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Politics Of Natural Resource Control And Development In Africa

Nwaoburu, Lucky

Department of Political Science
Faculty of Social Sciences
Rivers State University, Port Harcourt, Nigeria.
Lucky.nwaoburu@ust.edu.ng

ABSTRACT

Africa, straddling the equator and the prime meridian, is a continent rich in natural resources yet riddled with developmental challenges. As the second-largest continent, covering over 30.3 million km² and nearly 20% of the Earth's land surface, Africa encompasses diverse climates, with the humid South contrasting sharply with the arid North. Its proximity to the Red Sea, Indian Ocean, Mediterranean Sea, and Atlantic Ocean influences its climate and ecosystems. The continent is replete with valuable resources, including gold, diamonds, oil, and gas, which, while economically significant, have often led to conflict rather than development. For instance, in 2008 alone, Africa produced about 483 tons of gold, contributing to 20% of global production, with South Africa as a major player. The oil-rich Niger Delta exemplifies this paradox, generating over 1.8 billion barrels daily, yet the wealth does not translate into prosperity for its citizens. Instead, resource-rich countries experience overwhelming poverty, inadequate access to basic services, and strife over resource control, spurring agitations for equity in resource management. This article explores the interplay between poverty, governance, and resource management, highlighting instances of conflict, particularly related to blood diamonds in countries like Sierra Leone and the Niger Delta's militant struggles in Nigeria. We contend that effective resource management and equitable distribution of wealth may foster significant development and mitigate the cycle of conflict within these resource-rich nations.

Keywords: Development, resource control, Africa, Continent, conflict, natural resources, poverty

INTRODUCTION

Development in Africa has experienced staggering growth due to underlying scenarios prompted by internally generated factors such as poor governance (Mamdani, 2018; Mkandawire, 2020), thriving corruption (Larmer, 2020), resource control-induced conflicts (Collier & Hoeffler, 2022), regional crisis (Mwenda, 2021), and dependency on Western nations for external validation and resource assessment (Oguntola, 2022). In oil-rich nations like Nigeria, Angola, and Equatorial Guinea, there has been a disparity in their generated revenues and accomplished development. The abject poverty and protracted decadence allude to the economic sabotage which overwhelms these countries. Angola produces about 1.37 million barrels per day (bpd) (BP, 2022), holding the spot as the second largest oil-producing nation in Sub-Saharan Africa, while Equatorial Guinea has 92,823 bpd (EIA, 2022) and Nigeria holds the top spot with over 1.592.333 bpd (OPEC, 2022). The pathway to development keeps derailing as the system

of governance and poor structural reforms have undermined resource management, thereby causing a decline in the economic growth of the continent (Forster, 2023; Ojo, 2024). The way a society is structured and the policy making process- in other words, the political atmosphere- are of vital importance for the management of natural resources (Jamart & Rodeghier, 2009; Kayitare et al., 2015).

The tussle for resource control has plagued most African countries, especially the Sub-Saharan regions and this has held the door open to conflicts, violence, regional agitations for resource control, economic sabotage, and corruption amongst others. Bedeviled with a long history of bad governance, Africa has had more affluent leaders than developmental strides. Leveraging economic gains from exploited natural resources, these corrupt leaders and elites cart away the proceeds, amassing wealth and embezzling public funds at the expense of the citizen's welfare thus denying them access to basic amenities, developmental initiatives, and even distribution of resource dividends. "Resource revenue flows facilitate corruption by making it easy for officials to siphon profits for personal gains. Revenues also generate staggering wealth that facilitates corruption and patronage networks (Stewart, 2012). The resource curse parlance was coined by Richard Auty, a development scholar in the early 1990s.

This phrase was a tagline for wealth-laden countries that had so much yet remained immersed in development deficit. In 2018, Angola's fuel exports produced 92.4% of the country's total export while their oil rent accounted for 25.6% of their GDP. Still, in 2019 the country fell below the United Nation's human development index, ranking 148 out of the 189 shortlisted countries across the globe. In the same year, Nigeria's total fuel export constituted 94.1% while the revenue from oil rent was 9% of the GDP. Following in the footsteps of Angola, Nigeria also lagged in the United Nations' human development index by clinching the 161st spot out of 189 countries. From Angola to Nigeria, there have been overwhelming statistics of oil corruption trailing their petroleum industry which has been met with resistance from marginalized regions and agitating groups that have suffered deprivation and marginalization. "These conflicts tend to erupt on the back of long-term disruptions to local livelihoods that are caused both by environmental implications of resource extraction (Percival 1995, Jagger 2012). Furthermore, the prioritization of personal interest by the ruling class has caused poor resource management thus inhibiting development.

In the wake of recent happenings in most countries in Africa, we have witnessed a dramatic plunge into abysmal poverty though clad in immense wealth. You can feel the palpable void created by economic neglect when you visit some of these resource-laden regions in the continent. The level of impoverishment is a stark contrast with the staggering revenues generated from their natural resources. Conflict diamonds or blood diamonds as many would prefer to call them have been strutting the chord of various violent agitations stemming from resource control and poor governance. In 1968, Siaka Stevens became prime minister of Sierra Leone and coerced the country into a one-party system where he allied the diamond mines and political power thereby shifting resource control to the government and stirring up a clamor for class struggle among marginalized regions. When the reins of leadership were finally given to Joseph Momoh in 1985 after his 17-year rulership, this paved the way for illegal diamond mining within the country, enabling Illicit mining of diamonds to become a lucrative path to self-enrichment for the ruling class who were solely responsible for resource control. To hold sway to power, these politicians dispossess the regions bestowed with these resources thereby depriving them of economical returns. These became unsettling instances that gave birth to agitations and thriving conflicts which ensued for a long time, stifling development and creating room for rebel groups to trade these gems for weapons. Africa has long been argued to suffer from a so-called "resource curse", where countries' natural resource endowments have not translated into positive economic growth (Chachu & Nketiah-Amponsah, 2021; Henri, 2019; Ziaba, 2020). Artisanal miners are spotted along the muddy banks of small streams, shoveling and sifting gravel for a piece of these sparkling gems. Straddled between poverty and neglect, many people have resorted to grueling mining activities as a means to an end. In the Southwest Democratic Republic of Congo, there are streams and rivers whose riverbeds are laden with gem-quality diamonds yet the people within these regions suffer monumental deprivation. In the provincial capital of Tshikapa, the underdevelopment of these places is a far cry from the huge resources lodged within the

arms of the cities. The untarred roads and gross economical deficit stoke the zest for crude pursuits in the mines for the sustenance of livelihood.

In Nigeria, militancy in the Niger Delta region has become a tool for resistance against resource exploitation and emancipation from economic sabotage. The agitation for resource control by the marginalized region has culminated in oil-related restiveness, a conflict of interest bordering on territorial marking, and emancipation from resource exploitation (Nwaoburu, Onyekwere & Egobueze, 2024). The Niger Delta is also the location of massive oil deposits, which have been extracted for decades by the government of Nigeria and by Multinational Oil Companies (MNOCs) (Ajodo-Adebanjoko and Ojua 2013:2). Shanties and slums permeate these regions, and accrued proceeds from their resources utilized by the elites in power who undermine structural policies that ought to alleviate the plight of the people living in these terrains. The effect of oil spills and gas flares has been death to aquatic lives and waste to farm lands. It is on record that more gas is flared in Nigeria than anywhere in the world (Nore and Turner 1980).in 2008, Africa accounted for 483 tons of gold which is about 20% of the world's total gold production with South Africa producing half of that value and Ghana, Mali, Tanzania, and Guinea lending their quota in various dimensions. The revenue generated from these statistics is amassed by a few who exploit the gains at the expense of the regions where these natural resources are located.

Against this backdrop, the article explores the relationship between the politics of resource control management in Sub-Saharan Africa and the development deficit in these resource-laden countries. Taking an analytical view of this stance, some salient questions were raised and these were premised on how the political structure in most resource-rich countries in Africa has aided the stunted developmental phase in these countries. Furthermore, it examines the utilization of natural resource control by the elites and the ruling class in self-aggrandizement and structural acquisition of tools that will enable a protracted stay in power thus promoting social injustice. Finally, the paper also evaluates the implication of resource control tussle between government and marginalized regions in Africa. The paper posits that the economic impact of resource control agitations in Africa is huge thus fueling underdevelopment, resource-induced conflicts, and staggering human capital development across the continent. According to World Bank, the economic growth in Sub-Saharan Africa is going to suffer regressions from 4.1% in 2021 to 3.3% in 2022, a factor prompted by cases of rising inflation, intense weather conditions, adverse global financial conditions, rising debt margins, and economical setback caused by the COVID-19 pandemic amongst other factors. Bad governance and poorly utilized natural resources will exacerbate the already frail economies, entrenching the continent in a developmental deficit in comparison to other countries across the globe. The paper seeks to address these issues through the identification of politically engendered scenarios that have incited resource control conflicts in various parts of the continent and proffer solutions that will demystify the shrouded puppeteers pulling the strings of conflict in resource-rich countries in Africa.

Theoretical structure

The paper employs the theoretical structure that examines the relationship between resource control management in Africa and its underlying implications on the development of the continent. The article critically analyzes the place of Africa in the global economy with keen attention drawn to the impact of politics on natural resource control on development. With more than 70 million people living with less than a dollar with Africa accounting for 72% of that ratio, it has become imperative for African leaders to assume more dynamic and pragmatic roles that will foster inclusive governance geared towards sustainable development. The continent is home to 12% of the world's oil reserves and within its arms lies 80-90% of the world's chromium and platinum mineral resources. Although Africa is a major stakeholder in the export of raw materials which drives the economic prosperity of many nations, the continent has continued to wallow in abject poverty, underdevelopment, and human capital deficit.

In most African countries, natural resource control is solely the responsibility of the government with accrued funds disbursed to accounts managed by the ruling class. "This, in many cases, consolidates the power of entrenched elites and regime supporters, sharpening income inequality and stifling political

reform. In this way, it can be said that resource wealth worsens the quality of institutions since it allows governments to pacify dissent, avoid accountability and resist modernization (Isham et al., 2003). Africa is endowed with so many natural resources but the inability to translate these economic resources into developmental initiatives has become the bone of contention that has permeated several conversations surrounding gross underdevelopment in Africa today. Entrenched in power, these elites amass proceeds from natural resources and circumvent reliable statistics that could unmask them thus sapping the people of inclusive governance and alienating them from basic access to structural policies that would alleviate their plight. From the artisanal mines in the downtown Democratic Republic of Congo whose riverbeds overflow with diamonds to the Niger Delta Creeks in Nigeria where oil thrives in its marshes, the clamor for natural resource control has lingered for decades, culminating in conflicts and militancy that has become counterproductive to the government and the agitating sects.

Within the purview of this context, the cold war which ensued from the mining of conflict diamonds in countries like Sierra Leone, Liberia, Angola, Cote d'Ivoire, the Central African Republic, Zimbabwe, and the Democratic Republic of Congo spurred the establishment of the Kimberley Process, a certification scheme employed by diamond trading stakeholders to curb the trade of diamonds smothered in violence such as sales from conflict-torn areas to ensure fair trade and shun illicit smuggling of gems tainted with blood, inhuman labor, and conflict. Most of these agitations emanated from weak political structures which failed to provide inclusive governance for the people. Overwhelmed with a sense of abandonment, many of the locals in a bid to rebuff the ill-treatment employed the frustration-aggression method to establish resource control and territorial dominance. Forming militias and rebel groups, the agitating groups waged war with the government and rival groups, fighting for resource control. " in the early years of the resource boom investments were depicted as land and resource grabs by foreign investors, but the literature has increasingly emphasized the diversity of investment processes and has come to pay more attention to the role and responsibility of the state in regulating deals and ensuring that local populations' procedural rights to compensation, resettlement and consultation are followed (Cotula, 2013; Veit et al., 2013; Hall et al., 2015; Pedersen and Buur, 2016).

Resource-induced conflicts are counterproductive as the drums of war brings nothing but unpleasant tidings, discordant tune, and tales of woe. From genocidal wars to regional civil unrest, the impact on the economy is devastating. From economic sabotage to human rights abuse, victims of these conflicts have experiences that can best be described as harrowing. These conflict resources are not utilized for development but rather are financiers of wars and violence thus depleting the revenues that should promote development and investment. African leaders should begin to embrace better ways of governance. They should be imbued with a sense of service delivery because that will erode the ideology of self-enrichment when appointed into political or public offices.

Causes of resource control agitations and their impact on development in Africa

1. Bad governance and unhealthy political interest

The role of inclusive governance cannot be overemphasized as it is imperative for development in Africa. Governance consists of the traditions and institutions by which authority is exercised. This includes the process by which governments are selected, monitored and replaced; the capacity of government to effectively formulate and implement policies; and the respect of citizens and the state institutions that govern economic and social interactions among them (World Bank Institute) while bad governance includes governments that are ineffective and inefficient, not transparent, not responsive to the people, not held accountable for their actions, inequitable and exclusive to the elites, non-participatory; do not follow the rule of law and lacking policies that are consensus driven (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP). On the African Union's seven key aspiration agenda for 2063 lies a critical component of that text which is premised on good governance, rule of law, democracy, and respect for human rights. This value system seems to be missing in governance in Africa today. The quality of leaders elected into political office is marred by individuals who are swayed by personal gains than service-oriented intentions.

Natural resources in a specific geographical location, especially the type belonging to a group of people are tools for economic growth if wielded in the right direction but utilized for personal gains, the outcomes are unsavory. From gold-rich countries like South Africa, Ghana, Tanzania, Mali, and Guinea to diamond-laden countries like Sierra Leone, Botswana, Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo, there have been weighty outcomes of bad governance in these countries. To examine the extent of corruption in each African country post-independence, we assume that leaders in some of these countries hold discretionary power in their design and implementation of public policies and that they have the ability to extract economic rents. Additionally, they control all relevant branches of their economy - civil service, electoral commission, judiciary, media, security forces, and the central bank (Ayittey, 2012). Though many will attribute conflict diamonds to have emanated from greed pursuits yet the role of government in fueling those conflicts cannot be ignored. The absence of inclusive governance stoked the fire for marginalized agitations which culminated in genocidal wars, regional instability, and human rights abuse. The developmental deficit which permeates the continent depicts the disjointed relationship between the explored natural resources and a misplaced utilization of its accrued revenues. The clamor for resource control by the government does not translate to developmental initiatives and these unsettling instances can instill frustration and ignite agitations. According to Transparency International (TI), about 20 to 30% of funds from basic service provision were embezzled, aided by corrupt systems and structures. The criteria for good governance according to the African Development Bank is tethered to functional civil societies, dynamic private sector, and effective States, and the instrumentality of these criteria is hinged on accountability, transparency, functional judicial framework, and citizen participation. In African countries, the control of resources by political leaders and some privileged elites has not relayed the expected outcomes rather it has been met with resistance by agitating groups and marginalized regions. For decades, most of the Sub-Saharan African countries have been plagued by resource-induced conflict thus promoting revenue diversion. Accrued revenues from natural resources meant for development are channeled toward personal interests, procurement of tools to aid the continuous stay in power, funding of resource-induced conflicts, and several others. The claims of a particular 'national interest' that are invoked by governments and ruling elites when pushing large-scale investments are often debatable or work as a smokescreen for the dispossession of land and other resources. However, the crux of the matter is that the legal right of states to access land and resources in the name of the national interest, economic growth and/or development strategies reduces the formal rights-based ability of local populations to stop investments (Lindsay et al., 2017). In 2014, United Nations reports that 140,000 carats of the total weight of conflict diamonds were smuggled out of Central African Republic. In the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, militant agitations for resource control have had a militating effect on the economy of the country. In 2016, oil multinational, Eni, the Italian energy firm and parent company of Nigerian Agip Oil Company (NAOC) reported that its production fell short of 65,000 bpd following the attack on its pipelines in Bayelsa while Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) also reports attacks on its oil facilities. This development led to an estimated loss of \$6.72 million (1.3 billion) bpd by the two oil multinationals operating in that region. Protracted conflicts derail progressive developments in any region and African leaders should see beyond personal interests and provide service-based leadership. We talk about the governance of natural resources because we have millions of people living near these resources, but extraction causes more problems than it solves. These populations endure conflicts and poverty. We have nations that are rich in oil, which can be an advantage or a disadvantage. We have land that is a resource capable of attracting investors and turning them into happy people. Unfortunately, they are not (Hannah Forster, Executive Director of the African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies (ACDHRS)).

2. *Economic sabotage and misplaced priorities*

As the second largest continent in the world but one faced with distinct socio-economic problems largely caused by corruption and bad governance, Africa has grappled with poor governance structures for decades, impeding initiatives that should pave the way for development (Okorie, Egobueze & Amadi, 2025). The developing nations in Sub-Saharan Africa confront an especially acute set of constraints and

problems as they seek to emerge from the poverty that has gripped that portion of the continent (World Bank 1981, 1989b). Laden with so much renewable and non-renewable natural resources, the continent is a major stakeholder in the export of raw materials which aid the growth and development of other nations yet remains entrenched in underdevelopment and abysmal poverty. “Numerous observers have noted the struggles of African governments to cope with the crises their populations endure, frequently citing weaknesses in administrative capacity to manage reforms at both the macro and sectoral levels (Balogun and Mutahaba 1989, Rondinelli and Montgomery 1990). Corruption has become endemic and systemic in government institutions in Africa, promoting the enrichment of the elites and the ruling class. In 1991, United Nations submits that over \$200 billion were siphoned out of Africa by the ruling elites and this figure is more than half of African foreign debt and also overwhelms the amount of foreign aid given to Africa. “Many of the statutes, laws, and regulations in developing countries contain admirable rhetoric: strong environmental goals, relatively strict standards, actions designed to alleviate ecological damage and avoid new environmental problems. In reality, however, enforcement of these laws has been weak or non-existent, particularly in rural areas (Morell and Poznanski 1985:139).

Non-functional institutions have enabled the entrenchment of large-scale corruption and monumental misappropriation of funds which has compromised inclusive governance and sapped the masses of democratic dividends. Resource control has become an issue that has prompted heated engagements and conversations over the decades in Africa. As a leader, when the will to gratify self overwhelms the need to serve, the inclination to pursue self-serving ideas becomes heightened, disrupting the moral compass guiding leadership engagements. Africa has witnessed a splurge of corrupt leaders, from dictators to phony democrats, the continent has continued to suffer the impact of morally bankrupt individuals who embezzle public funds at the expense of the impoverished citizens who suffer neglect, marginalization, and bad governance.

3. *Regional marginalization and resource mismanagement*

Zimbabwe, despite having an influx of diamond sales, there seem to be no commensurate dividends accrued to the citizens. According to the World Food Programme, about 72% of the country’s population is currently living below the poverty line of 1 USD per day. Citizens are denied access to basic amenities while the ruling class lives in opulence, lounging on the revenues generated from these natural resources. Regions, where these natural resources are mined, suffer neglect and abandonment and there are instances where these untoward anomalies are met with fierce resistance and agitations. Within the confines of legislative structures in constitutions across various countries in the continent lies flagrant abuse of power and resource control autonomy which aids unwholesome intentions and social injustice. “Natural resources, with their historic grounding in the public domain and their high economic values, are central to the patronage interests that allow governing elites to maintain powers and privileges. This political logic shapes natural resource governance patterns across the continent. For example, agricultural policy in agrarian nations has evolved according to political interests bent towards controlling producers’ access to markets and inputs in order to extract rent. Similarly, forestry policy and management institutions across the continent are crafted according to central patronage interests in controlling and extracting rents from both formal and informal patterns of trade, and the utilization of products such as timber and charcoal (Oyono, 2004).

In an era where there is an upsurge in the global demand for mineral resources from Africa, countries laden with explorable potential across the continent are taking advantage of the global market to upscale and generate adequate revenues. The influx of multinationals and external investors is not translated into economical dividends to benefit the citizens. The continent produces about 12% of the world’s oil reserves, placing most of the Sub-Saharan countries on the list of top oil-producing nations in the world. Immersed in so much wealth yet the continent is lagging concerning development and structural institutions. One in three Africans lives below the global poverty line, a statistic embracing over 422 million people. Elected leaders and political officeholders need to do better by matching their words with actions. Non-implementation of various policies that should enhance inclusive governance has been ignored and this has led to gross underdevelopment in the continent. To eradicate the resource curse

generally, a great deal of research has offered solutions such as solid macro-economic policies, economic diversifications, natural resource funds, domestic or national ownership of resources, as well as transparency and accountability initiatives (Weinthal & Luong, 2006).

4. Resource exploitation and monopoly of resource-generated revenues

Natural resources are progress vehicles, especially when it conveys the right prospects. When it is properly utilized, the benefits accrued are massive but the continent is faced with staggering growth because there's underutilization of resources and misappropriation of accrued revenues permeate the continent, pitching the people controlling the resources against those who belong to the region where these resources are located. Records have proven the non-committal stance of governmental institutions towards providing adequate infrastructures and basic amenities to cushion the impact of the environmental pollution generated by the exploration of these natural resources. Frustrated natives are often spurred by this marginalization to form rebel groups and challenge such instances. A United Nations report found that the Katanga Province in the Democratic Republic of Congo was among the several places thriving with diamond bliss but the resource was not explored for the greater good of all but was licensed to international mining companies by the then President, Laurent-Desire Kabila and his son Joseph. Proceeds from the mining lined the pockets of the elites while the Congolese population had none, with several of them living in abject poverty. \$5 billion of assets from the state mining process were transferred to private companies to manage. Resource of this magnitude ought to translate to economic prosperity but that was not the case. Somewhere in a small village called Kilwa in the same Democratic Republic of Congo, some civilian group, fazed by the illicit extortion and exploitation by the government, took over a mine from the Australian mining firm, Anvil, agitating for resource control as the government seemed to be exploiting their resources without bridging the gap of economical deficit. It was a clear case of muzzling the cow threshing the field but that agitation was met with resistance from the Congolese army who doused the uprising with over 100 people losing their lives. For decades, marginalization has been beating the drums of war in Africa, inciting agitations and prompting resource control-induced conflicts.

Along the coastlines of the Niger Delta Creeks in Nigeria lies huge deposits of oil reserves. Although the region accounts for 95% of Nigeria's foreign exchange reserve yet is smothered in abject poverty, developmental deficit, and economical neglect (Egobueze & Ajieh, 2024). The Niger Delta region produces over 1.8 billion bpd with over 18 operating pipelines, serving as a support beam in terms of revenue generation for the country. In other climes, this abundance shapes the livelihood of the people and promotes the development and human capital growth of the people within the region. This utopic idealism seems elusive in the Niger Delta region as the palpable poverty can be felt without the slightest hint of doubt. The exploitation of resources from the region has brought no development despite the environmental implications posed by exploration activities. The cumulative effect of the marginalization within these countries or regions paves the way for class struggle and resource control tussles. Weak institutions and non-implementation of relevant policies by the government have exacerbated the resource control tussle which has undermined development in the region for decades.

CONCLUSION

Africa thrives with immense natural resources, renewable and non-renewable. From gold, cobalt, uranium, platinum, and even the world's most cherished gem, diamonds to vast arable lands, the continent is a repository of natural goodness. Africa accounts for 50% of the world's diamonds with Botswana, South Africa, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola, and Namibia contributing proportionately to that statistics. The continent also produces 483 tons of gold which is 20% of the world's gold production. Most of the natural resources in Africa fuel the prosperity of other nations while the continent is entrenched in abject poverty and underdevelopment. Lack of transparency shrouds resource management in the continent thus stifling economic dividends. Utilization of natural resources for development promotes equitable distribution of dividends, functional institutions, and quality governance while

misappropriation of revenues generated from the same truncates service delivery and its value chain, and this is the bane of underdevelopment in the continent.

Natural resource control conflicts create instability and keep investment opportunities at bay. As earlier reiterated in this article, these resource-induced conflicts are counterproductive and cause developmental retrogression. In the absence of effective political institutions and governance, natural resources can resort to a curse as the proceeds are either underutilized or misappropriated. For decades, war-torn countries in Sub-Saharan Africa have experienced stunted economic growth, low investment opportunities, insecurity, human rights abuses, and several others because of resource control agitations. These are factors that militate against progress and development and considering all these, the paper makes the following submissions. African leaders and elected political officeholders should provide good governance, eliminate corruption, encourage citizen participation, pursue transparency and accountability in all dealings and strive to establish functional institutions. Furthermore, effective conflict resolution methods should be utilized to stem the tide of conflicts emanating from resource control-induced agitations. African leaders must shun the get-rich-entitlement syndrome when elected into political offices and Siphoning of public funds should be discouraged. The Africa of our dream is possible if we harness our natural resources and use them to drive development to the continent.

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