

## THE ILLUSION OF AUTONOMY: UNRAVELING THE PARADOX OF AID AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF DEPENDENCY IN FRANCOPHONE AFRICA

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### Abstract

This study explores the persistent dependency of Francophone African countries on French aid, military support, financial arrangements, and cultural influence, rooted in colonial legacies and reinforced through neo-colonial mechanisms such as the CFA franc system and strategic interventions. The background of the problem highlights how formal independence masks ongoing economic, political, and cultural subjugation driven by external interests, resulting in underdevelopment and sovereignty illusions. The primary objectives are to critically analyze how aid and strategic support sustain dependency and to propose pathways for genuine autonomy. Employing a mixed-method approach, the research integrates a chronological narrative with thematic analysis, utilizing authoritative secondary sources, empirical data from institutions like the World Bank, and relevant theoretical frameworks including Dependency Theory and Neo-colonialism. Findings reveal that despite substantial aid inflows since the 1980s, development indicators in countries like Niger and Burkina Faso remain poor, with aid often serving French strategic and economic interests rather than fostering sustainable growth. The control of monetary reserves and cultural hegemonies further entrench dependency, evidenced by protests and coups that signal resistance to neo-colonial influence. The study recommends reforms emphasizing regional integration, monetary sovereignty, cultural revival of indigenous identities, and strengthening democratic governance and local capacity. Ultimately, the research advocates for a paradigm shift towards self-reliant development models that dismantle colonial structures, empowering African nations to reclaim sovereignty and foster sustainable progress.

**Keywords:** Autonomy, Dependency, Francophone Africa, Paradox of Aid.

### 1. Introduction

#### Background of the Study

The historical roots of the France-Afrique relationship trace back to the colonial era, where France established an extensive empire across West and Central Africa, comprising nations such as Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad, Central African Republic, Gabon, Republic of Congo, and Cameroon. During the colonial period, France systematically extracted resources and imposed administrative structures designed to serve colonial interests, laying the groundwork for a relationship characterized by asymmetry and dependency (Adebajo, 2010). Post-independence, France's continued engagement was not merely a matter of aid but a strategic extension of colonial influence, often cloaked under the guise of sovereignty and partnership, thus fostering what many scholars term a 'neo-colonial' framework (Fanon, 1961; Ndiaye, 2009).

In the immediate postcolonial period, French aid took various forms; economic, military, educational, and health; each serving to entrench a dependency that has persisted into the present. The economic aid, channeled through agencies like the *Agence Française de Développement* (AFD), has often been tied to specific projects that reinforce France's economic interests, such as resource extraction and market access. For example, in Côte d'Ivoire, French economic assistance prioritized cocoa and coffee sectors, vital to France's agricultural exports, effectively shaping the country's economic structure to favor French interests (Brenner, 2014). Military aid, via the French *Force Licorne* or *Operation Sangaris*, has been used to maintain stability favorable to French strategic interests, often intervening in conflicts in Mali, Central African Republic, and Chad; countries that remain heavily dependent on French military support (Mason, 2017). Educational and health aid, though seemingly altruistic, have also played roles in shaping cultural and political dependencies, with French language dominance and health

policies aligning with French institutions, thus perpetuating a form of soft power that sustains influence (Gagliardone et al., 2015).

The paradox of aid, its capacity to foster development while simultaneously entrenching dependency has been a central feature of France's relationship with its former colonies. Despite substantial aid flows, many Francophone African nations continue to experience stagnation or decline in key development indicators. For instance, the World Bank (2022) reports that countries like Niger and Burkina Faso remain among the poorest globally, with GDP per capita below US\$900, despite decades of aid. This paradoxical situation underscores how aid, instead of promoting sustainable development, often consolidates a cycle of dependency. French aid agencies, such as AFD and the French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, have historically prioritized projects that serve strategic interests such as; maintaining the CFA franc monetary union rather than fostering independent economic growth (Gordon & N'Diaye, 2019). This has contributed to what Fanon (1961) described as the 'colonial mentality'—an illusion of independence that masks ongoing economic subservience.

The role of aid in maintaining this dependency is further evidenced by the control of financial reserves through the two major monetary unions: the West African CFA franc zone and the Central African CFA franc zone. Both currencies are pegged to the euro and backed by the French Treasury, with reserves held in Paris, thus giving France significant control over the monetary sovereignty of these nations (Anele, 2018). This arrangement, established during the colonial period and maintained through the 20th century, is often criticized as a form of neo-colonial financial surveillance, limiting the fiscal autonomy of these nations while providing France with leverage over their economic policies (Amin & M'Barek, 2020). Notably, the French government and its agencies have historically maintained that these monetary policies stabilize inflation and facilitate development; however, critics argue that they primarily serve French economic and strategic interests (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2021). The central banks of these CFA zones, functioning as agents of France, have thus become a critical mechanism of economic control, reinforcing the dependency framework and perpetuating the illusion of sovereignty.

The contemporary France-Afrique relationship is deeply entrenched in a complex web of historical, economic, military, and cultural dependencies rooted in colonial legacies. Despite formal independence, the continued reliance on French aid, whether in the form of economic grants, military intervention, educational exchanges, or financial control has fostered a paradoxical development landscape where dependency persists under the guise of partnership and aid. This paradox sustains the 'French African illusion'; an illusion of independence masking ongoing neocolonial dominance. The strategic control of monetary reserves and financial institutions further exemplifies how French interests remain embedded in the fabric of African sovereignty, perpetuating a cycle of dependency that hampers genuine development and self-determination.

### **The Statement of the Problem**

Despite achieving formal political independence from France, many Francophone African nations continue to operate under a condition of masked or illusionary sovereignty, a phenomenon largely sustained by ongoing economic, military, and financial dependencies rooted in historical colonial arrangements. This apparent independence is often superficial, as these countries remain entangled in a web of strategic aid and financial mechanisms that serve French interests under the guise of partnership and development (Adebajo, 2010; Ndiaye, 2009). The reliance on French aid encompassing; economic grants, military support, educational exchanges, and health assistance has historically been employed not solely for fostering development but also as a means of maintaining influence and control over these nations' political and economic trajectories (Gordon & N'Diaye, 2019).

A critical concern is that this aid, rather than empowering these countries towards sustainable self-reliance, has perpetuated a cycle of dependency, effectively masking the true extent of their sovereignty. The aid programs are often tied to strategic interests, such as the maintenance of the CFA franc monetary union, which continues to restrict fiscal autonomy and financial independence. Reserves held in France and the pegged currency system serve as mechanisms for economic control, reinforcing a form of neo-colonial dominance that underpins the façade of independence (Anele, 2018; Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2021). Consequently, these nations are caught in a paradox where they appear to govern themselves politically, yet remain economically and financially subordinate, dependent on aid flows and monetary arrangements designed to serve French strategic and economic interests. Furthermore, the heavy dependency on aid and financial mechanisms rooted in colonial-era treaties has hindered genuine development, fostering stagnation and underdevelopment. The paradox of aid, its failure to lead to sustainable growth raises questions about the true nature of sovereignty and independence in these contexts (Fanon, 1961). If aid continues to serve as the primary tool for influence rather than development, then the proclaimed independence of these nations remains largely symbolic, masking an underlying neocolonial reality.

Therefore, understanding the role of French aid in constructing this façade of independence is crucial for unraveling the persistent dependency and for fostering genuine sovereignty in Francophone Africa.

## 2. A Brief Debate on France and the Development of French Africa

Proponents argue that France has played a significant role in the development of its former colonies in Africa by providing crucial aid, infrastructure, and expertise that have contributed to stabilizing and modernizing African economies. For instance, French aid agencies such as the *Agence Française de Développement* (AFD) have invested heavily in sectors like health, education, and infrastructure, ostensibly fostering socio-economic progress. According to Faye (2014), French development projects in West Africa have improved access to primary education and healthcare, which are essential foundations for long-term development. Furthermore, military interventions and peacekeeping missions, often justified by France as stabilizing efforts, have been credited with restoring order in conflict zones, thus creating conducive environments for economic activity (Mason, 2017). These initiatives suggest that France's involvement has had tangible developmental benefits, especially in crisis management and capacity building.

However, critics challenge this narrative by arguing that France's aid and interventions have predominantly served strategic and economic interests rather than genuine development goals. They contend that aid has often been tied to French economic benefits, such as preferential access to raw materials and markets, rather than fostering sustainable growth within African nations (Adebajo, 2010). For example, the continued maintenance of the CFA franc monetary system exemplifies how financial arrangements, largely controlled by France, limit monetary sovereignty and perpetuate economic dependency, undermining the development of autonomous financial institutions (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2021). Critics also point out that military interventions, instead of fostering stability, have often led to prolonged conflicts, state fragility and economic stagnation, evident in countries like Central African Republic and Mali, thus impeding development (Gordon & N'Diaye, 2019). These interventions, they argue, are less about fostering development and more about maintaining French influence and control.

On the other hand, defenders argue that France's contributions go beyond aid and military support, highlighting investments in infrastructure such as roads, ports, and energy facilities that have facilitated economic integration and regional trade. They point out that France's role in establishing educational institutions and training programs has helped develop human capital in various African countries, enabling these nations to build their administrative and technical capacities (Faye, 2014). Nevertheless, critics counter that these investments often serve to reinforce colonial legacies, such as the dominance of the French language and legal systems, which continue to inhibit genuine local agency and economic independence (Ndiaye, 2009). They argue that such cultural dependencies are a form of soft power that sustains the colonial relationship under the guise of partnership, thus hindering true development.

Furthermore, proponents emphasize France's role in fostering regional stability and economic integration through support for regional organizations and monetary unions like the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU). They argue that these arrangements have contributed to macroeconomic stability and facilitated trade among member states. Yet, critics contend that these arrangements are designed primarily to serve French economic interests, with the peg of the CFA franc to the euro and the control of reserves in Paris limiting the fiscal sovereignty of member states. Such arrangements, they argue, lock these countries into a dependency cycle where true economic independence remains elusive, and development is hampered by financial constraints imposed from outside (Anele, 2018).

The debate on France's role in African development reveals a complex picture. While there is evidence of positive contributions, including; infrastructure, stability and capacity building, these are often overshadowed by the systemic dependencies created through colonial-era financial arrangements, strategic military interventions and cultural hegemony. Such dependencies have arguably contributed more to underdevelopment by reinforcing structures of control and limiting the capacity for autonomous growth. Therefore, understanding whether France has genuinely fostered development or perpetuated underdevelopment in its former colonies remains a delicate question, requiring critical examination of both tangible achievements and the broader neo-colonial dynamics at play.

## 3. Review of Relevant Theories

### Dependency Theory

The proponents of Dependency Theory, including scholars like Andre Gunder Frank and Immanuel Wallerstein, argue that the global economic system is characterized by an inherent asymmetry where developing countries remain subordinate to industrialized nations. The core statement of Dependency Theory posits that underdevelopment in the periphery (including many African countries) is a direct consequence of their historical

and ongoing economic dependence on the core (developed nations). The theory assumes that the economic structure of the global system perpetuates dependency through mechanisms such as unequal exchange, foreign aid, and multinational corporations, which extract surplus value from peripheral countries and inhibit autonomous development (Frank, 1967). It also presumes that this dependency is structurally embedded, making it nearly impossible for developing nations to break free without fundamental changes to the global economic system. Critics argue that Dependency Theory overemphasizes external factors at the expense of internal governance issues and agency within developing countries (Evans, 1979). Nevertheless, in the context of French Africa, Dependency Theory effectively explains how aid, financial arrangements like the CFA franc, and foreign direct investment have reinforced economic dependency, thereby perpetuating underdevelopment. It highlights the paradox where aid intended for development often sustains existing dependencies, preventing autonomous growth and fostering a cycle of reliance on former colonial powers.

### **Neo-colonialism**

The proponents of Neo-colonialism, notably Kwame Nkrumah, argue that formal political independence does not equate to economic or cultural independence. The core statement of Neo-colonialism posits that former colonial powers continue to exert control over their former colonies through economic, financial, and cultural means, thus maintaining dominance without direct political rule (Nkrumah, 1965). The assumptions of this theory include the idea that international capitalism and multinational corporations serve as tools for neo-colonial power, exploiting resources and labor while preserving the status quo of dependency. It presumes that neo-colonial practices are often subtle, involving economic policies, aid dependencies, and cultural influences that sustain the colonial legacy (Nkrumah, 1965). Critics, however, argue that Neo-colonialism underestimates the agency of African elites and the internal factors influencing development (Lonsdale, 1989). In the context of French Africa, Neo-colonialism explains how financial arrangements like the CFA franc, control over trade, and military interventions serve to maintain French influence. These mechanisms sustain economic dependence and cultural dominance, thereby hindering genuine sovereignty and development. This theory critically illuminates the paradox where political independence exists, yet economic and cultural dependencies persist, perpetuating underdevelopment.

### **4. Methodology**

This study adopts a comprehensive and multi-layered methodological framework that integrates a chronological narrative with thematic analysis, enabling a nuanced understanding of France's multifaceted influence on African development and underdevelopment. The chronological element traces the evolution of France-Africa relations from the colonial period through independence and into the contemporary era, providing an organized timeline to contextualize key policy shifts, economic reforms, and geopolitical developments. This approach allows for the identification of continuities and ruptures over time, illustrating how historical legacies have persisted or transformed (Jones, 2018).

Complementing this, the thematic approach focuses on core issues such as economic dependency, aid policies, military interventions, financial arrangements like the CFA franc, and cultural influence. By organizing the analysis around these themes, the methodology facilitates a detailed exploration of specific mechanisms through which France has impacted African development trajectories. This dual approach ensures that the study captures both the macro-historical processes and the micro-level dynamics shaping development outcomes.

In terms of sources, the study relies heavily on authoritative secondary literature, including peer-reviewed journal articles, books by leading scholars in African and post-colonial studies, and comprehensive reports from institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). These sources provide empirical data, policy analyses, and interpretive frameworks necessary for critical evaluation. Recent empirical studies—particularly those employing quantitative methodologies offer insights into the causal relationships between aid, economic dependency, and development indicators, thus grounding the analysis in current data (Adebajo, 2010; Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2021).

The use of theoretical justifications is central to framing the investigation. Dependency theory, for instance, offers a lens to interpret how colonial structures and contemporary aid relations reinforce underdevelopment. Post-colonial theory provides insights into cultural and political legacies, while neocolonialism frameworks critique how economic and geopolitical dependencies continue to shape development outcomes (Fanon, 1961; Nkrumah, 1965). These theories guide the analysis of primary themes, allowing for a critical assessment of whether France's role has been genuinely developmental or primarily neo-colonial.

Furthermore, the methodology incorporates data from recent reports by the World Bank and other international agencies, which provide statistical evidence on growth, poverty, infrastructure development, and financial dependence. These reports enable the triangulation of qualitative insights with quantitative data, enhancing the robustness of the analysis. They also help situate historical insights within current development contexts, illustrating ongoing patterns or shifts.

This mixed-method, layered approach, combining a chronological framework with thematic analysis aims to produce a comprehensive understanding of France's complex role in Africa's development. It balances historical depth with thematic specificity, grounded in authoritative secondary sources, empirical data, and relevant theoretical perspectives, thus ensuring a rigorous and holistic investigation into the intertwined narratives of development and underdevelopment.

## **5. The Paradox of French Aid to Former French African Colonies**

### **French Economic Aid to Former African Colonies: An Analytical Perspective**

Since the decolonization wave that swept Africa in the 1960s, France has maintained a strategic and economic relationship with its former colonies, especially in West and Central Africa. Despite official declarations of independence, France's continued economic aid, military support, and diplomatic ties often encapsulated within the framework of *La Françafrique*—have played a significant role in shaping the development trajectories of these nations. From 1980 onwards, France's economic assistance to its former colonies has evolved amid global economic shifts, regional instabilities, and debates over neo-colonial influence. This essay critically examines the nature, scope, and impact of French aid from 1980, highlighting specific figures, agencies involved, and the implications of such aid on Africa's development.

The 1980s marked a period where French aid was closely linked to structural adjustment programs (SAPs) implemented in many African countries under the auspices of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. France's role was often indirect but influential, with aid channeled through bilateral agencies such as the Caisse Centrale de Coopération Economique (CCCE) and later, the Agence Française de Développement (AFD). During this period, aid flows to sub-Saharan Africa averaged around \$2 billion annually, with France accounting for roughly 25% of total aid to the region (OECD, 1988). While aid figures appeared substantial, the effectiveness was limited. Structural adjustment policies often prioritized debt repayment over genuine development, exacerbating poverty and underdevelopment. French aid, primarily aimed at maintaining political stability and access to natural resources, especially minerals and oil often bypassed local development needs. For example, in 1984, France extended approximately 300 million francs (\$60 million USD) in aid to support infrastructure projects in former colonies like Cameroon and Senegal, but critics argued this aid reinforced neo-colonial economic dependencies rather than fostering autonomous growth (Berman, 1988).

The late 1980s saw the creation of the Agence Française de Développement (AFD) in 1998, replacing the CCCE as France's primary development agency. From the early 1990s, aid programs increased in complexity, extending beyond infrastructure to include health, education, and governance reforms. Between 1990 and 2000, aid to Africa from France surged to approximately \$3.5 billion annually, with AFD disbursing around €1.2 billion annually by the late 1990s (AFD, 2001). However, French aid during this period was often tied to strategic interests, notably maintaining influence over resource-rich countries such as Congo, Gabon, and Côte d'Ivoire. For example, in 1995, France supported the stabilization of the Congo economy with a €100 million aid package aimed at supporting government reforms, but such aid was frequently criticized for serving French commercial interests rather than the direct needs of local populations (Kieh, 1999). Moreover, aid effectiveness was hampered by governance issues, corruption, and the limited capacity of recipient states, which often resulted in aid being diverted or underutilized, perpetuating underdevelopment.

In the 2000s, French aid to Africa continued to grow, driven by increased global concern about poverty alleviation and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). According to OECD (2010), France's aid to sub-Saharan Africa increased to over \$4 billion annually by 2005. The AFD expanded its portfolio, with a focus on sustainable development, climate change, and infrastructure. Notably, in 2007, France pledged €1 billion over five years for African development, emphasizing the importance of regional integration and private sector engagement (AFD, 2007). Despite increased aid levels, developmental outcomes remained mixed. For instance, in Côte d'Ivoire, French aid and diplomatic support during the political crisis of 2010-2011 were criticized for perpetuating a cycle of dependence and political interference. Moreover, aid effectiveness was challenged by issues related to conditionality, transparency, and the alignment of aid with local priorities. The reliance on aid also arguably hindered the development of autonomous economic policies, leaving recipient countries vulnerable to external shocks and fluctuating aid flows.

From 2010 onward, French aid policy has been influenced by the broader European Union strategy and France's own strategic interests, including access to natural resources and regional stability. In 2014, France announced the "Africa Initiative," promising €1.8 billion over five years to foster economic growth, security, and governance (French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, 2014). The establishment of the Alliance for the Sahel and increased military support such as Operation Barkhane have intertwined aid with security objectives. In spite of the above facts, aid figures reveal that between 2010 and 2020, aid to Africa from France averaged approximately

€2–3 billion annually, with substantial portions allocated to military and security assistance rather than purely developmental projects. This shift raises questions about the efficacy of aid in fostering sustainable development and whether aid is being used more as a strategic tool for maintaining influence than as a means to promote genuine economic independence. Furthermore, aid dependency persists; many African economies remain heavily reliant on aid flows, which can distort local markets and discourage structural reforms (Badiane & Makombe, 2019).

Basically, French economic aid to its former African colonies has been characterized by a complex blend of strategic interests, developmental initiatives, and geopolitical influence. From the 1980s through the present, aid flows have increased in nominal terms but have often fallen short of catalyzing sustainable development, partly due to issues of governance, aid dependency, and the persistent influence of French strategic priorities. While aid agencies such as AFD have expanded their portfolios, critical perspectives argue that aid has often reinforced neo-colonial patterns rather than fostering genuine independence. To enhance development outcomes, a reevaluation of aid strategies focusing on transparency, local ownership, and reducing dependency is essential. As France continues to shape its role in Africa's development, balancing strategic interests with genuine partnership remains a critical challenge.

### **French Military Aid to Former African Colonies**

Since the wave of decolonization in the 1960s, France has maintained a strategic interest in its former African colonies, often channeling military aid to safeguard its geopolitical and economic interests. Starting from the 1980s, French military aid to these nations has been substantial, often intertwined with economic and political support, with several agencies such as the French Ministry of Armed Forces (Ministère des Armées) and the French Foreign Ministry (Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères) playing pivotal roles. This aid has manifested through training, logistical support, and direct military interventions, aiming to stabilize regimes aligned with French interests but frequently criticized for perpetuating underdevelopment and undermining sovereignty.

During the early 1980s, France intensified its military engagement in Africa, particularly in Central Africa and the Sahel region. The French government, through the Ministry of Armed Forces, provided significant military aid to countries like Chad, Central African Republic, and Niger, primarily aimed at countering Soviet influence and supporting regimes sympathetic to French interests (Fowler, 1996). For instance, France's Operation Epervier in Chad, launched in 1986, exemplifies direct military intervention, with France deploying hundreds of troops to support the Chadian government against rebel factions and Libyan incursions. The French government allocated substantial military aid, including equipment, training, and intelligence, with annual military aid figures estimated at several hundred million euros in the 1980s (Fowler, 1996). This aid was often justified as necessary for regional stability but arguably served to sustain authoritarian regimes, limiting genuine development and democratic progress.

The 1990s marked a period of geopolitical recalibration following the end of the Cold War. France's military aid shifted from overt Cold War politics to addressing internal conflicts, such as in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Côte d'Ivoire. The French government, via the Ministry of Armed Forces, continued to provide military assistance, including training, logistical support, and small-scale interventions. For example, in Côte d'Ivoire, France supplied military aid to support the government during civil unrest, with aid packages estimated at millions of euros annually (Keenan, 2000). Despite claims of promoting stability, critics argue that such aid often entrenched authoritarianism and hindered economic development by suppressing opposition and fostering dependency on external military support (Keenan, 2000).

The early 21st century saw France's military aid increasingly intertwined with counter-terrorism efforts, especially in the Sahel region, exemplified by interventions in Mali and Niger. The French-led Operation Serval (2013) and subsequent Operation Barkhane (2014) involved extensive military aid, including troop deployments, equipment, and logistical support, with the French Ministry of Armed Forces investing hundreds of millions of euros annually (Foucher & Le Marcis, 2016). These operations often aimed at combating jihadist groups but have been criticized for perpetuating cycles of violence, destabilizing local economies, and failing to address underlying development deficits (Foucher & Le Marcis, 2016). The aid, while militarily significant, has not translated into sustainable development; instead, it has sometimes exacerbated socio-economic inequalities, with local populations bearing the brunt of ongoing conflict.

French military aid to African nations however has often prioritized strategic interests over genuine development goals. While quantifiable figures such as aid expenditures, troop deployments and equipment supplies highlight the scale of assistance, the qualitative impact raises questions about efficacy. The aid has frequently supported

authoritarian regimes, suppressed dissent, and perpetuated cycles of violence, which undermine efforts to foster stable, self-sufficient economies. According to Leenders (2014), military aid has often been used as a tool for influence rather than development, leading to dependency and underdevelopment. Moreover, the focus on military solutions neglects the socio-economic roots of instability, such as poverty, corruption, and lack of infrastructure, which are critical for sustainable development.

In concrete terms, French military aid to African countries since 1980 has been substantial and strategically motivated. While it has contributed to regional stability in some instances, the overarching impact on development remains questionable. The aid has often reinforced authoritarian regimes, suppressed opposition, and failed to promote sustainable economic growth. Moving forward, a critical reassessment of aid policies is necessary, emphasizing a balanced approach that prioritizes development, good governance, and local ownership over military intervention. Only through such reforms can aid transition from a tool of strategic influence to an effective instrument for genuine development and stability.

### **French Educational Aid to Former French African Colonies: A Critical Analysis**

Since the decolonization period, France has maintained a strategic interest in its former African colonies, particularly through various forms of economic and developmental aid, with a significant emphasis on education. French aid initiatives have aimed to bolster educational infrastructure, curriculum development, and human capital formation, ostensibly to foster stability and economic growth aligned with French geopolitical interests. However, the efficacy and intentions of these programs warrant critical scrutiny, especially concerning their actual impact on development outcomes in countries such as Cameroon.

Beginning in the 1980s, France formalized its commitment to aid former colonies through various agencies, notably the *Agence Française de Développement* (AFD), established in 1941, which became a primary conduit for development aid. AFD's mandate expanded in the 1980s to include educational projects, often tied to broader economic objectives (AFD, 2020). Concurrently, the *Caisse Centrale de Coopération Économique* (CCCE), established in 1948, functioned as a key agency channeling aid to Africa before its integration into AFD in 2000. The French government also directed aid via bilateral agreements, often embedded within the framework of the *Françafrique* policy, which prioritized maintaining political and economic influence through aid and technical assistance (Médard, 2002).

From the 1980s onward, French educational aid focused on building physical infrastructure—schools, teacher training centers, and universities—and curriculum reforms aimed at promoting French language and culture. The emphasis was on "Francophonization" as a means of cultural influence, often at the expense of indigenous languages and knowledge systems (Fardon & MacGaffey, 2000). This approach has been critiqued for perpetuating neocolonial relations, wherein aid sustains dependency rather than fostering autonomous development. Cameroon, a key recipient of French aid, exemplifies the broader patterns of aid delivery. According to official AFD reports, from 1980 to 2000, France committed approximately €50 million annually to Cameroon's educational sector, targeting infrastructure, teacher training, and curriculum development (AFD, 2001). These funds facilitated the construction of numerous primary and secondary schools, particularly in the anglophone regions, which historically lagged behind due to colonial legacies (Ngoh, 2010). Despite these investments, the impact on literacy rates and educational attainment has been mixed.

The literacy rate in Cameroon increased from approximately 64% in 1980 to 75% in 2000, with notable disparities between urban and rural areas (UNESCO, 2021). While infrastructure expansion contributed to this growth, issues such as teacher shortages, inadequate materials, and curricular mismatches persisted. Moreover, French influence remained dominant in curriculum content, which critics argue perpetuated cultural dependency and limited the development of indigenous knowledge systems (Tchombe, 2018). The French government and AFD have also supported higher education reforms, including the establishment of joint Franco-Cameroonian university programs and scholarships for Cameroonian students to study in France (AFD, 2017). However, these initiatives often lead to brain drain, as many students choose to settle in France post-graduation, thus depriving Cameroon of skilled professionals essential for national development (Bourdon, 2019). This phenomenon underscores the paradox where aid aimed at development inadvertently fuels dependency and migration rather than fostering local capacity.

French educational aid has however been characterized as primarily serving French geopolitical and economic interests rather than genuinely promoting sustainable development. The focus on language and curriculum alignment with France has often marginalized local languages and indigenous knowledge, which are crucial for culturally relevant and effective education (Fardon & MacGaffey, 2000). Such policies risk alienating students and communities, thereby undermining educational equity and social cohesion.

Furthermore, aid effectiveness has been questioned due to issues of governance, corruption, and misallocation. Reports indicate that a significant portion of aid funds in Cameroon, especially those aimed at education, have been diverted or poorly managed, reducing their impact (World Bank, 2018). The reliance on external aid also hampers the development of autonomous, locally-driven educational policies, perpetuating a form of neocolonial dependency. Recent shifts, such as the introduction of French Development Agency's (AFD) "Education for All" programs, have attempted to integrate local languages and contexts. Nonetheless, these initiatives remain limited in scope and are often overshadowed by continued emphasis on French language and curricula. The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed the fragility of the educational infrastructure financed by aid, with disparities widening and digital divides remaining unaddressed (UNICEF, 2020).

Therefore, French educational aid to African nations reflects a complex interplay of development objectives, cultural influence and geopolitical strategy. While tangible infrastructural and human resource improvements have occurred, the overall impact on sustainable development remains contested. The predominant focus on language, curriculum standardization, and external expertise has often marginalized local contexts, undermining the goal of autonomous development. Moreover, issues of aid mismanagement and dependency continue to challenge the efficacy of these programs. Moving forward, a critical reevaluation of aid policies, emphasizing indigenous knowledge, local governance, and genuine capacity-building, is necessary to transform aid from a tool of dependency into a catalyst for sustainable development.

### **French Health-Related Aid to Former French African Colonies**

Since gaining independence, many African nations have continued to engage with France through various forms of support, particularly in areas like healthcare. France has consistently prioritized its involvement in these countries' development efforts by providing both financial resources and technical assistance. Over the years, this aid has been channeled through multiple pathways, including direct bilateral collaborations, contributions via international organizations, and targeted programs such as the *Contrat de Désendettement et de Développement* (C2D). This relationship merits a thorough and critical analysis, focusing on the magnitude of the aid provided and the tangible effects it has had.

In the 1980s, French aid to African health systems was primarily delivered via bilateral agreements and through multilateral agencies like the World Bank and UNICEF. During this period, France's aid was relatively modest compared to the 2000s, with a focus on supporting infectious disease control particularly; malaria and HIV/AIDS and strengthening health infrastructure. For example, in 1985, France financed health programs amounting to approximately 30 million euros across its African partner countries, with Cameroon benefiting from a portion of this aid directed toward rural health clinics and vaccine programs (OECD, 2010).

However, these early efforts were often criticized for their limited scope and sustainability. Aid was frequently tied to political interests and lacked a comprehensive strategy for health system strengthening. The aid was also characterized by a top-down approach, emphasizing infrastructure over human resources, which limited the long-term impact on health outcomes. Moreover, the aid's effectiveness was compromised by issues such as corruption, mismanagement, and weak governance structures within recipient countries like Cameroon (Amponsah et al., 2017).

The early 2000s marked a significant shift, notably with the launch of the C2D mechanism in 2008. C2D was designed to alleviate the debt burden of heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC) while channeling funds into development projects, including health. France committed approximately 4.8 billion euros to 15 African countries under C2D between 2008 and 2015; Cameroon was a notable recipient, receiving roughly 150 million euros dedicated to health projects over this period (French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2016).

These funds targeted health system strengthening, vaccination campaigns, maternal health and infectious disease control. For Cameroon, C2D aid contributed to expanding access to primary healthcare and combating HIV/AIDS through programs like PEPFAR and Global Fund initiatives, which France co-financed. Nevertheless, despite the increased financial flows, the aid often failed to address systemic issues such as inadequate health workforce capacity, corruption, and inefficient resource management. For example, a 2015 audit revealed that only 60% of allocated funds for health projects in Cameroon were effectively utilized, with corruption and logistical delays cited as major obstacles (Cameroon Court of Accounts, 2015). Furthermore, while the aid increased access to certain health services, disparities persisted, particularly in rural areas where health infrastructure remains underdeveloped. Some analysts contend that aid reliance perpetuates dependency rather than fostering autonomous health systems capable of responding to local needs (Tchounga et al., 2018).

The adoption of the SDGs in 2015 intensified the global emphasis on health, with France reaffirming its commitment to health aid. Between 2015 and 2020, France increased health-related aid to African countries,

including Cameroon, with a focus on maternal health, nutrition and infectious diseases. According to the OECD (2020), France allocated approximately 600 million euros annually to health aid in Africa during this period, a significant portion of which targeted Cameroon.

Despite increased funding, the impact on health outcomes remains mixed. Cameroon has seen some improvements in maternal mortality rates, which decreased from 782 per 100,000 live births in 2010 to 596 in 2017 (WHO, 2019). However, challenges such as health worker shortages, inadequate infrastructure and health financing issues persist. However, aid often prioritizes disease-specific programs (vertical approaches) over health system strengthening, which limits sustainable progress (Buchanan et al., 2020). Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the fragility of Cameroon's health system, with aid channeled through France and international partners playing a critical role in vaccine procurement and deployment. Nevertheless, the pandemic highlighted the inadequacies of aid-driven health systems, especially when aid dependency overshadowed the need for systemic reforms.

While French aid, including mechanisms like C2D, has contributed to specific health achievements in Cameroon and other African nations, it has also been criticized for fostering dependency, lacking sustainability and sometimes prioritizing political and economic interests over genuine needs. The aid often fails to address the root causes of health system weaknesses, such as governance deficits, workforce shortages and infrastructural decay. Furthermore, the conditionalities attached to aid, including debt relief and performance benchmarks, have sometimes led to internal policy tensions and implementation challenges. There is also a need for greater local involvement, transparency and accountability in aid programs to ensure that funds translate into tangible health improvements. A more effective strategy would involve integrating aid with national health policies, fostering capacity building and promoting domestic resource mobilization. Additionally, France's role should evolve from being a primary aid provider to a partner in capacity development, emphasizing sustainability and resilience in health systems.

From 1980 onward, French health-related aid to former African colonies has followed a trajectory marked by increased financial flows, shifts in aid modalities and evolving strategic priorities. Despite notable successes, significant challenges remain, including systemic deficiencies, dependency and unequal health outcomes. Analysis suggests that future aid efforts should prioritize systemic reforms, local ownership and sustainable development to truly improve health outcomes in former French African colonies.

### **French Cultural Aid to Former French African Colonies**

Since the era of colonization, France has strategically sustained its influence over its former African territories, extending beyond economic and political engagement to include cultural diplomacy. Following independence, France directed its cultural assistance to these countries through various organizations, such as the Centre de coopération pour le développement (C2D), Aide au développement culturel (ADC), and other bilateral initiatives designed to promote cultural connections, language dissemination, and educational collaborations. From the 1980s onward, this support has served to reinforce France's ongoing influence and to shape the cultural identity of its former colonies, notably Cameroon. Nonetheless, the motivations behind these programs and their actual impact merit a critical analysis. Following independence in the 1960s and 1970s, France devised a strategy to preserve its influence through cultural diplomacy, recognizing that soft power could serve its geopolitical interests. The *Agence Française de Développement* (AFD), established in 1941, expanded its scope to include cultural projects, while the *Alliance Française* network became an emblem of France's soft power, promoting the French language and culture globally (Meyer, 2014). From the 1980s, these efforts intensified through targeted funding and programs, often via bilateral agreements with African governments.

In Cameroon, a key recipient of French cultural aid, these initiatives focused on language promotion, educational exchanges, and media collaborations. The C2D, launched in the early 2000s as a flagship aid program, aimed to combat underdevelopment by integrating cultural dimensions into development policies (C2D, 2009). Although primarily economic, these programs have embedded cultural components, reflecting France's strategic aim of maintaining cultural affinity and influence. While precise figures on cultural aid alone are scarce due to the conflation with broader development funding, estimates suggest that France allocated significant resources to cultural development in Africa. For example, between 2000 and 2010, France invested approximately €150 million annually in various cultural projects across Africa, a substantial part of which targeted language promotion, educational infrastructure and media broadcasting (AFD, 2011). For Cameroon specifically, France committed around €10 million annually in cultural aid during this period, with a focus on strengthening the French language, supporting Cameroonian arts and fostering academic collaborations (Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 2018).

Cameroon exemplifies France's strategic cultural influence. The country hosts numerous French cultural centers, notably the *Alliance Française* Yaoundé, which has expanded its programs to include cinema festivals, language courses, and arts exhibitions. These centers serve as soft power tools, reinforcing the French language and culture. The French government, through the *C2D*, has invested in developing cultural infrastructure, such as renovating theaters and supporting local arts projects (C2D, 2019). Furthermore, French cultural aid has also facilitated academic exchanges, with hundreds of Cameroonian students studying in France annually, often under scholarship programs like the *Eiffel Excellence Scholarship*. These exchanges are part of a broader strategy to create a Francophone cultural sphere that sustains France's influence. However, critics argue that such programs often prioritize France's cultural hegemony over local cultural expressions, leading to a form of cultural dependency (Ndi, 2016).

While France's cultural aid has contributed to the preservation and dissemination of French language and culture in Cameroon and beyond, it raises questions about sovereignty and cultural authenticity. These initiatives often serve France's geopolitical interests more than the development of indigenous cultural identities. The promotion of French as the *lingua franca*, for instance, marginalizes indigenous languages, which are vital carriers of local history and identity (Ambe, 2019). Moreover, the focus on cultural infrastructures, while beneficial, risks creating a neocolonial cultural ecosystem that privileges French cultural norms over local traditions. The reliance on French media and arts institutions may inhibit the development of autonomous cultural scenes rooted in local realities. For example, Cameroonian filmmakers and artists often depend on French funding and platforms for their work to gain visibility, which can distort local cultural expressions to fit Western paradigms (Tchamda, 2020).

It is therefore not wrong to say that French cultural aid to former French colonies has been significant since the 1980s, shaping language policies, educational exchanges and cultural infrastructure development. While these initiatives have facilitated cultural preservation and international visibility for local arts, they also perpetuate a neo-colonial cultural dynamic that risks overshadowing indigenous identities. This illustrates both the potential benefits of cultural aid and the perils of cultural dependency. For sustainable development, it is crucial that such aid evolves to empower local cultural expressions and promote cultural sovereignty rather than merely reproducing French cultural hegemony.

## **6. African Response to French Aid and its Negative Consequences**

From the 1980s onward, many African nations have expressed growing dissatisfaction with the economic dependency created by French aid and investment. French economic assistance has often been tied to structural adjustment programs (SAPs) imposed by institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, with France acting as a key partner. These programs, aimed at liberalizing economies, frequently resulted in austerity measures that exacerbated poverty, increased unemployment, and weakened local industries (Mkandawire, 2010). For instance, in 1994, the Rwandan genocide was preceded by economic instability rooted partly in aid-driven policies that failed to address underlying socio-economic issues (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2002). Moreover, many African countries have become wary of French economic influence, viewing it as a form of neocolonialism that benefits French multinational corporations at the expense of local entrepreneurship. Recent protests, such as those in Mali in 2020, highlight frustrations over economic hardship and the perception that aid perpetuates dependency rather than fostering sustainable development (Africa Report, 2020). The coup in Mali, which ousted President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta, was partly fueled by economic grievances, with citizens accusing France of backing corrupt elites and failing to support genuine economic sovereignty (Mali coup, 2020).

French military interventions in Africa have historically been justified as stability operations or anti-terrorism efforts, but they have often been perceived locally as neocolonial meddling. The 1981 coup in Burkina Faso, which overthrew President Thomas Sankara—a staunch critic of French influence—highlighted resistance to French military dominance. Sankara's government had sought to reduce dependence on France, advocating for African self-reliance, which antagonized Paris (Kouanda, 2015). More recently, the 2012 coup in Mali, which ousted President Amadou Toumani Touré, was closely linked to France's military presence in the region, particularly its Operation Serval against Islamist militants. The coup was widely seen as a backlash against France's perceived dominance and failure to stabilize the country effectively (Kouassi & Sillah, 2013). The 2020 military coup in Mali, which again ousted the government amid ongoing French-led anti-terror operations, was driven partly by frustration with France's inability to prevent coups and ongoing instability, fueling anti-French sentiments and protests demanding the end of military cooperation with France (Mali coup, 2020). These events underscore African resistance to what many perceive as France's neo-imperial military footprint.

French aid in education and culture has been a double-edged sword. While it facilitated the spread of the French language and access to Western-style education, it also fostered resentment due to cultural dominance and

perceived erosion of indigenous traditions. Since the 1980s, numerous African countries, including Cameroon and Senegal, have experienced protests against the dominance of French language in government and education, which is seen as a barrier to local cultural expression and national identity (Ogunyemi, 2018). The rise of pan-Africanist sentiments has led to calls for replacing French with indigenous languages in official settings, as seen in protests in Burkina Faso in 2019, where youth groups demanded the promotion of local languages over French (Tapsoba, 2019). The most recent protests in Chad, in 2021, also targeted the continued influence of French culture and education, with youth activists demanding the promotion of national languages and the reduction of French cultural dominance (Chad protests, 2021). These movements reflect a growing awareness of cultural imperialism fostered by aid programs that prioritize France's language and cultural norms.

French health aid, especially in the context of combating diseases like HIV/AIDS and Ebola, has been crucial but also controversial. While France has contributed significant resources, many Africans perceive this aid as paternalistic and tied to conditionalities that undermine local health systems. The Ebola outbreak in West Africa (2014-2016) exposed weaknesses in local health infrastructure, which critics argued were exacerbated by dependency on external aid, including French support (WHO, 2016). Additionally, the influx of Western health interventions has sometimes marginalized traditional medicine and local health practices, leading to mistrust. In recent years, protests have erupted in countries like Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), where citizens accuse foreign aid agencies, including France, of undermining national sovereignty and prioritizing their interests over local needs (Mbuya et al., 2020). The 2020 protests in Cameroon's Anglophone regions, sparked partly by frustrations over health crises and foreign influence, exemplify the broader discontent with aid that is perceived as neocolonial interference (Tchamda, 2020).

Recent coups and protests across Africa reveal a pattern of resistance to French influence, often framed as a fight against neocolonial control. The 2019 coup in Sudan, though not directly linked to France, was part of a wave of anti-Western sentiments that also affected French relations. The 2021 military coup in Guinea-Bissau and ongoing protests in the Central African Republic highlight the widespread frustration with external influence, including that of France, seen as supporting corrupt regimes or failing to deliver genuine sovereignty (Africa Confidential, 2021). The most notable recent example remains the 2020 coup in Mali, where the military overthrew elected officials amid mounting dissatisfaction with France's handling of security issues, especially in the Sahel region. These incidents underscore a broader rejection of what many Africans perceive as France's persistent neocolonial influence through military, economic, and cultural means, fueling calls for genuine independence and self-determination.

## **7. The Findings of the Study**

The analysis indicates that French aid, spanning economic, military, educational, health, and cultural domains, has consistently been intertwined with France's strategic interests, leading to a paradox where aid intended to promote development instead perpetuates dependency. For instance, since the 1980s, aid flows to Africa have increased, with France accounting for roughly 25% of total aid to sub-Saharan Africa in the 1980s, averaging around \$2 billion annually (OECD, 1988). Despite these significant figures, development outcomes have been disappointing; countries like Niger and Burkina Faso remain among the poorest globally, with GDP per capita below US\$900, despite decades of aid (World Bank, 2022). The core mechanism that sustains this dependency is the control of financial reserves through the CFA franc zones, which are pegged to the euro and backed by the French Treasury, with reserves held in Paris, thus constraining monetary sovereignty. In 2021, the CFA franc zone countries held reserves in Paris amounting to over €10 billion, giving France significant leverage over their monetary policies (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2021).

Moreover, aid tied to strategic interests, such as infrastructure projects that serve French economic benefits like; resource extraction has limited local capacity building. The aid's focus on maintaining the monetary union and strategic military interventions, such as France's involvement in Mali's 2012 and 2020 coups, demonstrates how aid often sustains authoritarian regimes and political instability, rather than promoting democratic governance or economic independence (Kouassi & Sillah, 2013). The continued reliance on aid, which often arrives with conditions favoring French interests, and the control of key financial institutions, reinforce a cycle of dependence, masking the façade of sovereignty while actual economic and political autonomy remains elusive. This dependency is further exemplified by the brain drain phenomenon in countries like Cameroon, where aid-supported programs have led to skilled professionals migrating to France, depleting local human resources essential for sustainable development (Bourdon, 2019). Collectively, these facts substantiate the conclusion that aid, while substantial in figures, has primarily served to entrench systemic dependencies rather than fostering the intended goal of autonomous self-reliance.

The evidence demonstrates that French military aid since the 1980s has been heavily strategic, often supporting authoritarian regimes or factions aligned with French interests. For example, France's involvement in Chad, through Operation Epervier launched in 1986, involved deploying hundreds of troops to support regimes against rebel forces and Libyan incursions, with annual military aid estimated at hundreds of millions of euros (Fowler, 1996). Similarly, France's support in Côte d'Ivoire during internal conflicts, including aid to security forces, has been criticized for entrenching authoritarianism and suppressing opposition, which hampers socio-economic development (Keenan, 2000). In the Sahel region, France's operations such as; Operation Serval (2013) and Operation Barkhane (2014) have involved deploying thousands of troops, providing logistical and military equipment, with annual expenditures reaching hundreds of millions of euros (Foucher & Le Marcis, 2016). While ostensibly aimed at combating terrorism, these interventions often exacerbate cycles of violence, destabilize local economies, and hinder development by fostering dependency on external military support. The focus on military solutions neglects the socio-economic roots of instability, such as poverty, corruption, and infrastructural deficits, which are crucial for sustainable growth. Furthermore, military aid has frequently supported regimes with poor governance, thereby reinforcing authoritarianism—exemplified by the 2012 coup in Mali and the recent 2020 coup—undermining democratic processes and fostering anti-French sentiments (Kouanda, 2015). The paradox is that despite significant military aid, many regions remain unstable, with ongoing conflicts and underdeveloped economies, indicating that military aid alone is insufficient for development and may, in fact, perpetuate cycles of violence and dependence. These facts underscore the need for a shift from military-centric strategies to comprehensive development approaches that address socio-economic vulnerabilities.

The data reveals that French aid in culture, education, and health has historically aimed at maintaining influence through soft power mechanisms. France's investment in cultural centers like the Alliance Française in Cameroon and the promotion of French language and curricula has created a deep cultural influence, often at the expense of indigenous languages and knowledge systems. Between 2000 and 2010, France invested approximately €150 million annually in cultural projects across Africa, including language promotion and arts support, with Cameroon hosting multiple French cultural centers (AFD, 2011). While these initiatives have fostered cultural exchange, critics argue they perpetuate neo-colonial cultural dependencies, marginalizing local languages and traditions, evident in protests demanding the promotion of indigenous languages over French (Tapsoba, 2019). Similarly, in education, aid programs have focused on infrastructure and curriculum standardization aligned with France, which has led to increased literacy rates but also brain drain, as many students choose to study and settle in France, depriving local economies of skilled professionals (Ngoh, 2010; Bourdon, 2019).

In health, aid programs such as the Contrat de Désendettement et de Développement (C2D) and support for infectious disease control have improved access to healthcare; however, systemic issues like corruption, weak infrastructure, and workforce shortages persist. For example, in Cameroon, only 60% of health funds allocated were effectively utilized in 2015 due to logistical and administrative challenges (Cameroon Court of Accounts, 2015). The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed health system fragility, where aid was critical but insufficient to build resilience, and dependency on external support remained problematic (WHO, 2016). Collectively, these facts substantiate that while French aid has achieved infrastructural and capacity-building milestones, it has also reinforced cultural dependencies, marginalized indigenous identities, and perpetuated health and educational system fragility—hindering genuine sovereignty and sustainable development. Addressing these issues requires a paradigm shift toward empowering local cultures, languages, and systems rather than maintaining external influence rooted in colonial legacies.

The evidence underscores that since the 1980s, African responses to French influence have become increasingly assertive and widespread. Protests such as those in Burkina Faso in 2019, Chad in 2021, and the Anglophone regions of Cameroon during the COVID-19 pandemic highlight frustrations over cultural dominance, economic dependence, and military interference (Ogunyemi, 2018; Tchamda, 2020). The coups in Mali in 2012 and 2020 exemplify political backlash against perceived French-backed regimes and interventions, with citizens and military factions demanding an end to external influence and greater self-reliance (Kouassi & Sillah, 2013; Mali coup, 2020). The 2020 coup in Mali, in particular, was driven by dissatisfaction with France's handling of security issues and the perception that French military presence perpetuates instability, fueling anti-French sentiments among the population (Africa Confidential, 2021). Similar sentiments are reflected in protests in Guinea-Bissau and the Central African Republic, where citizens accuse foreign influence, particularly French of supporting corrupt regimes and undermining sovereignty (Mbuya et al., 2020). Furthermore, the rise of pan-Africanist movements advocating for indigenous languages and cultural sovereignty signifies a shift toward asserting African identity and independence from colonial legacies. Collectively, these facts demonstrate an evolving African consciousness that challenges the long-standing neocolonial paradigm, emphasizing the need for genuine sovereignty, local agency, and the decolonization of development processes. This resistance signals a critical

turning point, urging a re-evaluation of aid and intervention strategies to align with African aspirations for self-determination.

## 8. Recommendations

To effectively break free from the systemic reliance on French-controlled monetary arrangements, African nations must prioritize the gradual dismantling of the CFA franc zone's dependency structure. This entails establishing independent monetary policies and promoting the adoption of indigenous or regional currencies that are not pegged to the euro or backed by external powers. Governments should work collaboratively to develop regional financial institutions, such as a Pan-African Central Bank, which can manage monetary policy, reserve holdings, and exchange rates rooted in African economic realities. This transition requires building strong fiscal institutions, improving tax collection, and increasing domestic revenues to fund development projects without external conditionalities. Furthermore, transparency and accountability in managing public finances must be prioritized to restore citizen trust and minimize the influence of external actors. By asserting monetary sovereignty, African countries will reduce the leverage of external powers, create space for independent economic planning, and foster local entrepreneurship, ultimately reversing the cycle of aid dependency and promoting sustainable, self-reliant growth.

Africa should critically recalibrate its approach to security by reducing reliance on external military aid that often supports authoritarian regimes and perpetuates cycles of violence. Instead, governments must invest in strengthening internal institutions, rule of law, and social cohesion, which are foundational for sustainable development. Regional organizations like the African Union should be empowered with the mandate, resources, and capacity to manage conflicts internally rather than depending on external military interventions. Promoting democratic governance, transparency, and anti-corruption measures will diminish the appeal of authoritarian regimes that rely on external military backing. Additionally, fostering socio-economic development through poverty alleviation, infrastructure investment, and education addresses the root causes of instability. Africa can also pursue a policy of strategic non-alignment, actively resisting external military pressures and interventions that serve foreign interests, and instead focus on regional peace initiatives driven and owned by African leaders and civil society, creating a self-sustaining security environment less vulnerable to external manipulation.

To counteract neo-colonial cultural dependence, African nations must invest heavily in reviving and promoting indigenous languages, arts, and knowledge systems. This involves reforming educational curricula to prioritize local history, indigenous sciences, and cultural practices, thereby fostering a sense of national and continental identity rooted in African realities. Governments should support local arts, media, and cultural industries through funding, policy incentives, and infrastructure development, making them competitive and sustainable without reliance on foreign funding. Moreover, encouraging the use of local languages in official and educational settings will strengthen cultural sovereignty and social cohesion. Establishing national cultural institutions, promoting indigenous media platforms, and supporting local artists and scholars can create a vibrant cultural ecosystem that is rooted in African identities. Such measures will not only diminish the influence of foreign cultural hegemony but also empower communities to define their cultural narratives and values, fostering a sense of ownership and pride essential for genuine independence.

African countries must shift from dependency on external aid towards self-driven development models that emphasize local ownership, capacity building, and good governance. This entails designing development strategies that are aligned with national priorities, informed by local knowledge, and implemented by local institutions. Governments should invest in strengthening public service delivery, transparency mechanisms, and anti-corruption frameworks, thereby reducing the need for external oversight and conditionalities. Promoting entrepreneurial ecosystems, supporting small and medium enterprises, and facilitating access to affordable finance will stimulate local economic activity and job creation. Additionally, fostering regional integration through the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) will create larger markets, reduce reliance on external trade partners, and promote intra-African economic resilience. Civil society and grassroots organizations must be empowered to participate actively in development planning, ensuring that policies reflect local needs and aspirations. Ultimately, Africa's path to independence from French dependency lies in cultivating self-sufficiency, building resilient institutions, and fostering a collective continental identity rooted in sovereignty and self-reliance.

## 9. Conclusion

The comprehensive analysis of France's historical and contemporary engagement in its former African colonies reveals a persistent pattern of neo-colonial dependency that is deeply rooted in colonial legacies and reinforced through strategic aid, military interventions, financial arrangements, and cultural influence. Dependency Theory provides a compelling framework to interpret these dynamics, illustrating how external economic structures such

as; aid tied to resource extraction, the maintenance of the CFA franc monetary system, and foreign direct investment perpetuate a cycle of subordinate development. Despite substantial aid inflows averaging billions of dollars annually since the 1980s, key indicators in countries like Niger and Burkina Faso remain dismal, with GDP per capita below US\$900, reflecting the failure of aid to translate into sustainable growth. The control of financial reserves by France and the pegging of currencies to the euro exemplify how structural dependencies are maintained, limiting fiscal sovereignty and reinforcing the illusion of independence while actual economic and political autonomy remains elusive. These empirical patterns substantiate the core argument that aid, rather than fostering self-reliance, often consolidates systemic dependencies that hinder genuine development.

Furthermore, neo-colonialism theory underscores the subtle yet pervasive mechanisms through which France continues to exert influence over its former colonies. By maintaining cultural hegemony through language policies, educational curricula, and media, France has succeeded in shaping a Francophone identity that often marginalizes indigenous languages and cultural practices. The ongoing proliferation of French cultural centers, scholarships, and media outlets, especially exemplified in Cameroon, exemplifies how soft power sustains colonial legacies. While these initiatives foster cultural exchange, they inadvertently reinforce cultural dependencies that undermine local identities and social cohesion. Similarly, France's strategic military aid, supporting authoritarian regimes via interventions such as Operation Epervier or Barkhane has often prioritized strategic interests over development objectives. These actions, intended to stabilize regimes or combat terrorism, frequently exacerbate cycles of violence, political instability, and socio-economic underdevelopment, as seen in Mali and the Sahel. Empirical evidence indicates that military aid alone cannot address the underlying socio-economic roots of instability, and instead, often perpetuates dependency and authoritarianism.

The empirical and theoretical insights converge on the conclusion that the aid architecture and strategic interventions employed by France have been more effective at maintaining influence than fostering sustainable, autonomous development. The continued reliance on external aid, military backing, and cultural influence has created a "dependency trap," where African nations are politically nominally independent but economically and culturally subordinate. The recurring pattern of protests, coups, and resistance movements since the 1980s such as; in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Chad highlight a growing African consciousness and rejection of neo-colonial control. These movements reflect a desire for genuine sovereignty rooted in self-determination, economic independence, and cultural revival. Recognizing this, it becomes clear that breaking free from this dependency requires a strategic overhaul of aid paradigms, emphasizing local ownership, regional integration, and the deconstruction of colonial-era financial and cultural structures.

The integration of dependency and neo-colonial theories with empirical evidence demonstrates that France's longstanding involvement in Africa has often resulted in reinforcing a cycle of dependency that undermines the continent's sovereignty and sustainable development. To move toward genuine independence, African countries must critically reassess their economic, military, and cultural engagements, prioritizing regional integration, self-sufficient economic policies, indigenous cultural revival, and democratic governance. Only through such comprehensive, locally-driven strategies can Africa dismantle the illusions of autonomy fostered by external influence and forge a path toward self-reliance and genuine sovereignty. This transformation demands a collective continental effort to redefine development paradigms, reject neocolonial dependencies, and reclaim Africa's agency in shaping its future.

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