

SOCIOECONOMIC INEQUALITIES: AFRICA AND THE WORLD

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Abstract

Background and Objective: There are huge inequalities within the African continent and between Africa and the world in socioeconomic terms. The aim of this article is to disseminate knowledge about the problems of African countries, their causes and effects, as well as to indicate the differences on the socioeconomic level between African regions and Africa and the world.

Materials and Methods: The article uses the literature sources. The empirical material is the data of the World Bank (OECD, Luxembourg Income Study, data of surveyed households obtained from government statistical agencies). The following research methods were used: descriptive analysis, comparative analysis, statistical data analysis.

Results: The socioeconomic situation in Africa is deteriorating in most indicators, for example GDP per capita or the national current account. Africa still faces many economic challenges, including catching up with the rest of the world and overcoming barriers to development.

Practical Implications: It should be noted that the difficult living conditions in the countries of Africa confirm the results obtained on the basis of the indicators used. The situations existing on this continent cause huge disproportions between African countries and the world.

Conclusion and Summary: Africa's socioeconomic situation is improving but with little or no change over the years. African countries are only aligning with other selected countries in terms of diplomacy. Other measures do not indicate the presence of convergence.

Keywords: Africa; development; inequalities; threats

JEL classification: F43; F63; P51; Z32; Y10; Y9

Paper type: research study

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1. Introduction

Socioeconomic inequality in the modern world is a significant problem, present in almost every country to some degree. In this paper, this issue will refer to the continent of Africa. This region was chosen since it consists mostly of developing countries, which are particularly affected by this issue. It is well known that this continent is backward and poor compared to the rest of the world. The literature is full of information regarding Africa's problems, such as difficult access to clean water, hunger, and lack of access to basic medical care. In times of increasing globalisation and the involvement of almost every country in international exchange programmes, it is important to raise awareness of the potential and problems of different regions of the world. This applies especially to those areas that are in a difficult situation requiring external intervention. This article aims to broaden the basic, common knowledge concerning the problems of this continent and their causes. The socioeconomic situation of selected African countries will be assessed in view of basic socioeconomic indicators, which include: GDP per capita, HDI, Gini Index, State Power Index. Their analysis will reveal the causes of socioeconomic inequality as well as its scale and structure with respect to Africa. The article addresses the problem based on the above-mentioned indices with reference to selected African countries and selected countries in Europe, North America, and Asia. The time range varies between the indicators due to data availability, but it covers the range from 2005 to 2020.

The problem of socioeconomic inequality affects the continent of Africa on many levels. It is the least developed part of the modern world. In addition, there is great diversity among African countries themselves, both politically, socially and economically. Africa can be divided into underdeveloped and medium-developed countries. The socioeconomic situation is the best in the northern part, which bears a long history of civilisation, attractive for tourists. In economic terms, relative to the rest of the continent, the southern region, rich in resources such as gold and diamonds, is also good socioeconomically. By far the weakest part of the continent is Central Africa. It is a predominantly agricultural region. Due to the backwardness of the continent, farming is undertaken in an inefficient way and there is not enough work for everyone, leading to poverty and hunger.

To complete the picture of socioeconomic inequality, the continent should also be compared to the rest of the world. When we compare African countries with countries in Central Europe, for example, the disparities are even greater than in Africa itself. To illustrate the scale and structure of this phenomenon, three socioeconomic indicators have been prepared, considering one country each from Europe, Asia and North America, as well as several African countries.

The purpose of the study is to analyse the disparities occurring both within the African continent and between Africa and the rest of the world, and to provide an insight into the causes of this phenomenon. The determination of the level of inequality occurring will be based on an analysis of indicators of socioeconomic di-

vergence such as GDP, HDI, the Gini Index and the State Power Index. Using these measures, verification will also be made of the occurrence of convergence between African countries and countries representing other regions of the world. The initial assumption of the study is that Africa's socioeconomic disparities have increased over the years.

2. Literature review

The subject of income inequality affecting the African continent is an area study for many researchers and economists. African problems provide a space for research and analysis of the phenomenon of socioeconomic inequality, its causes, and methods of reducing existing disparities. An example of the literature on African problems is the work of *The Routledge Handbook of African Development*, whose co-author, Philip Nel, has devoted an entire chapter to analysing the inequalities that exist there. As part of the study, he analyses the dynamics of net income disparities as measured by the Gini index. The author bases his analysis on data for the period 1990-2010. He identifies South Africa first, followed by Central Africa and West Africa, as the region most affected by the incidence of inequality. In addition, the researcher points out in the paper that despite a slight reduction in disparities, there is a noticeable long-term trend of inequality levels exceeding expectations on the African continent, especially in the sub-Saharan region (Nel, 2018).

Another paper dedicated to analysing the phenomenon of dichotomy in the social and economic dimensions is an article titled *Describing Income Inequality in South Africa: Household Income Decomposition by Geo-Type*, authored by Allen Murahwa. He analyses inequality spatially, that is, between and within urban and rural areas, covering the southern region of Africa with his analysis. In his study, the author again uses the Gini index, which he uses to determine inequality by source of income. Another measure used in the cited work is the Theil index, used to measure inequality by geography. The study shows that the source of persistent income inequality in the area under study is mainly labour income. In addition, the existing unemployment in South Africa drives the disparities that exist between urban and rural areas. The author also notes that the Gini index reaches its highest values in urban areas, where there are far more households than in rural areas (Murahwa, 2019).

Africa's socioeconomic problems are also addressed in the book *Poverty in a Rising Africa*, an entire chapter of which focuses on inequality in the region. The analysis deals with inequality in consumption levels, as measured by the Gini index. The availability of data flowing from household surveys allows the study to be carried out only for the period 1993–2008. The conclusions of the analysis are that Africa is home to the countries with the highest levels of inequality, and these are the southern regions of the continent. In addition, the authors note the growing inequalities within the continent. Their testimony is that most of Africa's poorest people

live in the poorest countries. The authors also looked at the aspect of extreme wealth, which is rarely addressed due to data availability. Their observations show that the wealth of billionaires increased in Africa during the period analysed. They cite inequality of opportunity, and circumstances at birth contributing to later poverty, as reasons that partly explain the existing state of inequality (Beegle, 2016).

3. Data and methodology of the study

3.1. Data

The study of socioeconomic inequality in relation to the continent of Africa concerns the period 2005–2020. The time interval analysed is due to the availability of data for the countries included. The data used are annual. In order to illustrate the scale and structure of the phenomenon, three socioeconomic indicators were prepared, taking into account one country each from Europe, Asia and North America, as well as several African countries.

The African countries that were analysed were South Africa, Namibia, Egypt, Nigeria and Congo. And the countries outside the African continent are the United States, China, Germany and Singapore. Not all countries are included in all indicators, among other things, through lack of available data. The selection of countries is with the intension of showing the dissimilarity of countries. The African countries taken into account are, in many respects, among those achieving some of the lowest results with regard to the given indicators – there are difficult living conditions, there are many social problems. However, the analysis includes a country such as Egypt, whose economy is considered one of the best on the continent, and most of the serious social problems do not affect this country. In contrast, the countries outside the continent included in the analysis are characterised by a high level of economic development, and are classified as either developing or already developed economies. These are economies that in many respects differ significantly from African economies. They represent a form of authority, a position to which African countries should aspire in an attempt to catch up or to reduce the disparities between them, if any. On the other hand, if there are no significant disparities or they appear to decrease over the years analysed, this indicates that the socioeconomic development of countries on the African continent is normal. As an illustration of the scale of the worsening situation, a table is presented that shows a larger number of African countries, in terms of the worsening situation, in several macroeconomic aspects. In addition, in order to show one of the aspects affecting Egypt's position, compared to other countries on the continent, the aspect of the country's tourism will be illustrated, as a primary source of revenue.

3.2. Indicators

The analysis of inequality will be based on indicators showing countries' socioeconomic development and growth, and problems such as inequality. The measures considered are GDP per capita, the Human Development Index, the Gini Index and the State Power Index.

Gross Domestic Product is an indicator that provides information about the economic potential of a country. It counts the aggregate value of final goods and services produced throughout the country over a specified period, usually one year. It also includes final goods produced by non-residents within an economy. The increase or decrease in real GDP, and the dynamics of such changes, is a measure of economic growth (Begg, 2014).

The Human Development Index (HDI) is another indicator that can be used to show the extent of the problem and understand the structure of socioeconomic disparities between Africa and the rest of the world. It measures the extent to which a country's society is developing and how its economy is progressing. The HDI is a synthetic measure taking levels from 0 (no development) to 1 (very high human development) or up to 100%. This measure consists of three aspects: long and healthy life, knowledge, prosperous standard of living. Since 2010, four smaller indicators have been used to measure development using the HDI (Office, 2019):

- life expectancy;
- the average number of years of education received by residents aged 25 and older;
- the expected number of years of education for children entering the education process;
- per capita national income in units of U.S. dollars, calculated at the purchasing power parity of the currency.

Another indicator considered is the Gini index, which directly indicates the level of differentiation, but this time internal, in selected countries. In economics it appears as a measure of statistical dispersion. Its purpose is to illustrate income and wealth inequalities within a given country. In econometrics, it is known as the social inequality index and most often refers to the distribution of income. The Gini coefficient ranges from 0 to 1, like the HDI. However, it should be interpreted quite the opposite. The higher the level, the greater the dispersion, and therefore the worse the situation of a country. This means that level 0 is a perfectly equal distribution, while 1 is when one person gets all the income, and others receive nothing. The social inequality index provides information about disparity from a slightly different angle than GDP and HDI. It deals with differences in internal distribution, so this summary will show which country has the greatest inequality in income distribution (Biernacki, 2021).

The State Power Index is a measure that provides information on the potential of countries. It is the sum of economic capital (GDP in Purchasing Power Parity, number of rich people, sovereign rating), militarisation (military spending, arms production and sales, military spending as a proportion of GDP, size of uniformed services, nuclear weapons ownership), land (land area), human resources (population size, 65+ dependency ratio), culture (number of universities, number of trademarks filed with the World Intellectual Property Organisation), natural resources (imports/exports, revenues from raw material extraction in relation to GDP), diplomacy (membership in major international organisations). One of the biggest advantages of this index is that it shows both the soft and hard power of countries. It covers a variety of areas, taking relatively many aspects into account, but like any index it is not perfect. However, it does not take into account all metrics, such as education in a country, or environmental pollution (In.Europa, 2018).

4. Results

4.1. GDP

The first of the indicators prepared in the compilation is Gross Domestic Product, the most universal and widely known. The value of GDP is shown in US dollars per capita.

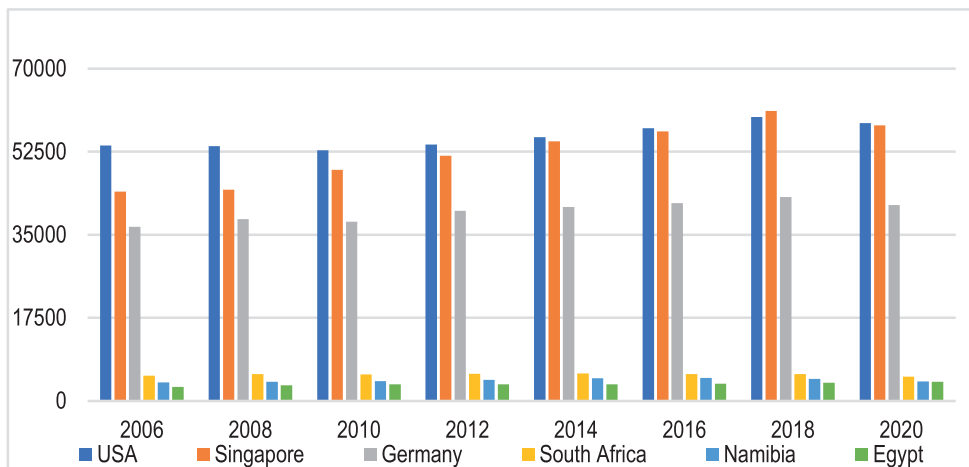


Figure 1. GDP per capita (in USD) in selected countries from 2006 to 2020

Source: Own compilation based on World Bank data (2022).

Figure 1 clearly shows the gap in GDP per capita between Africa and the rest of the world. The worst performing countries in the comparison belong to this continent. The highest scores are achieved by countries such as the USA and Singapore,

followed by Germany. While the performance of the most significant economies is not surprising, the level of GDP per capita in Egypt is worthy of comment. The area is one of the most developed in Africa, thanks to numerous tourist arrivals and international activities. It is evident from the country's performance that the income generated from growing tourism and international activities is not enough to close the gap between the largest economies. While the world GDP per capita ranged from between \$7,800 and over \$11,000, the same indicator in Egypt barely exceeded \$4,000. The highest value among African countries, however, was achieved by South Africa. GDP per capita in this region in the analysed period oscillated around 5.5 thousand USD. This is the most economically developed part of the continent, which is enriched by the mining of precious metals and stones. Namibia constantly occupies the penultimate place in the GDP per capita with the value of the index fluctuating between 4 and 4.8 thousand USD. In 2020, because of the decline, GDP per capita equalled the level reached in Egypt. Even though the representatives of Africa included in the list represent the best performing regions against the background of the continent, none of them has even caught up with the average value of the world index. It is also worth noting that the gap between the selected countries and those in Africa has not narrowed over the years. Economies such as the U.S., Singapore and Germany have grown and passed through various phases of business cycles in a benign manner with an upward trend. As far as African representatives were concerned, the positive changes were in the form of short-term fluctuations rather than a long-term trend. Moreover, these changes have been insignificant, so that the gap between the major economies has only widened, with much greater increases.

4.2. HDI Human Development Index

The HDI can be used in many ways to compare values both over time for a single country and between different countries over a given period. It divides countries in terms of development into four categories: very high, high, medium and low levels of socioeconomic development. With its social component, it complements the information provided by GDP (Stiglitz, 2019).

HDI provides more information about the socioeconomic situation of a country than GDP. As a qualitative indicator, it enables analysis of the quality of life in different countries and shows their degree of development. Unfortunately, as Figure 2 clearly shows, African countries rank last in this ranking with most of the continent achieving a low level of socioeconomic development. The more developed countries, on the other hand, achieve medium or a few high levels. Comparing these results with North America or Europe, it is easy to see the enormous gap separating Africa from them. This indicates a very high level of underdevelopment on the continent. However, the development gap can also be seen within Africa itself. The central part of the continent diverges from the northern and southern ends. It can also be seen there that often highly developed countries directly border low developed ones.

Central Africa has the lowest HDI levels, while the north and south perform moderately or relatively well on this indicator. In contrast, Figure 2 shows the development dynamics in three African countries and three representatives of other continents. The same countries were considered as in the case of GDP. The most developed country was Germany, which reached a level of HDI above 0.9 during the analysed period and showed an upward trend. A similar level was reached by the United States and Singapore, also with a clearly increasing relationship. All these countries are above the threshold of a very high level of development, with an HDI of 0.8. African countries, on the other hand, recorded a level far below the others throughout the period under analysis. Their HDI levels were similar to each other. It is worth noting that the representatives of Africa also achieve better results year after year, but only South Africa in 2016–2018 and Egypt in 2018 reached the level indicative of highly developed countries. Namibia did not exceed the level of 0.7, which means that it performed the weakest in the whole comparison and thus appeared as a medium-developed country, with a two-level gap between Namibia and representatives of other continents. In summary, the HDI data confirm that there was a gap between Africa and the rest of the world due to significant differences in both quantitative and qualitative aspects. It is a continent that is definitely underdeveloped compared to the others. However, the situation in these countries is improving from year to year. It is also worth noting that these changes occur faster in African countries than in the representatives of the rest of the world. Therefore, we can mention the occurrence of the phenomenon of convergence in the case of the indicator of socioeconomic development.

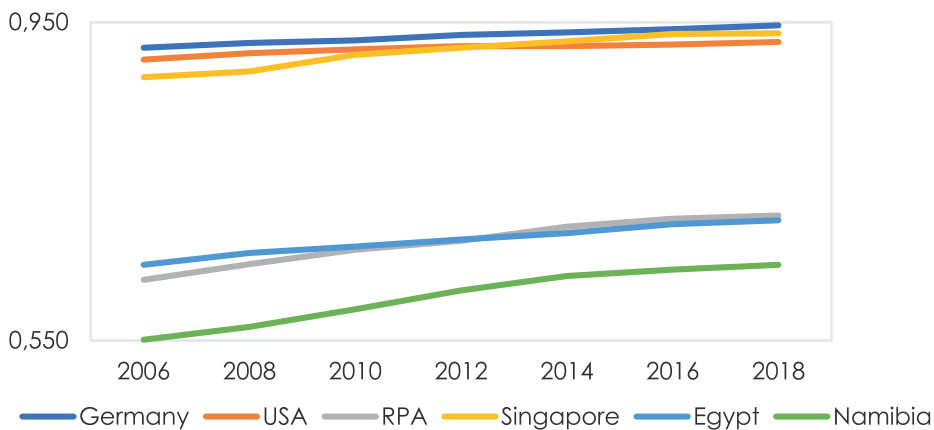


Figure 2. HDI in selected countries from 2006 to 2018

4.3. Gini Index

The Gini index is a very important indicator when analysing Africa in this aspect because it deals directly with the topic of inequality. The data on the Gini

coefficient are unfortunately fuzzy and incomplete. In many African countries the coefficient is measured irregularly and in a few it is not measured at all, or the data are not published. The selection of the period was a difficult task due to the availability of data and their irregularity. The period during which we were able to collect the largest number of Gini coefficient results for our selected countries was chosen.

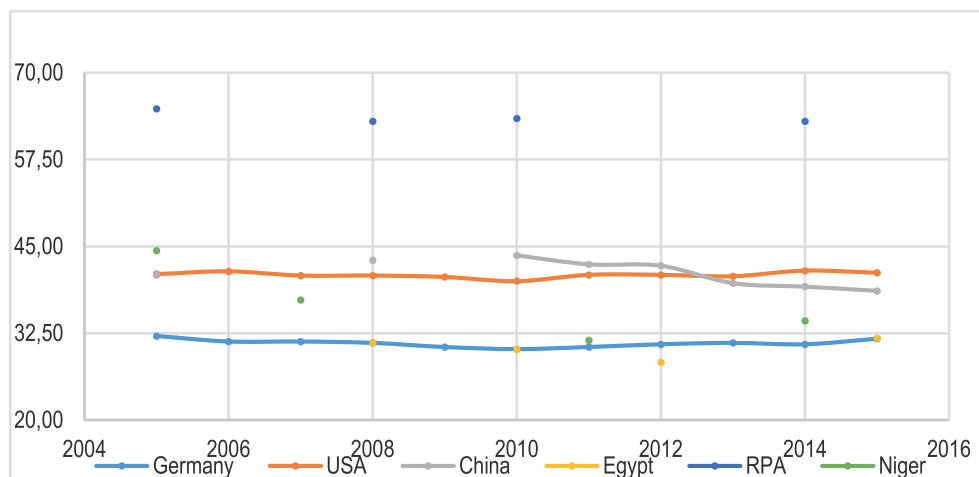


Figure 3. Gini Index in selected countries from 2005 to 2015

In almost half of Africa, information on the Gini index is lacking, while in the rest of the continent the situation looks worrying. While the results in the northern part of Africa are relatively low, close to those of the rest of the continent, the situation in the southern region looks much worse. Countries such as South Africa and Namibia have the highest levels of social inequality in the world. The central part of Africa also shows very high results, but they are not so alarming.

The data collected for African countries are unfortunately irregular and discontinuous, but there is still a pattern of relatively small fluctuations. Analysing Figure 3, it can be seen that among both African and other countries, the dynamics of the Gini coefficient were rather small. In most countries, the inequality of income distribution has changed little or not at all. This indicates ineffective policies to combat inequality. Europe's representative in this comparison is Germany, and it performed the best of all the countries analysed, consistently achieving a result close to 30% throughout the period analysed. Countries such as Egypt and Nigeria achieved a very similar result with the available data. In the case of Nigeria, this result was quite unexpected and may lead to misleading conclusions. A level of the Gini coefficient comparable to the result for Germany was not synonymous with the same equitable distribution of income in both Germany and Nigeria. It should also be considered that in poor countries the distribution of income may be relatively equal due to the overall low level of income. Then, the income to be distributed is much smaller and poverty

affects the whole population to a similar extent. In such a situation, the differences between the richest and the poorest will be much smaller than in a country with many wealthy and rapidly growing companies. Egypt, on the other hand, is one of the most developed African countries, thanks to its far-reaching civilisational history and its thriving tourism and diplomacy. The greatest variation in income distribution was in South Africa. It is a country with a relatively developed economy, as evidenced by the GDP figures presented. However, as one of the richer countries in Africa, while a small number of individuals have very high shares of income, the majority of individuals live in poverty. This is illustrated by an income inequality index with the highest level among the countries analysed. Figure 3 also shows the diversity of Africa as its representatives were in both the highest and one of the lowest positions. In contrast, the United States and China reached a moderate level.

Table 1. The world's economic situation in selected African countries and the world in 2014

GAUGE	What it concerns	Character	The strongest position among selected countries	The weakest position among selected countries	Average for selected African countries
GDP per capita	The potential of the economy	Quantitative	US (\$55574)	Egypt (\$3490)	USD 4675,667
HDI	Economic development	Qualitative	Germany (0.937)	Namibia (0.631)	0,670
Gini Index	Income distribution	Statistical measure	Germany (30.90)	South Africa (63.00)	Too little data

Source: Own compilation based on data from the World Bank (2014).

Table 1 summarises all the measures prepared in the Africa-World comparison. Data for 2014 are included due to the availability of information from the Gini index. This is the latest period for which it was possible to collect values for almost all the countries included. Unfortunately, it lacks information on Egypt. Due to this gap, the calculation of an average Gini index value for Africa was abandoned. However, the compiled information clearly shows that both qualitatively and quantitatively, Africa lagged behind the other continents. It can also be seen that Europe, represented by Germany, dominated the comparison. Moreover, in terms of income distribution, African countries performed poorly, which only sums up the analysis presented earlier. Among the metrics considered, only one shows improvement. Changes in the direction of development were observed only in the case of the HDI. In this respect, the analysed countries are catching up with the more developed representatives of Europe, Asia and North America. In the case of the other measures, the situation of

African countries is either unchanged or worsening, while the rest of the world is developing and growing stronger. These figures give a clear signal that Africa cannot cope with its problems on its own. The continent needs outside help to develop properly. This should be the wish not only of the African people but also of the rest of the world, which would gain strong trade partners and access to beautiful and unknown lands due to the improvement of the situation of African countries.

4.4. The State Power Index

Figure 4 shows the seven main dimensions considered when counting the State Power Index, and the overall result of the index value for selected countries. The analysis includes Egypt, the country that performs best on its continent, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the country at the bottom of the State Power Index ranking, and the United States, the country that ranks first in the world in this index.

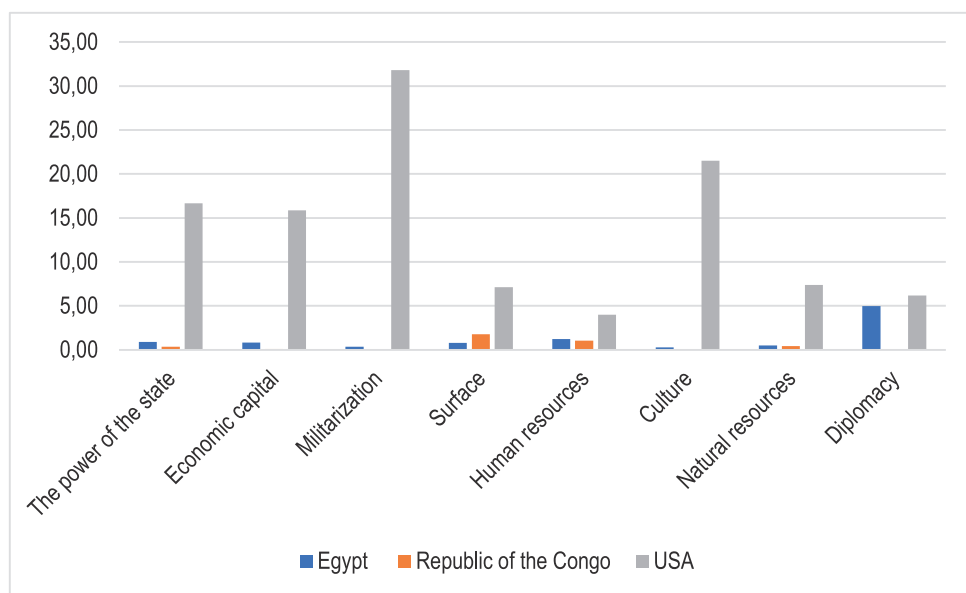


Figure 4. Power index of selected countries in 2017

Source: Own compilation based on In.Europa (2022).

In 2017, the power level of states was 0.9 for Egypt, 0.34 for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and 16.45 for the United States. It is easy to see the huge gap between the three countries. Economic capital in the case of Egypt reached 0.83, the Democratic Republic of the Congo only 0.09, and the United States 15.87. Once again, a great deal of variation can be seen, with a decidedly higher GDP or number of wealthy people found in Egypt compared to the other African country,

although these countries are still far from the United States. While militarisation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo was 0, for Egypt the level is slightly higher (0.34). The United States outdistanced the other countries with an enormous amount of weapons and military resources, hence its score of 31.80. In terms of surface area, for the first time in the presented ranking, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is ahead of Egypt. The surface area for Egypt was 0.78, for the Democratic Republic of the Congo 1.17, and for the United States 4.03. For the first time, African countries were only slightly behind the United States. Another aspect measured the highlights of how underdeveloped and backward the Democratic Republic of the Congo is and how many problems it faces. The level of culture for this country was 0, compared to 0.27 for Egypt and 21.49 for the United States. In the case of natural resources, Egypt and the Democratic Republic of the Congo recorded levels of 0.54 and 0.41, respectively. The United States is once again much higher on the list, with a level of 7.39. The level of diplomacy for the Democratic Republic of the Congo was again 0. The level of diplomacy in the United States and in Egypt was similar. Egypt is one of the few African countries to contribute on the international stage; the country is one of the presidents of the Arab League. The diplomacy level for the United States is 6.16, while for Egypt it is slightly lower (4.97).

In conclusion, one can see a variation in various aspects; in most cases, the United States attains a level higher than the African states and there are huge disparities within the African continent.

Numerous African states face conflicts, structural weakness of state institutions, as well as corruption and famine. Some of them have the status of failed states, i.e., with no control over their own territory. As a result, in most respects, African states will differ both among themselves and in relation to the world. It is easy to see the economic, social or political inequalities affecting this continent. Its situation is made even worse by the warming of the climate.

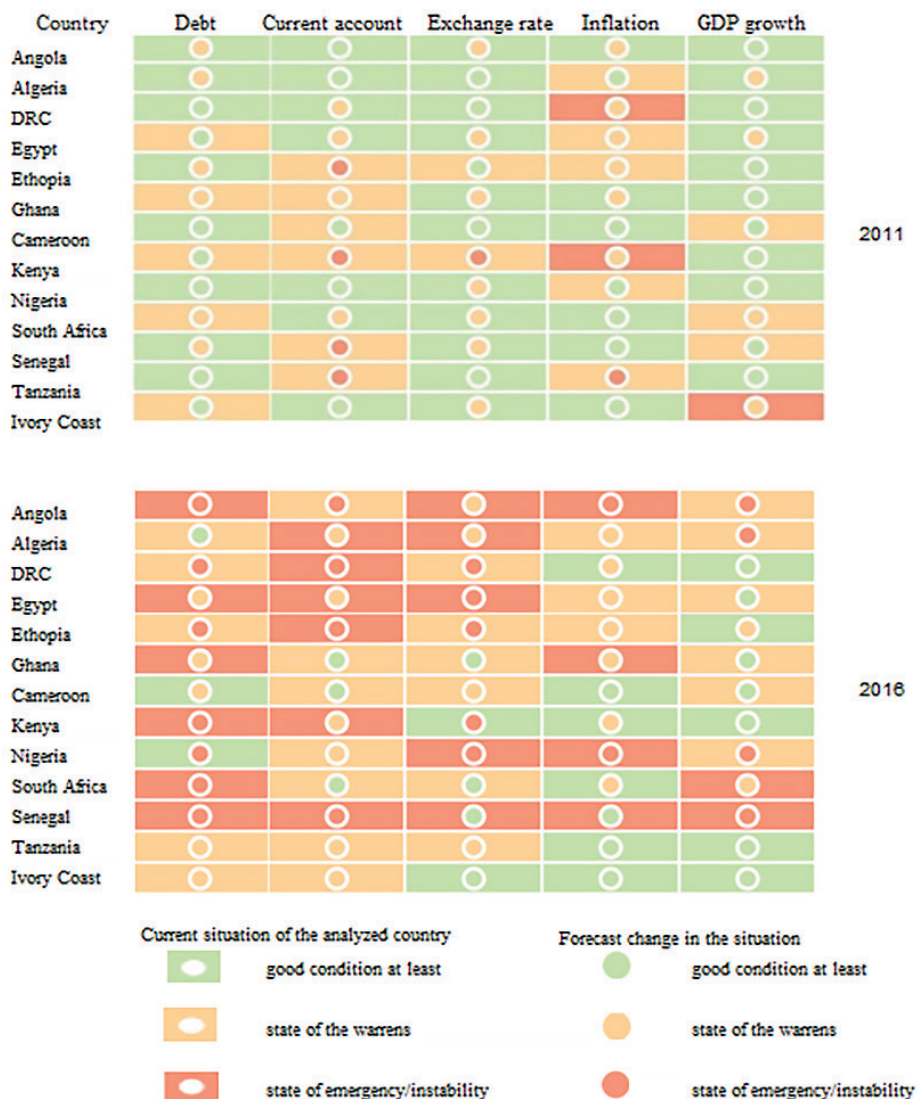
When comparing some African countries to the United States, we did not consider the weakest country, which is Komory, because its values oscillated around 0 for the various aspects.

4.5. Macroeconomic indicators of African countries

Table 2 summarises the values of the main macroeconomic indicators in two periods: 2011 and 2016. Analysing the data collected in Table 3, it can be seen that in 2011 the situation in most African countries was relatively good. However, even then, a significant number of economies were in an unstable or worrying situation. Moreover, even the countries whose 2016 results were relatively good contained forecasts of future economic deterioration. Analysing the 2016 results, one can see very worrying developments in African economies. Only a few indicators remained at a good level; in some countries the situation deteriorated in every aspect consid-

ered. Countries such as Angola or Senegal, whose economies were still relatively stable in 2011, are the weakest in this comparison. This analysis shows that Africa’s economic situation is deteriorating and that the continent is not able to recover from the crisis without outside help.

Table 2. Economic situation in selected countries in 2011 and 2016



Source: Kopiński, D., Polus, A., Tycholiz, W., “Afryka wielu prędkości” (2017).

4.6. Egypt – the case of tourism development

Tourism in some African countries is highly developed. These countries attract tourists, which helps them to develop, make a living, profit and benefit. The population there lives at a better level, and enjoys better living standards than the population in poor countries. Egypt is one of the most popular regions in Africa for tourism. It is a country with a rich history. It appears as one of the few countries in the international arena, and holds the presidency of the Arab League. Several sites of Egypt are on the UNESCO World Heritage List (such as the ruins of the city of Abu Mena). However, the pyramids in Giza are the main attraction (RAINBOW, 2021).

Table 3. Tourism potential of Egypt in 2005–2017

Year	Number of tourists (in millions)	Income (in USD billion)
2005	8.2	7.2
2006	8.6	8.1
2007	10.6	10.3
2008	12.3	12.4
2009	11.9	11.8
2010	14.1	13.6
2011	9.5	9.3
2012	11.1	10.8
2013	9.2	6.7
2014	9.6	8
2015	9.1	6.9
2016	5.2	3.3
2017	8.0	8.6

Source: Own study based on Index-Mundi (2022).

Analysing the data in Table 2, it can be seen that Egypt's tourism was growing until 2010. However, from 2011 onwards, the number of tourists decreased and, consequently, the income from tourism also declined. The country was facing problems that caused a decline in interest to travel to this region of Africa. There were terrorist attacks, making people afraid to visit the region. After years of turmoil, Egypt is experiencing a renaissance. It is now one of the most visited countries in the world by tourists. The number of tourists decreased until 2016 (it was only about 5 mil-

lion then). From 2017, an upward trend can already be seen, with 8 million tourists coming to Egypt in 2017, and in 2018 already 11.5 million. This was due to both the calming of Egypt's situation and the introduction of security rules. Active recreation also attracted tourists. Water sports such as diving are the most popular among tourists. The Red Sea is one of the richer seas in terms of coral reefs and the diversity of undersea landscapes. Cruises along the Nile or desert tours on camels, and visiting the mysterious pyramids also attract tourists. While the pandemic situation has caused the number of tourists to fall again, this is no longer an individual problem for Egypt, but unfortunately, for all countries of the world (Kociszewski, 2019).

5. Social problems

5.1. Conflicts in Africa

Africa is the scene of endless armed conflicts of extraordinary brutality and has many problems compared to other continents. In most cases, the stabilising missions of the United Nations and the intervention of neighbouring countries are ineffective. The conflicts arise mainly due to great ethnic and religious diversity, but also from the desire to control areas rich in raw materials and water. Four selected armed conflicts in the last few decades are presented below.

The first was the civil war in Sudan, which broke out as early as 1955, lasted more than 50 years and claimed more than 2 million lives. At least 4.5 million people were forced to leave their homes. The rebels demanded greater political and economic independence for the South, a different distribution of natural resources and power and a change in the status of the Islamic religion in the country. The signing of the peace agreement between the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement on 9 January 2005 in Nairobi was a watershed moment for the country. For the population, it was the beginning of real hope that the long-running and brutal conflict in Southern Sudan could be brought to a definitive end. Years of fighting had destroyed the country's infrastructure and halted its development (Unic.un.org, 2011).

In 2013, another civil war broke out in South Sudan. It is worth noting that South Sudan separated from Sudan in 2011. The war lasted 3 years, but its effects are still felt today. Two million people have become refugees. Today, half of the population of South Sudan is starving (this is about 5.5 million people). The country's economy was totally dependent on income from oil exports and went bankrupt when oil prices collapsed (ZPE, 2020).

The second example is the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea, which started in 1998. It concerned the route of the border between the two countries. The number of victims of the conflict is estimated at 370 000 Eritreans and 350 000 Ethiopians, but the total has risen to 8 million as a result of drought. In June 2000, following me-

diation by Algeria and the African Union, the two countries signed a ceasefire. This is one of the few examples where interventions by other states or organisations have been effective (Unic.un.org, 2005).

The third example is the civil war in Libya, started in 2011 by rebels to overthrow the dictator Muammar al-Gaddafi, which ended with the deaths of around 20 000 people. It resulted in the complete ruin of the economy, political destabilisation and the takeover of part of the territory by Islamist terrorists (Kulas, 2018).

The fourth example is piracy, one of the most serious and frequent contemporary conflicts affecting Africa. It involves the raiding and hijacking for ransom of large transport vessels such as container ships, bulk carriers and tankers by poor Somali people. The problem occurred mainly between 2005 and 2012, but even now there are cases of hijacking ships for ransom. Somalia is one of the poorest countries in the world (in 2016 it ranked last in the world in the HDI ranking). There is almost complete anarchy in this country with no prospects for development. The population there is starving. For this reason, some desperate residents began to hijack merchant ships sailing through the Gulf of Aden and the Bab Al-Mandab Strait and demand ransoms of hundreds of millions of dollars. In response, Western countries, mainly the US, sent military vessels to patrol the area (Kulas, 2017).

The numerous and frequent armed conflicts in Africa result in the internal instability of individual countries, and thus in poverty, famine, huge population migrations, etc. It is worth noting that instability also leads to a lack of overall economic development, leading to a situation where Africa is in a very difficult economic and social situation. In practically every country, you can find armed conflicts, civil wars, terrorism, piracy, which all affect the development of the entire continent, as well as individual African countries.

5.2. Diseases in Africa

In Africa, the main cause of death is disease. Due to the presence of a hot and humid climate, diseases develop in central Africa that are absent in most countries of the world. They are highly contagious and difficult to treat. One example is malaria. A high risk of malaria exists throughout central Africa. The disease is not present in the northern part of the continent. If malaria has occurred in other continents, it has mostly been at medium or low levels (Kulas, 2018).

Due to tribal customs, such as those related to burying the dead, epidemics of viral diseases periodically break out in Africa. These are transmitted between people and from corpses to living people. Epidemics of the Ebola virus are a case in point. Once again, the epidemic does not affect the northern part of the continent. The highest incidence of the virus is in the central part of the continent (Kulas, 2018).

There are also many diseases on the continent caused by the presence of contaminated water, such as amoebiasis and dysentery. The consumption of contaminated water leads to infection with often dangerous diseases. The bestknown such

disease is cholera, which is quite common in Africa. Between 2010 and 2014, it occupied almost the entire continent, being absent only in the northern part. On other continents, cholera occurred on a smaller scale. In contrast, in 2015, only the central part still had the disease, and the incidence on other continents was almost zero. Only in the southern part of Asia can cholera infections be found elsewhere (Kulas, 2018).

Malaria, Ebola and cholera are diseases that have enormous consequences; they are the cause of great socioeconomic disparity, both between countries of the African continent and the world. It is easy to see how difficult living conditions are in the countries of Africa, especially in the central part of the continent, where, over the years, Africa has had to cope with numerous epidemics, when their incidence on other continents has been small, and in the rest of the world, they have appeared on a much smaller scale. These are further arguments that confirm and demonstrate the inequalities that exist between Africa and other continents, as well as within African states themselves.

6. Summary

There are huge disparities between African regions. The rich countries account for the bulk of GDP and development because they are involved in tourism and the extraction of precious raw materials. This gives people living there the opportunity to lead a decent life. In poor regions, people live in difficult conditions, often without access to water. There is hunger and constant fear of the many dangers they face in their everyday lives. We can see that even the well-developed African countries are lagging behind other countries in the world. Catching up with other economies will be a huge challenge. Especially given the fact that the data show that Africa's situation is worsening in the years under consideration. On the one hand, we have rich countries that do not need to fight hunger, poverty, serious diseases or armed conflicts, and on the other hand, poor regions that have to cope with all these problems on a daily basis. The development outlook is low because there are large disparities, both socially, economically and politically. Both when comparing countries in terms of GDP and HDI, it is clear how far Africa diverges from the rest of the world. Despite incomplete data for the Gini index, large disparities can be seen within Africa, with one country scoring high and another very low. Sanitary conditions, differences in the form of politics, and the unrest that has prevailed for many years increase the disparity between African countries and cause the size of the gap between the continent's countries and the rest of the world to deepen. Among other things, the State Power Index confirms that Egypt is the country least divergent from developing and developed countries outside the continent. Although Egypt stands out in terms of the power of states among the African continent, it loses significantly to a world power like the United States. As a result, no African country is capable

of becoming a powerhouse in the next few decades, not even Egypt, and the states can only catch up with most of the world's developing countries. Socioeconomic inequality is a factor that significantly limits a high standard of living and the development of individual countries. Relationships between states and the results of individual countries prompt further analysis, research. The subject of African countries is an immeasurably important topic for discussion. It is worth considering what could be changed to reduce disparities.

Both public awareness of the dangers in African regions and assistance in improving the situation of these countries are very important. You can help Africa no matter where you live. Each region is struggling with different problems. Aid from Poland mainly concerns the fight against hunger, access to better medical care, education, or solving problems with access to water. For example, UNICEF organises various collections and charity initiatives. Currently, donations can be made for children in West and Central Africa. Their lives are in danger due to food and water shortages in this region. There is also the Polish Foundation for Africa, which raises public awareness of the problems surrounding the countries of this continent and tries to encourage and help. The Foundation has already completed two hundred and seventy-four projects and helped twenty countries. One of them, for example, is the construction of a paediatric ward in Madagascar. To help, you can also become a volunteer and, for example, teach children in African schools or kindergartens. Volunteers are also needed for repair and construction work. During the holidays, which last from the end of July to the end of September, there are semicolony for children, during which volunteers run various activities (Polska Fundacja Dla Afryki).

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