

Lagos 1980 and the right of Africans to science

Global Africa

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Whenever pan-Africanism and African research are at stake as they are in issue 3 of *Global Africa*, we must pass the test of a “first-rate intelligence” not to become bitter, angry or discouraged. So, when we retrace the history of the [Lagos Plan of Action](#) (LPA), one of the most ambitious development strategies for the continent, it's not just the sad fate that befell it that is disconcerting but the fact that, despite the violence of this experience, African states are not radically determined to realize all the consequences of its essential lesson, namely that the African future is a (pan)African responsibility.

It is important to recall that the LPA was adopted in April 1980 by the Conference of Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), following the adoption in 1979 of the [Monrovia Strategy for African Development](#). The LPA consisted of a set of concrete measures to implement that strategy whose pillars were "collective self-reliance and endogenous, self-sustaining development" for the period 1980-2000. It was subsequently presented to the 11th Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly in September 1980, and incorporated into the international strategy for the 3rd United Nations Development Decade (1981-1990). This text is one of the gestures of an Africa that takes all its problems in hand, thinks about its place in the world, is self-critical, initiates, proposes, projects itself and desires for its peoples.

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Chapter V of the LPA which deals specifically with "science and technology", sets out a series of proposals whose common thread - simple but highly ambitious - is as follows: "Member States should [...] adopt measures to ensure the development of an adequate science and technology base and the appropriate application of science and technology in spear-heading development in agriculture; transport and communications; industry, including agro-allied industries; health and sanitation; energy, education and manpower development, housing, urban development and environment". Remarkably, this chapter is the longest in the document: it runs to over thirty pages, while the others are around ten. At the heart of the pan-Africanism of the African Union (AU) and the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) lies a keen awareness of the importance of research and knowledge creation. It was also within the LPA that the proposal to mobilize national resources of up to 1% of GDP in favor of science and technology was put forward: "To demonstrate their political will and commitment to improving the lot of these peoples, Member States are urged, within the coming decade, to aim at gradually reaching the target of mobilising, at the domestic level, 1 per cent of their GDP for the development of their scientific and technological capabilities." Strong proposals indicate possible avenues of funding: increased state budget allocations, taxes on imported products, the introduction of a tax on the gross sales of major public and private enterprises in the production sector, the obligation placed by governments on all companies and enterprises with foreign participation to devote a fixed percentage of their total expenditure to research and development activities. The African Development Bank (AFDB) and regional development banks should "assign a definite percentage of these resources to financing Science and T projects".

Although it promoted collective autonomy and strong intra-African cooperation, the LPA was never really implemented; it was simply marginalized and abandoned in favor of the neo-liberal recipes of the World Bank's¹ [Berg Report](#) (1981) which, in total contradiction with Lagos, unsurprisingly mentions neither research nor scientific development, except for agriculture - because exports need to be stimulated - and "research needs" for health take up exactly three paragraphs (out of 217 pages!), even though the introduction of the report states that "African life expectancy at birth is [...] by far the lowest of any region in the world". Among these brutal devastations, the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), which were directly inspired by the Berg Report and were in fact, the only public policies implemented by African states over the following two decades, did not spare African universities, African research and the institutions that disseminated it (university presses, publishing houses). In 2000, the Bank itself recognized that they had been failures, and proposed poverty reduction strategies in place of the SAPs.

The tragedy lies not so much in the demise of the LPA and the entrenchment of an entire continent in nameless poverty and extroversion but in the fact that we were not enriched by the experience. We didn't come out of the ordeal richer but poorer² in our knowledge of global knowledge-power relations. More than twenty years after the end of the SAP cycle and the "return of the African state", none of the

1 It's worth recalling the context at the time: faced with the alarming trends in African economies, the Heads of State and Government drew up the Monrovia Strategy and the LAP. For their part, many of the World Bank's African ministers of economy and governors also asked the Bank to prepare a special document on the crisis in African economies. In October 1981, the World Bank issued a report entitled *Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Indicative Program of Action*, known as the Berg Report and named after its principal author, Elliot Berg.

2 Walter Benjamin (1933). *Expérience et pauvreté*. Editions Payot et Rivages

continent's 55 countries has reached the 1% target, and there is no self-sufficiency in any of the areas targeted by the LPA, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Agenda 2063 or the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Strategies for science and research have followed one another at national, regional and continental levels, and despite the AU's extensive institutional set-up for research (see map 1 on page 169), all these structures lack decent, sustainable funding.

The fate of the LPA and the Berg Report must therefore be analyzed in order to understand, with evidence and experience to back it up, that African research - its conception, funding, implementation and coordination - must be a matter of collective pan-African sovereignty and, above all, of political consistency.

At a time when the world has taken the pace of the digital revolution, when the uncertainties and the need for new knowledge are immense, Africa does not always seem to take seriously the indissoluble credo of chapter V of the LPA: training and scientific research are necessary and compulsory conditions for development, and their funding is a high priority. There can be no transformation of the agricultural, industrial, energy or health sectors, or of any other key area of knowledge without human resources capable of meeting these challenges and without research institutions capable of carrying out large-scale investigations and sparking groundbreaking, useful innovations.

We were saying that the conflict between the feeling of despair and the determination to change the order of things calms down in first-rate intelligences. This is why scientific communities must be on the front line, alongside pan-African and allied social movements to continue to make the case for an individual and collective right to science, and to force African states to face up to their obligation of consistency.

The scientific coordinators of this issue who, in reality, have been much more: rigorous mentors of exceptional scholarship and generosity, remind us in this special issue that Pan-Africanism has always been first and foremost an epistemic project. In addition to accompanying the authors, they have also spoken to experts in charge of scientific research in major pan-African organizations such as the AU and ECOWAS. Their commitment and work have been remarkable and we are deeply grateful to them. The authors have worked on major global issues: inclusion, difference, archives, pan-African knowledge-creation institutions, transnational mobilizations, demonstrating thereby the fruitfulness of the pan-African paradigm for thinking about African and global dynamics.