

## Shifting Multilateral Ties: Charting a New Path for Africa in the Wake of Trump's Actions

by Norman Tanfield



### America's retreat from global leadership

Donald Trump's decision to storm away from the WHO and tear up the Paris Agreement has been labelled everything from incompetence to global sabotage. However, this may be the wake-up call for Africa who for too long has languished in dependency. Now that he has put a freeze on funding, we will either sink or swim. We cannot continue to lament how dreadful the Americans (and Westerners in general) are, while refusing to address our own issues.

### The WHO withdrawal and Africa's health sector

Critics howl that Trump's exit from the WHO is sheer foolishness. Undoubtedly, it could leave vaccination drives in disarray and threaten life-saving programmes. However, let us speak the awkward truth: Africa, despite its 55 member states, contributes a meagre fraction to the WHO's budget.

We cannot continue to lament how dreadful the Americans (and Westerners in general) are, while refusing to address our own issues.

Transparency International consistently ranks African countries among the most corrupt in the world. According to the African Development Bank, corruption costs approximately US\$148 billion annually – nearly a quarter of the continent's GDP. Is this Trump's fault as well? Where does all that money go when many patients still cannot access basic medical supplies? Meanwhile, presidents and ministers jet off to European clinics instead of tackling the devastation in their own backyards. When Tanzanian President John Magufuli's wife received treatment in a hospital in Dar es Salaam in 2020, it made international headlines.

Trump's unwelcome surprise should urge us to fund our healthcare systems. Otherwise, we will continue to inhabit fragile states aspiring to be functional nations, waiting for the next major catastrophe.

### **The Paris Agreement exit and Africa's climate agenda**

Africa is likely to suffer more than many other regions from global warming. However, if our entire climate strategy depended on a single American signature, perhaps we were deluding ourselves from the outset. We can either continue to lament or harness our abundant sun, rivers, and wind to foster genuine, African-led green revolutions.

Africa has consistently demanded justice on carbon emissions, yet largely depended on Western support. If we are serious about ending environmental degradation we must unite under the African Union's Climate Change and Resilient Development Strategy and Action Plan for a collective response.

Africa is one of the wealthiest continents and houses the key minerals for the Global Just Energy Transition. It must be able to use this transition to clean energy to its advantage and to lessen its dependence – one in which 80% of the AU's budget is donor funded.

The outgoing Chairperson of the AU Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, recently penned a letter to African Heads of State, condemning our continued financial dependence on donors.

The need to discuss how Africa will navigate its way out of increasing donor dependency is clear.

### **The wider African tragedy: 2024 and beyond**

Five countries had already conducted Mars missions by 2023 while parts of Africa still lack clean water and reliable electricity. This is not due to a lack of resources but to chronic mismanagement and theft. Instead of unity, we are plagued by war, stolen elections, coups, and famine. South Africa, Africa's economic powerhouse, now struggles under crippling power cuts.

### **Emerging models of African agency and innovation**

Although dependency and mismanagement often dominate narratives of Africa's struggles, robust African-driven solutions are reshaping economies, services, and institutions, demonstrating the continent's capacity to break free from external reliance and build sustainable development.

Rwanda exemplifies healthcare reform in Africa. Its Mutuelles de Santé (community-based insurance) has achieved near-universal coverage, significantly reducing maternal and child mortality. Built on local mobilisation and government accountability, it shows that political will and partnerships can yield lasting benefits without over-reliance on foreign aid.

Similarly, the Africa CDC has strengthened health security with coordinated pandemic plans and rapid responses. Expanding such initiatives across the continent could reduce dependence on bodies like the WHO.

Energy security has long hindered Africa, worsening poverty and slowing growth. Yet, countries like Kenya have advanced in renewable energy. The Lake Turkana Wind Project, Africa's largest, supplies 15% of Kenya's electricity. South Africa's REIPPPP has also drawn billions in investment, creating jobs and diversifying the grid.

These successes debunk the myth that Africa must rely on fossil fuels or foreign investment. They offer a blueprint for harnessing natural resources – sun, wind, and water – to drive growth and combat climate change.

**For continent-wide impact, Africa needs:**

**1.Regional cooperation:** The African Union must scale programmes through cross-border collaboration and resource sharing.

**2.Policy harmonisation:** Governments must foster innovation with supportive regulations.

**3.Long-term investment:** Sustained public and private funding is crucial because short-term donor projects hinder progress.

Africa can reduce its dependence on foreign aid and shape its future. We have the capacity, but we need the political will to sustain these gains.

Donald Trump's actions may have exposed our dependence and forced us to confront our realities. However, Africa has always been resilient and it can harness its own resources, talent, and innovation, and redefine its role on the world stage - not as a perpetual recipient of charity but as a leader in sustainable development. Our success stories prove this.

Let us seize this moment!

*The opinions or recommendations expressed in this news column are strictly those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent those of the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation.*



**WEBSITE**  
[IJR.ORG.ZA](http://IJR.ORG.ZA)



**EMAIL US**  
[INFO@IJR.ORG.ZA](mailto:INFO@IJR.ORG.ZA)

Stay updated and follow us on social media

