AUTOCHTHONY, CULTURAL WARS AND POLITICAL CONFLICTS IN AFRICA

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Abstract

In this paper, the connection between autochthony, cultural wars and political conflicts in Africa is analyzed. Africa has a history of vulnerability to inter-ethnic, inter-cultural, inter-religious and political conflicts. As a result, it has been implied by different scholars that crisis and instability are founded in Africa. The most worrisome aspect of these conflagrations is that no remedy put forward in this regard seems to have worked, and the detrimental effects have slowed down Africa's growth and development. Due to the fact that all institutions of the colonial states were created as tools of exploitation throughout the colonial period, colonialism has been blamed for the underdevelopment of the continent consequent upon varied forms of conflicts. Even after colonial period, the mechanisms of exploitation have persisted in Africa, resulting to continued bad governance, corruption, poverty and instability across the continent. This paper presents the implications of cultural wars and conflicts, their causes, effects and remedies. It analytically and historically examines the impacts of autochthony and conflicts on the political culture of Africa, with the conclusion that autochthony and ethnicity promote conflicts and crises in Africa.

Keywords: autochthony, cultural wars, political conflicts, colonialism, development.

Introduction

African development has been negatively affected by quite a lot of factors, including autochthony or the politics of belonging, cultural wars, ethno-religious and political crises, etc. The issue of exclusion and new forms of identity problems that results to the "repackaging," "retribalization," "reconstruction," and "redefinition" by some Africans is so ubiquitous and unsettling that it warranted its own special issue of conflict between ethnic groups (Alabi 2010, p.549). There is high level of autonomy and claims to cultural superiority by many people in Africa. Some cultures are seen as better and superior over and above the others.

Cultural hates, biases and prejudices from people of other cultures are so imminent and prominent. Some people are afraid and suspicious of other people's cultures. There is no doubt that the coming into contact of one culture with other cultures, if not well-handled, can lead to cultural war or conflict. For instance, the contact of western cultures and values with the traditional African cultures and values during colonialism resulted to cultural conflict that eroded African values and norms leaving the continent with new cultural values and behaviour that are contrary to the African personality and identity. No one should denigrate or destroy other people's cultures and values because every culture, all this being equal, has its own locus of values. Colonialism is thus, responsible for cultural onslaught in Africa; it is responsible for the exploitation, degradation and annihilation of Africans and their values for selfish gains. The attack on Africa's identity and culture by the West has unprecedented consequences, especially now that the colonial masters have left the continent in principle, many African societies and states still suffer from another form of colonialism, which many scholars refer to as *internal colonialism* carried out by Africans against fellow Africans. This situation is seen among major ethnic groups against the smaller ones, between the rich and the poor, and among religions. There is no cordial inter-faith, inter-ethnic, inter-cultural and inter-human relationships in Africa as a result of autochthony and cultural wars on the continent. In his analysis of the predicament of Nigerians as a result of colonialism Elechi writes that,

> Western imperial ideologies cast a complex web of predicaments in various segments of Nigeria, political, economic, psycho-mental, socio-cultural and religious relations. It changed the socio-cultural, political, economic, and religious systems of the people and matriculated them into an entirely new system of life and being with attendant confusions here and there. The moral fabric of the country was damaged and the people were left with superficial moral values. The trado-religious and cultural lives of the people were destroyed with divisive and polarized doctrines and antics with the people made to accept an entirely new religion clothed in Western garb and style. This forcefully left the people with no other option than to be westernized in order to make sense of the new religious and cultural life: a disjointedly fabricated cultural life devoid of a systematic and gradual mode of acculturation foisted on the people. Economically, Nigeria was left with a consumerist-capitalist mentality devoid of productive sense and power base. Politically, there was a forced system that lacked the adaptation of peculiar circumstances and

realities of the Nigerian people and society. This has led to a divided system of government and governance predicated on ethnocentrism and religious sentiments (2021, p.92).

What is true of Nigeria is equally true of most Africa states in relation to the above quotation. Political, ethnic and religious conflicts have drawn a lot of negative attention to Africa for a very long time. Since the early 1990s, when many African states opened the hitherto closed economic and political sphere, the topic of ethnic pluralism, which is a significant manifestation of socio-political conflicts, has continued to dominate academic and policy debates. The liberalization of economies brought about by the opening of markets resulted in the emergence of new non-state forces in the previously dominated economic space by the state (Gilpin 2016, p.12). In addition to this development, is a political situation that is anchored on multiparty arrangements and interests (Sharma 1993, p.347). The numerous ethnic groups that make up Africa are very significant in this development. Political parties are established in various nations along ethnic and religious lines or cleavages. Ethnic interests are responsible for the unrest and violence in parts of the continent. According to Green, the establishment of major colonial states, and low rates of urbanization are some of the factors contributing to ethnic diversity and crisis (2011, p.3). In the light of this, numerous social scientists have linked ethnic and cultural pluralism to Africa's poor economic growth, political unrest, and high levels of social inequality (Barr & Oduro 2005, p.355). The implications of ethnic/cultural diversities and political unrests in Africa are covered in this paper.

Autochthony, Cultural Wars and Political Conflicts in Africa
The meaning of *autochthony* is derived from two terms: "self" and "soil" in the sense that we can literally refer to autochthony to mean "son of the soil" in the Nigerian parlance. It is an assertion of "original inhabitants", which is directly related to the identity makers' concepts like ethnicity, tribalism, place of birth or belonging. It borders on the exclusivist tendency inherent in the quest for belongingness, indigenization and citizenship. According to Elechi, there are different forms of expressions and actions that show deep-rooted and extreme tribalism; they include such expressions like "son of the soil", non-indigenous people" and "state of origin". These contradict the belief in oneness and as such detrimental to human dignity and nation-building. These actions hinder good governance and breed corruption, disunity and instability (2021, p. 87). They are potent issues that caused widespread violence and political crisis in many climes in Africa. It is called politics of origin, and one of the bases for underdevelopment

in Africa. Autochthony, which has to do with the polarization and segregation of strangers by the indigenes, undermines political liberalization and the sense of globalization of human mankind, and celebratorily elevates the return of human race to the locally enclosed sense of exclusionary and marginalizing ideologies that undermines sense of enlightenment and global flow. The conflict that arise from this mentality is usually between the "sons of the soil" (autochthons) and those who do not belong to the soil (allochthons). Xenophobia in South Africa and ethnicity/ tribalism in Nigeria are clear instances.

The term *cultural war* is translated in German as *Kulturkampf* meaning *cultural struggle*. A cultural war is when two or more social groups engage in conflict over supremacy of certain values, beliefs, or practices. It frequently refers to subjects where there is societal polarization and widespread disagreement. Its modern usage alludes to a societal phenomenon in which several social groups with various beliefs and values try to influence public policy in opposition to one another (Ruiz, et al, 2022, p.35). The "polarizing" social issues in politics and public affairs are now described as "cultural war." A cultural war is an encounter between two divergent sets of cultural ideals. This can be used to contrast the west with the east, rural areas with cities, or traditional values with modern secularism. Cultural war or inter-ethnic conflicts have existed since the dawn of humanity, although it is recently that scholars and intellectuals in general seems to have become more conscious about it, following the end of the cold war (Isajiw, 2000 p.18). Cultural identity conflicts concern all regions of the world, including the African continent and, by extension the Western region. Such conflicts are also the most susceptible to trigger massive loss of human lives, properties and sources of livelihood. The term "cultural war" refers to the idea that there is a battle between traditionalist/conservative values and progressive or liberal values (Kalu, 2020, p.13). It is fight against ideas and cultures that are deemed offensive, subversive, and blasphemous.

The combined ideas of autochthony and cultural wars in our context does not in any way take for granted the role of inter-cultural penetration or relations made possible by the benefit of cultural globalization that has to do with the coming together of different cultures as the remedy for global peace, unity and the "levelling of cultural differences" (Modison, 1998, p.63). Cultures are expected to meet and relate for peace and harmony rather than for conflicts and wars.

In a multi-ethnic society like Africa, cultural integration has become a challenging process. Cultural hegemony or chauvinism has eaten deep into the hearts of

African leaders such that they cannot see beyond their interests and tribes. In essence, it is difficult for any society like Africa with its multi-lingual, multi-cultural and multi-ethnic identities to achieve cultural integration. Practically speaking, members of each ethnic group in Africa work to further their groups' interests, which frequently lead to conflict due to each group's ambition to exert hegemony over others (Egbule 2018, p. 85). There have been several ethnic and cultural conflicts in Nigeria, Rwanda, and South Africa, which are rarely reported by the media (Isajiw, p.107). One of the ongoing problems in Nigeria, for instance, is the struggle for dominance and control of power among the major ethnic groups. Among the major ethnic groups in Nigeria that have been prominently known for the quest for power and dominance are Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo. Besides ethnic and cultural crises, religious conflict is also prominent in Africa. Many crises in African tend to include a religious component (Juergensmeyer, 2003, p.16). The majority of crises encountered in Africa: Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria, Al Shabab in Somalia, and the Islamic State West African Province (ISWAP) in West Africa are motivated by religion. Also, the avoidable and disastrous civil war in Nigeria that claimed millions of lives in 1966, the current Boko Haram insurgency in the North East, the Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra etc. are all facilitated by ethnic chauvinism (Egbule, p.85). Ideally, cultural, ethnic and religious diversities are supposed to be tools for societal development and national integration but they have constituted setbacks in Africa with mutual intolerance, conflicts and wars, which are hindrance to national progress and development.

Cultural Pluralism, Political Conflicts and Underdevelopment in Africa
Culture is a concept that is continuously evolving. It has to do with the totality of a people's way of life, their shared ways of thinking, perceiving and evaluation (Broom and Seignich, 1977, Pp.55-57). Culture makes a people unique and distinct from others with certain values, norms, beliefs and characteristics that are commonly shared by them within their society. These characteristics are transmitted from people to people and from generation to another. Culture is one of the human social compositions that gives visibility to identity, which projects and announces one's place of birth or origin even though not intended for any negative purpose. Africa is blessed with cultural pluralism, which rather than being a blessing, has constituted serious obstacles to peace, harmonious co-existence and the development of the continent. It has resulted to different shades of conflicts: political, ethnic/tribal and religious conflicts.

One of the main effects of African invasion by the colonial masters was the destruction of African cultures and values, as well as the continuous underdeveloped and impoverishment of the continent and its people. Africa has continued to have the most undeveloped nations in the world despite her immense material and human wealth. She seems not to have been able to adequately develop her own abiding identity devoid of western influences. Africans seem accustomed to living a dependent life, and an uncritical emulation and adoption of western culture and values. A continent that depends on another to survive can only advance at the pace determined by its master. Political conflicts and ethnic/cultural rivalry have a lot of implications to the development of a people and their continent. It primarily fosters prejudice and discrimination, which impede the socioeconomic growth and development of the continent, especially in the light of national, continental and global economic progress and sustenance (Noyoo, 2000, p.56). Ethnic and cultural rivalries are responsible for many difficulties that African nations are currently experiencing, including senseless killings, insecurity, civil wars, conflicts, religious crises and poverty.

Colonial rule in Africa was based on intricate networks of cooperation with local elites who were directly allied with the colonial state via patron-client relationships with the European field agents of the state. The foundation of colonial power was the authority of "big men" who oversaw complex networks of clientage involving unequal but reciprocal relationships with "little boys" as well as control over women, children, and people in various degrees of dependence. Headmen, chiefs, and even kings were organized into hierarchies of "decentralized despotism" by colonial powers, which also used different cadres of African collaborators to carry out various forms of indirect rule. These collaborators may have been appointed by the regime directly or held indigenous positions that were part of the state apparatus (Mamdani, 1996, p.16). While the colonial masters were the main generators of money and power, colonialism served as an instrument of arbitrary authority and force. Dealing with the continent offered opportunity and risk to both the colonizers and Africans respectively. The colonizers had the opportunity to have access to the variety of resources in the Africa; while Africans had the risk of suffering punishments and paying coercive taxes.

The point is that the growth of modern African states was profoundly, persistently, and widely impacted by European colonialism. Ethnic crisis is one of the colonial era's most lasting effects. The roots of ethnic conflict in post-colonial Africa were sowed when the European powers imposed official territorial boundaries across the continent. The dispersal of indigenous ethno-cultural

groups was not given much or any thought while those limits were being defined. With the end of colonial control, the former colonies became some of the most ethnically divided states in the world, with their colonial borders substantially unaltered. Yet, ethnic violence has not always taken the same shapes or occurred at the same rates throughout Africa. Intergroup violence have torn apart some states, most notably, Rwanda and Burundi (Englebert 2009, p.27). Others, like Angola, have experienced sporadic but incredibly violent ethnic revolutions, the Biafran secession in Nigeria, the Eritrean secession in Ethiopia, and the English crisis in the North West of Cameroon, have had to deal with low-intensity but lengthy separatist revolts by ethno regional minority.

Cultural wars, which are mostly fueled by ethnic rivalries and animosities, have drawn increasing attention in contemporary time. Political conflicts have also had unprecedented impact in Cameroon and other African countries. In 2019, the Ambazonia crisis had the nation divided. Some people have managed to stay away from severe violent interethnic conflict, yet how can one explain the differences in the types and occurrence of violent ethnic conflict among a group of countries that were all under colonial rule? Throughout post-colonial Africa, ethnic conflict has been widespread and frequent, and a number of hypotheses have been put forward to explain this phenomenon. The dichotomy between ranked and unranked systems of ethnic stratification, which "rests upon the coincidence or non-coincidence of social class and ethnic origins," is perhaps the foundation of the most detailed structural theories of ethnic conflict. When the two coexist, one can speak of ranked ethnic groupings; when classes are crossed, one can speak of unranked groups (Horowitz 1985, p.22). These models contend that the classification of interethnic relations as ranked or unranked should affect the frequency, intensity, and types of conflict. Hechter refers to systems of interethnic connections that are vertically integrated or "ranked" as systems of "internal colonialism" characterized by a "cultural division of labour" (1975, p.35). The cultural division of labour refers to a pattern of structural discrimination so that 'individuals are assigned to specific types of employment and other social positions on the basis of observable culture. Although vast, European contact with Africa before the 19th century was primarily restricted to a small handful of coastal enclaves. Europe continued to have little interest in the vast interior, at least while traders could get what they wanted from native intermediaries working out of those enclaves. This was altered by the industrial revolution. European nations started importing agricultural products and raw resources as their areas of expertise shifted toward industry. A wave of colonial expansion that concentrated on Africa and Asia was prompted by this growing desire. Europe used colonialism

to take over direct administrative control over the regions that produced these goods in order to ensure supplies of them (Migdal, 1988, p.23).

Consequently, the fact that there are significant ways in which the social structures of the indigenous peoples were altered, one major concern of the colonial legacy is that the colonial powers gave little thought to the existing ethnic groups' natural borders when they divided Africa among themselves. Within each colony's newly established geographical boundaries, there were various ethnic groups represented, and many ethnic nationalities were split between two or more colonial organizations. As the frontiers of newly sovereign nation-states, these borders obtained international legitimacy after independence (Hechter, 1974, p.154). The emerging African governments were immediately confronted with the dual issues of separatist sentiments within their markers and the prospect of irredentist battles across their borders due to the disparity between state borders and the geographic distribution of ethnic groupings. By establishing administrative dominance over their colonial realms, European powers altered constructive social relationships. They unavoidably undercut established social order and authority structures. Increased wages among Europe's industrial working classes at the end of the 19th century led to a demand for a second category of agricultural products: food crops of a kind that had been regarded as luxuries previously available only to Europe's elite (Young, 1994, p.84-85). Although depriving subordinate groups material resources necessary to support and sustain the state, assimilated groups had the resource base to enforce their supremacy. The dominant group could deter non-elites within the subordinate group from aggressively challenging the status quo by manipulating access to jobs, land, and sustenance guarantees.

The modern ethnic and cultural pluralism in post-colonial period in Africa are founded on variety or related factors. In Africa, ethnic and cultural diversities are particularly vulnerable to contemporary political and economic developments. As these result in reduced public provision of goods due to differing preferences, citizens of ethnically diverse states have an incentive to secede and found other, more homogeneous ones (Alesina & Spolaore, 2003, p.18). Based on this, African countries are most affected by the economic crisis in the areas of social welfare, poverty, and standard of living, and life expectancy. Social obstacles brought about by ethnicity obstructed the beneficial spillover that results from investment in knowledge creation (Ofodile 2014, p.45). So, it makes it harder for individual actors to integrate, which lowers the level of social capital that may otherwise be attained. Ethnicity fosters mistrust and encourages the use of the common good

for personal gain, all of which impede growth and development. Africa's crises are often exacerbated by low-quality institutions brought on by poor leadership, colonialism, and neocolonialism, which promote ethnicity, religious polarization and conflicts, and slows the rate of growth and development in the continent.

Consequences of Autochthony, Cultural Wars and Political Conflicts in Africa
African nations are unique in having numerous ethnic groups with distinct identities and cultures. Almost 1.3 billion people live in 54 political entities referred to as countries in Africa. There are well over 3,000 tribes and ethnic groups in the nation. The continent's enormous population and diversity of tribes should have been a blessing, but this is not the case because practically everything done in Africa has tribal overtones. Several tribes are spread over two or more nations. And on a continent tribal ties are still strongly felt by the populace, leaders frequently act in ways that favour their own tribes over all others (Amin, 2002, p.962). Instead of acting as a blending pot for development and prosperity, African people and states are divided against each other.

Africa is a big and diverse continent made up of nations with unique histories, climatic circumstances, and economic development levels. Her richness and complexity are reflected in the causes of its conflicts. Some factors are entirely domestic and reflect unique sub-regional dynamics, whereas others have a major global component. Notwithstanding these distinctions, there are certain commonalities and experiences among African conflicts (Adedeji, 1999, p.364). A community will inevitably experience conflicts, due to the fact that when people interact, they typically have interests they want to defend. When different people are interested in common interests, there would not be any hiccups in the relationship. Conflicting interests, on the other hand, result to rupture in human relationship and connection, and give rise to cliques and alliances. Africa as a continent has experienced many hostilities, and has continued to see conflicts in a variety of forms as a result of conflicting selfish interests (Cammack et al. 1988, p.13). Despites that they have strong sense of commitment to their tradition of communalism pre-colonialism was the scene of several conflicts emanating from inordinate self-interest and aspirations. No matter how one attempts to separate current conflicts in Africa from outside forces, one cannot. This is not to suggest, however, that Africans are not partly responsible for the conflicts wreaking havoc on their continent. No one can easily subjugate a population without strong internal forces and collaborations. This appears to be Africa's current status.

Among all the continents, Africa has the greatest rate of ethnic conflicts that have resulted to lose of lives and property, and the general underdevelopment. Africa can only be considered independent to the extent that it has real autonomy from western influences and domination. Currently, the continent is still subject to the whims and fancies of the western world (Kalu 2020, p.14). All Africa's policies, whether economic, political and otherwise, are still connected to the apron strings of her former colonial masters and catered to their needs. We have nations that speak the English language that serve the interests of Great Britain, nations that speak the French language that serve the interests of France. As a result, the western powers have a keen interest in Africa as they seek to increase their economic hegemony. For this reason, Africa is used as a battleground by the developed nations of the globe that want to rule her so that they can profit from her resources. Most times conflicts are ignited in Africa by the western powers in order to ensure that their weapons are sold to belligerents engaged in the conflict. African leaders who are committed to its development are deposed in order to give room for a puppet that will carry out the demands of the West and East in terms of economics. Hence, Africa is embroiled in never-ending wars due to the advanced countries' economic interests. The western world cannot provide for equal partnership with Africa, let alone for the preservation of Africa's cultural heritage and identity (Konings, et al 2004, p.192). Their interest in Africa is mainly from three perspectives: political, economic, and cultural. The result over time is the development western world as against the development of Africa.

Many African countries have experienced political turbulence and instability as a result of greed and the unquenchable desire of its leaders to hold onto power (Kalu, p.15). They do not want to give up control, even though the people they rule have shown their discontent with their government. Conflicts result from coups, countercoups, insurrections, and revolutions. Conflicts cannot be absent in a country that is politically unstable since it is the responsibility of the government to maintain law and order. Conflicts will undoubtedly increase in a country where the government is not stable and at peace. The insatiable quest for money is unquenchable among Africans and their leaders. They mortgage the continent's future to foreign powers due to their avarice. Agreements are made with foreign governments solely for the profit of the rulers. Africa has attained political independence, but given the way its leaders are negotiating agreements with the East and West, it has once again find itself under another colonial rule known as neo-colonialism, albeit voluntarily this time.

Poverty, corruption and inept leadership and underdevelopment are also the consequences of autochthony, cultural wars and political conflicts in Africa. Excruciating poverty, declining educational quality, widespread administrative incompetence, corruption, breaches of human rights, and misgovernment have characterized post-colonial Africa. In order to further their financial interests and geopolitical objectives, international interests have invariably cooperated with various fighting groups for abundance of weapons that have been flooding Africa comes from the developed nations in the northern hemisphere (Aning 2002, p.149). There is no doubt, as noted above, that one of the world's poorest continents is Africa. This is mostly because of the terrible environmental circumstances, corruption, and massive foreign debt that worsen the already impoverished conditions (Dze-Ngwa, p.28). Corruption as one of the primary causes of internal conflicts in Africa is connected to embezzlement and theft of public monies has crippled the march of socioeconomic transformation and political unification in Africa (Dze-Ngwa, 2014, p.34). Africa's resources have been mismanaged for so long that the people are tired with their leaders. The issue of ineffective leadership has plagued the continent for a long time, delaying political integration and unity in nearly all African states (Olaosebikan, 2010, p.553). The values of political tolerance, social justice, and administrative tact may be what most African states need given the diversity of their populations and cultures. Regrettably, the realities on ground in most African countries indicate that the majority of African leaders are feeble, dishonest, and unpatriotic. In addition to delaying socioeconomic and national integration, these rulers' beliefs have provoked extensive and violent bloodshed.

Remedy to Autochthony, Cultural Wars and Political Conflicts in Africa

The majority of African nations have no other means of controlling and resolving conflicts between groups, especially those that are politically motivated. It is prudent and necessary for nations to understand in what way they are likely to experience conflicts and resolve it using forces that are the best option. The majority of African nations have no other means of controlling and resolving conflicts between groups, especially those that are politically motivated. According to Yorons, as diverse people and cultures interact with one another within a same society, certain circumstances of cultural variety and social cleavage are present. In order to reduce disputes in human civilization, conflict management is implemented. These methods represent human endeavours or attempts to resolve fundamental social contradictions. In any instance, the forms, causes, and effects that a conflict evokes in a specific political pluralistic system affect how that conflict is managed or resolved.

Intergroup conflict is where ethnic strife begins. Hence, segmentation and the separation of groups at the mass level from one another through wholly distinct networks of social and political organizations is a key element in managing political conflicts. Only elites and professionals in conflict management are require to diplomatically intervene, interact and resolve conflicts within intergroup and international spheres or levels. Groups should be allowed autonomy over their own affairs especially when they are unable to come to a compromise. Enlightened delegates from each group will make decisions regarding matters of common interest. There should be a commonality of views and holistic accommodation of everyone on things that have to do with control and how common interests are defined. Moreover, proportional representation should be used to guarantee the involvement of representatives from each of these groups in the decisions that have an impact on them. When "vital issues of interests" are at stake, any group represented in authoritative decision-making processes ought to be given the right to veto those processes. According to proponents of power sharing, a prerequisite viewed as necessary for success is goodwill between prominent representatives of the ethnic segments, which avoids the evident vulnerability of such a system to intransigent behaviour. As posited by Elechi (2021, p.96), sound moral regeneration is also necessary for the avoidance and perhaps resolution of conflicts. This requires the inculcation, internalization and demonstration of patriotic and nationalistic spirit by Africans and their leaders. African leaders must be genuine with sound moral character and commitment to peace and progress on the continent, since the quality of national progress is to a large extent determined by the leaders.

Conclusion

The attempts to achieve good governance and development in Africa over the years has been marred by ethno-religious and cultural conflicts. Africa is also witnessing explosions of violence arising from politics of autochthony and confrontations of the "sons of the soil," which is threatening the very foundations of social order and cohesion on the continent. These have drawn a lot of attention, criticism and condemnation all over the world. The numerous ethnic groups that make up Africa have ended up being underdeveloped, backward and very insignificant in global influence and meaningful contributions. Political parties in various nations are established along ethnic and religious lines leading to political conflicts and lack of national growth and development. For variety of reasons, there are still ongoing hostilities throughout Africa. Evidence suggests that most of these conflicts have been sparked by other factors like historical and economic.

Visionary, detribalized, competent, and capable leaders that can revolutionize and restructure the continent, revitalize the economy and strengthen the democratic institutions with rule of law and justice are in high demand in Africa.

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