Ubuntu and Rawlsian Justice: A Framework for Addressing Environmental Constraints to Talent Development in Africa

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Abstract

The underdevelopment of Africa continues to be a significant issue, with some scholars, such as Walter Rodney, attributing it to a mix of historical, political, and economic causes. The factors encompass the history of colonialism, persistent wars, and insufficient infrastructure, all of which impede growth and development throughout the continent. However, this paper attributes Africa's under-development to the environmental circumstances in which numerous African children are raised. This environment often characterised by antiquated cultural practices, tribal and ethnic conflicts, and poverty among others has impeded the capacity to cultivate and express their talent. These limits have a ripple effect, resulting in adverse results such as economic stagnation, diminished global standing, and brain drain, eventually sustaining the cycle of under-development throughout the continent. This paper further claims that the root cause of these factors, especially wars and poverty, which leads to Africa's under-development is bad governance. This paper therefore suggests drawing on the principles of Ubuntu and Rawls' Theory of Justice, that a just and collective society where fairness and equity thrive can provide the foundation for creating a healthy environment that will support the development of children's talents for the development of Africa.

Keywords: Africa, Under-development, Environment, Talents, Children, ubuntu, Rawlsian Justice.

Introduction

Centuries ago, the only means of communication with someone from a distant land was through letters. This sometimes takes months or years before proper communication is achieved. Nowadays, technology has made communication very easy such that communicating with a person in any part of the world is just a click away. In a similar instance, the major means of transportation before the invention of the first aeroplane in 1903 were horses and ships [Lambart, 2020]. The movement of people and goods from one country to another used to take several days, months or years, depending on the distance. However, with the invention of aeroplanes, fast-sailing ships, speed boats, and cars, transportation has become time-saving. Thanks to science and technology for making life simple and smooth.

The transition from the rudimentary method of communication and transportation to the modern and advanced forms became possible through a nurtured talent. Most importantly, the environment was a special medium in which those talents were planted and nurtured. The environment in which one grows has a great impact on the development of one's talent. According to Julia Roberts, "Having talent does not guarantee that a young person will develop that talent and reach an exceptional level of expertise. Opportunities and resources of the schools, community, and home environment are required to encourage and foster talent" [2008: 502]. This means that the development of one's talent is dependent on the environment one lives in.

If Roberts' assertion is true, then it is arguably that Africa's environment does not support the development of talent in young people. This is because a good number of children in Africa are out of school as a result of different environmental circumstances. Research carried out by UNESCO in 2019 reveals that sub-Saharan Africa has the highest number of out-of-school children; "As in previous years, sub-Saharan Africa remains the region with the highest out-of-school rates for all age groups. Out of the 59 million out-of-school children of primary school age, 32 million, or more than one-half, live in sub-Saharan Africa" [2019: 7]. In most cases, the children are out of school as a result of wars, poverty, and religious/cultural beliefs but not necessarily because they lack the intellectual capacity to undergo studies or they do not have the passion for Western education. In this case, the environment seems to be a barrier or an obstacle to the development of the talents of the affected children.

Therefore, this paper seeks to explore the effects of the environment on the talents of African children. The paper shall begin with the analysis of some key concepts such as; environment, talent, and Africa; followed by a detailed discussion on "the environmental factors that affect children's talent development in Africa" in relation to children from other parts of the world. The paper shall discuss the general impacts of Children's talent under-development in Africa. After which, the paper shall present some suggestions on the way forward.

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Understanding Key Terms

The meaning of the word "environment" varies depending on the context. In this paper, the word environment simply means the situations or social conditions that surround an individual [Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2021]. The social conditions or environment according to Barnett and Casper include:

"**The immediate physical surroundings, social relationships, and cultural milieus within which defined groups of people function and interact. Components of the social environment include: built infrastructure; industrial and occupational structure; labour markets; social and economic processes; wealth; social, human, and health services; power relations; government; race relations; social inequality; cultural practices; the arts; religious institutions and practices; and beliefs about place and community**"
[2001: 465]

Barnett and Casper's definition of social environment encompasses most aspects of human interaction. Generally, human beings are constantly in contact with their environment, beginning from the moment of conception where the womb is the first environment till birth. At birth, human beings are exposed to the world which is a bigger environment through the family. Here, an individual is introduced to the parents, siblings and other members of the family. Thereafter, one begins to move into the wider society which comprises different people and events. These events may sometimes help to develop or under-develop their talent.

The word 'talent' as used in this paper denotes innate qualities of a person which are latently present. Gallardo et al., define talent as the "innate abilities, acquired skills, knowledge, competencies, and attitudes that cause a person to achieve outstanding results in a particular context" [2013: 297]. Talent is first of all acknowledged as an inborn quality or acquired skill; it could be academics or athletics. In each case, there is a need to nurture one's talent, especially the inborn ability to yield expertise. But in a situation where one's talent is not nurtured, the effect may be termed, "talent-underdevelopment." There are environ-mental factors that may enhance the development of one's talent. Some of these factors include; attending good schools with qualified teachers, a conducive home for learning, having access to learning materials, parental guidance, having a mentor, coaching by an expert and so on.

The word "Africa" has many controversies in terms of a consensual definition. But in this paper, the word Africa signifies a place or geographical area and most importantly, a continent. According to Ladipo Mabogunje et al; "Africa is the second largest continent after Asia, covering about one-fifth of the total land surface of the earth. The continent is bounded to the west by the Atlantic Ocean, to the north by the Mediterranean Sea, to the east by the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, and to the south by the mingling waters of the Atlantic and Indian oceans" (2020). Therefore, the paper focuses on the children who live within Africa as a continent no matter their race, cultural or religious belief. By children, the paper implies any human being under the age of 18 years [UNICEF, 2021].

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Environmental Factors Hindering the Development of Children's Talent in Africa

One of the oldest and most common problems of Africa which has come up in almost all discussions about Africa's under-development is poverty. A good number of Africans live on a "hand-to-mouth" income. According to UNDP, "Sub-Saharan Africa is the only region that has witnessed an increase both in the incidence of poverty and in the absolute number of poor people. About 300 million people there (almost half of the region's population) live on less than $1 a day" [2006: 268]. This partially validates the result of UNESCO about the number of African children who are out of school. By critically engaging the result and the claim of UNDP, if almost half of the region's population live on less than $1 a day, how then can those families train their children, since there is no free education in most countries in Africa? The chances of the children of those families being educated look gloomy. But what then becomes of the talented children in those families? Perhaps, some of them are the ones who roam on the streets and in the open markets hawking for food instead of being in school.

In cases where children from poor families manage to attend school, they are faced with different challenges such as lack of adequate learning materials and payment of school fees. In some cases, they are usually sent home when they fail to pay the school fees on time. Also, most of those children attend public or rural schools where there is no infrastructure and qualified teachers. Julius Agbor [2012] claims, "Considering the significance of rural poverty across the continent, it should not come as no surprise that rural school-children are the most disadvantaged from a socioeconomic perspective when it comes to access to a quality education". Agbor also claims that rural schools generally struggle with the issue of qualified teachers and sufficient teachers in relation to the number of children enrolled in the school. Perhaps, poverty is one of the reasons for insufficient and incompetent teachers in rural areas since people generally prefer to migrate to the city in search of greener pastures. Poverty, therefore, can be seen as an enemy of talent development for some children in Africa.

The second factor or characteristic of an African environment that seems to be an obstacle to the development of children's talent is "conflict." Although this factor affects some parts of the continent, its impacts in the affected regions are colossal and may affect other regions as well. One of its famous impacts is on the educational sector. Kathryn Touré argues that "The impact of crisis situations on educational systems is significant and of a variety of kinds. Violence and conflict have become a part of everyday life and threaten education and societal development on the African continent" [2006: 17]. In a similar vein, Seitz Klaus avers that "Wars and military conflicts inevitably impair the functioning of educational systems, and they are often associated with considerable destruction of the original educational infrastructure. Millions of children are prevented from attending school as a consequence of violent conflicts" [2004: 21]. Also, children are not only prevented from attending school but are also killed in the process. According to the figure released by UNICEF, the decade between 1990 to 1999 witnessed two million child deaths from armed conflict, six million children were brutally injured, one million children were orphaned or disconnected from their families, and twelve million were rendered homeless [qtd in Bensalah et al, 2000: 8]. More practically, some selected countries with a high impact of conflict on the education and welfare of children will be discussed. The countries are; the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Nigeria.

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), witnessed several wars. The most recent of it all was in 2003 which is considered as the great war of Africa. Notwithstanding, some rebel groups also emerged after the war. According to the Council on Foreign Relations CFR, the most prominent group after the war was recognised as the March 23 Movement (M23), which according to the CFR was organised by the Tutsis ethnic group and sponsored by the Rwandan government. The group rebelled against the Congolese government for allegedly defaulting on the peace deal signed in 2009. This made the UN Security Council organise an aggressive brigade to support the DRC army in to fight against M23. The rebel group was finally defeated in 2013 [Global Conflict Tracker, 2021].

The effects of these conflicts are enormous, especially on children. The result from Internet Relay Chat, IRC claims that the most victims of the war are children. More than half of the estimated 5.4 million deaths are linked to children. Again, UNICEF ranked DRC as the country with the maximum number of child soldiers, labourers and sexual slaves [Jones and Naylor, 2004: 5]. This conflict has also caused many children

to drop out of school as a result of insecurity. Jones and Naylor presented a figure of approximately 180 000 children who are out of school. According to them, conflict produces other factors like poverty, family constraints, lack of teachers, ill health as a result of malnutrition, and death of loved ones [2004: 11]. All these factors affect the development of talent amongst the affected children in the DRC.

Nigeria also experienced several conflicts, ranging from; civil, inter-ethnic, and communal. However, the recent and the ongoing conflict which calls for urgent attention is that of Boko Haram insurgency. The group started around 2003 by a charismatic preacher, Muhammed Yusuf. The primary aim of the group is to establish God's Kingdom on earth by retreating themselves from the wider society. Though, the group was antagonistic to the Nigerian government and rejects western education as non-Islamic, it was generally non-violent until 2009 [Campbell, 2014: 2]. The group conducts violent attacks in the north-eastern part of Nigeria and Plateau state. The leader of the group, Abubakar Shekau also claimed to be responsible for a suicide bomb attack in Lagos' fuel depot on 25 June 2014 [Campbell, 2014: 3].

These attacks by Boko Haram have devastating effects on the inhabitants of the affected areas. John Campbells claims that; "the struggle between the government and Boko Haram has dire humanitarian consequences. Many people have been internally displaced in the north-eastern part of Nigeria and many refugees have fled to neighbouring countries" [2014: 1]. Apart from the children who have taken refuge in the neighbouring countries, the con-

flict has also claimed the lives of many children, others have been abducted, internally displaced, and forcefully recruited. [Isokpan and Durojaye, 2006: 2].

The ravaging effects of the Boko Haram insurgency have been traumatic for children in the affected areas as they have been compelled to abandon their precious homes in fear of being killed. They have also abandoned school which is the main target of the terrorist group. According to the report by UNICEF, the continuous attack on schools, teachers, and school children has forced over one million children out of school and their teachers also have been forced to stay away from school. Again, the abandoned schools have been used as refugee camps [Isokpan and Durojaye, 2006: 10]. But the school is meant to be a place for studies but it has become a home for internally displaced children together with their families.

Generally, the attacks by the insurgents have not just displaced children but also resulted in the deaths of many children. Isokpan and Durojaye claim that a government-owned boarding school in Mamudo, Yobe state was attacked by the insurgents in July 2013. In the attack, 42 students and some teachers were killed and the school building was set ablaze. A similar attack on a school also took place on 25 February 2014 when the insurgents invaded Federal Government College, Buni, Yadi, Yobe state. The attack claimed the lives of about 59 students and several buildings were burnt down in the school. Another shocking event of this kind took place in April 2014 when over 200 Chibok girls were abducted from their school dormitory. Later the same year in November, a suicide bomber disguised himself as

a member of a secondary school and killed about 47 students and many sustained injuries in Potiskum, Yobe state [2006: 10-11].

The case studies in the two countries above show clearly how conflict has detrimental impact on education and the future of the affected children. Generally, education is described as a process of character formation and skills acquisition. Babs Fafunwa describes education as; "the aggregate of all the processes by which a child or a young adult develops abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviour which are of positive value to the society in which he lives" [1974: 17]. Following Fafunwa's line of thought, the aim of education is defeated in the affected regions, and the abilities/talents of the affected children may not be developed. Some children are forcefully recruited into the armed rebel group to antagonise or fight the state. All these affect the development of children's talent in the affected areas.

The third factor which partly under-develops the talent of children in Africa is "culture." Although, what we may term the western civilisation has conquered several parts of Africa, other parts still hold onto their cultural beliefs and practices. The cruelest of all kinds is "education for a girl child is a waste of resources." In Zimbabwe for instance, the UNAIDS reports that the secondary school enrolment ratio for girls in some parts of the country has declined. This is linked to the patriarchal attitude which considers educating a girl child as a waste of money since they will end up benefiting other families. Some religions like the Apostolic Sect within the region usually give out their girl children for marriage whilst still in primary school to older members

of the sect [Kambarami, 2006: 5]. This cultural practice does not only hinder or under-develop the talent of a girl child but also enslave them. It also opposes the Universal Declaration for Human Right (UDHR) to education which says, "everyone has the right to education…" [1948: 26].

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, a survey was carried out by Laura Bolton to ascertain the barriers to education for girls in the country. Gender inequality emerged as a prime factor. In her study, discriminatory culture where girls are looked down upon was identified. This culture makes girls view themselves as inferior to the boys. Also, domestic chores are usually done by girls such that girls are kept out of school to look after younger siblings as well as to do kitchen work and laundry [2020: 5]. The negative effects of this culture are colossal; early child marriage, teenage pregnancy, poverty, prostitution and high risk of contracting STIs. This cultural practice of course, has done more harm than good in developing the talent of a girl child in the affected regions.

Another aspect of culture which is worth mentioning is the idea of parents determining the occupation of their children. In the Tiv culture, the people who are found mostly in Benue state, Nigeria, once a child is born, he/she is introduced to the farm as early as four years old. This is because their main occupation is farming, and so every male child is obliged to farm. The Tiv people have different types of hoes for each age group. Therefore, one has no excuse to stay away from farming as long as you are up to four years old. In some families in Tiv land, if a child shows other kinds of abilities other than farming, he is greatly scolded by

his parents. Such a child is being called lazy and one who has no bright future. The Tiv people's commitment to farm is known all over Nigeria. Moses Tsenongo agrees that the main occupation of the Tiv is subsistence farming. They regard yam farming as their birth right and commit themselves to its work with religious dedication. Their farming productivity is what has earned Benue, the state where they are the most populous ethnic group, the official title of being the "Food basket of the nation" [2011: 134].

This excessive commitment to farming is a tradition that has been passed on by their ancestors. Emmanuel Ahua claims that; "Before the advent of Christianity and its development, traditional Tiv education was based on oral tradition and the undertaking of practical activities used in domestic life, as well as occupations such as cooking, child bearing and rearing, farming and animal husbandry among others" [2019: 29]. This aspect of Tiv culture has not been friendly with children who show abilities in other areas of life such as arts, science and technology, fishing, or western education in general. Though the practice is no longer prevalent in the area as compared to thirty or forty years ago, other individuals in the region still hold on to this tradition. It has caused many talented children in the area to end up spending their entire life in the farm in order to preserve this aspect of the Tiv culture.

The experience of children from other developed nations seems to be different from the children in Africa. European nations, for instance, have strong policies that support early development of children's abilities. A survey was carried out by Velea and Tamburlini amongst five European countries; Armenia, England, Italy, Kazakhstan, Moldova on "Early Child Development in the European Regions." The result shows that all these countries have strong policies in the field of early child education [2014: 14]. Although the mere existence of policies does not guarantee their enactment, the percentage of school children in the regions clearly shows their implementation. The study shows the percentage of school children in these countries as follows; Armenia 70.4%, England 80%, Italy 98%, Kazakhstan 74%, and Moldova 97.4% [Velea and Tamburlini, 2014: 10-13].

A practical case is seen in the story of Arat Hosseini, a six-year-old footballer in the making. His father, Muhammed Hosseini, an Iranian having discovered the talent of his child as early as 13 months, quit his job in order to focus completely on his son. He also sold his house and car and moved to Liverpool to better pursue their goal (Oh My Goal, 00: 01:10). In an interview with Arat's father he said; "We are thinking about the future and the steps we can take. Nothing will stop us. Arat loves school and football. He is currently playing with the Liverpool FC Academy and wants to be the best player in the world. So, I'm doing all I can to help him" [IRAN, 2020]. This will help the child to develop his talent and possibly achieve his dream of becoming the best footballer in the world.

The Impacts of Children's Talent-Under-development on Africa

The first impact one could think of when it comes to the under-development of the talents of children in Africa is the under-development of Africa itself. This is because human resources is the fundamental attribute of any developed state. But in a situation where the human resource is left in shambles, such a state may experience no development as is the case of Africa. According to Lederman, "Not only do we have to have equity and close the famous achievement gap, we also need to have innovation if we are going to survive, so you have to nurture the gifted kids" [qtd in Roberts, 2008: 502]. This means that the state or any organisation should not only focus on human relations but also the development and management of human resources for its development. Many countries in Africa today are underdeveloped because they do not develop the talents of their citizens. It sounds strange when Africa, a continent blessed with numerous natural resources, can only import the final products of almost everything. However, it is not a surprise because many talented children cannot develop their talents because of different environmental factors surrounding them.

The aforementioned point explains why developed nations continuously hunt for talented personnel across the world. This also leads to the second impact which is the loss of personnel to developed nations, also known as brain drain. It is no longer stories that developed nations fish out talented people from under-developed nations. This is evident in the report of the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce, "The best employers the world will be looking for is the most competent, most creative, and most innovative people on the face of the earth and will be willing to pay them top dollar for their services" [qtd in Roberts, 2008: 502]. Many talented individuals are also willing to work for developed nations to receive their fair wages. Since almost everyone desires greener pastures, it is evident that Africa may lose her talented people to other nations.

This also gives birth to another impact, a "decrease in the continent's economy and fame." It looks devastating, in the sense that the few talented people whose talents were developed and are supposed to work and boost the economy of their respective African states have gone to look for a greener pasture. This has affected almost all the sectors in many African states, especially the sports and health sectors. Many football players who play for European countries are of African origin. According to Khaled Beydoun [2018], "Twelve of the 23 French players called up to represent France in Russia are of African ancestry rooted in nine nations across the continent". Fortunately for France, they won the World Cup. This is a huge loss for Africa. The health sector also has a similar experience if not worse. The available results as of 2000 show that; "Approximately 65,000 African-born physicians and 70,000 African-born professional nurses were working overseas in developed countries" [Clemens and Petterson, 2008].

It is very pathetic how Africa is developing other nations at its expense. Some of these African physicians were at the forefront during the COVID-19 pandemic but the world never recognised them as African physicians. The only African country which made some efforts to produce COVID-19 vaccine was South Africa (Dorfman and Kirstein, 2001). Otherwise, no other African country attempted to produce a COVID-19 vaccine but relied on the "residual" from other nations. But the vaccine only got to Africa when those countries vaccinated more than half of their population. One may question both the level of independence and the future of Africa as a continent.

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Recommendations

The negative impacts which are caused as a result of the under-development of children's talent in Africa are enormous and the factors responsible for children's talent under-development (poverty conflict and some cultural practices) are complex. However, it will be an empty effort if the root cause of these challenges is not addressed. According to this paper, the root cause of the present condition of Africa revolves around its "self-centred leaders" who have no interest in the well-being of their people and states. They are only concerned with the welfare of their families but the development of their nation is completely relegated. After all, their children are attending the best schools abroad. Thus, "self-centred leaders" become the primary factor for Africa's predicaments.

To address this issue, there should be an amendment to the constitutions of each African state. It should first of all make the judiciary independent not only on paper but in reality. This will empower the judges to rule against any corrupt government without fear of being removed from office. Secondly, there should be a law that would force the leaders to execute their manifesto. In other words, there should be a constitutional provision which would kick corrupt and unfaithful leaders out of the office before their tenure expires. In this case, most leaders may be forced to execute their campaign promises for a better Africa.

Additionally, if self-centred politicians are the root cause of Africa's underdevelopment, then a general state reformation through John Rawls' theory of Justice becomes necessary. Rawls' theory emphasizes justice as fairness. He proposes a redistribution of

wealth for the benefit of the least advantageous members of the society. According to him, "For us the primary subject of justice is the basic structure of society, or more exactly, the way in which the major social institutions distribute rights and duties and determine the division of advantages from social cooperation" [1999: 6]. According to Rawls, the major social institutions include; the political constitutions or the state, the economy, the family, and education. These social institutions have profound impacts on the lives of people and everyone has certain expectations of life which may be determined in some ways by these social institutions [1999:7].

The major social institutions according to John Rawls are responsible for the distribution of rights and duties. By rights, Rawls implies the fundamental rights that each individual has such as the right to take part in a political affair, right to freedom of speech and assembly, right to be treated fairly by others, right to vote or to hold office, right to education, right to own property and to move from one place to another and so on [1999: 195, 275, 327]. According to Rawls, everyone has the moral obligation or duty to respect the rights of others. For example, if everyone has the right to education then it means that no one should be the cause of a child's inability to be educated. Unfortunately, the environmental conditions in Africa have denied a good number of children education, thereby preventing them from developing their talents. However, if Rawls' theory of justice is to be implemented by African states, there will be fairness in the distribution of resources and the wealth of Africa shall no longer be

in the hands of the few. This will reduce poverty, and also prevent unnecessary conflicts since the rights of everyone will be upheld thereby creating an enabling environment to nurture the talents of African children for the development of Africa.

Furthermore, African communitarianism which is rightly captured in the philosophy of ubuntu also needs to be emphasized or implemented where there is need. Ubuntu philosophy places the needs of the community before that of the individual. According to John Mbiti, the individual does not exist alone but owes his existence to the community. The individual for Mbiti is part of a whole [1969:108]. This means that the community is a corporate body where the individual's existence belongs. But most importantly, since the individual is part of the whole group or the community, it means that whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group and vice versa. In this case, Mbiti captures it well when he says that the individual or a person who is an African can only say "I am because we are" [1969:109]. In simple terms, it means that my existence as an African is only possible because of the existence of the other person. If this is true, then no country or group of people in Africa should go to war with one another simply because if I destroy another person, I am indirectly destroying myself since we share a common existence.

Another important aspect of Ubuntu which is paramount to our discussion is its emphasis on the common good. According to Michael Eze, "ubuntu is a politics of common good according to

which collective pursuit of ends as shared by members of a community is the primary political aim" (2008: 389). This means that the end of any endeavour for Africans should be for the common good of the community. What this idea attempts to postulate is that the ends or the interests of an individual do not and should not conflict with those of the community. But, in any case of conflict, the community's ends take precedence. Ifeanyi Menkiti sums it up when he says that the reality of the community is prior to the reality of the individual histories (1984:171). In simple terms, the community's needs should be considered before the needs of the individual. But is this the case with African politicians? Not, as many politicians prefer to enrich themselves at the expense of the community's needs thereby increasing the level of poverty in Africa. This is practically against the idea of communitarianism and the politics of common good as proposed by the ubuntu philosophy. Therefore, to eradicate poverty in Africa, the values of ubuntu need to be emphasized so that the politics of the common good will become the ultimate priority for African politicians and everyone.

If these suggestions are implemented, African leaders will have no other choice than to develop their nations. This will eradicate poverty and every child will have access to quality education to develop their talents. There will be mutual understanding between the government and the civilians. This means that civilians will hardly rebel against the government and this may put an end to unnecessary crises which usually arise as a result of the government's failure to execute its mandate.

Conclusion

This paper revealed some of the challenges faced by African children in the area of talent development as a result of poor environmental conditions. The paper identified Poverty, Conflict, and some cultural practices as the major environmental factors responsible for the under-development of the talents of some children in Africa. The paper shows the prevalence of poverty in Africa, whereby more than half of the continent's population survives on 1 US dollar a day. Also, the incidence of wars across different regions and some cultural practices have contributed to the number of out-of-school children, which by extension results in the under-development of their talents.

Furthermore, the paper noted that the failure to develop children's talents in Africa has resulted in the under-development of Africa. The under-development of Africa has resulted in the loss of her human resources to some developed nations, which is a huge detriment to Africa's economy. The paper identified the root cause of Africa's under-development and offered some possible solutions. In a nutshell, the paper has addressed some of the factors responsible for children's talent under-development in Africa. However, subsequent researchers should focus on each factor exhaustively to obtain a more concrete result.

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