

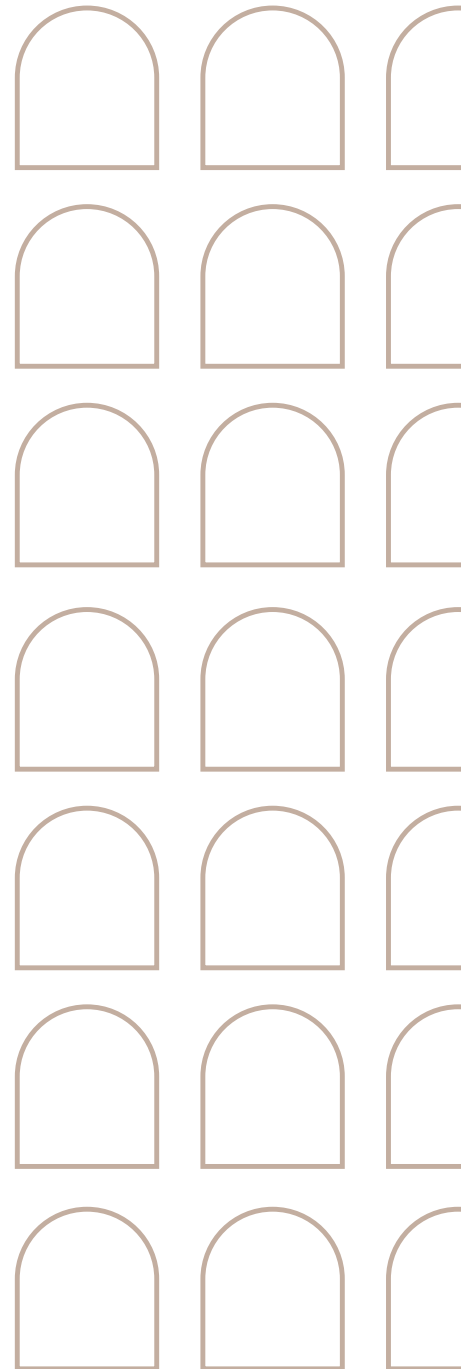
STG Policy Papers

POLICY BRIEF

BEYOND THE RHETORICS OF COLONIALISM AND NEO- COLONIALISM: AN AFRO-SCIENCE DIPLOMACY PERSPECTIVE

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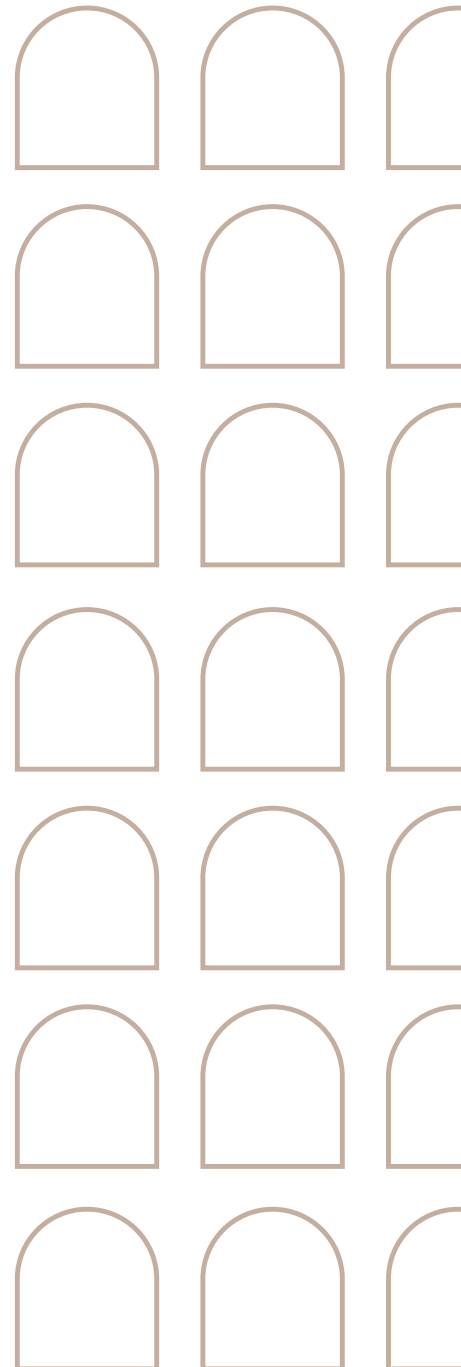


EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The narratives of colonization and neo-colonialism of Africa can be changed; not to forget history but to reflect, learn lessons and develop strategies to overcome re-occurrence in any form. Science Diplomacy is discussed in this policy brief as a global governance tool with the capacity to help Africa redefine history by adopting an Afro-Science Diplomacy strategy in addressing its domestic and global challenges. Africa is currently in a transition period in history where it is constructively engaging with world players in Science, Technology, and Innovation (STI), for its domestic industrialization and for equipping its teeming young demography with STI skills. Some of this is already been seen in the digitization of the economy, but because it was not a conscious strategy but rather a mere spillover from the impact of globalization, the benefits are still largely untapped. Member states of the African Union (AU), must therefore redefine their STI foreign policies to aid local research and manufacturing. The global perspective of Science Diplomacy is aimed at addressing common global challenges which will significantly benefit Africa. Setting up a framework by state STI agencies for developing a unique and common Afro-Science Diplomacy strategy is, however, advocated for in this brief to address most of the common challenges Africa is confronted with. Such a strategy has the embedded potential to spill into more global contexts. An Afro-Science Diplomacy could act as a gatekeeper for African institutions' sovereignty in reshaping imperial foreign policies. Too much power asymmetry in Africa will further entrench the concept of neo-colonialism. Therefore, it is recommended that African leaders and their negotiators should avoid being coopted by world economic players into advancing soft powers that could jeopardize STI development and the attainment of Pan-Africanism. This requires the transnational assemblage of the right knowledge and technical support.

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1. INTRODUCTION

There is no denying that Africa was heavily colonized and economically exploited by the developed countries of today. The shreds of evidence still exist today in diverse forms such as artificial borders with associated socio-cultural, peace, security, economic challenges, environmental degradation, and climate change issues. Theoretically, there is no 21st Century African nation that is under this old style of colonialism. However, Africa is experiencing a new form of colonialism called [neo-colonialism](#). This is characterized by conditionalized foreign aid, socio-cultural-economic imperialism, fragmented and unequal foreign policies working against Pan-Africanism¹, and globalization that has not seen Africa as a competitive player. Indeed, [globalization has been significantly driven by Science, Technology, and Innovation \(STI\)](#)². So, developing appropriate and adequate STI frameworks at the national level through the agencies for STI and foreign affairs is critical for the Continent. Therefore, this policy brief is meant to highlight a few critical areas of neo-colonization as it relates to STI, with emphasis on how the sovereign states can redefine history by leveraging human and natural resources and the interest shown by the world power-play on the Continent. Here, one major diplomatic tool “Science diplomacy” is reflected upon to redirect the African discourse on colonization and neo-colonization.

2. NEO-COLONIALISM

The ongoing science and research system in Africa requires appropriate foreign policies through the instrumentality of “Afro-Science Diplomacy” to combat this neo-colonial trend and to change the narrative. Neo-colonialism in science is a system where scientists or researchers from the Global South have marginal inputs in research projects carried out in developing nations by the Global North³. In terms of project funding and expenditure

mechanisms, a significant amount of aid tends to return to the benefactor’s countries by way of supplies, consultancy services, or other complicated means. A [former director of strategy](#) at the Global Fund to Fight Aids, Tuberculosis, and Malaria has expressed the need to have research on the Continent led by African institutions, and to equitably possess the research fund rather than disbursements via Western institutions which can entail disproportionate allocation⁴. It is a similar scenario with most African-based multinationals who export their hard or soft science research. The outcome of such research is usually only tried or implemented on the Continent. Such disparity does not support the development of sustainable research infrastructures and solutions in African nations. These frustrations and concerns are being expressed by scholars and professionals as reflected in an online [panel discussion](#) at the University of Cape Town, South Africa. In the words of a senior scholar from Harvard University at the event; Professor Rifat Atun; “95% of research funding ends up in Western institutions and very little ends up in Africa. Africa should lead research and funding should follow to African universities, not via institutions in Western countries”. Some [examples of neo-colonial science](#) have also been discussed in [public health elsewhere](#).

Another dimension for critical consideration by the various African governments and members of parliament is the transparent interest in considering the minimal investment made by foreign companies solely for the [exploration and exploitation of natural resources](#) without further investment in the value addition of most of these crude resources within the Continent. A [few examples](#) include the exportation of the raw forms of diamonds, gold, and tantalum from the Republic of Congo, crude oil, and other precious minerals from Nigeria by international corporations. This is the case in most of the resource-rich countries in Africa⁵ due to corrupt practices. Such neo-

1 Prashad, V. (2008). *The darker nations: a people's history of the Third World*. The New Press. 231-233.

2 Boiko, I. (2019) Technological Reconstruction of the Global Economy. *Globalization*, 2-22

3 Dahdouh-Guebas, F., Ahimbisibwe, J., Van Moll, R., & Koedam, N. (2003) Neo-colonial science by the most industrialised upon the least developed countries in peer-reviewed publishing. *Scientometrics*, 56(3), 329-343.

4 Overland, I., Fossum Sagbakken, H., Isataeva, A., Kolodzinskaia, G., Simpson, N. P., Trisos, C., & Vakulchuk, R. (2021). Funding flows for climate change research on Africa: where do they come from and where do they go?. *Climate and Development*, 1-20.

5 Mailey, J. R. (2015). *The anatomy of the resource curse: predatory investment in Africa's extractive industries*. National defense univ fort mcnaire dc africa center for strategic studies.

colonial acts deprive the host countries of the opportunity to industrialize, develop capacity, provide new skills, create jobs, build infrastructures, enhance economic activities and stabilize the political economy with peace and security. These polarized and unequal developmental initiatives have created opportunities for new global power players such as China to fill the vacuum in some respect, even though the Chinese practices are not adjudged to conform to best practices.

3. SCIENCE DIPLOMACY

The practice of Science Diplomacy (SD) is not new. However, the strategies and national approaches to the concept are now being refined to consciously influence foreign policies. It is a sub-category of new diplomacy, describing how scientific knowledge informs foreign policies⁶.

There are three main global approaches to the understanding of SD⁷.

1. Science in diplomacy. This denotes how scientific advice is used to frame foreign policies.
2. Diplomacy for science. It is the facilitation of international science cooperation using diplomatic ties.
3. Science for diplomacy. This involves how science or its cooperation promotes international relations between countries.

These approaches are tailored toward addressing common global challenges like public health, climate change, energy, and food security. While Africa stands to enormously benefit from this global approach, the [AU Division of Science and Technology](#) in collaboration with the ministers of science, foreign affairs and other relevant STI stakeholders from the member states such as national academies of science, science granting councils, research institutions, the diasporas and the organized private sector must make common inputs to the design of national strategies

towards an effective Afro-Science Diplomacy strategy that will take advantage of the global approach in helping to address the many severe domestic challenges that Africa currently faces. Examples of these challenges include poor capacity for manufacturing and production across the entire value chain of its raw materials, severe brain drain, high unemployment rate, poor infrastructure, insecurity, weak education, and institutional systems.

The [COVID-19 vaccine inequity](#) has clearly shown the poor state of Science Diplomacy strategy in Africa, despite the efforts of the World Health Organization (WHO). It was an extremely difficult task for most African countries to access and use the WHO-approved vaccines after the vaccine breakthrough due to [different reasons](#) such as the inability of the Continent to produce its vaccines, the absence of adequate funds, lack of trained professionals in handling the vaccine, poor storage facilities for available vaccines, citizen apathy to vaccination, poor science communication strategy, public health database management and planning. These are excuses that an effective Afro-Science Diplomacy strategy can significantly address; leveraging well-formulated STI foreign policies and informed-bilateral agreements in managing public health. In fairness to most of the vaccine-producing countries, they initially focused largely on meeting domestic needs. However, as one of the benefits of the global approach to Science Diplomacy, the [COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access \(COVAX\)](#) was initiated by WHO, the European Commission and the French Government, to ensure worldwide equitable access to the vaccines.

3.1 USA, China, Russia, the EU and Science Diplomacy in brief

Science Diplomacy was a successful tool used during the cold world war to douse tension, foster collaboration, and ensure national security⁸. After over 60 years, the concept is being further developed by innovations to

6 Gluckman, P. D., Turekian, V. C., Grimes, R. W., & Kishi, T. (2017) Science diplomacy: a pragmatic perspective from the inside. *Science & Diplomacy*, 6(4), 1-13.
7 Van Langenhove, L. (2016). *Global Science Diplomacy as a new tool for Global Governance*
8 Dolan, B. M. (2012). Science and technology agreements as tools for science diplomacy: A US case study. *Science & Diplomacy*, 1(4).

address common global challenges of the 21st Century. The advanced technological capabilities of global economic players such as the USA, China, Russia, and the EU are not unconnected to their past, present, and proposed STI strategies in developing strategic partnerships that support their foreign policies. These strategies indirectly address their domestic challenges. Several [S&T bilateral](#) and [multilateral agreements](#) exist among these nations to drive STI capabilities and this has necessitated diverse approaches based on national interests that ensure competitive foreign policies. As such, one of the challenges facing Science Diplomacy is the fear of non-transparent collaboration and partnership in high-tech and emerging technologies due to competition in a fast-changing technological world. The EU and USA Science Diplomacy strategy is considered liberal compared to China and Russia, with a more conservative outlook. There is no doubt that these development partners have positively contributed in some ways toward advancing Africa; however, one could argue against the developmental and sustainable impacts that such interventions have so far in liberating Africa from the technically dependent state it currently finds itself.

3.2 China-Africa and Afro-Science Diplomacy

Africa has a deficit in STI infrastructure and skills, yet, they are needed for achieving the [Agenda 2063 initiative of the Africa Union, \(AU\)](#). Neither China nor the Global North has the silver bullet for eradicating Africa's challenges. However, their contributory roles could significantly leapfrog the initiative milestones if the countries of the Continent can effectively connect their unique and common challenges to non-fragmented local and foreign policies that are evidence-based. Institutional innovation and developing relevant partnerships to achieve this is the core of Afro-Science Diplomacy. The concept largely depends on the ability of the AU leadership to coordinate a common

framework and the platforms for its member states and non-state actors in their fine-tuning of evidence-based STI strategies that promote local content rather than STI plans that are largely products of political assumptions. The AU through its Division for Science and Technology should begin an annual Science Diplomacy Summit that will assist its member states and relevant stakeholders with the policy tools required in meeting the objectives of an Afro Science Diplomacy strategy.

There are three schools of thought on the Chinese agenda in Africa: as a development partner, a neo-colonizer, or as an economic competitor⁹. The Chinese Science Diplomacy strategy on the Continent can be largely seen as Science for Diplomacy¹⁰. In other words, using science and technology as soft power to advance the Chinese Agenda and its foreign policies¹¹. China has been accused of a lack of respect for human rights, sustainable development plans, and indifference regarding good governance and practices. As important as these perspectives could be and for Africa to watch out for, what will be of more critical importance is how Africa positions itself with adequate skills and evidence-based knowledge support in entering into negotiations and agreements with China and other development partners. This will determine which perspective or a combination of the perspectives is at play on the Continent, especially as it relates to technology transfer and domestication. China has played a critical role in addressing the infrastructural deficit and corporate financing in Africa. Whether such interventions are sustainable is another kettle of fish. This could have probably spurred the renewed interest of the Global North and other development partners in Africa. It is a pivotal transition period for the Continent with the opportunity to redefine its history.

3.3 Afro-Science Diplomacy

The strategy for implementing Science Diplomacy in Africa is still largely left to

9 Alden, C. (2007) *China in Africa*. London: Zed Books. 5-6

10 Epping, E. (2020). Lifting the smokescreen of science diplomacy: comparing the political instrumentation of science and innovation centres. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 7(1), 1-13.

11 Economy, E. C. (2014). China's imperial president: Xi Jinping tightens his grip. *Foreign Aff.*, 93, 80.

the traditional practice of international relations¹² by the member states and this has not yielded the desired results in terms of Science, Technology, and Innovation development. The transnationality nature of Science Diplomacy has not sufficiently penetrated the government policy-making arena. Most of the foreign policies from African countries are not deeply rooted in scientific evidence. This is unlike the case for developed nations like the United States of America, Canada, the EU countries and some other emerging strong economies like China. These countries are developing [their Science Diplomacy strategies](#) to have a more global influence. Africa first needs a Science Diplomacy to address its fundamental STI needs before considering using science as a soft power to wield global influence. For example, South Africa which tends to have a better framework of Science Diplomacy on the Continent is using the concept to [rebuild international relations](#) after the apartheid and to [develop its science](#).

In a side event on Science Diplomacy at the recently concluded [2022 AU-EU summit](#), the Chair of [INGSA](#) African Chapter, Nigerian Academy of Science, Mobolaji Oladoyin Odubanjo, argued that the practice of Science Diplomacy on the Continent dates back to history, that the practice would only have to be labelled as such. However, this brief complements his position by arguing that beyond the labelling, a different approach from the previous approaches will have to be scientifically designed. Hence, Afro Science Diplomacy Strategy. Most [African scientists](#) work in isolated manners with a poor environment that supports partnership and collaboration. More so, the mechanisms for feeding scientific outputs into local and foreign policies are vague, not well understood or almost not in existence. In this context, an Afro-Science Diplomacy strategy is important because it will deliberately institutionalize practices and policies that will support local content development, build collaborations, enhance suitable policies that are evidence-based, give opportunity

for scientific inputs to policymaking and help develop a common framework for STI foreign policies in Africa. Such a strategy will help African countries to competitively benefit from the soft-power- Science Diplomacy like the one China is currently brandishing on the Continent. International actors seem to be taking advantage of the fragmented policies in Africa. This is problematic because it becomes difficult to establish a standard for external foreign policies operation on the Continent. Although, each member state of the AU has its sovereignty, however, the commonly shared challenges should provide a compromise ground for negotiating a common STI foreign policy that benefits the entire Continent. Addressing these issues as isolated cases might pose significant hindrances to the achievement of the [STI goals contained in the Agenda 2063](#) of the "Africa We Want".

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made to the Division of Science and Technology of the African Union (S&T AU), and the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Science, Technology and Innovation of the AU member states to redefine the colonization and neo-colonization narratives of the Continent and support the quest to achieve Agenda 2063 through the instrumentality of Afro-Science Diplomacy.

4.1 Expand Science Diplomacy knowledge on the Continent

Science Diplomacy has been proven to help nations support one another, especially in difficult times; taking lessons from the COVAX initiative. Its practice on the Continent has been embedded but not as a deliberate strategy. The strategic engagement of the concept is a powerful tool for global governance; therefore, state actors must champion the course of education and create awareness of the benefits of engaging strategic Science Diplomacy by building the institutional and human capacity of its practice and principles. Let the ideals of Science Diplomacy within

12 Shaw, T. M. (2019). International Relations in Africa in Theory and Practice. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*.

the context of addressing domestic and global challenges form the core of strategic institutions such as the Ministries of Foreign and Internal affairs, Education, Science, Technology & Innovation. This should reflect on the AU S&T agenda. It can be achieved by the S&T AU and the ministries of S&T in the member states championing Science Diplomacy institutional mapping, followed by an analysis of the synergy that exists among them, and how their outputs and national interests effectively feed into local and foreign policies.

4.2 Afro-Science Diplomacy Strategy

This is a transnational STI approach to Science Diplomacy in influencing domestic and foreign policies as they address unique challenges in Africa. The majority of the problems that STI seeks to address in Africa are similar across the Continent. The strategic involvement of state and non-state actors is critical. With this in mind, the Science and Technology Division of the AU should begin an annual Science Diplomacy Summit and also consistently advocate for it in providing knowledge support that will help member states develop a national Science Diplomacy strategy with an overall objective of feeding into an Afro-Science Diplomacy framework. This is to equip the member states and the AU at large with competitive STI knowledge while entering into bilateral, multilateral, or regional agreements with development partners. The objective of this engagement is to ensure that the Continent does not have fragmented STI foreign policies that work against human resources development, value chain addition of natural resources, infrastructural development, and Pan-Africanism.

4.3 AU Institutional innovation in member states

The AU should consider having Science Diplomats in the member states with the sole objective of providing knowledge support to advance the importance of the strategic use of Science Diplomacy. It will assist in developing a common framework to initiate a sustainable Science Diplomacy strategy on the Continent. This will also help the AU

to fairly achieve a single STI foreign policy targeted at addressing the unique challenges on the Continent.

4.4 Imperial foreign policy gatekeeper

The Afro-Science Diplomacy strategy should be designed as a gatekeeper to filter imperial policies that tend to work for neo-colonialism in the area of Science, Technology and Innovation. For instance, Africa has partnerships like [Africa-Turkey Partnership and China-Africa Cooperation](#). These partnerships are often designed toward Africa without a corresponding competitive strategy by Africa to optimally benefit from such cooperation. For example, there are reports of China importing [workers](#) and materials that could be sourced locally. This practice deprives Africa of raw materials and capacity development. A strategic Afro Science Diplomacy policy will filter such imperial policies. The EU has a [Common Foreign and Security Policy \(CFSP\)](#) which focuses on security and defence diplomacy. Therefore, developing the capacity framework for a common AU STI policy should be possible. Partnerships and agreements should be reached to support the quest of the countries of the Continent to industrialize their raw material processing, develop STI human resources and build institutional capacities in line with the [SDG Agenda 9 and 17](#).

5. CONCLUSION

The domestication of Science, Technology, and Innovation, (STI), to aid socio-economic development is critical. It is one of the ways to enable capacity enhancement, drive sustainable development, and provide support for an equitable engagement at the global level. Science Diplomacy is potentially one effective tool in achieving such strides. Africa needs an Afro-Science Diplomacy strategy to be able to compete favourably with international actors and advance the Continent's STI drive.

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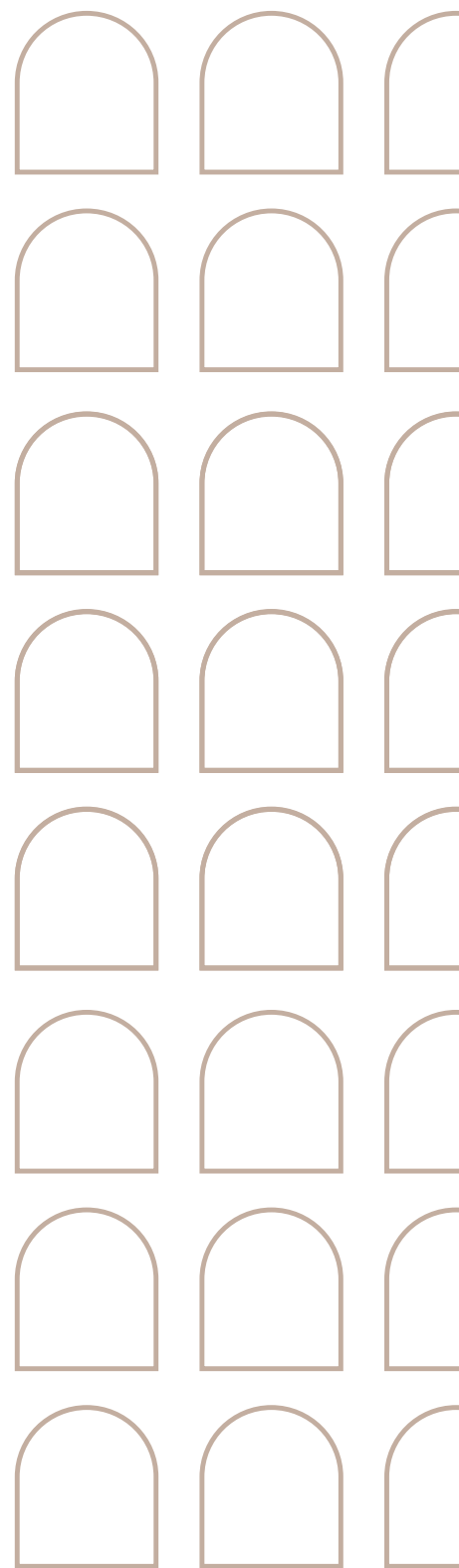
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