

Rather than an AU Seat at a G-21: Jeffrey Sachs Should Lead a Knowledge Coalition to Enhance Power to Reduce if not Stop the Exploitation of Africa

By

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The United Nations held a pre-Summit on Food Systems on July 26-28, 2021, as a primer for its first Global Food Summit coming up in September 2021. At this meeting, Jeffrey Sachs, American and popular Economist as well as UN Special Envoy on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), made an important intervention. Many Africans were excited that Sachs called for the African Union, representing 1.4 billion people, to have a seat at a G-20 that transforms into G-21. The media focus has been on the tokenism of an AU seat, instead of many cogent issues that Sachs eloquently repeated.

I use repeated because this thought system dated from a long line of agitators for independence of Africa and scholars such as Dr. Walter Rodney in *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, and more recently, Dr. Arikana Chihombori-Quao in many speeches and YouTube videos beyond her *Africa 101: The Wake Up Call*. Arikana was fired as African Union Ambassador to the United States by the African Union. Many an African, like myself, saw the termination of Arikana's appointment as punitive. She dared to point out that colonialists never left Africa and showed how they continue to rip-off and exploit Africa.

Lucky for Arikana to have only lost her job. Walter Rodney lost his life. He was assassinated in 1980 at age 38. I am not aware that the riddle of who killed Rodney was ever solved. However, this illustrious Guyanese lives on through his works as an unsung great African hero. The Nobel Prize will always elude the likes of Rodney. If his type had been recognized it would have raised questions on the orthodoxy that Africa's problems solely rests on African shoulders.

It is extremely helpful and hope raising to have an American Economist from the US articulating and showing the import of external dynamics on the continuing underdevelopment of Africa. He asked the pre-summit meeting to go into the history of why the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) remains in turmoil and poverty. Though Arikana articulated on this theme of the West causing turmoil in Africa in order to extract resources, Jeffrey Sachs rightly noted the extractions of King Leopold of Belgium's claim to ownership of the Congo through to the CIA's assassination of Patrice Lumumba and installed Mobutu Seseseko. Arikana details several assassinations of other visionary leaders of Africa as well as overthrow of others by colonialists operating under a different mode of imperialism referred to as neo-colonialism.

Jeffrey Sachs rightly pointed to Glencore's extraction of cobalt from the DRC without responsibility or accountability to the sovereignty claims of the government of the DRC but paying taxes at Glencore's home country for the insurance of continuing protection under the continuing destabilization of peace in the DRC – after all, weapons are not made in the DRC.

Arikana had called attention to the exploitation of Africans through loans from the world arena – especially the West, including from the Bretton Woods institutions. Of course, the US led some European powers, at the end of the Second World War, to design a United Nations at the political level and the Bretton Woods institutions at the economic level not to have tea parties but to rebuild and control the world for their interests with the architect being the primus inter pares (first among equals). The equals at the time were limited to the United Kingdom and France. Token veto rights were granted to Kuomintang China and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) now Russia. Of course, in terms of tokenism, Egypt, Ethiopia, Liberia, and apartheid South Africa had token presence at the foundation of the UN. They were only needed to boost the pretense of having a multilateral entity that is “united”.

The claims of Europeans to ownership of Africa were ratified by the act of the US going ahead to with the formation of the UN without insisting on self-determination and the need for all territories being free and at the table from the beginning. Why should the US, the primus inter pares, insist for a place at the table for Africans? It new that the Europeans would have accused it of interference and probably called attention to the unsalutary situation of race relations in America, a situation that had benefitted and built America on the back of black people over centuries?

For me, what is important are the billions of African people, not mere political representation by the AU Envoy at a G-21. Does having the AU envoy at the G-21 meeting go beyond the protocol of just having an African sited for the sake of formality? Would it not be a reference point for legitimizing tokenism for Africans?

Just as it was in the beginning, so it remains that neither the UN Secretary-General nor the Presidents of the Bretton Woods institutions dare to intervene and call for a stop to the continuing structured ripping-off and exploitation of Africans. African leaders are not exonerated either. Most of them rip-off their continent and stash away proceeds of their loot with the cover of major powers from the West. In effect, there is a commonality of interests between bad African leaders and external powers ripping-off Africa.

I am not excusing most African leaders from their failure in moving Africa forward in spite of the active efforts to assassinate any that showed promise on developing Africa. If some Asian leaders could be focused and wiggle through structured underdevelopment, there must be enough of eternal excuses for the failure of African leaders ensure improved lives for their people. African bad leaders should have recognized the thorny paths to development and avoided them by creating alternative routes.

I doff my hat to Jeffrey Sachs even if he is more accommodative to African bad leadership. After all, African leaders cherish Westerners more. Nonetheless, I appreciate Sachs being current during his intervention by calling for vaccine equity as opposed to vaccine hoarding with respect to the global Covid-19 pandemic. Sachs noted that the US alone was able to raise 7 trillion dollars in loans -at zero interest- to fight the scourge when Africans neither raised a penny/cent nor a yuan. Hence, it was possible for the West to implement lockdowns with some little human face as opposed to what happened in Africa.

As usual, African leaders found it easier to go abegging for vaccine donations through the COVAX arrangement. I must be thankful to Western taxpayers that I got two doses of AstraZeneca vaccines through this modality even if European interests now say that the AstraZeneca vaccines produced in India will not have equal rights with those made in Europe and probably America.

Of course, Africans are naïve if they think that the little vaccines being received are out of love. Declaring the Indian version of AstraZeneca as not measuring up for ease of passage in Europe

shows the long-term preferred interest on financial flows on vaccine purchases. This material interest is separate from the fear of Covid-19 mutants that are of concern to mankind in general. The relative abandonment of Africa on Ebola virus speaks volumes since this virus was not as virulent outside of Africa.

We should abhor tokenisms. Generally, they play on people's intelligence. They also give false impressions, which in this case is the pretense that 1.4 billion Africans are brought on to the table. So, my apologies to Jeffrey Sachs for differing with his call for a stronger UN and at the same time wanting a seat for the African Union at the proposed G-21.

At the end of the Cold-War in 1990/1991, the weak countries called for a new world order in which the United Nations would be a stronger coordinator of our world for good. Boutros Boutros-Ghali got carried away and thought the call was for real. He learnt the hard way as the carpet was pulled under his feet and he became the only UN Secretary-General, so far, not elected for a second term. He over-relied on the French to save him by continuing to veto Kofi Annan with the hope that the decision would go to the General Assembly that would gang up against America and give him a second term. The French bargained and lifted their veto on Kofi Annan and history was made to have a black man at helms of the UN. Kofi Annan also thought he could be daring in his second term and say it truthfully as he saw it. He was almost fired. In summation, only the weak countries yearn for strong multilateralism.

From antecedents, what use is an African Union's Envoy having a seat at a G-21 to join: Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States and the European Union? For me, not much.

Being at the table should not be because Africa has a population of 1.4 billion. Sitting at G-21 should be based on the summation of the material net worth of the African Union making worthwhile contributions. Slighting Nigeria, the G-20 has the token presence of South Africa. What food has the South African representation at meetings put on the table in Africa? What use would a ceremonial presence at the table be, without decision-making powers? Will AU presence stop Western companies from continuing with the underdevelopment of Africa? Will it remove the European resistance to having Africans manufacture vaccines through their sharing of

knowledge? If anything, the token presence would legitimize an erroneous perception that Jeffrey Sachs is inadvertently selling: that of a multilateral G-21 would turn around and start to serve the developmental interests of Africans.

Power exists to bolster interests. Under Western competitive ideology as opposed to Yoruba “*Omoluabi*” (character plus integrity imbued with a we sharing spirit) or Zulu “*Ubuntu*” (I am because you are spirit), it would be naïve to expect that granting a seat to the African Union would see to the protection of African interests. It is a joke to call for higher taxation for the 2,700 billionaires of our world to allow an African child have access to safe drinking water or reduce maternal mortality rate in Africa not to talk of ensuring that Africans enjoy utmost freedom which I had put as an ideal situation of enjoying the summation of all the SDGs that Jeffrey Sachs advises the UN on.

I have no problem if the three billionaires wanting to create luxurious tastes and control space travels go to live in space and leave their billions behind with instructions to use their resources for realizing the SDGs as Sachs suggested in his intervention. But we know that the dominant ideology on earth does not support such orientation. Their respective billions would be invested for more material acquisitions irrespective of whether they need it or not.

By the way, does our world really need a G-21 when so many UN Agencies are doing their best but are deliberately underfunded as Jeffrey Sachs rightly noted? Should the League of Arab States (LAS); the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN); the Organization of American States (OAS) etc., not be entitled to their respective seats at a G-24? More importantly, will Sachs suggestion not further undermine the United Nations? I am sure he and I are agreed for a stronger UN even if I know that such will never happen.

For me, Prof. Sachs could be of much help to the 1.4 billion people of Africa, probably as opposed to their bad leaders, if he directs a detailed study that builds on the thoughts of Walter Rodney, Arikana etc., to unravel the mechanisms of continuing ripping-off and exploitation of Africans by private interests actively supported by their respective national governments and the Bretton Woods institutions etc. Such knowledge can help towards the implementation of policies that bolsters the SDGs by a new set of purposefully recruited African leaders.