

Why has Africa fallen behind the rest of the world's economies?

For millions of Africans, life is often nasty, brutish and short. Science, technology and innovation can turn their destiny around

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We should now consider why African countries must invest in science and technology, how science creates wealth, and what Africa must do to achieve this "new liberation" - using its untapped natural wealth, human resources, and effective policy execution to create explosive wealth that by-passes western-led globalisation and creates national and continental technology hubs. This is what will reposition Africa - with advantage - in the phenomenon of globalisation ...

The secret that lies behind science and the prosperity of nations is simple but profound: ideas matter ... This is the most important secret of the wealth of the industrialised world. And the constant pursuit of the economic and military advantage and superiority which scientific invention and technology confer is an essential component of a world-view that changes the realities on the ground.

Africa has fallen behind because its people, despite their historical abilities in science, have not done this in an organised manner. The more the western world was able to invent and innovate in the past 300 years, the more "civilised" it became. And as Africa, in comparison, remained closer to nature and was dominated by natural phenomena, the more "primitive" and backward the continent seemed.

Western science led to the invention of gunpowder and other superior military weapons that outclassed bows, arrows and spears. Combined with the development of shipping transportation, the west became intrepid explorers of the world, developed a world-view of racial superiority, which led it to achieve military and economic conquests that resulted in transatlantic slavery and colonialism.

Evil as that epoch may have been, it was the product of world-views - world-views that were based on, and achieved because of science and technology. Asia has learned and applied the same lesson to economics, and its rising wealth is the result.

It is difficult now to imagine life without electricity, refrigerators, cars, telephones, air-conditioners, railways, dishwashers, and many other everyday appliances that make life in the modern era convenient, comfortable, and more economically productive. But for millions of Africans, life without these inventions and the innovations based on them is still their daily reality. And that reality often is nasty, brutish and short. Science, technology and innovation can turn their destiny around - and should ...

African countries need to make technology and innovation a strategic priority from the standpoint of a world-view that Africa can invent and innovate, and must do so in order to liberate itself from the oppressive dominance of globalisation. Why not manufacture its own mobile phones or innovate based on the original cell phone? In doing so, African countries need to understand that there really is no such thing as "transfer of technology". No nation will willingly transfer its technological know-how to others because that knowledge is the basis of competitive advantage. Industrial nations can at best give a developing country a shallow surface insight into their know-how, and even then only in the context of foreign investment deals in which developed countries that host foreign direct investment inflows skilfully negotiate and secure such agreements, and have skilled workforces to absorb and expand on such prowess.

This is easy to say, but hard to do. Nigeria has developed a national science and technology policy which recognises the strategic importance of this sector for the country's development. Nigeria's science, technology and innovation policy frankly recognises that there has long existed a disconnection between the country's economic planning and science and technology, and pledges to build the technological capacity necessary to develop a modern economy.

According to President Goodluck Jonathan, there is "nowhere in this world now you can move your economy without science and technology. For the next four years we will emphasise so much on S&T because we have no choice; without that we are just dreaming."

*This is an edited extract from **Emerging Africa: How the Global Economy's 'Last Frontier' Can Prosper and Matter** by Kingsley Chiedu Moghalu, published by Penguin*

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