

YMCA MODEL UNITED NATIONS 2025

Topic Descriptions

Committee: African Summit

Chair: Li Jiang

Topic #1: Legacy of Colonialism

Introduction & Background

Neocolonialism is defined by the “A Dictionary of African Politics” as: “The maintenance of colonial domination after formal political independence through the sustenance of a relationship of economic, political, or ideological dependence.” Since the 1500s, Africa has been exploited for her natural resources and colonized by outside powers such as Belgium, United Kingdom, and France. Currently, despite most African nations being independent for over 50 years, African nations still face challenges from colonialism, such as former colonial powers exercising continued economic control over countries (as was the case in the Congo in the 1960s) or border disputes between nations.

Current Status

Neocolonialism is most prevalent through the continued use of the CFA Franc, which is a post-colonial currency by the French and Belgians, by the majority of central African nations and the economic power that France and Belgium wield over former colonies through a fixed exchange rate of 1 Euro = 656 CFA Francs. Although there have been plans to eliminate the CFA Franc in 2027, this deadline has been pushed back before. Nations such as Mali have been trying to get rid of neocolonialism through the expulsion of French troops from their nation, which sheds light to the power former colonial powers also wield through military bases in their former colonies.

Themes to Consider

The current issue of neocolonialism and how to tackle it in Africa has become interconnected with the growing **polarization** on the world stage as a **tug of war of influence** has developed in Africa between authoritarian nations, such as China and Russia and Western nations, such as France, the United States, and Great Britain.

Military factors, such as combating regional terrorism and regional conflict, have led to the legacy of colonialism being put to the forefront, as past colonial nations would often intervene militarily in their former colonies. However, we have also seen a transition of African nations no longer relying on former colonial powers for military assistance and instead relying on new actors, such as Russia's Wagner Group.

Colonialism has also left a lasting **political legacy** on African nations. This influence can be seen in the **justice systems** of many African nations, where its courts carry on practices of colonial times such as the death penalty which were used to target marginalized communities.

Economically, colonial rule has led African nations to rely on the export of natural resources while importing manufactured goods. This reliance on the **sale of natural resources** has also led to a lack of interest in intra-African trade and the implementation of high tariffs between African nations. Companies in former colonial powers continue to maintain an influence in former colonies serving as employers in these nations. The United Nations has also reported large **wealth inequality** in former colonies between the top 1% in wealth and how much wealth they control, another hallmark of colonialism.

Discussion Questions

1. What initiatives/programs should the UN implement to support African nations in their bid to rid their legacies of colonialism?
2. What role should Africa play in the face of a new bipolar world?
3. How can the UN mediate between all parties involved to ensure a fair settlement for all sides during the decolonization stage?

Resources

1. Ibrahim, Mo. "Africa's Past is Not its Future." *Foreign Affairs*, November 1st, 2022. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/africa/mo-ibrahim-africa-past-not-its-future>.

(Highly Recommended) Description: An opinion piece on how Africa should move past its colonial legacy.

2. Nyerere, Julius. "Africa Throws Off Colonial Rule." *Foreign Affairs*, August 7th, 2022. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/lists/africa-throws-colonial-rule>.

(Highly Recommended) Description: Provides an insight as to how African leaders immediately decolonization dreamed of Africa's position in the world.

3. Okereke, Caleb. "The Death Penalty Isn't African, it's a Legacy of Colonialism." *Foreign Policy*, November 11th, 2021. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/11/11/the-death-penalty-isnt-african-its-a-legacy-of-colonialism/>.

Description: Mentions how the legacy of colonialism can be seen in the continued use of the death penalty.

4. Wider, Unu. "A colonial legacy? Income inequality in former British African colonies." *United Nations*, April 2015. <https://www.wider.unu.edu/publication/colonial-legacy>.

Description: Provides an analysis of how income inequality is a legacy of colonialism.

5. Mindaoudou, Aïchatou . "From Independence to Long-term Stability: United Nations Efforts in Africa." *United Nations*, September 2015. <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/independence-long-term-stability-united-nations-efforts-africa>.

(Highly Recommended) Description: Provides an analysis of how the United Nations have attempted to mitigate the effects of colonialism.

6. Settles, Joshua. "The Impact of Colonialism on African Economic Development." *Tennessee Research and Creative Exchange*, May 1996. trace.tennessee.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1182&context=utk_chanhonproj.

Description: This source provides an analysis on the impact colonialism has on the economies of Africa.

Topic #2: Energy Security

Introduction & Background

Energy Security is defined by the US Department of Energy as: “having enough energy to meet demand and having a power system and infrastructure that are protected against physical and cyber threats.” As Africa continues to grow as an economic power, her demand for energy often outpaces her access to energy, thus **slowing down her economic growth**. With around half of Africa’s population —546 million people— being unemployed, energy demand is higher than ever. Therefore, energy security is a pressing issue that must be solved to ensure future African prosperity.

Current Status

The current energy crisis stems from the war in Ukraine and other factors, such as supply chain bottlenecks, which have led to a rise in energy prices. In 2021, around 43% of Africans — around 600 million people — did not have access to electricity. Rising prices and shortages have also forced many African nations to implement power cuts, further hindering economic growth.

Themes to Consider

The lack of a reliable source of energy has raised **social concerns** in African nations as Africa’s population is set to grow to **2.5 billion by 2050**, and there have been concerns of **how African nations could reduce poverty and fight unemployment with the great stress already placed on the power system**.

There have also been **ecological concerns** as African nations increasingly turn to “dirty” forms of energy, such as burning coal, that may be detrimental to the global fight against climate change. Africa is well positioned to transition to clean energy, with the continent possessing the natural resources needed to transition, such as 80% of the world’s manganese, platinum, and chromium, 50% of the world’s cobalt, and 20% of the world’s graphite. Despite being rich in the natural resources to transition to clean and reliable energy, some African nations are economically **dependent on the export of fossil fuels** and thus, a complete transition would leave them vulnerable economically. New discoveries in oil and natural gas have been proven to be a major source of foreign investment to the continent’s nations.

A major source of Africa’s current energy crisis is a **lack of proper infrastructure** to support Africa’s power needs. Africa’s nations have been forced to engage in power cuts to ensure grid stability. In 2022, there were around **222 grid collapses**, showing the precarious state Africa’s energy infrastructure is in.

It has been estimated that Africa will require around \$400 billion to modernize its infrastructure to increase its electricity production. This exposes the financial vulnerabilities of many African nations, as many are heavily in debt and unable to finance the modernization required to ensure energy security. It thus becomes the United Nation’s duty to ensure energy security in Africa through means such as outside investment or cooperation in the continent.

Discussion Questions

1. How can the United Nations bring the African nations together for a comprehensive plan to combat energy insecurity and its underlying problems?
2. How can the United Nations incentivise African nations to transition to green energies?
3. How can African nations work together to develop and utilize green technologies?

Resources

1. Baskaran, Gracelin. "Achieving Universal Energy Access in Africa amid Global Decarbonization." *Center of Strategic & International Studies*, January 31st, 2024. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/achieving-universal-energy-access-africa-amid-global-decarbonization#:~:text=Energy%20is%20a%20significant%20impediment,is%20impossible%20without%20energy%20access.>

Description: Details the struggles of Africa to achieve energy security and provides reasons that might hamper its effort. How can the United Nations ensure African nations are not disproportionately affected by the transition to green energies?

2. Mathekga, Ralph. "South Africa's Energy Crisis." *Gis Reports*, August 31st, 2023. <https://www.gisreportsonline.com/r/southern-africa-energy/>.

Description: Provides an analysis into the South African Energy Crisis and its causes.

3. MAGOME, MOGOMOTSI . "What can we do': Millions in African Countries Need Power." *AP News*, March 25th, 2023. <https://apnews.com/article/electricity-africa-just-energy-transition-d20d1ba86e90c3b9c81f0fc76979acfc>.

Description: Provides a report into the current energy crisis affecting Africa.

4. Auth, Katie. "How the US Can Better Support Africa's Energy Transition." *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, January 31st, 2023. <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2023/01/how-the-us-can-better-support-africas-energy-transition?lang=en>.

(Highly Recommended) Description: Provides an analysis as to how Africa can transition into clean reliable energy and what it needs.

5. IEA. "Africa Energy Outlook." *IEA*, 2022. <https://www.iea.org/reports/africa-energy-outlook-2022/key-findings>.

(Highly Recommended) Description: Provides a report onto the state of Africa's Energy situation in 2022 and how it can expand.

6. Okwatch, Douglas. "Africa's Stand at COP27." *United Nations*, November 1, 2022. <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/november-2022/energy-africas-stand-cop27>.

Description: It gives a report on Africa's commitments towards clean energy and whether Africa has met the goals that it has set.

Topic #3: Political Stability

Introduction

Political stability is a necessity for a functioning state. The state must have the trust and faith of the governed to run efficiently. Should political instability arise in a nation, it could pose great risk and consequence to people of the state and the states around the nation. According to the United Nations, political instability “engenders organized crime, including targeted attacks against police, women, journalists, and migrants.”

Background

Africa has been no stranger to the prospect of political instability. Since the beginning of decolonization in the 1950s, Africa has been plagued with coups that have destabilized regimes across the continent. Since 1950, Africa has accounted for roughly half of the coups across the world, with 106 having occurred. Other forms of political instability come through the forms of civil wars, major protest movements, and resistance toward colonial rule.

Current Status

Currently, the levels of instability in Africa have risen to a 6-year high. 37 African nations have been categorized by the Civil Unrest Index to be at “high or extreme risk” for civil unrest. Coups have struck African nations like Gabon, Mali, Chad, and Niger, while violent protests and riots have rocked African nations such as South Africa and the Democratic Republic of Congo. 16 African Nations are categorized to have “Active Conflicts.” This spike in instability has been explained by some as the result of a rise in the price of living or conflict due to election results.

Themes to Consider

Political instability brings about questions of Africa’s economic future. It has been noted that recent coups in countries rich in natural resources may cause a **decrease in economic investment** by Western nations due to concerns of human rights violations and environmental impacts. Alongside this, political instability has also led to the destruction of vital infrastructure and has impaired the ability to conduct trade between nations

Political instability has also brought up questions about **democracy’s future in Africa**. It has been noted that the increasing number of coups in West Africa have led to a **decrease in political rights and civil liberties** in the region. The growing hotspot of coups in West Africa has led to concerns of instability spilling across borders and impacting neighboring nations. The growing instability has also led to questions raised as to how organizations such as the African Union can **help prevent or mitigate the impact of coups**.

Impacts to the daily lives of Africans can be felt through political instability. This can be felt through the **decrease or halt in governmental services** such as welfare, healthcare, and other basic needs. With an estimate of 460 million Africans living in poverty, these services are vital for their everyday survival. It thus becomes the United Nation’s duty to ensure basic human rights are upheld, to prevent mass suffering, and to resolve the fundamental issues that cause political instability.

Discussion Questions

1. How can African nations mitigate the negative economic effect of political instability on the continent?
2. What role should regional organizations such as the African Union play to help ensure political stability?
3. How should the United Nations work to alleviate suffering of peoples affected by political instability?

Resources

1. Vines, Alex. "Africa in 2023: Continuing Political and Economic Volatility." *Chatham House*, January 9th, 2023.
<https://www.chathamhouse.org/2023/01/africa-2023-continuing-political-and-economic-volatility>.

(Highly Recommended) Description: Provides an overview of challenges faced by Africa in 2023, has a section focusing on political instability.

2. Hendrix, Cullen. "Political Unrest in Africa Threatens Global Critical Minerals Supplies and their Futures." *Peterson Institute for International Economics*, September 19th, 2023.
<https://www.piie.com/research/piie-charts/political-unrest-africa-threatens-global-critical-mineral-supplies-and-their>.

(Highly Recommended) Description: This source goes over the impacts that political instability may have to the export of natural minerals from Africa.

3. Brooke-Holland, Louisa. "Africa in 2024: Democracy and Instability." *UK Parliament*, January 15th, 2024.
<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/africa-in-2024-democracy-and-instability/>.

Description: Report done by the British Parliament on the future of democracy and the prospect of instability in Africa

4. Africa Center for Strategic Studies. "Autocracy and Instability in Africa." *Africa Center for Strategic Studies*, March 9th, 2021.
<https://africacenter.org/spotlight/autocracy-and-instability-in-africa/>.

Description: This article correlates instability in Africa to autocracy in Africa.

5. Shoshana, Kedem. "Civil unrest in Africa Soars to Six-Year High." *African Business*, May 25th, 2023.
<https://african.business/2023/05/politics/civil-unrest-in-africa-soars-to-six-year-high>.

Description: This article gives an overview of the rising trend of coups and civil unrest in Africa alongside its statistics.

6. Brooke-Holland, Louisa. "Coups and Political Instability in West Africa." *UK Parliament*, September 18th, 2023.

https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9861/?_gl=1*lo3rp3*_up*MQ..*_ga*MTk0ODlwNzk2Mi4xNzE2MDg3Mzc0*_ga_14RSNY7L8B*MTcxNjA4NzM3NC4xLjAuMTcxNjA4NzM3NC4wLjAuMA.

Description: This source provides an overview of the political instability in West Africa.