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## **Poverty and Riches in Africa: A Closer Look with Solidarity**

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**Abstract:** The continent of Africa faces global challenges as the current food crisis following the health crisis of Covid-19. Africa is also facing the challenge of its portrayal and image in the world, that we summarize by the term ‘poverty’. Colonial heritage and designed data analysis explain confirming this interpretation. In the light of such characterization, any global affliction is expected to be multiple times higher in impact on Africa. Yet, on the other hand, life and joy are readily perceptible on the faces and in the behavior of African people, even in the poorest areas. The young population, women’s participation, various natural endowments, liveliness, joy and resilience are the main riches of Africa. Why then do most countries show low developmental performance? The main argument in this text is a deficiency of strategic organization and local solidarities. Deep awareness and the will to change is the task ahead of the concerned.

**Keywords:** Africa - Poverty - Riches - Solidarity - Strategy

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## 1. Preliminary Remarks

The question of poverty in Africa is so much political that its key content and statistics always provoke thoughts, comments and contradictions. Potentially, there is no doubt that the continent as large as 30 million km<sup>2</sup> is rich in minerals (40% of world reserve in gold), arable land (60% of the world's unexploitable piece), good weather and agricultural conditions in large sections of many countries. The main area of poverty is the precisely political organization and strategy. One important remark to keep in mind with any analysis any expert makes is the diversity within the same situation studied from one region to another, from one country to the next. No demonstration is needed to state that South Africa is significantly different from Nigeria even though these two countries stand at the head of all countries in terms of GDP. Poverty in South Africa is mostly racial and mostly urban in Nigeria with some regional differences as well. Post Mugabe Zimbabwe is a different story of the struggle for the restoration of hope by and for local African Zimbabweans together with Zimbabwean immigrants.

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## 2. Social Nature of Humanity

After saying this, poverty, like other indicators of well-being, fulfillment or human flourishing is relative. In his inaugural discourse in Addis Ababa on February 5, 2022, the newly elected President of the African Union and President of the Republic of Senegal Macky Sall review some of the most crucial issues facing the continent, from health to self-sustenance and development. It seems more accurate to capture this notion of poverty from those concrete angles of life. Despite limitations, the joint response to Covid-19 has been perceived as a success. One of the impacts of this

pandemic is the rediscovery of traditional medical wisdom and the curative virtue of local plants. Must we wait for calamities to discover endemic forms of strategic progress in other areas? As a West African and specifically a citizen of Burkina Faso, I tend to stress more the ‘anthropological poverty’ which I define as the *crisis of togetherness*. The human person is profoundly a social being. A good community is therefore a constitutive part of personal life. The insufficiency of real solidarity between nations and peoples, coupled with the earlier mentioned organizational weakness of our states represents *real poverty* in my view. In Burkina Faso as a tiny example, Covid-19 did not deter agricultural producers as much as terrorism does from holding to the demands of their sector. Although, I am no political scientist nor a security expert, the visible military poverty of my country against this terrorism that has taken tens of hundreds of lives, displaced an unknown figure of thousands and still preventing peasants from growing crops in some of their occupied areas. Without public strategy, the Mediterranean Sea has more Africans to kill, if those youth therein affected find the means to get there at all. If not, poverty will clothe itself in increased *general insecurity*.

Regarding the specific food crisis of this year 2022 and with the awareness that 12% of African importation of wheat is from Ukraine: Somalia, Tunisia and Lybia ranking first, we cannot affirm the same relativity. Food is part of human basic need. Its shortage is therefore a matter of life or death. Some other African countries import grain from Russia up to 32% of their total importations of this product. There is also corn and oil that our countries import from Ukraine. President Macky Sall of Senegal, in his capacity as President of the African Union, met President Vladimir Puttine on June 2, 2022 in Sochi, Russia, to discuss the freeing of a corridor at Odessa for transportation of food stock and agricultural inputs like fertilizers, in order to avoid starvation of large populations on the continent. In the

Sahelian region of West Africa, equally affected by food insecurity, we have already mentioned the general insecurity factor in those of their countries occupied by terrorist groups. The Food Security and Nutrition Work Group identified a total population of about 28 million affected by the current food crisis of 2022 in that area of Africa.

The Ukrainian FOOD ship finally set sail on August 16, 2022, from the Pivdenny port, and arrived into Djibouti (East Africa) on August 30, 2022 with 23.000 tons of cereals mainly destined to Somalia, Ethiopia and Kenya where an estimated 22 million of population were in danger of food starvation. Since population is one of African riches, food crisis is a real threat to integrity.

To conclude this short and personal comment on today's news about Food Crisis, I simply insist on the social nature of humanity. More than any other ill, the failure to build global solidarities is the most crucial issue. I cannot agree enough with Pope Francis when he kept exhorting the world on the *globalization of indifference*, in the wake of Covid-19. What I mean is also that this solidarity must start among Africans themselves. The G 5 Sahel may wait another 50 years to get \$ 1,5 billion from the world's nations to deploy a combined Security Force over their territory while Ukraine alone could get more than 20 times the same amount within a month (all things considered); but what do Africans do to squelch the remotely designed and internally bought-in plight of terrorism? What do Africans do to become true actors of their own progress when other powers tend to reduce them to mere consumers of world's goods and mere disciples in global progress? We have had several wake-up calls, but the slumber seems quite deep.

### **3. Understanding Poverty in Africa**

Poverty is defined as earning less than \$1.90 a day and this situation covers 9.2% of world population (nearing 700 million people). The main indicators are access to social capital, access to social services, vulnerability, social exclusion, health and education. In plain words

poverty is hunger, lack of shelter, illiteracy, sickness and morality rate, powerlessness and voicelessness. Through such prism, Africa looks the most miserable of places in the world. So true that 'Africa' is no longer a place but the very concept of poverty. For instance, Egypt that is among the three richest countries of the continent cannot fit in for many western minds. This country has, by all means, to be in the Middle East, because it has a history; it is the birthplace of world civilization: Writing, Science, Architecture, Politics and Religion. And since Africa is a kind of the John 1:46 'Nazareth' for the world, Egypt can therefore not be in Africa.

The land area (as already mentioned: nearing 12 million square miles) is nearly three times Europe or the United States and a little less than twice Russia. Raw materials or natural resources can easily be listed: diamond (about 50% of world production certain years), gold (about 20% of world production on average), coltan (40 to 70% worldwide), and others like copper, uranium (18% worldwide), high-grade woods, etc. In terms of agricultural production for export, cocoa (about 70% of world production in good years), and others like coffee, tea, and cotton. Oceans, rivers (like the Nile and the Congo) and lakes (mainly in the Great Lakes Region of Central, Eastern and Southern Africa) containing around 3000 species of fish, wildlife, cattle raising and more.

#### **4. The Profound Richness of Africa**

Africa has a young and dynamic population – for only about 6% of African population is above 60 of age - women and their participation in social construction, represent real power in the 1.2 billion of souls populating the continent. Liberia has known of a woman as head of State for two consecutive terms: in the person of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf (2006 – 2018). We have an incredible cultural diversity within each country: more than 300 languages spoken in Cameroon alone, for instance. It is only far

from Africa that many contemporaries take the continent itself to be a single country – so much colonialism has pounded on international opinion with falsified map scales. These African youth are full of the dream for a brighter future and free of colonial trauma. They constitute good dialogue partners with worldwide youth if unhindered by local governments and systems.

The main reality I wish to pinpoint as greatest richness of the continent is resilience. If we take the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) as an epitome of the whole continent and if we observe the cultural expression of the people in their music, there is no doubt about the ‘joy of living’ that may readily open to Pope Francis’ “joy of the Gospel” of Christ. Considering this liveliness in the midst of countless past and unfinished tragedies, manifests a high level of resilience. Critics may argue for unconscious life-style. In reality this is not the case. Some so-called evolved cultures value more “the wrath of the avenger” when things don’t go right. If suicidal rates and outbreak of violence constitute sound indicators of human flourishing or happiness, mere statistics would place DRC ahead of most other countries in the First World.

Delving further more into world history, the reason for slave trade could be summed up in the fitting physical condition of the African negroes (around 12 million souls among the best) taken to sustain the plantations’ labor in the Americas, from 1526 to 1867. This human bleeding was followed closely by direct colonization and foreign rule, mainly by Belgium, Great Britain and France. Despite nefarious political and economic systems left in place by those foreign powers, the ‘joy of living’ remains the hallmark of Africans. This realization prompted our late Jesuit Superior General, Nicholas Adolfo to suggest a particular face of Christ in Africa: *Christ the Life*. In the same vein, he presented Asia as culturally representing the *Way* and Europe the *Truth* of Christ who once said (in Jn 14, 6), “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life”. This reality was explored by the late Professor Laurenti Magesa alongside Gerald Hughes, S.J. and Michael Amalados, S.J. in a book edited and published in

2018 by Dr. Festo Mkenda, S.J., with the sub-title: *A Confluence of Asia, Europe and Africa in Jesus of Nazareth* (Mkenda et al, 2017). Besides the historical baggage of Africa, Magesa is highlighting contemporary challenges that he summarizes in the two head-plagues of war and corruption afflicting Africa (Irudayaraj, 2018).

## Conclusion

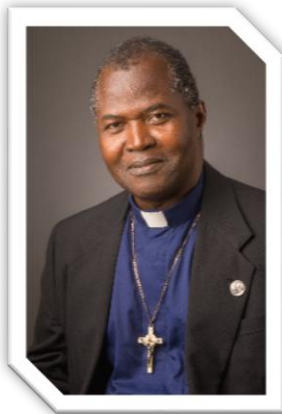
How do Africans remain vibrant with life? How do they very often fit in so well in Europe or North America as they contribute to the discovery and scientific progress? The answer is to be found in this ancestral tradition of abundant life drawing on the not-so-written African metaphysics of *life-force*. This metaphysics and deep worldview form the basis of African Religion as well. For reference, one may read the Philosophy of Alexis Kagame (1912 – 1981). People convert to Christianity in order to have an increase in their life-force (Bwanga, 2018). This is also the promise of Christ. Therefore, they are right on target. Now, for the deeper understanding and inclusion of the message of the Cross as paradoxical life-enhancing instrument, theologians, pastors and preachers still have much work to do. Their encouragement comes from the fruit already visible in this *cultural resilience* that has preceded the missionary proclamation of the Gospel of Christ. It seems that before nominally knowing Christ, in Him they “live and move and have their being” (Acts 17, 28), that is full of life and with deep joy, despite unlimited sorrows that have somehow affected the spirit of *togetherness*, that supreme value of the Kingdom of God. Indeed, life is worth living when shared in love.

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