

13TH
HD
2025

**HIGH-LEVEL
DIALOGUE
PUBLICATION**

THEME

**JUSTICE, RIGHTS, REPARATIONS
AND STATE BUILDING**



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Acronyms

ACDEG – African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance

ACP – African, Caribbean and Pacific (states)

AGA – African Governance Architecture

AI – Artificial Intelligence

APRM – African Peer Review Mechanism

APSA – African Peace and Security Architecture

AU – African Union

CARICOM – Caribbean Community

CIDO - Citizens and Diaspora Directorate

CEPS – Centre for European Policy Studies

COVID-19 – Coronavirus Disease (2019)

CSV - Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation

CTRH – Commission for Truth, Reconciliation and Healing

FAO – Food and Agriculture Organisation

GBV – Gender-Based Violence

HLD - High-Level Dialogue

ICTJ - International Centre for Transitional Justice

IDP - Internally Displaced Person

IGAD – Intergovernmental Authority on Development

IMF – International Monetary Fund

IUU – Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (fishing)

MYO - Mzimba Youth Organisation

NAPTIP – National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons

NDPVF – Niger Delta People’s Volunteer Force

NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation

NYDA – Nile Youth Development Actions

OAU – Organisation of African Unity

OHCHR – Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

PAP – Presidential Amnesty Programme

PAPS – Department of Political Affairs, Peace and Security (African Union)

PCRD – Post Conflict Reconstruction and Development

PCVE – Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism

R-ARCSS – Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan

RTGONU – Revitalised Transitional Government of National Unity

SADC - Southern African Development Community

SDG – Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)

TJRC – Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission

TRC – Truth and Reconciliation Commission

UJOSS – Union of Journalists in South Sudan

UN – United Nations

UNDP - United Nations Development Programme

UNECA – United Nations Economic Commission for Africa

UNEP – United Nations Environment Programme

UNOCT – United Nations Office of Counterterrorism

USAID – United States Agency for International Development

WTO – World Trade Organisation

WWII – World War II

YEEP - Youth Economic Empowerment Project (YEEP)



FOREWORD

Declaring 2025 the ***"Justice for Africans and People of African Descent through Reparations"*** as the theme of the year is more than symbolic; it's a launchpad for transformative, justice-driven state-building in Africa. The year also marks a crucial turning point for the discourse on reparations and restorative justice.

The 13th HLD publication significantly advances this global conversation on reparative justice - building on progress made so far. Rooted in reparative justice, gender equity, youth empowerment, and state building. The views and ideas contained in this publication critique ongoing colonial-era systems that perpetuate the marginalization of women, youth, and grassroots communities. They underscore the urgent need to move from rhetoric to tangible action and ideates on how we can use tech and AI to for reparations.

This central theme highlights the need for reparations that go beyond financial compensation. It must encompass institutional reform, truth-telling, recognition of historical and ongoing harm, and guarantees against repetition. Most importantly it help us look forward to build our communities and nations. The contributions in this publication highlight, Africa's youth and diaspora communities as present-day leaders, not future stakeholders. Through civic activism, digital advocacy, and community mobilization, young people are reframing reparative justice today.

Equally underscored is the importance of women as fundamental pillar to state-building and not an auxiliary. This critically underscores the need to further realise existing frameworks that include the Maputo protocol. Most importantly, documenting diverse views help us learn, and reclaim Africa's intellectual autonomy on reparations, justice and state building. With this in mind, this publication is key facilitate conversation, while providing a foundational understanding and insights for the world of today especially through the lens of young Africans.

I extend my deepest gratitude to all who contributed to this publication and invite all Member States, CSO's Partners and Africans to build on this work we have begun a as a department. I call on all to continue the discourse about reparations as a key lever to building an inclusive, just and resilient Africa – brick by brick.

H.E. Amb. Bankole Adeoye

Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security
African Union Commission



PREFACE

2025 has been positioned as a pivotal year for Africa's collective journey toward reparative justice and inclusive governance. This 13th High Level Dialogue publication marks a significant step in that direction, moving beyond mere reflection, into a phase of transformative action.

This publication challenges us to confront the deep-rooted legacies of colonialism, particularly those that continue to marginalize women, youth, and communities. As explored in these pages, reparations are not just about compensation; they are about reimagining systems, confronting uncomfortable truths, and embedding justice into the

very foundation of our governance.

Africa's youth and diaspora are at the forefront, not on the margins. Armed with digital platforms, bold activism, and unwavering resolve, they are reshaping justice as a concrete reality rooted in fairness, inclusion, and economic independence.

At the heart of this vision are also women. Through core AU instruments like the Maputo Protocol, we recognize the leadership of African women, we can ensure that any future worth building must be inclusive and gender responsive. Intellectual autonomy is equally vital, our ideas, histories, and cultural strength must inform the Africa we are creating for ourselves.

This publication is more than a collection of different views, it is a look back at our past; it is a map for our future. It provides the historical context, key insights, and practical advice needed for this journey. I urge Member States, civil society, and especially young Africans to engage deeply with its messages and to carry forward the work of repair and renewal with conviction

With appreciation to all contributors, let us move forward together in building a just, sovereign, and inclusive Africa.

Patience Chiradza

Director, Governance and Conflict Prevention Directorate (GCPD)
African Union Commission



Vote of Thanks

This publication marks a crucial moment in the ongoing conversation about reparative justice and transformative state-building throughout Africa. It opens new avenues for thought and action in these vital areas, pushing the dialogue forward and inspiring change. Its creation is a collective achievement, driven by the passion and expertise of countless individuals and groups.

I extend my deepest gratitude to the H.E Amb. Bankole Adeoye and Mme Patience Chiradza for their visionary leadership and your passion for African youth and women. I would also like to thank the Chair of the AGA-APSA Platform and all Members of the platform to have brought this idea to life.

Contributors, editors – well done on your submissions - your insightful analyses and bold perspectives have enriched this work, providing a clear lens on the complexities of reparations. The AGA- APSA Secretariat team and editors deserve special recognition for their diligent efforts in crafting a cohesive and impactful publication that resonates with clarity and purpose.

Finally - I extend our heartfelt appreciation to Africa's dynamic youth! Their courageous activism, pioneering digital innovations, and dedicated community initiatives are not only redefining justice but also fostering a movement grounded in equity and inclusion.

Equally, as a "he for she" allow me to honour the women of Africa, whose commitment to gender justice anchor this movement. To the diaspora, civil society organizations, Member States, and partners, we appreciate your unwavering support.

Together, we are laying the groundwork for the African We want and the Africa We deserve.

With sincere appreciation,

Amb. Salah Hammad

Ag. Head, AGA-APSA Secretariat
Governance, conflict prevention Directorate
Political Affairs, Peace and Security
African Union Commission

Background

The Enduring Quest for Reparations in Africa

Africa's pursuit of reparative justice is not a recent development. Its roots stretch back to the early 1990s, when the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) established the Group of Eminent Persons to advocate for reparations concerning slavery and other historical wrongs. This initiative gained momentum with the 1993 Abuja Proclamation, which critically framed the question of reparations in relation to the injustices inflicted upon Africans and the African Diaspora through enslavement, colonization, and neo-colonialism.¹ The Abuja Proclamation importantly recognized that these injustices were not merely historical relics but rather continued to manifest in the present. Consequently, it highlighted the need for concerted efforts from Africans and people of African descent, alongside crucial support from the international community, to achieve reparative justice.

Advancing the Agenda: From Durban to Accra

Following Abuja, the 2001 Durban Declaration further advanced the conversation, acknowledging the harms of racism and racial discrimination and calling for a comprehensive plan of action to combat them. Crucially, this declaration recognized the transatlantic slave trade and the trafficking of enslaved Africans as a tragedy and a crime against humanity.²

The reparations dialogue, though momentarily subdued, was powerfully rekindled by the African Union's (AU) 2021 theme of the year, *"Arts, Culture and Heritage: Levers for Building the Africa We Want."*³ This theme specifically championed the restitution of artifacts and Africa's cultural heritage.

Building on this renewed focus, Accra, Ghana, hosted the Africa-Diaspora summit on reparations in 2022. This crucial convening underscored the deep interconnectedness of reparations and racial healing. The subsequent 2023 Accra Declaration significantly expanded continental discussions on reparations to include a broader range of stakeholders, specifically Africans in the diaspora.⁴ This pivotal declaration, emerging from the conference, paved the way for the AU's 2025 theme: *"Justice for Africans and People of African Descent Through Reparations."*⁵ This strategic decision by the AU Assembly empowers the African Union and its member states to lead in forging a

¹ A declaration of the first Abuja Pan-African Conference on Reparations for African Enslavement, Colonisation and Neo-Colonisation, sponsored by the Organisation of African Unity and its Reparations Commission, April 27-29, 1993, Abuja, Nigeria.

² United Nations. *Durban Declaration and Programme of Action*. Adopted at the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, Durban, South Africa, 31 August-8 September 2001. A/CONF.189/12. New York: United Nations, 2001.

³ African Union Theme of the Year 2021 – "The AU Year of the Arts, Culture and Heritage: Levers for Building the Africa We Want"

⁴ African Union. *Accra Proclamation on Reparations*. Adopted at the International Conference on Building a United Front to Advance the Cause of Justice and Reparations to Africans, Accra, Ghana, 14-17 November 2023. African Union, 2023

⁵ African Union Theme of the Year 2025 - "Justice for Africans and People of African Descent through Reparations"

common position and a united front in the global fight for justice against crimes and mass atrocities committed against Africans and people of African descent.

Broadening the Scope of Reparations

Initially, demands for reparations primarily focused on debt cancellation and artifact restitution. While important, these specific issues did not fully capture the extensive scope of historical injustices and their ongoing impact. This narrow focus potentially overlooked other critical forms of redress, such as direct financial compensation, developmental investments, or formal apologies. Consequently, the current push extends beyond mere financial compensation to a more comprehensive recognition of injustice, encompassing apology, restitution, and assurances of non-repetition. However, mobilizing and sustaining continental and international cooperation, alongside strong political will, remains critical in the pursuit of reparations for Africans and people of African descent.

Legal foundations, future justice.

From a legal standpoint, the issue of reparations has been integrated into international human rights law as a principle of transitional justice. This principle dictates that violations stemming from historical atrocities must be redressed through restorative and compensatory measures.

A significant global advancement in this regard came in December 2013, when the UN adopted Resolution 68/237, which issued a "*Proclamation of the International Decade for People of African Descent*."⁶ This resolution established a vital framework to address the persistent issues of racism, racial discrimination, and xenophobia endured by people of African descent worldwide. This advancement of human rights systems and instruments at the global level vividly demonstrates the fundamental principle of the indivisibility of Human Rights and firmly lays the foundation for the claim for reparations.

The current push for reparations by Africa, led by the African Union, is therefore well-grounded in historical backing. It draws on past successful cases where reparations have been granted. For example, the Japanese were granted reparations by the U.S. government after World War II, acknowledging the violation of their rights and the harm they suffered. These historical examples underscore the legal and moral foundations of reparations. They demonstrate that nations and communities have, in the past, taken responsibility for historical injustices.

Leveraging these precedents helps frame the African reparations agenda as more than just a call for compensation. It positions it as an integral part of a broader global effort for justice, the restoration of dignity, and the meaningful acknowledgment of long-

⁶ United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/RES/68/237, Proclamation of the International Decade for People of African Descent. Adopted on 23 December 2013

standing historical harms. This pursuit is not merely about correcting the past; it is about charting a clearer, more equitable path for the future.

Summary papers

CHAPTER 1: "Leveraging on AI: The Case for Justice and Reparations for Africa"

Ransom T. Macheka's article "Leveraging on AI: The Case for Justice and Reparations for Africa" argues that Artificial Intelligence and modern technology offers an opportunity to quantify and address historical injustices which that have underdeveloped Africa. Macheka demonstrates how AI can process vast datasets to calculate the costs of colonialism, model development, and provide evidence for reparations claims aligned with Agenda 2063. Macheka emphasises the critical role of African youth and diaspora in leveraging digital activism. He calls on African leaders to demand structural reforms of global economic systems, UN Security Council representation, and comprehensive reparations encompassing technology transfer and institutional transformation beyond money.

CHAPTER 2: "Beyond Rhetoric: Centring Reparative Justice and Gender Equity in African State-Building"

Sedilame Ntshingane's article "Beyond Rhetoric: Centring Reparative Justice and Gender Equity in African State-Building" argues that effective African state-building demands genuine implementation of justice frameworks, particularly those promoting gender-responsive reparations and protecting marginalised communities. The article further evaluates the gap between Africa's robust policy architecture and its staggered implementation. The article stresses that reparative justice must extend beyond money to include acknowledgment of harm, institutional reform, and non-repetition guarantees, serving as both recognition of past wrongs and a tool for rebuilding inclusive states. Overall, the paper contends that reparations are fundamental to legitimate state-building, proposing that Africa's future hinges on upheld rights and repaired harms.

CHAPTER 3: "African States on Trial: Dismantling Institutions That Betray Their People"

Immanuel Mwendwa Kiilu's article "African States on Trial: Dismantling Institutions That Betray Their People" argues that many African public institutions have retained their colonial origins serving elite interests and fostering a far-reaching crisis of legitimacy. Kiilu illustrates that post-colonial governments have largely preserved colonial control frameworks, leading to systematic exclusion, corruption, and public distrust. Equally, the article underscores Africa's youth majority as a powerful force for transformation and concludes by calling for comprehensive institutional restoration through structural reform, which is foundational to the African Union's Agenda 2063.

CHAPTER 4: "Equity as Reparations: Advancing Gender Justice in African Development"

Resty Nabaggala's article "Equity as Reparations: Advancing Gender Justice in African Development" argues that gender equity itself constitutes a form of reparative justice for Africa's legacies of discrimination against women. Contextualised by the African Union's 2025 the article shows how colonial systems embedded patriarchal norms that marginalised women from power, with these inequalities largely retained by postcolonial states. Nabaggala presents Rwanda's gender quota system and Kenya's 2010 constitutional reforms as examples of gender-responsive reparations in practice. Resty further stresses that reparations must extend beyond money to include structural transformations like enforcing the Maputo Protocol, conducting gender audits, and embedding gender parity.

CHAPTER 5: "Invisible No More: Gender, Justice, and the Price of Exclusion"

Shamsiyya Ibrahim Barde's article "Invisible No More: Gender, Justice, and the Price of Exclusion" argues that meaningful reparations and state-building in Africa must address the systematic exclusion and the gendered harm which women have endured. Shamsiyya, explains how colonial powers reinforced patriarchal systems, denying women their rights and establishing a marginalisation that has persisted. The article further explores how truth and reconciliation commissions have failed to adequately address gender-based violence and structural harms. The work concludes by calling for comprehensive gender-sensitive reparations, including having mandatory gender audits, and support for grassroots women-led initiatives.

CHAPTER 6: "Land as Reparation: A Radical Blueprint for Gendered and Youth-Led State-Building in Africa"

Moses Nkhana's article "Land as Reparation: A Radical Blueprint for Gendered and Youth-Led State-Building in Africa" argues that comprehensive land reform must be the foundation for reparative justice and democratic governance. Drawing from experience, Nkhana demonstrates how colonial legacies created patriarchal land systems that still exclude women and youth from ownership. The article showcases practical, community-driven solutions like joint land titling, youth cooperatives, and customary law reforms. Nkhana emphasises that the Maputo Protocol on women's rights requires urgent implementation, positioning the youth as present co-architects of democracy.

CHAPTER 7: "Youth & Diaspora Leadership: Shaping Reparative Justice through Digital Activism, Civic Engagement, and Advocacy"

Samuel Adeyinka Owa's article "Youth & Diaspora Leadership: Shaping Reparative Justice through Digital Activism, Civic Engagement, and Advocacy" examines how Africa's youth and diaspora communities are driving transformative reparative justice movements, aligning with the African Union's 2025 theme. These groups are redefining reparations beyond financial compensation to encompass comprehensive justice: truth-telling, recognition, institutional reform, and healing. They utilise digital platforms and strategic advocacy to amplify marginalised voices. Owa highlights examples like @VeryDarkMan's anti-trafficking activism and #EndSARS, while also noting the challenges. The work stresses that youth and diaspora leadership are indispensable for resilient, inclusive African states, calling for institutionalised participation, capacity building, and gender-responsive approaches to ensure reparations contribute to healing and democratic governance.

CHAPTER 8: "A Radical Reimagining: How the Young African Generation Can Best Approach the Reparations Question in Their Lifetime"

Douglas Drake Onen's article "A Radical Reimagining: How the Young African Generation Can Best Approach the Reparations Question in Their Lifetime" argues that Africa's youth must abandon victim-centred approaches to reparations, instead pursuing structural economic transformation through strategic leverage. Onen analyses decades of failed moral appeals, showing how the Bretton Woods financial architecture systematically disadvantages Africa through discriminatory lending and the "commodity trap." Onen stresses that meaningful reparations must involve comprehensive restructuring of global economic systems, restoration of African sovereignty over natural resources, and fundamental reforms within multilateral institutions. The work concludes by positioning Africa's youth as key to economic liberation through strategic leverage, and an unrelenting demand for structural change thereby transforming reparations from symbolic gestures into tangible transformation.

CHAPTER 9: "Decolonising the University and Knowledge Production as a Form of Reparative Justice to Promote Democracy and Academic Freedom in Africa"

Kwadwo Appiagyei-Atua's article "Decolonising the University and Knowledge Production as a Form of Reparative Justice to Promote Democracy and Academic Freedom in Africa" argues that true reparations for Africa must extend beyond finances to encompass restoring indigenous knowledge systems and decolonising higher education. The article traces how colonial powers committed "epistemicide" by destroying Africa's pre-modern universities, replacing them with structures designed to train a Europeanised elite. Appiagyei-Atua demonstrates how this colonial legacy persists, creating "asymmetrical" relationships where Africa consumes knowledge. He stresses that post-independence African leaders lack moral authority to demand

reparations while suppressing academic freedom. The article calls for comprehensive decolonisation of curriculum and university cultures based on traditional African communal learning, arguing that only by reclaiming indigenous epistemologies can Africa negotiate meaningful reparative justice.

CHAPTER 10: "Towards a Just Africa: The 13th High-Level Dialogue and South Sudan's Path to Lasting Peace"

Michael Thak Nguany and Ruot George Wal Mut's article "Towards a Just Africa: The 13th High-Level Dialogue and South Sudan's Path to Lasting Peace" examines how the African Union's 13th Biennial High-Level Dialogue aligns with South Sudan's ongoing peace process. The article shows how the dialogue's focus on "Justice, Rights, Reparations, and State-building" directly supports South Sudan's transitional justice mechanisms, while addressing implementation challenges. Central to the analysis is the work of the Nile Youth Development Actions (NYDA), a grassroots organisation exemplifying youth-led peacebuilding. The authors argue that lasting peace in South Sudan requires comprehensive policies protecting vulnerable groups especially women, people with disabilities, and youth supported by awareness campaigns, robust legal frameworks, and sustained support for civil society organisations like NYDA.

Chapter 1: Leveraging on AI: The case for justice and reparations for Africa

Ransom T. Macheka

Africa stands at a crossroads in its development. Although it needs to look forward, develop and compete in a fast changing world it is difficult to do so without reflecting and addressing historical circumstances that have contributed to its current state of development. Slavery, genocide, apartheid and colonialism, all unprecedented evils that made Africa a resource base for colonial masters, underdeveloped the continent.

Africa's call for justice and reparations is not a misnomer. The Jewish movement has successfully called for reparations for suffering during the Holocaust. Jewish victims have received financial compensation and the return of their property. Japanese Americans and Japanese Canadian men, women, children, citizens, and non-citizens who were detained by their respective governments during the Second World War received apologies and financial compensation in the 1980s (Howard-Hassmann, 2008). This makes the case for justice and reparations overwhelming. This article is intended to inform the discourse on justice and reparations for Africa. The central argument is that Artificial Intelligence (AI) and modern technology offer an opportunity to address the negative impact of slavery and colonialism.

The case for justice and reparations

Scholars have argued that Africa's case for reparations is justifiable as Africa has endured over six centuries of relentless subjugation (Banjo, 2003). Howard-Hassmann (2008) posits that the international law of economic rights provides stronger backing for Western responsibility to Africa than a claim for reparations for injuries to Africans long dead. This article uses this assertion as a point of departure by proposing that a reparations program can be structured in line with Africa's development blueprint and leverage the existence of institutions such as the African Development Bank, which are funding development programs and projects. A reparations plan can be structured and coordinated by recognized institutions on the African continent. The reparation plan can be in tandem with Agenda 2063 to ensure congruence with Africa's development priorities in education, health, and infrastructure.

Reparations are a relevant starting point for addressing global inequalities that still exist today. The United Nations digital magazine, African Renewal, outlines how Ghana exported \$9.58 billion in gold in 2024, yet it only retained 14% of the value due to the nature of multinational agreements. The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) produces over 70% of the world's cobalt, yet only 1% is refined in the country before being exported (United Nations, 2024). Similarly, Somalia loses \$300 million a year in illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing by foreign fishing fleets. These

contemporary challenges have historical roots that can be addressed by embracing reparations and social justice, which can be utilized to offset such developments.

Reparations in isolation would not lead to a sustainable and equal world. Guarantees of non-repetition of subjugation would be difficult to provide without reform of global institutions, including the United Nations. The reform of the United Nations organs, especially the Security Council, would ensure that the domination by some states is systematically addressed. The treaties, laws, institutions, and processes that govern the political and economic order need to be based on equality, coexistence, and collaboration. A starting point for Africa would be to leverage AI to document, initiate discussions, and justify the need for social justice and reparations.

The case for AI.

The advent of Artificial Intelligence and modelling software presents opportunities to calculate the financial, environmental, and social costs of slavery and colonialism on the continent. The computed cost of these developments can be utilized as a baseline to calculate and model justice and reparation for Africa today. This justice and reparations could be based on Africa's current and future development needs. For instance, although financial reparations can be a priority, technological transfer can be modelled as part of the compensation. This technology would assist Africa in closing the gap by providing sustainable technology for its development needs. This is in line with the thinking that reparations are at the core of social justice as they demand compensation for wrongs committed (Banjo, 2003).

AI is being utilized to model and predict disease progression in health, as well as climate change. The availability of sufficient real data would enable us to model the impact of slavery and colonialism on Africa and compute the human capital loss, financial loss, and environmental impact they caused. These findings would be the basis of engagement between Africa and Western countries on justice and reparations. It is worth noting that the West continues to enjoy the benefit of the human capital from people of African descent, and analysis of this dataset, including contemporary computations, would need to be considered.

AI can also be utilized to compute the pace and development that Western states would have achieved without the extraction of human and natural resources from Africa. The basis for this analysis would be available data on the pace at which the West was developing and the utilization of scenario development capabilities of AI platforms, either through machine learning or existing platforms. Big data analytics can integrate both structured and unstructured data sources and leverage AI-driven analytics to uncover patterns and compute associated losses and gains, which would be key in building the case for social justice and reparations.

Open Global Rights, an independent platform for analysis and opinion on international human rights issues, highlights how AI can process historical records, economic trends, and political changes to recognize the early signs of human rights abuses

(Open Global Rights, 2024). By analysing this data, AI can predict when certain populations might be at risk, allowing defenders to intervene before violence or oppression escalates. This technology showcases how AI is being utilised today and can be leveraged to address both historical and contemporary human rights issues.

A positive development is the African Union's adoption of the Continental Artificial Intelligence Strategy. The African Union (AU) Continental AI Strategy aims to stimulate economic growth, create new industries, drive innovation, generate employment opportunities, generate new businesses for women and youth, support the preservation of Africa's cultural heritage and help solve some of Africa's most complex and urgent challenges in healthcare, agriculture, education, finance and public service delivery (African Union, 2024). The strategy can be leveraged to support documentation of past injustices and provide the continent's leading institutions with data and evidence to drive engagements on reparations forward.

However, it needs to be noted that AI is not a magic bullet as it has inherent weaknesses that need to be addressed. The 2025 session of the Permanent Forum on People of African Descent, which serves as an advisory body to the Human Rights Council, discussed AI and digital justice in one of its sessions. It noted how, despite AI increasingly shaping critical aspects of modern life, it can inherit biases as it may be designed, used, and regulated on the basis of structures that reflect power imbalances that are discriminatory. This means that the data it processes may lead to discriminatory outcomes. This calls for youth in the diaspora and youth residing in Africa to develop system checks and balances in leveraging AI to understand Africa's state of development and how it can promote equality.

Lessons from reparations and social justice

Lessons from reparation case studies can offer lessons for Africa today. The case of the Second World War victors' reparations from Germany, Italy, and Finland has lessons on the nature of losses claimed and how these were made up for. The victors made claims for bodily loss, loss of liberty, loss of property, forced emigration, time spent in concentration camps, social disorder, and the economic cost of war as represented by the capital destroyed and the value of civilian goods and services forgone to make war goods. Payments were made in cash and kind, including goods, services, capital equipment, land, farm, and forest products, with penalties added for late deliveries (Banjo, 2003). This case offers lessons on how Africa can approach its reparations in a meaningful manner today.

The role of citizens

Leveraging the creativity and innovation of young people, as outlined in Aspiration 6 of Agenda 2063, is key in drawing attention to the issues of justice and reparations for Africa. A reparations investment business case thus needs to be developed by people of African heritage, including politicians, researchers, scholars, and students both in

Africa and beyond. This would ensure that the resources and technologies received are relevant to the needs of Africa. This is in line with Ali Mazrui, who summarizes the types of reparations that may be relevant, including capital transfer, skill transfer, and power sharing (Martin & Yaquinto, 2007).

Youth in Africa and the diaspora can play a role in encouraging states and institutions to commit to reparations and justice for Africa. Youth in the diaspora can call for social justice to be included on the United Nations and Bretton Woods Institutions agendas so that acknowledgement of past wrongs is done and a future course of action is developed. Youth can also lead thought processes by providing models of analysis that explore policies and laws through a lens that acknowledges the unequal footing that African states find themselves in. A case needs to be made for the existing structure of global institutions and processes, and how they perpetuate inequality, and youth of African descent have a role in highlighting this.

Fiveable (2024) says that digital activism has revolutionized social movements in the African diaspora, with social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook becoming crucial tools for organizing, communication, and mobilization. Digital platforms have also become spaces for cultural preservation and identity formation. These are important aspects for youth in the diaspora to leverage. The global solidarity as seen through the #BlackLivesMatter and #MeToo movements reveals the potential that social media has to bring light to an issue. African youth and youth of African descent need to be brave and take up the mantle to begin showcasing the need for social justice for Africa.

In addition, social media platforms are argued to be spaces for cultural revitalization and identity formation Fiveable, 2024. Complemented by digital archives and online museums like the Digital Diaspora Family Reunion project and the Black Archives Digital collections, indeed, digital platforms are tools that can be leveraged by African youth and youth of African descent. Global discussions on inequality and how it can be overcome can be spurred by youth with contemporary experiences, adding value to deliberations and engagements.

The 2025 speech by the African Union Special Envoy on Youth reveals a strong appreciation of the means and impact of colonization, including systemic exploitation of land and resources, which resulted in divided communities and disrupted trade routes. What is clear from the speech is how the legacy of forced labour and colonial rule laid the foundation for conflicts being experienced today. Calling for reparations would not only address past developments but also lay the foundation for addressing the ongoing conflicts across borders that still affect Africa today.

The African Union Special Envoy on Youth outlined how the office of the special envoy on youth, together with relevant stakeholders, will raise awareness on the concept of reparations through hosting a series of virtual and physical dialogues, launching an international hashtag, and leveraging existing African Union continental youth engagement dialogues and summits. This high-level engagement also needs to be

complemented with in situ dialogues that bring youth at the community level to the table.

Education curricula at both High school and tertiary level need to move beyond exploring colonialism as a historical period, but as a foundational factor that has led to the current state of development on the continent. Reparations should be a concept that youth learn about from an early stage and be able to articulate on its pros and cons. This will ensure that a movement of youth can emerge and advocate for reparations in a relevant and meaningful manner, as they are custodians of the African continent. The hashtags that the African Union Special Envoy on Youth will then be owned and pushed for by youth with a comprehensive appreciation of the issues at stake.

A call to action for leaders

It is imperative for Africa to speak with one voice to demand social justice for Africa under the banner of the African Union. This calls for the Heads of State and Government to set aside internal differences and approach justice and reparations with a coordinated approach. The African Union has demonstrated the ability to speak with one voice, as seen through the establishment of the African Continental Free Trade Area in 2018, as well as the adoption of Agenda 2063.

The African Union (AU) can similarly draw on its established infrastructure, which includes permanent offices in major international hubs. These offices are located at the UN headquarters in New York, the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Geneva, the EU and the ACP states in Brussels, the League of Arab States in Cairo, and the Organization of American States in Washington, D.C (African Union, n.d.). These AU missions act as secretariats, sounding boards, and coordinators for various Africa groups within these international organizations (Tieku, 2019).

This article does not seek to denigrate Africa's progress in economic, political, and social spheres. Significant progress has been made by the continent despite inequalities that exist in global institutions and the North to South dichotomy. This article makes the case that Africa could be a bigger force to reckon with on the global scale if legacy issues are addressed in a fair and transparent manner. This does not take away from internal issues Africa needs to address for enhanced development. However, some of the issues Africa needs to address have roots in centuries of subjugation, thus the need for redress through reparations and social justice mechanisms.

In conclusion, this article argues that leveraging on the power of AI tools, the impact of the slave trade, resource extraction from Africa and colonization can be estimated and compensated utilizing contemporary value. Africa can then utilize its leadership and governance infrastructure to determine how reparations should be structured.

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Chapter 2: Beyond Rhetoric: Centering Reparative Justice and Gender Equity in African State-Building

Sedilame Ntshingane

The African Union's (AU) designation of 2025 as the "Year of Justice for Africans and People of African Descent Through Reparations" signals a powerful shift toward confronting Africa's historical and contemporary injustices. Under the overarching theme "Justice, Rights, Reparations, and State-building," the 13th High-Level Dialogue (HLD) offers a strategic platform to reignite African-led discourses around reparative and restorative justice. This paper contends that effective state-building cannot be separated from the genuine implementation of justice frameworks, especially those that promote gender-responsive reparations and uphold the rights of historically marginalized communities. Despite a robust policy architecture, including the Maputo Protocol and the SADC Gender Protocol, implementation has remained staggered across the continent thereby necessitating a need to pivot from rhetorical commitment to actionable progress.

Reparative Justice as a Foundation for State-building

Reparative justice in the African context extends beyond monetary compensation to encompass acknowledgment of harm, institutional reform, and non-repetition guarantees. This broader understanding is essential for rebuilding trust between states and citizens, particularly those disenfranchised by colonialism, patriarchy, and contemporary structural violence. According to the AU's Agenda 2063, achieving "an Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law" requires addressing both historical and ongoing injustices.

While the AU has taken commendable steps in establishing frameworks for justice and reconciliation, such as the African Transitional Justice Policy and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, real progress is stymied by a lack of enforcement mechanisms and political will. Reparations, when understood and implemented effectively, serve as both an acknowledgment of past wrongs and as a tool for reconstructing inclusive, resilient states.

The Maputo Protocol: A Comprehensive but Underutilized Tool

Adopted in 2003, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol) stands as one of the most progressive human rights instruments globally. It addresses a comprehensive spectrum of women's rights: from rights and protection from gender-based violence.

However, more than two decades later, the rate of ratification and implementation among AU Member States remains uneven. As of 2023, 44 of the 55 Member States had signed the Protocol, but only 43 had ratified, and even fewer had domesticated its provisions. Countries such as Rwanda, Namibia, and South Africa have made substantial progress in incorporating the Protocol into their national legislation and policies. Others, on the other hand, continue to fall behind, whether due to socio-cultural resistance, a lack of political commitment, or insufficient institutional capacity. According to the World Economic Forum (2023), at the current rate of progress, eliminating the global gender gap will take approximately 131 years, necessitating the acceleration of gender equity framework implementation.

Gaps in Political Will and Institutional Accountability

The challenge is not merely about policy design but implementation. The AU, alongside mechanisms like the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), must shift its focus from the celebration of policy adoption to monitoring enforcement and holding Member States accountable. There must be consequences for non-compliance and incentives for countries that prioritize gender equity and reparative justice.

Evidence suggests that Member States with robust civil society engagement, particularly women-led movements, are more likely to implement gender-responsive policies. For example, in Sierra Leone, the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Bill (2022) was passed after years of sustained advocacy from grassroots organizations. This highlights the indispensable role of civil society in translating continental aspirations into national realities.

The Role of Civil Society and the African Diaspora

Civil society organizations (CSOs), particularly those led by women and youth, are critical drivers of justice and accountability. Their proximity to communities allows them to contextualize global and continental frameworks and advocate for culturally appropriate interventions. In countries like Kenya and Nigeria, CSOs have played a pivotal role in legal reforms and awareness campaigns on gender-based violence and reproductive rights.

Similarly, the African diaspora serves as a vital link between African nations and global justice movements. Diaspora-led campaigns for reparations, such as those by the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and Pan-African civil society networks, underscore the transnational dimension of the struggle for justice. Recognising and institutionalising the role of the diaspora in AU policymaking could enhance both legitimacy and resource mobilization for reparative justice.

Toward Gender-Responsive Reparations

Reparations must be designed with an understanding of how historical harms affect men and women differently. Gender-responsive reparations recognize the unique suffering of women, including sexual violence, economic disempowerment, and exclusion from political processes. As the Maputo Protocol outlines, states are obligated to eliminate all forms of discrimination and integrate a gender perspective into all policies and programs.

Moreover, the African Transitional Justice Policy underscores the importance of involving women in the design and implementation of reparations programs. This means ensuring that reparations are not only symbolic but materially transformative, providing access to land, education, healthcare, and livelihoods for women affected by conflict and structural violence.

Recommendations

1. **Strengthen Accountability Mechanisms:** The AU and APRM should establish clearer benchmarks and timelines for implementation of the Maputo Protocol and similar instruments, with annual scorecards to monitor progress.
2. **Amplify Civil Society Voices:** Support for grassroots women- and youth-led organizations must be institutionalized within AU decision-making processes.
3. **Promote Legal Harmonization:** Encourage Member States to domesticate international and continental frameworks into national legislation with clear enforcement provisions.
4. **Centre Reparations in State-building Agendas:** Reparations should be embedded within broader governance frameworks as tools for reconciliation and inclusive development.
5. **Foster Diaspora Engagement:** Develop formal mechanisms to incorporate diaspora perspectives into transitional justice and reparations strategies.

Justice, reparations, and rights are not abstract ideals; they are cornerstones of legitimate and inclusive state-building. The 13th High-Level Dialogue offers a timely opportunity for the African Union and its Member States to reflect on past commitments and renew their dedication to transformative justice. The Maputo Protocol, though far-reaching in its vision, must be matched by political will, resource allocation, and institutional integrity. Africa's future depends not on the promises we celebrate, but on the rights we uphold, the harms we repair, and the inclusive societies we actively build.

Author Bio

Sedilame Ntshingane is an impact communications strategist and project manager with over a decade of experience advancing governance, gender equity, and civic participation across Africa. She has led nationally influential docuseries, served as an African Union Election Observer, and published on women's political participation. As a 2024 Research and Policy Advocacy Fellow, she earned a certificate in Behavioural Science in Public Policy from the World Bank Institute in 2025. Sedilame has mobilized international grants and was named one of the 54 Faces of Africa by UN Volunteers, UNDP, and Youth Connekt Africa. Her work bridges policy and people, using storytelling, research, and engagement to drive inclusive governance and sustainable development.

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Chapter 3: African states on trial: dismantling institutions that betray their people.

Immanuel Mwendwa Kiilu

I was ten years old when I first witnessed the silent cruelty of the state. My uncle, a respected teacher in our rural community, was arrested for organizing a forum that demanded transparency in the allocation of education bursaries. No warrant was presented. At the local police station, an aging colonial structure with barred windows and fading government signage, he was held for days without charge or record. The police chief later admitted that the order had come from higher authorities, and my uncle was released with a warning to stay quiet. That building, its walls, its protocols, and its purpose had barely changed since the 1950s. Built during British colonial rule, it reflected an era when state institutions were designed to control rather than serve the African population. The architecture, both physical and bureaucratic, was a legacy of foreign domination: rigid, extractive, and unresponsive to the lived realities of African citizens.

This experience, though personal, speaks to a deeper truth. Across Africa, many public institutions still reflect the architecture of exclusion, control, and repression. Though renamed and staffed by Africans, these institutions continue to operate on foundations laid during colonialism. The police station that detained my uncle was not exceptional. It symbolized a much larger betrayal found in the fabric of governance. Instead of becoming guardians of public service and dignity, many institutions function as barriers to justice and reminders of systems designed to dominate rather than empower. The echoes of the colonial state remain loud in how public authority is exercised and accountability evaded.

This is not merely a question of inefficiency or weak leadership. It is a structural crisis rooted in how post-colonial African states inherited institutions without transforming them. As Mahmood Mamdani observed in 1996, many governments preserved colonial frameworks of rule, choosing stability over justice. Courts, police, land commissions, and bureaucracies were not reimaged to reflect the will of the people. Consequently, they continue to serve elites and external interests, not citizens. The Mo Ibrahim Index (2023) shows that fewer than 20 African countries have improved their accountability scores in the last decade. This failure is not incidental. It is systemic.

The effects of this institutional betrayal are felt most deeply by the marginalized. Land tribunals continue to deny ancestral claims. Parliaments pass laws with minimal citizen input. Anti-corruption agencies reveal scandals that rarely result in convictions. The African Union (2022) estimates that Africa loses over 88 billion US dollars annually through illicit financial flows. These outcomes are predictable in systems designed to

exclude. For everyday citizens, the absence of accountability means daily struggles for justice, basic services, and recognition in the eyes of the state.

Amid this dysfunction, young Africans are rejecting silence. Africa has the world's youngest population, with over 60 percent under 25. In 2024, Kenya witnessed a historic youth-led protest against a punitive finance bill. Over 1.2 million young people mobilized in days, offering legal aid, civic education, and medical support through platforms like WhatsApp and TikTok. This was not just about taxes. It was a loud rejection of opaque institutions and unaccountable leadership.

This essay argues that institutional accountability is not a technical recommendation but a moral imperative. Without rebuilding institutions to reflect justice and dignity, state-building efforts will remain hollow. The future of governance in Africa depends on our willingness to dismantle outdated structures and replace them with systems that serve, include, and protect all citizens.

Institutional Betrayal: A Structural Legacy Entrenched

The dysfunction of many African institutions cannot be fully understood without examining their colonial foundations. Colonial regimes established state institutions to control, extract, and suppress local populations. At independence, rather than dismantling these oppressive systems, most African governments retained their structure, adapting their functions without altering their underlying logic (Mamdani, 1996). This historical continuity has entrenched exclusion, inequality, and public distrust.

Institutions that should uphold justice often reproduce harm. Courts remain inaccessible for ordinary citizens, while land tribunals regularly dismiss claims by rural and indigenous communities. Public offices are plagued by patronage and opacity. In fragile states like South Sudan (Tchie, 2021), and the Democratic Republic of Congo, weak institutions have enabled the mismanagement of billions in natural resource revenues, worsening poverty and conflict.

Transparency International (2023) warns that systemic corruption across Africa erodes trust and magnifies inequality. Women, youth, and marginalized communities bear the brunt, often excluded from decision-making and legal protections.

Rising Civic Consciousness: The Youth as Architects of Transformation

Across Africa, young people are emerging as powerful architects of institutional transformation, and uprisings have echoed across the continent. In Nigeria, the #EndSARS protests against police brutality evolved into a broader demand for reform. In Sudan, youth played a decisive role in the 2019 revolution that toppled decades of

authoritarian rule. These efforts reflect a rising regional consciousness rejecting elite impunity and demanding inclusive governance.

The African diaspora has amplified these movements through global solidarity campaigns, financial support, and digital activism. During #EndSARS, diaspora voices in cities like London and Washington kept international attention focused on demands for justice. The above highlights how Africa's youth are not waiting to be included but are actively creating a new democratic architecture

Accountability: The Indispensable Cornerstone for Justice and State-Building

Accountability is more than just a bureaucratic duty; it is the fundamental structural and moral anchor of any just society. Fortunately, despite previous problems, improvements are emerging across Africa. For example, Rwanda's Office of the Auditor General has a track record of successfully recovering misused public funds, demonstrating the country's dedication to fiscal responsibility. Similarly, Ghana's Public Accounts Committee actively encourages openness by televising its sessions, giving individuals immediate access to the inspection of public expenditure. Botswana's Directorate on Corruption and Economic Crime (DCEC) exemplifies this tendency by constantly pursuing and prosecuting high officials found to be involved in corrupt acts, hence upholding the integrity of its governmental institutions.

The above instances demonstrate an increasing resolve among African states to strengthen governance. Equally, civic technology is expanding these efforts. BudgIT in Nigeria empowers citizens to monitor public expenditure. Mzalendo in Kenya tracks legislative performance, while diaspora-led platforms like Follow the Money Global amplify domestic accountability across borders.

Charting the Course: Recommendations for Institutional Redemption

Africa's institutional redemption requires a bold strategy rooted in three interconnected pillars: institutional reform, civic power, and transnational accountability. These pillars are grounded in a justice-centered framework of memory, reform, and participation. Memory entails confronting historical injustice through truth commissions, public archives, national memorials, and reparative storytelling. Reform demands structural redesign, legal safeguards, and independent oversight, while participation calls for inclusive engagement through civic education and digital platforms that elevate community voices.

These civic tech platforms should be scaled continent-wide under the African Union Digital Transformation Strategy (2020). Legal domestication of instruments like the AU Youth Charter (2006) and the Gender Strategy (2018) is essential to ensure that youth

and gender inclusion are constitutional rights, not discretionary policies. Reform is not just an administrative goal but a moral and generational responsibility.

Civic power should be fostered through education and community engagement, in addition to inclusion in national curricula and non-formal learning environments. Initiatives such as Sierra Leone's civic clubs (2019) and the African Union's Civic Education Toolkit (2021) offer practical and adaptable models. An informed citizenry remains the most resilient defender of democracy. To ensure civic knowledge is accessible and enduring across generations, collaboration among civil society, educators, and local authorities is essential.

These efforts must be pursued with urgency and resolve. They are not peripheral; they are foundational to building the just, inclusive, and accountable institutions envisioned in Agenda 2063 and demanded by Africa's people today.

Conclusion

African states stand on trial not before a court of law but before the conscience of their people. Institutions rooted in colonial design have failed to uphold justice, dignity, and inclusion. Yet across the continent, youth, marginalized communities, and the diaspora are rising not to destroy but to rebuild. The path forward demands institutional transformation, historical redress, and a bold pursuit of reparations. The verdict is unwritten. It will be shaped by the reforms embraced today. A just future is possible if Africa rebuilds from within through equity, accountability, and commitment to the Africa We Want.

Author Bio

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Chapter 4: Equity as Reparations: Advancing Gender Justice in African Development.

Resty Nabaggala

Introduction

The call for reparations to Africa has gained momentum in recent years, with demands for compensation for historical injustices such as slavery and colonialism. While reparations are often framed in terms of financial compensation or restitution of stolen artifacts, research on the on gender and reparations highlights the often-neglected gendered dimensions of human rights violations and post-conflict justice. Reparations must go beyond redressing material losses rather dismantle the systems that enabled injustice and rebuild inclusive and equitable institutions.

This article argues that gender equity itself is a form of reparative justice. With utmost consideration of the AU 2025 theme, “Justice for Africans and People of African Descent Through Reparations,” this article explores how African states can realize justice through gender-responsive state-building, informed by feminist and equity-centered approaches. Drawing on African policy frameworks and real-world examples, this article brings to light that advancing gender justice is not a side effort but rather a foundation of sustainable and transformative development

Understanding Reparations in the African Context.

The African Union’s 2025 theme draws on both external and internal reparations. Externally, it invites former colonial powers to take charge of centuries of enslavement, land dispossession, and racialized exploitation. Internally, the African Union challenges its member states to confront domestic legacies of exclusion, violence, and structural injustice, which for long have been normalized.

Reparations, then, are not only about compensation. According to the African Transitional Justice Policy, they must include restitution, rehabilitation, guarantees of non-repetition, and satisfaction. Moreover, reparations must also fervently prioritize those most affected and vulnerable, especially women, girls, as well as other marginalized communities who continue to live with the compounded effects of historical violence. Greiff (2006) stresses that reparations programs must seek to achieve recognition, civic trust, and social solidarity.

Colonial and Postcolonial Gendered Harm

Colonial systems significantly disrupted African governance and legal systems, embedding patriarchal norms and marginalizing women’s roles in society, excluding

them from political, economic, and cultural power. Women were denied land ownership, stripped of leadership roles, and subjected to gendered violence. This shift led to the deterioration of women's status across various aspects of life, including marriage, divorce, and property rights. While these reforms evidently sideline women, post-independence states, rather than dismantling these systems, the majority, if not all, retained them, deepening inequality and reinforcing gender hierarchies.

Today, African women face disproportionate and multi-faceted poverty, limited access to land and credit, and underrepresentation in decision-making. Despite progress in some areas, women remain underrepresented in leadership roles and peace negotiations due to restrictive laws, cultural practices, and institutional barriers. It is imperative that an understanding of the progress achieved towards increasing women's visibility is known to address this injustice. Akpan et al (2024) highlight the double tragedy of women in conflict context areas. The aftermath of conflict leaves many women struggling with trauma, shame, and social stigma, further hindering their participation in society. Young women, in particular, face discrimination and exclusion from peacebuilding efforts, often overlooked in favour of young men due to patriarchal tendencies. These injustices are not incidental but rather are a product of structural violence that requires reparative transformation, and to address them, we need inclusive leadership models, targeted policies, and investment in women's education and skills development to leverage their unique contributions to fostering sustainable peace and stability in Africa.

Gender equity as a form of reparations

To repair such systemic harm, equity itself must be recognized as a form of reparations. This means designing and implementing policies that intentionally address power imbalances and centre the needs of historically excluded groups. The Maputo Protocol, which is one of Africa's strongest instruments on women's rights, lays a legal foundation for gender responsive and transformative reparations (African Union, 2003). It further highlights that women's land rights, reproductive health, and political participation are not only rights but a mechanism of repair. Similarly, the African Transitional Justice Policy emphasizes that transitional justice must account for the specific experiences and rights of women. When African states invest in women's empowerment, gender budgeting, inclusive governance, and protection from gender-based violence (GBV), they are not just delivering services, they are restoring justice.

Case studies of Gender-responsive and transformative reparations

Rwanda: political representation and institutional reform

Rwanda is marked as a continental role model for its dedication to gender equity. The country was in the 6th position out of 146 countries in the World Economic Forum's 2022 Global Gender Gap Index. Even though challenges still exist, Rwanda has proven to be a pioneer of gender equity. Additionally, Rwanda has recorded a female majority representation exceeding 56% which exceeds the global average. This achievement is attributed to the gender quota system instituted in 2003. Today, Rwanda has adopted numerous laws promoting women's rights, including protection against gender-based violence and equal inheritance rights due to the increased female representation.

Kenya: Constitutional Reforms

The constitution of Kenya 2010 introduced significant affirmative action and gender equity provisions to rectify the historical exclusion of women in political representation and other spheres. While enforcement remains a challenge, these legal shifts represent structural reparations aimed at correcting the systemic exclusion of women. In the same instance, affirmative action alone may not lead to gender parity and correction of marginalization but these provisions create opportunities for women and youth to contribute more fully to Kenyan society.

Embedding equity in state-building and governance

Reparations cannot be separated from state-building. A just state is one that recognizes and repairs past harms while designing systems that prevent future injustices. This may take shape in reinforcing gender parity in leadership, ensuring women are not just beneficiaries but decision makers in any process. Secondly, it also restores land and resource justice to eliminate the exclusion of women from economic assets. Thirdly, it strengthens accountability systems, ensuring laws on gender-based violence are implemented and perpetrators are brought to justice as the law stipulates. And lastly, such a state prioritizes intersectional inclusion, recognizing the multi-faceted layers of discrimination faced by the various marginalised groups, including women, PWDs, indigenous peoples, among others. Therefore, reparations are not just a program but a principle that guides inclusive governance and equitable transformation.

Recommendations.

To the African Union and Member States:

Operationalize the Maputo Protocol and integrate it into national legal systems. While most member states have ratified the Protocol, its domestication and implementation are still elusive. There is an urgent need to translate its provisions into national laws and policies, especially those concerning reproductive rights, land ownership, inheritance, political representation, and protection from violence. By so doing, AU Member States turn rights into reparations, restoring dignity and agency to women and girls. Therefore, AU should emphasize this call to action to all its member states.

Conduct gender audits in public institutions and transitional justice programs. Gender auditing analyses the equity, inclusiveness, and responsiveness of the institutions and programs to the unique needs of men, women, and other gender identities. It ensures that systems of governance do not replicate historic harm. Moreover, in transitional justice programs, it means centring survivors of gender-based violence, displaced women, and other vulnerable groups in the reparative process.

Allocate reparations funds to support community-led, women-focused initiatives. Several women's groups, particularly at the grassroots level, are engaged in healing, accountability, and justice work, including restoring livelihoods through income-generating activities, reintegrating displaced women and children into communities, among others, often without state support. However, these community initiatives are often underfunded and politically unrecognized. AU should earmark reparations budgets for local, women-led organizations that are doing the work of reconciliation, healing, and development, and eliminate unnecessary bureaucratic processes.

To the civil society and youth movements:

Document and amplify stories of gendered harm and resistance. Civil society organizations (CSOs) and youth-led movements play a vital role in ensuring that the lived realities of marginalized communities, especially women, girls, and gender-diverse people, are not overlooked in national and continental reparations conversations. Many forms of gendered harm, including conflict-related sexual violence, displacement, reproductive coercion, and finally exclusion from land and leadership, remain undocumented and socially silenced.

Advocate for reparations that include non-monetary, transformative. Reparations must go beyond one-time financial payments. For many survivors and communities, especially women and youth, transformative reparations, particularly those that address the structural causes of inequality, are more meaningful and sustainable. These may include free or subsidized education for children of survivors or for young women affected by conflict and poverty, policy reforms to restore women's access to land and other property, among others.

To development partners and donors:

Fund long-term, flexible programs that support gender justice as a development and peacebuilding priority. While donors have increasingly recognized gender as a cross-cutting issue, funding for gender justice often remains short-term, project-based, and narrowly focused. To support reparative and transformative change, development partners must shift from short-term to multi-year and core funding and prioritize context-sensitive approaches that reflect the diverse realities of African communities, such as post-conflict societies and cultures, border regions, or indigenous territories. Additionally, development agencies must recognize gender justice not as an add-on, but as central to peacebuilding, governance, and development, as reparative justice cannot succeed without addressing patriarchal systems that underpin exclusion and violence.

Invest in grassroots feminist organizing and survivor-led reparations initiatives. Some of the most impactful reparations work happens at the grassroots level, often outside formal government or international NGO structures. These efforts in some cases are led by survivors of conflict, displacement, or GBV and often rooted in indigenous knowledge systems, yet they remain underfunded and politically unrecognized. Therefore, reparations interventions should be co-designed by survivors, not just consulted. Furthermore, they should prioritize funding for such initiatives and create clear, simplified pathways.

Conclusion

Reparations are about more than money; they are about power, dignity, and the right to belong. For African women and other marginalized communities, reparative justice must mean access to land, leadership, safety, and respect. As Africa commemorates the Year of Justice for Africans and People of African Descent, it must embrace a bold, inclusive vision of reparations, one that places gender equity at the centre of state-building, democracy, and peace. There can be no justice without gender justice. And there can be no reparation without equity.

Author Bio

Resty Nabaggala, a Master's student in Development Studies at the University of Nairobi, is a dedicated development practitioner and researcher. Specializing in gender, youth, and development, Resty's work focuses on fostering non-discriminatory, inclusive, and equitable societies. She achieves this by advancing gender equality, upholding the rights of women and girls, and championing youth empowerment and involvement in development processes through both her research and practical implementation.

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Chapter 5: Invisible no more: gender, justice, and the price of exclusion

Shamsiyya Ibrahim Barde

My mother's hands were blistered from years of unpaid care. She delivered five children without ever seeing a trained midwife, walked kilometres to fetch water each morning, and buried two daughters lost to preventable childbirth complications. Her strength held our family together in the face of poverty, yet when the village land was redistributed after a peace accord, her name never appeared on the title deed. "Women do not inherit," she was told without hesitation. "Your worth is in what you give, not what you own." I was too young to understand the full weight of those words, but I never forgot the silence with which she folded the letter and placed it into the corner of her kitenge wrapper. That silence spoke louder than rage. It carried the exhaustion of generations of African women whose labour built homes, whose prayers raised nations, and whose suffering never made it into the official record.

This story is not hers alone. It is a microcosm of a continent-wide indictment of how gendered injustice is woven into the very architecture of governance, economy, and law in Africa. From ancestral traditions manipulated by colonial powers to modern legislation that retains patriarchal scaffolding, African women have been rendered invisible in policy, in property, and often in pain. And yet, calls for justice, reparations, and state-building still risk bypassing the gendered nature of harm that women have endured for centuries. Reparations that do not address these wounds will not heal them. They will only deepen the cracks in our fragile systems. If Africa is to build just, inclusive, and resilient states, it must begin by recognizing that gendered injustice is not a footnote to history; it is the body of the text.

At the root of this exclusion lies a legacy inherited from colonialism. While patriarchy predated colonial contact, its entrenchment as law and governance intensified during imperial rule. Colonial administrators reinforced customary laws that denied women the right to own land, vote, or inherit. In many cases, European legal systems fused with patriarchal interpretations of African tradition to create a double bind that marginalized women both culturally and legally. In settler colonies like Kenya and Zimbabwe, African women were displaced from fertile lands and restricted to domestic roles, often without recourse to legal protections. Courts upheld laws that cast women as perpetual minors, subject to the authority of fathers, husbands, and chiefs. Their labour was instrumental to the survival of the community, yet it was never rewarded with rights.

Independence did not bring automatic liberation for women. Post-colonial governments across Africa inherited institutions that were never designed with gender equity in mind. While some countries codified progressive laws, many failed to dismantle the patriarchal frameworks inherited from the colonial state. In many places,

land titling systems still favour men. Civil and family laws remain silent on marital rape. Women are vastly underrepresented in courts, land commissions, and peace negotiations. As of 2024, fewer than 20 African countries have passed inheritance laws that ensure equal rights for daughters and sons. And though women are often the primary survivors of armed conflict, their needs are routinely sidelined in transitional justice and post-conflict reconstruction efforts.

Truth and reconciliation commissions (TRC), heralded as tools of national healing, have too often failed to capture the gendered dimensions of harm. In South Africa, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission acknowledged apartheid's violence against women, yet its reparations program did not prioritize sexual violence survivors. In Liberia, the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission recognized the brutalities women faced during the civil war, but implementation stalled, leaving victims without redress. Kenya's TJRC documented testimonies of gender-based violence, yet few of its gender-specific recommendations were ever enforced. These failures send a chilling message: that the suffering of women is acknowledged only as spectacle, not as substance worthy of structured repair.

As the African Union moves forward with its 2025 theme on justice and reparations, it must reckon with this history. Justice cannot be gender blind. A state that fails to recognize how its systems have historically harmed half its population cannot claim to be on the path to restoration. The question is not whether women deserve reparations, but whether African states are courageous enough to redesign their systems with equity as the foundation, not an afterthought.

The price of exclusion is not only measured in policy but in the quiet, unacknowledged sacrifices of women whose labour sustains African households and economies. Across the continent, women are the primary providers of unpaid care. They are the ones who rise before dawn to fetch water, prepare meals for entire families, tend to crops and children, and nurse the elderly and the sick. According to the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, women in sub-Saharan Africa perform nearly three times more unpaid care and domestic work than men (UNECA, 2020). This invisible labour is the backbone of communities, yet it is absent from national accounts and policy frameworks. The very systems that benefit from women's time and toil deny them legal protections, economic compensation, or social security. When disasters strike or conflict erupts, it is these same women who cushion the blows and rebuild from the ruins, often with no formal recognition or institutional support.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the burden of care disproportionately fell on women, many of whom lost access to income as lockdowns restricted informal trade and mobility. While stimulus packages and recovery funds were distributed in some countries, few targeted the care economy or acknowledged the compounded impact on women (UN Women Africa, 2021). In rural Sierra Leone, for example, mothers continued to walk miles to reach water points, even as their children missed school and local clinics faced medicine shortages. Their labour increased, their access to

justice decreased, and their contribution went unmeasured. In nations emerging from conflict, this pattern repeats itself. Women shoulder the emotional and physical labour of restoring families and communities, yet transitional justice mechanisms rarely compensate or even acknowledge these efforts.

If reparations are to be meaningful, they must expand beyond the narrow lens of physical injury or combat-related trauma. They must recognize the structural and intergenerational harms created by centuries of unpaid labour. Social protection policies that include cash transfers, maternity leave, subsidized childcare, and care-based pensions are not acts of charity; they are instruments of restorative justice. Countries such as Kenya and Rwanda have piloted limited social protection programs, but they remain fragmented and underfunded (African Development Bank, 2022). These initiatives must be scaled, institutionalized, and framed within a gender-responsive reparations agenda. Only then can the labour of caregiving, so foundational yet so overlooked, receive the dignity and protection it deserves.

Justice also falters when it claims to be neutral. Gender-neutral approaches to reparations may seem equitable on the surface, but in practice, they often perpetuate the very exclusions they intend to correct. By failing to account for the specific experiences of women, these frameworks silence survivors of sexual violence, erase the burdens of caregiving, and ignore the social stigma that many women carry after conflict or displacement. When reparations are designed without gender analysis, they reinforce male-centered narratives of harm. The result is a justice process that recognizes the soldier's gunshot wound but not the woman's scar from repeated assaults. It compensates for the loss of income but overlooks the years a mother spent caring for orphaned children while her own livelihood was extinguished.

One of the clearest examples of this blind spot is found in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where tens of thousands of women endured sexual violence during protracted conflict. Despite international condemnation and media attention, very few survivors have received any form of compensation or long-term psychosocial support (Human Rights Watch, 2022). The legal system remains hostile to victims, and stigma discourages women from coming forward. Similar dynamics played out in post-apartheid South Africa. Although the Truth and Reconciliation Commission acknowledged that women suffered unique forms of violence during apartheid, the reparations program did not prioritize gender-based harms (Ross, 2003). Out of over 22,000 statements collected by the TRC fewer than ten percent focused on sexual or domestic violence. The women who testified did so bravely, but the institutions listening were not prepared to act.

Kenya's Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission mirrored these failures. Its final report documented sexual violence during episodes of state repression and ethnic violence, yet only a small fraction of the recommended reparations were ever implemented (TJRC Kenya, 2013). Survivors, many of whom continue to live with trauma, poverty, and public shame, remain in limbo. The gaps in these processes are

not accidental. They reflect a broader discomfort with addressing gendered harm as a central pillar of state violence. In effect, silence becomes policy.

To truly repair what has been broken, reparations must be gender-sensitive by design, not retrofitted after public pressure. This means creating separate and well-resourced channels for survivors of gender-based violence. It means designing policies that recognize both visible and invisible harm. And it means amplifying women's voices at every stage of transitional justice, from truth-telling to implementation. Without these measures, states risk enshrining historical injustice under the guise of gender neutrality.

As the African Union embarks on a continental conversation about justice and reparations, this issue must be brought to the fore. The AU Transitional Justice Policy, adopted in 2019, provides a framework that includes gender considerations. However, implementation remains uneven and often symbolic rather than structural (AU Commission, 2019). Member States must go further by mandating that all reparations commissions, post-conflict programs, and national reconciliation efforts include dedicated gender audits and gender justice benchmarks. Only through such deliberate, inclusive approaches can we ensure that women are not once again excluded from the very justice they fought to build.

A feminist framework for reparative justice already exists in Africa, though it remains underutilized. The Maputo Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa offers a robust legal foundation for recognizing gendered harm and restoring women's rights through state accountability. It outlines reproductive health, protection from violence, and property rights as integral to justice. Yet while forty-six countries have signed the Protocol, fewer than twenty have fully implemented its provisions. Ratification without enforcement is not justice. It is a symbolic gesture that leaves women in the same vulnerable positions.

To change this reality, African states must domesticate the Maputo Protocol within national constitutions and laws, allocate resources for its enforcement, and establish independent mechanisms to monitor compliance. Governments should embed gender-responsive budgeting in all reparation programs. This includes funding for psychosocial support, sexual and reproductive healthcare, land redistribution, and recognition of unpaid care work through tax credits or pensions. Furthermore, every transitional justice mechanism must include gender audits and women-led advisory panels. Without institutional safeguards and representation, justice processes will continue to overlook the lived realities of half the population.

Innovation must also come from below. Local women's courts in Mozambique, digital feminist collectives like the Feminist Coalition in Nigeria, and trauma healing circles in The Gambia show that communities are already leading reparative work. In Nigeria, women represent over 60% of the informal economy, yet less than 10% have land ownership rights, perpetuating cycles of exclusion (National Bureau of Statistics

Nigeria, 2022). States must fund and replicate these efforts nationally, ensuring they are not isolated experiments but models of inclusive governance.

As we look toward the future, African justice must evolve beyond courtroom verdicts and political resolutions. It must be restorative, people-centered, and unapologetically gender-conscious. A continent cannot be rebuilt on partial memory. To heal fully, it must remember everyone. The invisible must be seen. The excluded must be restored. Only then can Africa truly say it has begun the journey toward justice.

Author Bio

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Chapter 6: Land as Reparation: A Radical Blueprint for Gendered and Youth-Led State-Building in Africa

Moses Nkhana

The battle for justice is fought on the land

Land signifies more than a mere resource; it embodies power, identity, and history. Across Africa, persistent problems related to land rights, management, and reparations signify the scars of colonial rule, patriarchy, and post-colonial betrayal. Rural regions exhibit this impact more clearly as women and youth are continually marginalized in decision-making, land access, and opportunities for development.

As the African Union declares 2025 the “Year of Justice for Africans and People of African Descent”, we must move from rhetoric to reparation—from symbolic recognition to material redistribution. This requires a gendered, youth-led, and community-driven approach to transitional justice that addresses structural land inequities as a core obstacle to democratic governance, institutional legitimacy, and state-building. This article proposes that land reform—framed as reparation—is essential to building resilient, inclusive African states. Drawing from grassroots experience in Malawi’s Northern Region, it challenges us to rethink justice from the ground up.

Land, Power, and the Architecture of Injustice

Africa’s colonial legacy was built on land dispossession. Colonial administrations codified patriarchal land practices, forcibly removed indigenous populations, and handed land governance to male chiefs. Today, these structures remain embedded in customary systems, often romanticized but serving as gateways to exclusion, especially for women and youth. In Malawi, over 60% of the land is held under customary tenure. Patriarchal norms deny women inheritance, dispossess widows, and treat youth as dependents. These aren’t “traditional” practices—they are engineered systems of control, legally shielded and socially normalized.

The state’s failure to democratize land governance creates citizens without rights, denies economic agency, and undermines public trust. Land injustice drives weak governance, fragile democracy, and unsustainable development. These enduring land injustices are not merely historical accidents—they are deliberate continuities of settler-colonial violence and patriarchal statecraft, repackaged through modern inaction. The romanticization of customary tenure systems conceals a brutal reality: women are treated as property within property regimes, and youth as perpetual subordinates. This system institutionalizes multi-generational poverty by denying women and young people the means to own, control, or benefit from land, Africa’s most vital productive asset. By preserving these systems under the guise of cultural integrity, the state becomes complicit in a form of silent structural apartheid, where

land access becomes a marker of citizenship, dignity, and survival. Without confronting this entrenched hierarchy, any vision of democratic governance or reparative justice remains hollow.

Grassroots Reparations - Justice that starts from below

In response, grassroots actors have emerged as the true architects of justice and state-building. In Malawi's Mzimba District, the Mzimba Youth Organization (MYO) reclaims land justice as reparation and transforms customary systems into inclusive, accountable spaces.

Through community-centered campaigns—“*Her Land, Her Property*,” “*Her Land, Her Identity*,” and “*Save Her Land*”—MYO: Facilitates joint land titling for couples to secure women's ownership. Supports youth cooperatives to farm communal land sustainably. Co-develops customary by-laws with traditional leaders to protect widows. Trains community paralegals and monitors to resolve land disputes. Uses activism—music, poetry, theatre—to confront patriarchy and mobilize support.

These are not mere pilot projects or symbolic interventions—they are community-designed justice systems rooted in lived experience, cultural fluency, and political courage. By challenging both harmful traditions and institutional inertia, they redefine who holds power in land governance, shifting authority from male-dominated elites to women, youth, and other excluded voices.

These models are actionable, scalable, and adaptable across Africa's diverse contexts. They demonstrate that state-building begins not in parliaments or policy papers, but in fields, villages, and cultural spaces where people resist, reimagine, and reconstruct justice with their own hands. MYO's work proves that when justice is rooted in the grassroots, it becomes not only inclusive but unstoppable.

Reparation as State-Building

Reparations are not about victimhood—they are about realigning power and restoring dignity. When rooted in land rights, reparations move beyond symbolism to deliver material justice that empowers communities and transforms governance. They help build trust between citizens and institutions through visible, lived justice; redistribute power by enabling women and youth to become civic and economic actors; reduce conflict by addressing land-based grievances; and promote sustainable development grounded in equity rather than exploitation.

In Mzimba, MYO's grassroots reforms have produced customary systems that are more inclusive, transparent, and accountable than many formal state institutions. These efforts are not in opposition to state structures—they are community-driven innovations that fill governance gaps. By embedding justice in traditional leadership and everyday life, MYO demonstrates that reparation is not a one-time event, but a

long-term strategy for building legitimate, democratic governance. Justice is not the outcome of state-building—it is its foundation and ongoing process.

Gender justice and the Maputo protocol

The Maputo Protocol is Africa's most powerful gender equality instrument. Article 15 affirms women's right to land, property, and inheritance. Yet in many states, it remains underfunded and unenforced, leaving a dangerous gap between legal commitments and lived realities. Two decades after its adoption, governments continue to ratify the Protocol without allocating resources, integrating it into national laws, or building enforcement mechanisms. As a result, women continue to face exclusion, evictions, and legal invisibility.

At MYO, the Protocol is not symbolic—it is a living tool for justice. Through structured community trainings, paralegal support, and rights awareness campaigns, women are empowered to assert inheritance rights, negotiate joint land titles, and challenge discriminatory practices. Traditional leaders and local authorities are engaged to align customary systems with constitutional and international gender standards. These efforts translate treaty commitments into enforceable local norms and community practices.

But legal empowerment alone is not enough. MYO also helps transform institutions. Customary by-laws are revised, community dispute mechanisms are reformed, and narratives around women's roles in land governance are reshaped. In these spaces, the Maputo Protocol becomes a catalyst for real change, not an abstract ideal but a driver of grassroots transformation.

It is now time for the African Union and its Member States to go beyond ratification. The Maputo Protocol must be institutionalized, resourced, and enforced with the same urgency as national security or economic policy. Justice for African women cannot wait another generation. Gender-responsive justice must be cultural, institutional, and above all, practiced.

YOUTH AS CO-ARCHITECTS OF DEMOCRACY.

Youth are not future leaders—they are present builders of democracy, justice, and institutional renewal. With the majority of Africa's population under 35, the future of the continent hinges not on whether youth are included, but how they are empowered to shape the systems that govern them. Yet across Africa, young people continue to be structurally excluded from land ownership, civic spaces, and policy-making processes, treated as dependents or agitators rather than as legitimate stakeholders. This exclusion fuels economic despair, forced migration, intergenerational conflict, and democratic fatigue. Disillusioned with unresponsive leadership and locked out of resource access, many youth disengage or revolt, threatening social cohesion and

sustainable development. MYO directly counters this by placing youth at the center of land governance and democratic accountability.

Through bold initiatives such as: Establishing Youth Land Monitoring Committees to track land-related injustices and monitor the transparency of community land deals, Training youth in the 2016 Land Act, equipping them with legal literacy and negotiation skills to engage meaningfully in land processes, Supporting youth-run, climate-smart agriculture projects that demonstrate innovation, entrepreneurship, and ecological stewardship, Hosting public dialogues on transparency, participation, and land budgeting to deepen civic education and demand responsive governance. These are not soft skills—they are foundational acts of democratic co-creation. They are turning young people into watchdogs, planners, and leaders—not someday, but today. The result is a generation invested in justice, sustainability, and institutional legitimacy—and unwilling to settle for symbolic representation. Africa's democracy will only mature when its largest demographic is not managed, but mobilized as co-architects of justice and governance. Land rights are the frontlines of that mobilization.

The State's role - Political Courage or Continued Complicity?

Reparations demand political will, moral clarity, and courageous leadership—qualities that cannot be outsourced to civil society or relegated to donor-driven projects. While grassroots organizations like MYO are innovating solutions and filling critical gaps, the burden of systemic transformation lies with the State. Anything less is a betrayal of both constitutional duty and continental commitments. The state must move beyond token acknowledgments and adopt a bold, measurable, and rights-based reparations agenda. This includes: Reforming land laws to eliminate all forms of gender and generational discrimination, especially within customary tenure systems. Enforce joint land titling and enact protections against gender-based evictions and dispossession. Institutionalizing legal aid and supporting community justice systems, recognizing them as essential extensions of democratic governance. Establishing land reparation commissions, not as symbolic bodies, but with legally binding authority, transparent processes, and time-bound mandates. States must recognize that reparations are not charity—they are obligations rooted in justice, accountability, and the rule of law. Ignoring these responsibilities perpetuates the very harm reparations are meant to redress. Institutional accountability is not optional—it is the litmus test of democracy. A state that cannot or will not confront historical injustice cannot claim to be democratic. The true measure of governance is not how well it serves the powerful, but how courageously it repairs harm and restores dignity to the marginalized. This is the choice African states face: political courage or continued complicity.

Land Justice as Sustainable Development

Sustainable development in Africa will remain a distant dream if the structural injustices embedded in land access and ownership are not addressed head-on. Land is the foundation upon which food systems, climate resilience, livelihoods, and economic transformation are built. Yet, in many African contexts, land remains insecure, unjustly distributed, and governed by opaque or discriminatory systems, particularly disadvantaging women and youth. The African Union's Agenda 2063 and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) both envision a future of inclusive growth, ecological balance, and social equity. But these visions are unattainable if the majority of rural women who grow Africa's food lack the right to own the land they till, or if youth remain landless.

Author Bio

Moses Nkhana is a land and gender justice advocate from Malawi and the Executive Director of the Mzimba Youth Organization (MYO). He spearheads grassroots campaigns centred on women's and youth land rights, customary law reform, and strengthening community-based justice systems. As a member of the WISE Youth Network, Moses employs legal empowerment and cultural "activism" to challenge exclusion, promote climate resilience, and advance equity in rural governance. His work is deeply rooted in indigenous Ngoni traditions, reflecting a strong commitment to building inclusive, rights-based development from the grassroots.

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Chapter 7: Youth & Diaspora Leadership: Shaping Reparative Justice through Digital Activism, Civic Engagement, and Advocacy.

Samuel Adeyinka Owa

The African Union's 2025 theme, *"Year of Justice for Africans and People of African Descent Through Reparations,"* marks a pivotal moment in Africa's ongoing quest to confront historical injustices and build inclusive, resilient states. Central to this transformative agenda are Africa's youth and diaspora communities, whose leadership in reparative justice movements is reshaping how the continent and its global descendants engage with legacies of slavery, colonialism, apartheid, and systemic discrimination.

Youth and diaspora movements are redefining reparations beyond financial compensation, advancing comprehensive justice that includes truth-telling, recognition, institutional reform, and healing. Through digital activism, civic engagement, and global advocacy, these groups amplify marginalized voices, hold power to account, and foster solidarity across borders.

This article explores the multifaceted role of youth and diaspora leadership in reparative justice, highlighting their innovative use of digital platforms, strategic civic participation, and international advocacy. It examines challenges they face and opportunities to strengthen their impact, aligning with the African Union's call for African-led discourse on justice, rights, reparations, and state-building.

Historical and Conceptual Foundations of Reparative Justice in Africa

Reparative justice in Africa draws on both indigenous restorative traditions and contemporary transitional justice frameworks. Many African societies historically practiced communal reconciliation and restorative justice, emphasizing healing and social cohesion over punitive measures. Colonialism and slavery disrupted these systems, inflicting deep wounds that continue to affect social and political structures.

Modern reparative justice efforts seek to address these legacies by combining acknowledgment of past harms, material and symbolic redress, and institutional reforms to prevent recurrence. The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, alongside civil society coalitions, advocates for reparations as a transformative process encompassing truth commissions, apologies, reparative programs, and structural change.

This broad, holistic vision creates space for youth and diaspora leadership to actively shape reparative justice agendas, ensuring they reflect the diverse experiences and aspirations of affected communities.

Digital Activism: Africa's Youth Leading the Charge

The digital revolution has empowered Africa's youth to become vanguards of reparative justice activism. With over 60% of Africa's population under 25, young people are leveraging social media platforms Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and TikTok to organize, educate, and mobilize mass participation in justice campaigns.

Case Study: VeryDarkMan – Nigeria's Digital Revolutionary

Martins Vincent Otse, popularly known as VeryDarkMan, has made significant contributions to restorative and reparative justice in Nigeria through his activism against human trafficking. Collaborating closely with the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), VeryDarkMan played a pivotal role in exposing trafficking syndicates and raising public awareness about the plight of trafficked Nigerian girls stranded abroad. His advocacy prompted NAPTIP's major operations that led to the rescue of 78 victims from Côte d'Ivoire and the arrest of key traffickers.

Beyond advocacy, VeryDarkMan donated ₦20 million to support victim rehabilitation, directly aiding survivors' recovery and reintegration. His efforts embody restorative justice principles by empowering victims, facilitating healing, and holding offenders accountable. Through digital activism and partnership with law enforcement, VeryDarkMan exemplifies how youth leadership can drive reparative justice that restores dignity and promotes social healing in contemporary African contexts.

Broader Digital Trends

Beyond individual figures, youth-led digital activism has driven continent-wide movements such as #EndSARS in Nigeria, which protested police brutality, and #FeesMustFall in South Africa, advocating for affordable education (Politics4Her, 2024). These campaigns have not only raised awareness but also pressured governments to undertake reforms aligned with justice and reparations goals.

Digital activism also transcends borders, connecting African youth with diaspora communities. This transnational digital solidarity amplifies calls for reparations and justice on global platforms, fostering a shared identity and collective action.

Diaspora Advocacy: Linking Global and Local Struggles

The African diaspora estimated at over 200 million people globally plays a critical role in reparative justice advocacy. Diaspora communities demand recognition, reparations, and the right to return, framing these as fundamental human rights rather than acts of charity or political concession.

International Policy Engagement

Diaspora leaders actively participate in international forums such as the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, United Nations Human Rights Council, and the World Conference Against Racism. These engagements elevate reparations on global agendas and press governments and international bodies to commit to justice and reparations.

Resource Mobilization and Solidarity

The diaspora's economic contributions to Africa through remittances exceeding \$95 billion annually highlight their potential to drive sustainable development if integrated through inclusive policies promoting citizenship rights and repatriation. Diaspora advocacy also mobilizes financial, intellectual, and political resources to support grassroots reparations initiatives in Africa.

Bridging Identities and Narratives

Diaspora movements serve as bridges linking historical memory and contemporary struggles, ensuring reparative justice addresses the transatlantic slave trade's enduring impacts and systemic racism in host countries. Their activism fosters a pan-African identity and solidarity essential for comprehensive reparations frameworks.

Civic Engagement and Youth Participation in Transitional Justice

Youth participation in transitional justice mechanisms is vital for breaking cycles of conflict and impunity and for fostering democratic governance. Youth-led organizations collaborate with institutions like Impunity Watch and the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSV) to influence national policies and African Union regional frameworks on justice.

Empowering Youth in Fragile Contexts

In fragile states such as the Central African Republic, integrated programs combining trauma healing, leadership development, and civic education empower youth to lead peacebuilding initiatives and participate safely in democratic processes. These efforts enhance social cohesion and contribute to state-building aligned with reparative justice.

Youth-Led Transitional Justice Academies

Youth-led transitional justice academies and forums provide spaces for young Africans to document abuses, share testimonies, and advocate for reparations that address

their specific experiences and needs. Such inclusive platforms ensure that reparations contribute to healing, institutional reform, and social justice.

Challenges Facing Youth and Diaspora Leadership

Despite their critical role, youth and diaspora movements face significant challenges:

- **Political Resistance:** reparations are not discussed due to fears of political instability, financial costs, or loss of legitimacy, limiting youth and diaspora influence.
- **Resource Limitations:** Many youth organizations lack sustainable funding and institutional support, hindering their capacity to scale impact.
- **Digital Divide:** Unequal access to technology excludes rural and marginalized youth from digital activism's benefits.
- **Social and Gender Exclusion:** Intersectional barriers marginalize young women, persons with disabilities, and minority groups within youth and diaspora movements.
- **Fragmented Diaspora Engagement:** Diaspora communities often face organizational fragmentation, limiting coordinated advocacy.

Opportunities and Strategic Recommendations

To overcome these challenges and harness youth and diaspora leadership for reparative justice, the following strategies are essential:

1. **Institutionalize Youth and Diaspora Participation:** Governments and regional bodies should formalize youth and diaspora roles in reparations policymaking and governance.
2. **Expand Capacity Building and Funding:** Invest in training, mentorship, and sustainable financing for youth and diaspora organizations, with emphasis on gender equity and inclusion.
3. **Bridge the Digital Divide:** Enhance digital infrastructure and literacy programs to democratize access to activism tools.
4. **Promote Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships:** Foster collaboration among governments, civil society, diaspora networks, the private sector, and international partners to support reparations initiatives.
5. **Adopt Gender-Responsive and Intersectional Approaches:** Ensure reparations frameworks address diverse vulnerabilities and empower marginalized youth.

- 6. Enhance Public Awareness and Education:** Conduct campaigns to build societal support for reparations and youth engagement, combating misinformation and stigma.

Conclusion

Youth and diaspora leadership are indispensable to advancing reparative justice and building resilient, inclusive African states. Through innovative digital activism, strategic civic engagement, and global advocacy, these movements transform reparations into comprehensive processes of healing, recognition, and institutional reform.

Aligned with the African Union's 2025 theme, their efforts embody African-led solutions to historical injustices and contemporary challenges. Empowering youth and diaspora through inclusive policies, capacity building, and sustained dialogue is critical to realizing justice for Africans and people of African descent, fostering peace, democracy, and sustainable development across the continent.

The 13th High-Level Dialogue on Democracy, Governance, Human Rights, Peace and Security provides a timely platform to elevate these voices and embed youth and diaspora leadership at the core of reparations and state-building efforts.

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Chapter 8: A radical reimagining: how the young African generation can best approach the reparations question in their lifetime.

Douglas Drake Onen

The Historical Debt and the failure of moral appeal.

For centuries, the African continent has been shaped by the trans-Atlantic slave trade, colonialism, apartheid, systematic racial discrimination, and the struggle of the African State in maintaining its legitimacy amidst governance successes and failures. The young African generation stands at a turning point that history will not offer twice. The question now is no longer whether reparations are justified; that case has long been settled by the weight of blood, bodies, and broken civilizations. The question is: how will the current generation act to collect and correct what is owed, repair what was(is) broken, and rebuild what was stolen, not in theory, but in tangible, irreversible consequences.

Traditionally, the demand for reparations has been presented as a moral issue rooted only in monetary compensation, and idealism, which have not achieved justice. Leaders from Africa and the diaspora have justifiably emphasised the atrocities of slavery, colonialism, and persistent economic exploitation, appealing to the conscience of Europe and America. Regardless of the validity of these claims, they have rarely resulted in significant justice. The Western world observably recognizes these atrocities without consequences but rather perpetuates the economic frameworks that sustain Africa's dependence. Too frequently, 'Africa' gets caught in the cycle of performative anger, venting on social media, hosting conferences that result in nothing, and expecting a saviour to "take the correct action."

The Cost of Victimhood

For a long time, Africa has maintained a stance of victimization. This role maintains a cycle of defensiveness and hides African deficiencies. Countries, therefore, function in survival mode, prioritizing the immediate well-being of their citizens under limited resources. As a result, reparative justice—especially financial compensation—seldom becomes a focus for the government. This is clear in Northern Uganda after the LRA, where reparations for victims of war are still unsettled (Nabakooza, 2025). Likewise, among the Teso of Uganda, ongoing calls for compensation for stolen livestock continue without resolution (Nabakooza, 2025).

This trend extends beyond Uganda. In Nigeria's Niger Delta, multinational corporations (MNCs) have been involved in years of environmental damage and resource abuse, with documented oil spills polluting land and water bodies (Amnesty International, 2020; UNEP, 2011). This ecological damage sparked armed opposition, including groups such as the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF) (Human Rights Watch, 2003). As a result, the Nigerian government initiated the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) in 2009 to disarm militants and offer compensation to communities (Obi, 2014). Nonetheless, academics contend that the PAP did not tackle core issues, including resource ownership and fair restitution, which ultimately led to a resurgence of instability (Okonta, 2021; Ukeje, 2018).

The divide between rhetoric and action

The historical trajectory of reparations efforts is marked by a pattern of rhetorical recognition without meaningful implementation. In 1993, the inaugural Pan-African Conference on Reparations convened in Abuja, Nigeria, issued a compelling call for the international community to acknowledge the "unique and unprecedented moral debt owed to the peoples of Africa" (The University of Edinburgh, 2018). Similarly, the 2001 Durban World Conference Against Racism, formally recognized the imperative for reparative justice (United Nations, 2001). However, these declarations, though symbolically significant, were not followed by substantive action. Even where agreements have materialized—such as Germany's compensation offer to Namibia for the Herero-Nama genocide (BBC News, 2025)—the reparative measures have been largely symbolic, falling far short of the scale of the atrocities they purport to address.

The limitations of this moralist approach are now glaring. Appeals to conscience alone neither redistribute power nor catalyze systemic transformation. They have not compelled wealthy nations to assume accountability for the economic consequences of centuries of exploitation—nor to deliver the trillions of dollars owed in reparations. Even in hypothetical scenarios where financial compensation is offered, structural injustices remain deeply entrenched. If African demands continue to be framed primarily as moral appeals, they will continue to be met with gestures of performative solidarity rather than transformative redress.

Pan-Africanist reparations efforts, though grounded in just cause, have yielded minimal material progress. Since 1963, when the Organization of African Unity (OAU)—the precursor to the African Union—formally raised the issue, the pursuit of reparations for historical crimes against Africans and their descendants has produced largely symbolic outcomes. A strategic recalibration is imperative.

As the continent's emerging generation, we cannot afford to wait another lifetime to de-perennialize historical and economic injustices. We must reject the paradigm that socializes African youth into a perpetual posture of grievance without recourse.

Reparations must be redefined—not as mere financial transfers, but as the comprehensive restructuring of global systems that have perpetuated African subordination.

Insufficiency of monetary redress

Financial compensation alone cannot heal the wounds of centuries-long exploitation. Contemporary discourse on reparations remains conceptually narrow and excessively fixated on monetary redress. While restitution is undeniably important, it is fundamentally inadequate in confronting the structural and epistemic violence wrought by colonialism, racial capitalism, and global economic marginalization.

The architecture of the international financial system, forged under the Washington Consensus, institutionalized asymmetries that continue to undermine Africa's sovereignty. The Bretton Woods institutions, through skewed voting rights, entrench Western dominance—illustrated by the United States and Europe controlling over 50% of IMF voting shares, while Sub-Saharan Africa, comprising 45 nations, commands less than 5% (Bretton Woods Project, 2022). This imbalance ensures that African economic policies remain subject to external approval, denying the continent true policy autonomy.

Moreover, the centrality of the U.S. dollar as the global reserve currency renders African economies perpetually vulnerable to foreign monetary decisions. When Africa faced its debt crisis in the 1980s, the international community responded with austerity-inducing Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), rather than debt cancellation—unlike post-WWII Europe, which received the Marshall Plan. SAPs enforced mass privatization, trade liberalization, and the dismantling of public institutions in healthcare, education, and industry. The impact was devastating from 1980 to 2000, Sub-Saharan Africa's per capita income declined by 10%, while its debt burden increased significantly (CNBC Africa, 2024).

Today, African nations collectively pay a punitive average interest rate of 11.6%, amounting to \$130 billion annually compared to the U.S.'s 3.1% (African Elements News, 2025). In Uganda, public debt servicing consumes 52% of GDP; in Ghana, it exceeds 50% of government revenue. These figures illustrate the continuation of structural extraction mechanisms that functionally replicate the rationality of colonial exploitation.

Africa's "commodity trap" is clear: Ghana retains little of its \$11.6B gold revenue (Bank of Ghana, 2025); the DRC processes just 1% of its vast cobalt (U.S. Geological Survey, 2024); West Africa earns little from 70% of global cacao (Fairtrade Foundation, 2023); and Somalia loses \$300M annually to illegal fishing (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2022).

More destructively, Africa can be argued to be a net creditor to the world. Through illicit financial flows, unfavourable trade terms, exploitative investment treaties, and disproportionately high debt servicing, the continent loses over \$500 billion annually. This massive outflow coexists with the highest poverty rates globally—a contradiction that is neither accidental nor unavoidable, but the predictable outcome of a global order designed to preserve colonial hierarchies under new guises.

Towards transformative reparations

An impactful framework for reparations should go beyond mere financial compensation to encompass essential structural changes. Africa must shift from being a raw commodity exporter to becoming a hub for value-added production. To accomplish this, transformative reparations necessitate breaking down the "African Risk Premium," which artificially raises borrowing expenses and restricts Africa's access to capital markets. Equally vital is regaining complete sovereignty over natural resources and the financial independence required to execute development strategies tailored to specific contexts. The framework for this involves creating strong domestic institutions, reducing illegal financial transfers, bringing back stolen assets, and utilizing foreign direct investment in a way that enhances, rather than weakens, national economies.

Conclusion

It should be realised that Africa's demographic vitality, its youth, is its most strategic asset despite their current systemic underrepresentation in the institutions that shape its economic future.

Youth-led movements across the continent, from Burkina Faso's assertive renegotiation of gold revenues to Kenya's recent "Gen Z" mobilizations, signal a generational appetite for transformative change. This generation must not be content with symbolic inclusion; it must demand, and design new governance architectures rooted in justice, equity, and sovereignty.

There is no immutable law condemning Africa to underdevelopment. Merely five decades ago, nations such as South Korea, China, and India were among the world's most impoverished, yet they have since ascended to the status of economic powerhouses. Their transformative development demonstrates that profound progress is achievable when underpinned by a bold vision, strategic leadership, and institutional alignment.

Africa's potential for similar growth, however, cannot be realized through appeals to benevolence. Reparations are unlikely to be bestowed as a gesture of charity; rather, they must be actively pursued by African nations through diplomatic leverage, economic self-determination, and systemic disruption.

Author Bio

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As a member of the African Youth for Transitional Justice Network (AU-affiliated), Onen blends legal acumen with grassroots activism. His work in Uganda's National Youth Parliament advanced climate-smart policies, and he contributes to the Centre for Constitutional Governance. His dual expertise highlights a commitment to transformative justice, both economic and social

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Chapter 9: Decolonising the university and knowledge production as a form of reparative justice to promote democracy and academic freedom in Africa

Kwadwo Appiagyei-Atua

Background

Demands for reparation for the historical injustices inflicted on African peoples, knowledge base, and institutions in connection with the infamous trans-Atlantic slave trade and colonialism have been expressed and re-echoed in different fora. In almost all these situations, reparations demanded have mainly been in the form of compensation for the atrocities committed against African peoples and or restitution of stolen cultural artefacts. However, not much headway has been achieved in the pursuit of this goal, apart from perhaps a few apologies rendered by some Western leaders, mainly from the monarchy. These weak responses have not, however, dampened the spirits of African scholars and political leadership for reparations. It is in line with this quest that the AU declared 2025 the theme "Justice for Africans and People of African Descent Through Reparations."

Our contribution to this discourse relies on the use of reparative justice, which transcends a punitive approach to repairing past wrongs to empowering the victim through healing to acquire agency to negotiate with the perpetrator on an even keel to obtain justice in the end. The proposed use of the reparative justice approach, itself part of the traditional African process of conflict resolution, centres around reclaiming the African means of knowledge production (centred around the right to know) and its traditional understanding of democracy and human rights. Reclaiming the philosophical basis of these two concepts holds the key to unlocking the African potential, which will equip the continent to demand restorative justice, an essential component of reparative justice.

Knowledge production, democracy, and higher education

The knowledge base of Africa was developed through various informal means, as well as its university education systems established in the pre-modern era, prior to European contact. Informally, knowledge was obtained through thinking, experimentation, and experience-sharing. Out of this process emerged the right to know, which includes the right to seek, receive, produce, impart, and or apply knowledge as a communal value. The body of knowledge so produced helped to sustain pre-colonial African societies in agriculture, health, crafts, and industries, among others. It also led to the development of different systems of governance and

human rights ethos, as well as religious structures to regulate the different societies. The plurality of forms and types was made possible by the fact that Africans, far from passively accepting the political systems, chose forms, altered them, and developed entirely new ones.

The exercise of the right to know in turn resulted in the development of more sophisticated forms of formalised education and the acquisition of advanced forms of knowledge within Africa's pre-modern university settings. Out of this process emerged rudimentary forms of academic freedom, as part of the right to know, in these institutions of higher learning, to propel the production of knowledge. These ancient universities were associated with scientific and technological advances in law, religion, mathematics, medicine, metallurgy, philosophy, astrology, numerology, etc. Among them are the *Per-ankh* (House of Light), established around 2000 BCE, and the *Biblioteca Alexandrina*, both in Egypt. Others include the universities of Al Azhar (Egypt, 10th century), Al Qarawwyin (Morocco, 7th century), Sankorey (Mali Empire, 15th century).

Epistemicide

During colonization, Europe devalued and destroyed Africa's indigenous knowledge and traditional learning centres, leading to the commission of acts of epistemicide, linguicide, and theft of history through European "colonial science." The so-called scientific successes of the West were projected to allege that Africans were intellectually inferior and so deserved and needed to be colonized. Consequently, "mind colonialism" became a critical angle of the colonial project.

Centuries later, in place of the pre-modern universities, the colonial university education system, which did not seek to promote science for development in Africa. Instead, the purpose of establishing these institutions was devoted to training theologians and schoolteachers, such as the Fourah Bay College, established in 1827 as the first western-style university to be built in sub-Saharan Africa. The second purpose was to train a Europeanised elite, to maintain, after colonialism, the politico-economic framework put in place by the colonialists.

This second mission of the colonial mission was largely responsible for the destruction of traditional African political systems, which were taught as outmoded, uncivilised, and undemocratic. Further, the colonial universities were subjected to a suzerain relationship with their European metropolitan universities. Out of this relationship emerged internationalisation, which has placed African higher education at the periphery, as consumers of knowledge produced by better-endowed universities from the Global North, with relationships described as being "asymmetrical, unethical and unequal."

Amalgam of liberal democracy, one-party, and military rule

African intelligentsia embraced Western democratic principles and practices which propelled them to power at the time of independence. However, they soon abandoned liberal democracy in place of one-party rule, which was in line with traditional African political systems, military rule. The result was the use of the repressive instrument of the state to control the state, including the university.

Considering the strong relationship that exists between democracy and academic freedom; by weakening democracy, academics automatically became victims. Among others, the state sought to convert the colonial university into a developmental university and make it part of the organic structure of the state; and to use the suppressive power of the state to control the university, academics, and students. The impact of this process on academic freedom in Africa has been significant, especially in compromising the use of academic freedom to challenge orthodoxy and speak truth to power. This practice, in turn, has affected knowledge production.

Post-Cold War democracy

Democracy was reintroduced by the West following the collapse of the Berlin Wall, resulting in the design and adoption of new constitutions that respected multi-party democracy, human rights, and respect for the rule of law, among others. Nonetheless, the effectiveness of this ethos has become disputed with recent research by Afrobarometer revealing a decline in resistance to military rule (Afrobarometer, 2024).

Within the university environment, institutional autonomy has been compromised despite the introduction of academic freedom in most of the post-Cold War constitutions. Governments have set up proxies through university management, while academics are also suppressing the academic freedom of students. Students' leadership and politics have also been co-opted into national politics. Therefore, democracy does not exist on many university campuses in Africa.

Conclusion/Recommendations

So long as practices such as corruption, mismanagement, and others that undermine state-building exist, Africa will continue to be disabled from acquiring the agency and moral courage to lead the fight for reparation because it is instead benefiting from the continued practice of colonialism, if not the slave trade as well.

Reparative/restorative justice should call for the application of indigenous knowledge systems embedded in the purpose that informed the setting up of the ancient universities, as well as the rudimentary elements of academic freedom that were practised in these institutions. One clear finding is the use of knowledge as a communal good, not for purposes of commercialisation and commodification. Another

is the application of knowledge to promote societal development, but not under the control of the state. The reorganisation and return to the *raison d'être* for the establishment of these ancient universities will help to democratise academic freedom, help to recalibrate the asymmetrical power balance within the university, which favours university management against academics and students, and by academics against students. This will, in turn, equip students to acquire democratic habits in the classroom, which they will seek to practise in the larger society.

Through this means, the university will become sites for democratic development and be in position to play a critical liberatory pro-democracy for academic freedom. This will expand the purpose of the university beyond the pursuit of knowledge to the pursuit of democracy in the larger society.

To achieve that role, the university and the means of knowledge production must be decolonised. This means, among other things, a decolonisation of curriculum change, which should involve an epistemological paradigm shift from Eurocentric knowledge to Africa-centred knowledge; and a change of university cultures and systems that are alienating, as well as increased and affordable access to education in general. The goal of decolonising knowledge production, the university, academic freedom, and democracy “aligns with principles of justice, equality, and a more accurate understanding of the world we live in.”

Article 3 of the Charter for African Cultural Renaissance holds the prospects for realising this objective. Among others, it recognises the right of African men and women to assert their dignity, to “promote freedom of expression and cultural democracy, which is inseparable from social and political democracy”; and, “to promote the popularisation of science and technology, including traditional knowledge systems.”

Considering the afore, it can be contended that a strong argument has been made for a legal basis for reparations that challenges the ethical reasoning employed by numerous academics. A key element for achieving this is the restoration of conventional African governance systems, the related human rights principles, and the strengthening of both formal and informal knowledge production frameworks. Through this approach, a foundation would have been established to help African and diaspora communities find healing and empowerment. This will allow them to reclaim their voice, engage in direct dialogue with those who have wronged them, and ultimately achieve a sense of justice.

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Article Submitted on behalf of:

Africa Coalition for Academic Freedom: A coalition that seeks to address the challenges that prevent African universities and other intellectual establishments from fulfilling their core purpose, that is, the production, dissemination and application of knowledge that promotes democracy, human rights and sustainable development on the continent.

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Chapter 10: Towards a just Africa: the 13th high-level dialogue and South Sudan's path to lasting peace

Mr. Michael Thak Ngyany and Mr. Ruot George Wal Mut

The pursuit of justice, human rights, reparations, and robust state-building is foundational to a stable and prosperous Africa. This year, the African Union Commission's Department of Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS), in collaboration with the African Peace and Security Architecture (AGA-APSA) Platform and the Government of Ghana, is poised to host the 13th Biennial High-Level Dialogue (HLD) on Democracy, Human Rights, Governance, Peace and Security. This Dialogue resonates deeply with the African Union's 2025 theme: "*Year of Justice for Africans and People of African Descent Through Reparations*," and will specifically delve into "Justice, Rights, Reparations, and State-building." This article explores the critical intersection of these themes with the ongoing efforts in the Republic of South Sudan, a Member State of the African Union, and spotlights the significant contributions of the Nile Youth Development Actions (NYDA) in advancing these principles on the ground.

The 13th High-Level Dialogue: A Beacon for Peace in South Sudan

The High-Level Dialogue serves as an indispensable platform for addressing complex challenges and fostering stability across the African continent. Its pertinence to the South Sudan's Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) of 2018 is profound and multifaceted. The Agreement addresses "Justice, Rights, Reparations, and State-building" primarily through Chapter V. This chapter establishes a Commission for Truth, Reconciliation and Healing (CTRH) and a Hybrid Court for South Sudan (HCSS). These bodies are designed to investigate human rights violations, ensure accountability, and foster national reconciliation. The agreement also mandates the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity (RTGONU) to implement a people-driven reconciliation process, including provisions for victim compensation and reparations, thus building a foundation for justice, rights, and state-building.

Reinforcing the Principles of the Peace Agreement: The R-ARCSS explicitly aims to establish democratic governance structures, including a transitional government, constitutional reform, and eventual elections. The HLD consistently emphasizes inclusive and accountable governance, directly aligning with the R-ARCSS's objectives. Furthermore, the R-ARCSS includes provisions for human rights

protection, transitional justice mechanisms such as the Commission for Truth, Reconciliation and Healing, and a Compensation and Reparation Authority. The HLD provides a vital forum to underscore the critical need for upholding human rights, addressing impunity, and supporting these transitional justice processes in South Sudan. The United Nations (UN) and African Union (AU) bodies frequently leverage these dialogues to highlight the human rights situation and press for compliance with the peace agreement's human rights clauses. The core purpose of the R-ARCSS is to end conflict and establish lasting peace and security, a goal directly supported by HLD's advocacy for ceasefire adherence, security sector reform, and addressing factors that fuel conflict in line with the AU's goal to Silence the Guns in Africa by 2030.

Providing a Platform for Regional and International Support: The HLD brings together AU Member States, regional economic communities like IGAD, United Nations (UN) entities, and civil society organizations, creating a collective platform for sustained diplomatic pressure and coordinated interventions to support South Sudan's peace process. Recommendations from these dialogues often inform AU Summit decisions, providing a high-level mandate for further engagement. This concerted effort is crucial for South Sudan, which continues to navigate the complexities of post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation.

Addressing Challenges and Promoting Accountability: The HLD rigorously scrutinizes implementation challenges of peace agreements, including the R-ARCSS. For South Sudan, this has meant highlighting issues such as delayed unification of forces, lack of progress on constitutional reform, shrinking civic space, widening political divide, subnational violence, and persistent human rights abuses. It serves to hold signatory parties accountable for their commitments, emphasizing the need for political will, adequate funding, and accelerated completion of critical tasks outlined in the agreement. Discussions also highlight the need to address root causes of conflict, such as corruption and impunity, which impede successful implementation and good governance. By fostering an environment of scrutiny and dialogue, the HLD plays a crucial role in ensuring that commitments are honored and progress is made towards sustainable peace.

Fostering Dialogue and Inclusivity: These dialogues emphasize inclusive political processes and broad-based participation in peacebuilding. For South Sudan, this translates into calls for greater engagement of civil society, women, youth, and other marginalized groups in the peace and constitutional-making processes. Recognizing that lasting peace requires the active participation of all segments of society, the HLD champions a more inclusive approach to governance and peacebuilding.

Justice, Rights, and Reparations: A South Sudanese Perspective

The 13th HLD's focus on "Justice, Rights, Reparations, and State-building" is particularly pertinent to South Sudan, a nation grappling with the aftermath of prolonged conflict. As the country celebrates its 14th Independence Day this July 2025, it remains dreadfully far from lasting peace and stability. Justice is integral for

democratic governance, and the South Sudanese government, like all African governments, must prioritize the promotion and protection of human rights, regardless of age, social status, or disability. For society to thrive, justice, rights, and reparations must serve as the foundation for building and achieving democratic systems, with significant emphasis on women and people living with disabilities in hard-to-reach areas.

Rights, encompassing the right to life and liberty, freedom from slavery and torture, freedom of opinion and expression, and the right to work and education, are fundamental to democratic governance. These universal rights are even more critical in a context like South Sudan, where years of conflict have severely impacted the lives and livelihoods of its citizens. Given that South Sudan has been profoundly affected by wars and conflicts, with devastation particularly severe in rural and hard-to-reach areas, the concept of reparations becomes crucial. Many in these remote areas lack awareness of their rights, face challenges in accessing justice, and may not know where to report grievances. The HLD offers a vital opportunity to address these gaps and ensure that the principles of justice and reparations reach those who have suffered the most.

The Role of Nile Youth Development Actions (NYDA)

Amidst the complexities of peacebuilding and justice advocacy in South Sudan, the Nile Youth Development Actions (NYDA) stands out as a beacon of grassroots engagement. Established in 2017, NYDA is a dedicated organization committed to advancing socio-economic development in South Sudan and the Nile Basin region. With a vision to empower young people and foster cooperation, NYDA plays a critical role in promoting peace agreements in South Sudan and addressing the very issues the 13th HLD seeks to highlight.

The organization consistently champions the full implementation of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance (ACDEG) and actively encourages youth engagement in South Sudan's political and electoral processes. NYDA also mobilizes young people for peace dialogues focused on Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development (PCRD) and advocates for the national ratification of the Africa Youth Charter.

NYDA's work directly contributes to the objectives of the publication accompanying the 13th HLD, particularly by:

- **Showcasing innovative youth-led approaches to transitional justice:** NYDA's grassroots initiatives empower young people, who are often marginalized, to engage in peacebuilding and advocate for their rights. This youth-centric approach is vital, as young people represent a significant demographic in South Sudan and are key to its future stability.

- **Highlighting the role of civil society:** As a civil society organization, NYDA is at the forefront of addressing the needs of vulnerable populations, including African women in rural areas, people with disabilities, and youth in hard-to-reach areas. Their direct engagement with communities ensures that the voices and needs of the most marginalized are heard and addressed.
- **Strengthening public understanding of AU policy frameworks:** Through its work, NYDA helps bridge the gap between policy and practice, ensuring that the principles of justice, rights, and reparations resonate at the community level. This localization of broad AU policies is critical for their effective implementation and for fostering a sense of ownership among the populace.

NYDA's efforts exemplify how local organizations can be instrumental in translating high-level policy discussions into tangible impacts on the ground. Their work in awareness campaigns, capacity building, and advocacy directly supports the objectives of the R-ARCSS and the broader goals of the African Union for an integrated, prosperous, and peaceful Africa. By focusing on empowering youth and vulnerable groups, NYDA contributes significantly to creating a more inclusive and just society in South Sudan.

Call to Action: Paving the Way for a Just and Peaceful South Sudan

In alignment with the 13th HLD's objectives and the urgent needs in South Sudan, it is imperative that African governments and relevant institutions such as the AU and regional bodies take decisive action:

- **Develop comprehensive policies** that provide justice, rights, and reparations to African women in rural areas, people with disabilities, and youth in hard-to-reach areas. These policies must be tailored to the specific contexts and challenges faced by these vulnerable groups, ensuring that they are not left behind in the pursuit of justice and development.
- **Conduct extensive awareness campaigns** through Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) operating in rural or remote areas, like NYDA, to educate communities on their rights and avenues for seeking justice. Bridging the knowledge gap is crucial for empowering citizens to claim their rights and engage with judicial and transitional justice mechanisms.
- **Establish robust frameworks** that encourage member states to enact laws protecting African women in rural areas, people with disabilities, and youth in hard-to-reach areas. Legislative frameworks provide the necessary legal basis for safeguarding human rights and ensuring accountability for violations.
- **Provide sustained technical and financial support** for CSOs, including NYDA, to enable them to effectively conduct their operations and reach the most vulnerable populations. Local organizations are often best positioned to

understand and address community-specific needs, but they require adequate resources to scale their impact.

Conclusion

The 13th High-Level Dialogue on Democracy, Governance, Human Rights, Peace and Security offers a critical opportunity to reinforce the principles of justice, rights, and reparations across Africa, with a specific focus on nations like South Sudan. The ongoing efforts to implement the R-ARCSS, coupled with the dedicated work of organizations like NYDA, are crucial steps towards building inclusive, accountable, and resilient governance structures. By prioritizing the needs of the most vulnerable and empowering local actors, the continent can move closer to achieving sustainable peace, democratic governance, and respect for human rights for all its citizens. The path to a truly just and peaceful South Sudan, and indeed a just Africa, is a collective endeavour that demands unwavering commitment, collaborative action, and a deep understanding of the unique challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

Author Bio's

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Michael Thak Nguany Jal is an Inclusion and IDP Advocate, serving as Country Coordinator for Nile Youth Development Actions (NYDA), with seven years of humanitarian experience. He has held positions as a MEL & Communication Officer at MHA and ACTED, and as an Information Management Assistant at MTN South Sudan and Zas-Aviation. Mr. Thak champions youth empowerment through peace, education, entrepreneurship, and innovation and has presented local peacebuilding approaches at the 2023 12th High-level Dialogue on Human Rights, Democracy and Governance in Africa, and participated in the African Union's Transitional Justice Training in South Sudan.

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Mr. Ruot George, a former refugee and Internally Displaced Person (IDP), is a seasoned freelance journalist, human rights activist, and entrepreneur with over a decade of experience in broadcasting and translation. Currently, Ruot serves as the interim Secretary-General of the South Sudan Young Peace Builders' Forum and is a member of the transition working group. He's a alumnus of the Young African Leaders Initiative (2018), African Union Youth 4 Transitional Justice, and various regional and Pan-African Youth initiatives. Ruot is the current Programs Manager of the Nile Youth Development Action (NYDA). His professional background includes working with the Union of Journalists in South Sudan (UJOSS), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Danish Refugee Council, Internews, and Bentiu Radio.

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