**IMUN 2026 Research Report**

**African Union Issue #1: The question of economic independence from global superpowers and encouraging African development.**

Ensuring sustainable development while maintaining economic independence is a key goal of the African Union. As of 2023, 22 of 54 African UN Member States have "Low Human Development," while only two African Member States have "Very High Human Development", demonstrating the ongoing need for African development (Dierks). In supporting development, however, many African Union Members States have weakened their economic independence by becoming indebted to, or dependent on, global superpowers.

Africa's public debt, meaning the collective debt taken out by all the African governments, has ballooned from $120 billion in 1990 to over $1.8 trillion today, leading many experts to declare an African Debt Crisis. Approximately 57% of the total African population lives in areas where debt payments surpass social spending, meaning African governments are forced to sacrifice development for debt payments (Adeyemi). Bilateral creditors own 21% of African external debt as of 2024, making Africa heavily reliant on loans from foreign superpowers. The Chinese government, for example, owns 9% of all African external debt because of its increased loaning through the Belt and Road Initiative (Harcourt et al). China's lending in Africa has mostly focused on building infrastructure in crucial sectors like energy and transportation, accelerating African development. However, due to the excessive amount of African debt owed to China, critics claim that the Belt and Road Initiative is, in reality, a tool of "debt trap diplomacy", where powerful creditors extend unpayable loans, forcing the recipient to give political, economic, or strategic concessions when they inevitably default. Western sources

often claim Djibouti is a victim of "debt trap diplomacy", as it is believed that China has leveraged their ownership of Djiboutian debt to open a military base in the country (Blanchard).

Loans to Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs) have often been criticized due to their conditionality. In theory, development loans are humanitarian in nature due to their focus on development and disaster relief, but their conditionality may cause instability and slow development. For example, there were widespread protests in 2024 after Kenyan President William Ruto tried to raise taxes to meet the conditions for a $3.9 billion loan from the IMF. Over the two-week protest, at least 39 protestors were killed and a further 361 were injured, demonstrating the unpopularity and destabilizing possibility of conditioned loans (Liverseed).

The challenges posed by debt dependency and conditional lending highlight the importance of pursuing economic strategies that strengthen African development without compromising economic dependence. Measures such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) have sought to increase African economic power through connecting trade between African economies, thereby also increasing self-reliance ("The African Continental Free Trade Area"). Delegates should focus on solutions which reduce reliance on foreign creditors, expand domestic industries, and strengthen regional financial institutions.

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