studies on the consequences and exploitation of colonialism and imperialism in Africa. By explaining how African states were exploited even after winning independence, he set the stage for the birth of neocolonialism as a critical philosophy. A thorough examination of the economic and social effects of colonialism on Africa may be found in Rodney's landmark work, "How

Europe Underdeveloped Africa" (1972). The book emphasizes how the colonial powers shaped African economies to their own advantage, with long-lasting negative effects. He maintained that the colonial past of African nations continued to have a significant impact on their post-independence political and economic structures, giving rise to a new type of exploitation and dependency known as neocolonialism. Walter Rodney laid the groundwork for the emergence of neocolonialism as a new ideology for the ongoing exploitation of African states after independence by writing in plain terms about the exploration and effects of imperialism and colonization of Africa [10].

The key to understanding "the economic backwardness of a given African nation and the symptoms of underdevelopment and the secondary factors that make for poverty lies in identifying the relationship which is one of exploitation between Africa and some developed countries. The actual ownership of the means of production in one country by the residents of another is more extensive than just trade [11]. The wealth of Africa will continue to flow abroad and into the hands of those entities as long as foreigners possess land, mines, factories, banks, insurance firms, means of transportation, news articles, power plants, and other assets. An implied notion of neo-colonialism is drawn from the dependency theory advanced in the study of the underdevelopment of Africa by the likes of Walter Rodney. The postulates made by Walter Rodney above was further emphasized by Ake and Amechi Okolo, through the "changing of guards," which notes that former colonizers institutionalized structurally unequal economic relationships between themselves and their former colonies to methodically coordinate the processes of extracting raw materials and resources from those territories for their financial gain [10, 4]. In so far as it sustains the ability to appropriate the idea of balance of power through the dominance and enslavement of weaker states in the international economic order, this is analogous to the interdependence of state systems. This is referred to as a stage in which the exploitation systems and structures have advanced to the point where they no longer require the physical presence of the colonizers or their oversight.

Neo-colonialism is the term used to describe the capitalist rule of Africa throughout the post-colonial historical period, which is typically understood to be the initial phases of the independent African governments' political development following decolonization. The more developed stages of imperialism are characterized by the use of unfair and powerful economic systems and processes to impose the former conquerors as dependent governments over their freed colonies [11]. While the physical transfer of power to modern African states marked the independence of most African nations, many foreign powers continued to play a significant role in interfering with the continent's political, economic, and social life, especially in the countries that France and Belgium had colonized [12]. This is the reason that the ills of colonialism and the uneven organization and architecture of the African state which left it permanently under the authority and involvement of the Europeans have transformed Africa into a bloody hotbed of conflicts, civil wars, genocides, and political instability [13]. Acemoglu et al. [14] stated that neocolonialism's facts can be easily highlighted, such as the political crisis in Congo that is linked to the exploration of economic resources and political imbalance, as well as France's persistent influence and

interference in internal coordination and the resolution of political differences and leadership disputes in Mozambique, Angola, and Sudan all go through the same thing. The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has a long history of exploitation by external powers. This was stated by Adam Hochschild, who extensively documented the atrocities committed during Belgian colonial rule in his book "King Leopold's Ghost. During the colonial era, when it was under brutal Belgian rule, its vast mineral wealth (including diamonds, gold, and coltan) was extracted for the benefit of European countries [15]. After gaining independence, the DRC continued to face neocolonial challenges. Foreign corporations and governments have exploited their resources, leading to economic dependency and political instability [5]. France's influence in the DRC has been significant. French companies have been involved in mining and other sectors, often prioritizing their interests over the well-being of the Congolese people. Neocolonial dynamics persist, with multinational corporations profiting from the country's natural resources while many Congolese citizens remain impoverished.

3.1 In the case study of Sudan

According to the human rights watch, Sudan particularly during the Darfur conflict, faced neocolonial pressures. The exploitation of its oil resources by foreign companies exacerbated internal conflicts [16]. Powerful nations and corporations influenced Sudanese politics, often supporting leaders who served their interests. This interference hindered genuine democratic processes and perpetuated instability.

3.2 In the case study of Angola

Angola rich in oil and diamonds, experienced neocolonial exploitation. According to Amnesty International, it was During its civil war, external actors fueled conflict by backing different factions. French companies, among others, have been involved in Angola's resource extraction. The resulting wealth gap and political tensions mirror neocolonial patterns [17].

3.3 In the case study of Mozambique

According to the IMF Mozambique, with its natural gas reserves and other resources, has faced similar challenges. Foreign companies have profited from its wealth, while the majority of Mozambicans struggle with poverty. France's influence, along with that of other Western nations, has shaped Mozambique's political landscape. Economic dependency and unequal power dynamics persist. points are mentioned below: The statement that "foreign faces have withdrawn after appropriate native or local faces (the interlocutor's valuables – negotiators worth talking to) have been groomed and installed to perpetuate the continued influence of the former colonizers" has been made to examine the effects of neo-colonialism in Africa [18]. The claim was made that despite the former colonizers' removal of their international stigma and corresponding political responsibility through their grant of independence and tactical withdrawal to their "home bases in the West, from where it still operates coquettishly and covertly, exploiting nations, maneuvering men and governments but this time by remote control," the level of economic exploitation of Africa remained unchanged after independence. Wolff [19] stated that considering the circumstances

under which local entrepreneurship was developed and made to compete and create capital, many of them became what is usually described as ‘compradors’, that is, intermediaries between foreign interest and the indigenous polity and economy, which are transformed or transited to the former colony as a source of both capitals and contracts. Many of such indigenous Entrepreneurs were known to have established companies with foreign interest and partnership at various stages of their contract awards and execution as well as the transfer of funds to overseas countries resulting in capital flight. This takes a discerning mind back to the theoretical appraisal of the study of Imperialism as a stage of Western capitalism which juxtaposes with the concept of Neo-colonialism at an advanced stage by borrowing definitions of the learning curves in Marxian theory, which The former USSR leader Vladimir Lenin made a substantial theoretical contribution advanced thus:

‘...Capitalism is at the stage of development ... in which a certain group of countries have their economies conditioned by the development and expansion of another economy, to which the former is subject.

This is a detailed tabular data set covering the last 50 years on the influence of neocolonialism on specific African countries such as Congo, Angola, Mozambique, and Sudan. It includes a thorough analysis of numerous socioeconomic, political, and cultural variables (Table 1). However, here is a condensed version of some crucial points.

Table 1. Neocolonialism Effects in Congo (DRC), Angola, Mozambique, Sudan

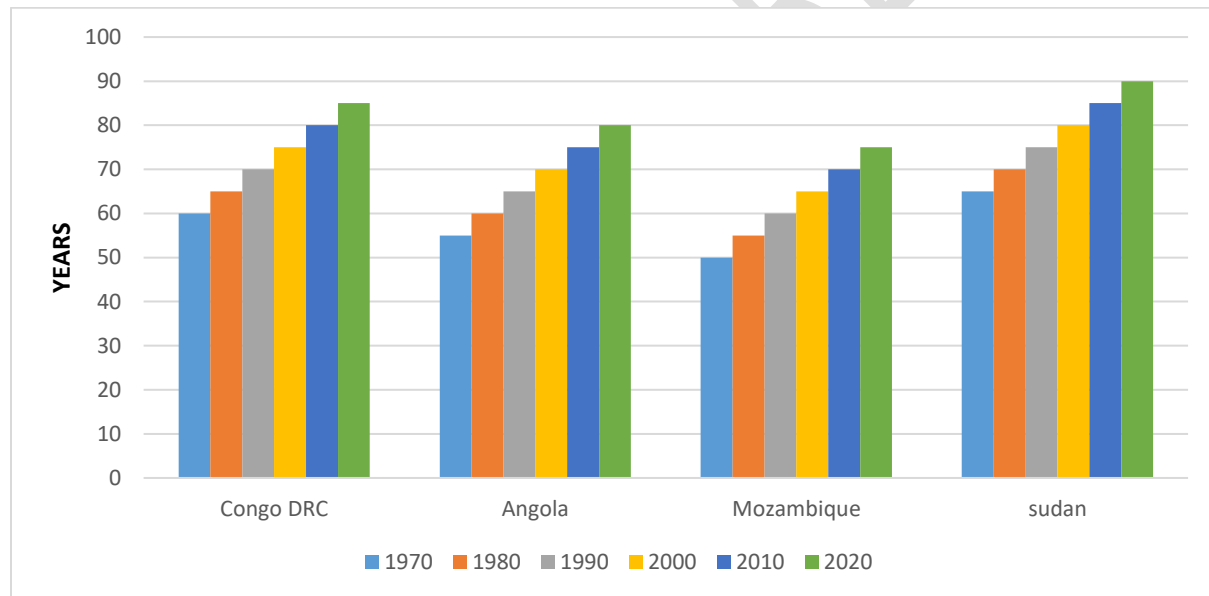
Year	Congo (DRC)	Angola	Mozambique	Sudan
1970	Economic exploitation; political instability	Portuguese colonial rule; exploitation of resources	Portuguese colonial rule; economic exploitation	British colonial rule; economic exploitation
1980	Continued political instability; resource exploitation by external powers	Independence from Portugal; Civil War	Independence from Portugal; Civil War	Civil War; political instability
1990	Dictatorship; civil war	Civil war aftermath; foreign interference	Post-civil war reconstruction; foreign investment	Civil war; dictatorship; famine
2000	Conflict and instability; resource plundering	End of civil war; oil boom	Economic growth; foreign investment	Continuing civil war; Darfur conflict
2010	Political instability; continued resource exploitation	Economic growth; corruption	Economic development; foreign investment	Political instability; South Sudan's separation

2020	Ongoing conflict; humanitarian crises	Economic challenges; political corruption	Economic progress; foreign investment	Political transition; economic challenges
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Source: Authors' Compilation

Over the last 50 years, neocolonialism has had an impact on these countries. Cultural influence, technical dependency, and regional dynamics would all play important roles, but they are not expressly stated in the table. Furthermore, each country's history and experiences with neocolonialism may differ, necessitating a more thorough evaluation of specific events, policies, and socioeconomic indicators throughout time. This is a bar chart that graphically depicts the decline brought about by neo-colonialism in the Congo (DRC), Angola, Mozambique, and Sudan during the past 50 years is dependent upon data on pertinent socio-economic variables for each of these nations. Let's depict the decline on a scale of 0 to 100, where 100 represents the highest level of decline.

Fig. 2. A Bar Chart Showing the Decline of Congo (Drc), Angola, Mozambique, and Sudan Over the Past 50 Years



Source: Authors' Compilation

This bar chart fig. 2 visualizes the decline of Congo (DRC), Angola, Mozambique, and Sudan over the past 50 years due to the effects of neo-colonialism. Each country's decline is represented by a bar for each decade, with the height of the bar corresponding to the level of decline. The scale ranges from 0 to 100, with higher values indicating greater decline.

4. CLASS STRUCTURES AND NEO-COLONIALISM IN NIGERIA

The interplay between class structures and neo-colonialism in Nigeria reveals a deeply entrenched dynamic that perpetuates underdevelopment, shaped by historical and socio-economic processes. Neo-colonialism, as a transitional phase in ex-colonial states, has proven in Nigeria to be a persistent mechanism that maintains dependency and systemic exploitation. Despite formal independence, Nigeria's socio-economic formation remains tethered to the legacy of colonial domination, reflecting the preparatory conditions laid during the decolonization period [20]. Neo-colonialism extends beyond the mere continuation of colonial patterns; it reflects a dependency on international financial and capitalist structures. This dependency often transcends a direct colonial past, as seen in nations like Liberia and Ethiopia, which were not colonized in the classical sense but have experienced neo-colonial dynamics due to fragile economic structures [21]. In Nigeria, this dependency has manifested in a paradoxical coexistence of abundant resources and pervasive underdevelopment, with vast oil revenues failing to alleviate poverty, unemployment, and infrastructural decay [22].

Colonialism in Nigeria was a multifaceted project aimed at restructuring indigenous societies to serve colonial economic and political interests. The reorientation of social institutions, from family structures to economic systems, reflected this goal. The introduction of formal education, new political frameworks, and a market economy fundamentally altered traditional Nigerian society [23]. For instance, colonialism replaced indigenous economies, which were communal and subsistence-oriented, with capitalist systems tied to global markets [24]. This transformation laid the groundwork for persistent socio-economic inequalities and dependency. Pre-colonial Nigerian societies had their own class structures, characterized by kinship-based systems, traditional hierarchies, and social roles. Colonial rule disrupted these arrangements, replacing them with a stratified society shaped by access to resources and power under colonial frameworks. In the post-colonial period, this stratification persisted, as elites co-opted during colonial rule maintained their positions through alliances with foreign capital [25]. This phenomenon entrenched a culture of underdevelopment and reinforced social inequities. The notion of class as tied to property and power, as articulated by thinkers like Marx and Wolff, underscores the dynamics of Nigeria's socio-economic hierarchy.

The bourgeoisie, consisting of foreign capitalists and local elites, preserves its dominance through control over the means of production and ideologies that justify systemic inequities [26]. In Nigeria, this manifests in the continued exploitation of resources and the marginalization of the working class, a dynamic reminiscent of colonial economic structures. Nigeria's crisis of development is rooted in the dual legacies of colonialism and neo-colonialism. Despite its rich resource base, the country suffers from high poverty rates, unemployment, and inadequate social services, exacerbated by systemic corruption and mismanagement [27]. Scholars attribute these issues to the historical erosion of indigenous institutions and the imposition of exploitative systems [28]. This situation has prompted debates on whether Nigeria's

developmental stagnation is an outcome of colonial exploitation, neo-colonial dependency, or internal governance failures.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Neocolonialism continues to shape the socio-economic and political landscapes of African nations, with Western aid often serving as a tool for reinforcing dependency and exploitation. In the case of Nigeria, a country rich in resources yet grappling with poverty, unemployment, and infrastructural decay, underscores the profound impact of neocolonial practices. Despite its oil wealth, Nigeria's reliance on external financial and trade structures mirrors the struggles of other African nations, including Congo, Angola, Mozambique, and Sudan. In Nigeria, neo-colonial mechanisms have entrenched class divisions, aligning local elites with foreign capital to maintain exploitative frameworks established during colonial rule. This has perpetuated economic vulnerabilities, political instability, and social inequities, reflecting a broader continental struggle. Addressing these challenges requires dismantling the exploitative systems underpinning aid and trade relations. Empowering African voices, fostering genuine partnerships, and promoting self-reliance are essential to overcoming these barriers. For Nigeria and the broader continent, a transformative shift toward decolonized, inclusive, and sustainable development is not just desirable but imperative to break the cycles of exploitation and dependency that hinder progress.

DISCLAIMER (ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE)

Author(s) hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc.) and text-to-image generators have been used during the writing or editing of this manuscript.

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