**US – Africa Leaders Summit 2022 : A New Dawn for US – Africa Relations?**

The US – Africa Leaders Summit (the “Summit”) closed yesterday where 49 Heads of States went on a field trip to the USA, courtesy of the US President Biden. While the narrative has been that the meeting has nothing to do with China (and Russia to a lesser degree) and its undeniable influence on the African continent, it was still the big elephant in the room that everyone can see, even if not discussed.

US’s economic power in Africa has been declining for years where the focus has been on structural adjustment issues, lectures on human rights and governance and a lot of focus on security since 9/11 but very little in development agenda that creates jobs and transforms economies. China on the other hand has invested in infrastructure development and loans. In 2021, the US Foreign Direct investment fell by 5.3% to USD 30 billion while China on the other hand records trade in Africa at a record high of USD 254 billion and free of lectures on human rights, governance and the new “ESG” buzz word as conditionalities attached to financing.

An outcome of the Summit has been that the USA has pledged USD 55 billion over next 3 years to a continent comprising of 54 countries which translates into approximately USD 1 billion per country over the next 3 years. This will be distributed in supporting health programs in Africa, Climate Change, Women Partnerships and USD 15 billion will go to trade and investment partnerships and deals which include new deals like:

* USD 1 billion investment in Africa by VISA over the next 5 years to expand mobile money partnerships
* USD 80 million from General Electric and Standard Bank to improve healthcare services through access to cutting-edge equipment
* USD 858 million in new contracts from Cisco Systems and Cybastion, a cybersecurity company owned by Cameroonian immigrant Thierry Wandji Ketchiozo, to beef up cybersecurity protection in Côte d’Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Congo Brazzaville, Benin, Cameroon and Niger.
* USD 500 million Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) regional grant to transportation networks in Niger and Benin;
* USD 370 million in new investments by the US International Development Finance Corporation (DFC), including $100m for reliable clean energy; and
* USD 350 million Digital Transformation with Africa initiative to facilitate some USD 500 billion in financing to expand digital access and literacy across the continent.

Africa’s needs are well known. They range from food security, energy security, debt relief, infrastructure development, health and education. While USA interests will continue to be humanitarian and security, the investment side focuses largely on technology, cybersecurity, digitalisation, and health. In the light of this, is the USA the answer to Africa’s woes? The answer is a resonate no.

Africa is an undeniable force, and its geostrategic position is on the rise. With its many problems and challenges, the opportunities are overwhelmingly obvious. Africa’s strength lies in its abundant natural resources and its human resources with 70% of the population in Africa below the age of 30. The Africa Continental Free Trade Area is the biggest leverage that Africa, that if done properly, can propel it into a super power status of a single market of 1.4 billion people with a GDP of USD 3.4 trillion. This calls for radical shift in mindset when negotiating trade and investment deals from all parties.

African leaders have been lured this last year to similar field trips in Paris, Beijing, Ankara, Moscow therefore making the case that it is impossible to not have an Africa Strategy today. It is time for African leaders to stop waiting for the Africa agenda to be set by others and work for win-win partnerships. Not all money is necessary and not all areas that development partners propose which are their priorities need to be our priorities. When it comes to the USA, the priority should be to renew the America Growth Opportunities Act which expires in 2025 however it would be opportune for Africa to lobby for expansion of its application to extend to investment and value add, as opposed to extractive nature of trading resources as it stands. The Summit would have been an opportunity for a concerted one voice of Africa to table this to the USA.

Meanwhile there are certain things that cannot be ignored like the overwhelming number of African states that do not side with the US and EU war against Russia within the context of the Russia and Ukraine war. While the US government is smooching African Leaders at the Summit and dangling commitments and pledges, its Congress passed the Countering Malign Russian Activities in Africa Act whose objective is to monitor and police Africa in its relations with Russia in terms of partnerships that it may enter. The Bill is not only a form of punishment to African states for the way they voted in the wake of the Russian illegal invasion of Ukraine, but it also positions the US as “morally superior” and in a position to lecture African leader on their geopolitical strategies.

Despite the effort to mask the obvious unequal power dynamics between the US and Africa with theatrics and performance exhibited by both African Leaders and US leaders over the last 3 days, it is obvious that, increasingly, African leaders are going to choose allies according to their geopolitical interests and economic priorities and that within the context of China, despite this new effort the USA still pales significantly.

Following the commitments that the USA made and the priorities that the US has when it comes to Africa, it is evident that Africa can no longer rely on external forces to develop itself. African countries will have to rely on each other to industrialise their raw materials, develop their infrastructures and people and it is about time.