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## **Breaking the Cycle of Poverty for Developing a New Africa: Insights from Genesis 41:33-40**

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### **Abstract**

The focus of the United Nations 'Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)' initiative since 2015 has been "Eradicating extreme poverty for all people everywhere by 2030," if not wholly, then at least reduce it to an ambitious 3% of the world's population. These concerns have been a reality in Africa, home to 34 of the world's 48 poorest countries, and about two-thirds of the world's developing countries are in Africa. Furthermore, of the 32 countries in the world with the lowest levels of human development, 24 are in Africa. Even in other continents, where poverty levels have declined dramatically over the past four decades, Africa's population of poor people has increased. Therefore, if poverty is to be reduced to 3% globally, Africa would be at the forefront of this movement. This paper seeks to contribute to this ongoing discourse through the description of the nature of African poverty, the comparison of African perceptions of poverty in the past as they relate to the present, the consideration of factors militating against African growth, and the presentation of a Biblical framework for developing a new Africa. Through the historical-critical method, the paper revealed that African history demands that a new generation of African leaders detach themselves from the failed cultures and policies of the past and engage in the global struggle to eradicate poverty. Only when Africa becomes a model for prosperity and dignity can it be acknowledged

that a new Africa has emerged to take her place at the forefront of global progress and development. Finally, the paper recommends that Africa accept, recognise and identify her challenges and seek solutions from within; leadership development has to be prioritised; trustworthy, visionary, and God-fearing leaders be given opportunities; the need for electoral processes to be open and accommodating for everyone.

## **Introduction**

The focus of the United Nations 'Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) initiative since 2015 has been "Eradicating extreme poverty for all people everywhere by 2030." The apex body's well-articulated goal is to eradicate poverty, if not wholly, then at least reduce it to an ambitious 3% of the world's population. Given Africa's human and material potential, it can be argued that the continent should focus on wealth creation and prosperity beyond the global poverty eradication agenda associated with the MDGs while reducing crippling corruption and inequality. In other words, as Africa develops a consistent growth trajectory in its own right, such growth should benefit all sections of the people and be environmentally sustainable (Bicaba et al., 2015).

The global movement to eradicate poverty by 2030 has been widely recognised. It has gained consensus among global establishments, particularly in light of the vigorous debates that have characterised the unveiling of the UN post-MDG goals. Furthermore, in 2013, the World Bank and its governors endorsed two interlinked targets: (i) to end poverty by 2030 and (ii) to ensure shared prosperity for everyone. The explicit targets were: (i) to bring the ratio of the global population living on the verge or below a standard poverty level to less than 3 percent; and (ii) to promote the "per capita income growth of the poorest 40 percent of the population in each country." In like manner, poverty eradication has always been highly prioritised in the plans and policies of the African Development Bank, and this has also been reflected in agencies

charged with growth in both developed and developing countries (Bicaba et al., 2015).<sup>1</sup>

About two-thirds of the world's developing countries are located on the continent of Africa. Therefore, if poverty is reduced to 3% globally, Africa would be at the forefront of this movement. This paper seeks to contribute to this ongoing discourse through the description of the nature of African poverty, the comparison of African perceptions of poverty in the past as they relate to the present, the consideration of factors militating against African growth, and the presentation of a Biblical framework<sup>2</sup> for developing a new Africa.

## Defining the Concept of Poverty

Etymologically, the words “poverty” and “poor” are derived from the Latin word *pauper*, which has been employed to mean “poor.” *Pauper* has its

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<sup>1</sup> The 2022 Africa Sustainable Development Report comprehensively analyses Africa's progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the African Union's Agenda 2063 objectives. The report highlights the need for investment in developing more resilient education systems, adopting robust development planning strategies, and prioritizing digital technology, free primary education, and sustainable financing. Despite declines in maternal and child deaths and HIV/AIDS incidence, poverty rates remain high across Africa, and the majority of the world's multidimensionally poor people live in Africa. The report highlights slow progress in providing quality education, gender equality, and women empowerment, as well as the threat of pollution, acidification, waste dumping, urbanization, and poor coastal infrastructure management. Life below water faces pollution, acidification, waste dumping, urbanization, and poor coastal infrastructure management. Small Island Developing States face threats from tourism. Life on land faces loss of forest cover, biodiversity, and land degradation. Climate-smart policies could decrease carbon emissions. Africa is progressing on universal primary education targets, but coverage and quality remain low. Gender equality and women's empowerment have seen mixed progress (ASDR, 2022, xiv-xxiv; UN-SDG, 2022, 1-40).

<sup>2</sup> A Biblical framework refers to a system or perspective through which individuals interpret and understand the world, human existence, and morality based on the teachings and principles found in the Bible, which is the holy scripture of Christianity. This framework is rooted in the belief that the Bible contains divine revelations and guidance from God, and it serves as the ultimate authority for understanding the nature of God, humanity, and the purpose of life.

roots in two Latin words *pau-* and *pario*, which offer a combined sense of “giving birth to nothing,” typically employed to refer to unproductive livestock and farmland (Westover, 2008). Several sources offer further insight into the term “poverty.” For instance, in its most extreme form, poverty is the lack of the basic human needs necessary to sustain a dignified existence. This includes suitable and nutritious food, clothing, housing, clean water, and health services. The United Nations Human Development Report (1998) asserts that poverty is a complex phenomenon that generally refers to inadequate resources and the deprivation of choices that enable people to enjoy decent living.

According to Balogun (1999:11-16), poverty could be defined as a state where a society hardly attains what would broadly be recognised as a basic survival level. Additionally, such a state would be characterised by limited access to the necessities for functional existence, such as clothing, food, and suitable accommodation (World Bank, 2007). In the view of the World Bank (2007), conditions could be described as ‘poor’ if the more significant percentage of any given society lives on a per capita income lower than US \$370 at any given time or as being moderately poor if living on less than US\$2 per day, and extremely poor when living on less than US\$1 daily (World Bank, 2007). The report projects that in 2001, “1.1 billion people...had outlays below US\$1 a day, and 2.7 billion survived on less than US\$2 a day”. Poverty as a condition, while appearing to be primarily confined to developing nations, is a general phenomenon that may be evident in developed countries where it is most apparent in social contexts defined by problems such as penury and the tenacity of “ghetto” housing clusters (World Bank, 2007).

In the language of Englama and Bamidele (1997: 315-331), poverty refers to a state where an individual is not intelligent, skilled, or financially buoyant enough to fend for or provide sufficiently for vital human necessities such as clothing, food; decent lodging; the contentment of social and financial responsibilities; access to industrious service; and such others. Furthermore, such individuals are typically constrained from admission to pecuniary and social infrastructure comprising access to health, schooling, potable water, and sanitation. These preclude the individual from accessing welfare, and as such, they are limited by scarce economic and social infrastructure availability.

They conclude by labelling individuals in this situation as subject to a “lack of capabilities.”

Fallavier, as cited by Addae-Karankye (2014), considers poverty a structure of seclusion from society and groups devoid of acceptance within a productive setup. In his view, poverty denies one access and is suitable for an industrious society. He stated that people experiencing poverty have limited access to good food if they do not manage to grow it themselves, thereby threatening their security. One can infer from this definition that poverty impedes the ability of individuals to transcend subsistence living and embrace the productivity that leads to sustained prosperity. Indeed, another definition of poverty stresses economic opportunity. This concept is the most difficult to measure empirically, but it is typically central in the theories and public policy debates on poverty eradication. Therefore, poverty in this paper is considered to be individuals' inability to access the basic amenities, necessities, and opportunities required for a dignified existence.

## **The Nature of Poverty in Africa**

Africa has typically been the centre of focus of global discussions on poverty. However, such discussions must acknowledge the nuances inherent in considering poverty in Africa. For instance, there are apparent variations in the experience of poverty by various countries in Africa, with nations such as Uganda, Mali, Nigeria, Zambia, Niger, Madagascar, Zimbabwe, Burundi, and Rwanda, having more than 50 percent of their populace living below \$ 1 a day in 2002. This can be compared to 1999, when these countries were characterised by greater rural poverty than urban poverty, with 37 percent living below two-thirds of their national mean per capita income. Indicators for 2005 point to South Africa at 86 percent and the Central African Republic at 77 percent as the countries in Africa with the highest rural poverty rate, respectively (*World Bank, African Development Indicators 2005*). Socio-economic pointers such as per capita revenue, life anticipation at birth (years), access to well-being care services, access to pure water, access to education, and access to hygiene facilities also depict the degree of poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of the World Bank focuses on eight goals to be achieved from 2000 to 2015: extreme poverty and hunger eradication; achievement of universal primary education; promoting gender parity and empowering women; reduction of child mortality; improvement of maternal health; combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; ensuring environmental sustainability; and developing a global partnership for development.<sup>3</sup> Five years later, the World Bank’s African Development Indicators show that nearly 700 million people in 47 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa present the world with its most formidable development challenge. Africa is home to 34 of the world’s 48 poorest countries. Furthermore, of the 32 countries in the world with the lowest levels of human development, 24 are in Africa. However, it is not all doom and gloom for Africa, as a few countries are on track to meet many of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

In contrast to other regions, where poverty levels have declined dramatically over the past four decades, Africa’s population of poor people has increased. For instance, from 1981 to 2001, the number of Africans living in poverty nearly doubled from 164 million to 314 million (*World Bank Database, African Development Indices, 2005: xxi*). Sadly, by 2015, not much evidence for the attainment of the MDGs was visible in Africa, although it cannot be denied that the project has contributed to the growth of Africa.

The poverty reduction struggle has undeniably been negatively impacted by the pandemic that ravaged Africa. On October 14, 2021, a World Bank statement confessed, “Now, for the first time in a generation, the expedition to end poverty has suffered a setback”.<sup>4</sup> Globally, extreme poverty rose in 2020 for the first period in over 20 years as the ravages of the COVID-19 pandemic, compounded by the forces of conflict and climate change, slowed the poverty reduction progress. Now, about 100 million additional people live in poverty due to the plague.<sup>5</sup>

In 2018, four out of five individuals below the global poverty line lived in rural areas. Half of the poor were children, while women represented most people experiencing poverty in most sections and among some age groups. About 70

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www5.worldbank.org/mdgs/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/overview#1>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/overview#1>

percent of the poor aged 15 and older worldwide have no primary education or basic schooling. Almost half of the people experiencing poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa live in five nations: Nigeria, Tanzania, Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Madagascar. To put that into perspective, it is estimated that these countries account for about 10 percent of the world's population. Additionally, in 2020 more than 40 percent of Africa's poor lived in economies distorted by conflict, fragility, and inequality, and those numbers are expected to rise to 67 percent in the next decade.<sup>6</sup>

Numerous people who had just escaped extreme poverty could be forced back into it by the convergence of COVID-19, conflict, and climate change. This has created another level of poverty, what the World Bank called the "new poor," this will probably be more urban than the extreme poverty related to the rural poor. In other words, this new poverty will more likely be related to informal services and manufacturing contexts, livelihoods dependent on very small-scale agriculture, choked urban sceneries, and work in the areas most affected by lockdowns and mobility restrictions. This will directly affect middle-income countries such as India and Nigeria, which studies have shown are home to about 80 percent of the innovative poor.<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, studies estimate climate change will drive 68 million to 132 million into poverty by 2030. Climate change is an acute threat to Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia nations — the countries where most global poor are. In several African countries, including Cameroon, Liberia, and the Central African Republic, many poor live in areas affected by conflict and face high flood exposure.

The latest research predicts that the effects of the present crisis will almost surely be felt in most nations through 2030. Under these circumstances, reducing the global poverty rate to less than 3 percent by 2030, previously at risk before the crisis, is beyond reach without swift, significant, and substantial policy action.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/overview#1>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/overview#1>

## Africa in the Past and the Present

Scholars greatly dispute the origin of the name “Africa.” Most believe it stems from words used by the Phoenicians, Greeks, and Romans. Significant instances include the Egyptian term *afru-ika*, meaning “Motherland”; the Greek term *aphrike*, meaning “without cold”; and the Latin term *aprica*, meaning “sunny”.<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, as the second-largest continent, Africa and all things African appear to be synonymous with poverty, corruption, hunger, war, disease, illiteracy, inequality, environmental degradation, and bad governance.

Other voices, in contrast, argue that the name ‘Africa’ is of relatively new coinage, and the continent had been known by other names and graced with a loftier reputation than present appearances seem to suggest. In the words of Edmund Burke, as cited by Causa et al. (2022), “A people will never look forward to posterity, who never look back to their ancestors.”

In Henry Cabot Lodge’s (1096) *The History of Nations, Vol. 18*, the author writes that the African nations are no new finding; Africa was not a newly discovered continent in the likes of America or Australia. While Europe was the home of itinerant hunter-gatherers, one of the greatest civilisations on record had started to work out its purpose on the banks of the Nile. Africa was not just an existing continent but a global leader in the arts and sciences. Gurowski (2005) asserts that many of the “architects, artists, merchants, mechanics, operatives, sailors, agriculturists...” of the ancient world originated from Egypt (Diop, 1974: xiv)<sup>9</sup> (one of the African countries). Weatherwax

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/africa-human-geography/>

<sup>9</sup> Cheik Anta Diop believes Ancient Egypt was a Negro civilization. He claims that the history of Black Africa will remain suspended in the air and cannot be written correctly until African historians dare to connect it with the history of Egypt. In particular, the study of languages, institutions, and so forth, cannot be treated properly; in a word, it will be impossible to build African humanities, a body of African human sciences, so long as that relationship does not appear legitimate. The African historian who evades the problem of Egypt is neither modest nor objective, nor unruffled; he is ignorant, cowardly, and neurotic. Imagine, if you can, the uncomfortable position of a western historian who was to write the history of Europe without referring to Greco-Latin



(1962) confirms this assertion by stating that “modern canons, flying missiles, ship propellers, automatic hammers, gas motors, meat cleavers, and even upholstery tack hammers were developed in Africa’s early use of power.”

In 1893, a renowned French geographer, Jacques Élisée Reclus (1994: 193-95), wrote that Africa had been a “great civilised power during the period in which savage tribes overrun Europe. Arithmetic, architecture, geometry, astrology, all the arts, and nearly all of today’s industries and sciences were known while the Greeks lived in caves. The pattern of our thinking originated in Africa.” One of the seven wonders of the Ancient is located in Egypt. The great Pyramids, which were the products of ancient African ingenuity manifested in the architectural and engineering skills displayed in their making, provided the platform for the origin of modern calculus. According to Paul Johnson (1978), many things were manufactured in Africa. He asserts that Africans did “manufacture and wear large quantities of fine jewelry, rings, diadems, earrings, anklets, bangles, and girdles featuring gold, silver,...feldspar, cornelium, amethyst, jasper, lapis-lazuli, garnets, and haemorites” (Johnson, 1978).

William Kelly and Henry Bessemer have traditionally been credited with modern carbon steel production. However, the Haya people of modern-day Tanzania had been producing high-grade carbon steel for at least two millennia prior to the advent of the Industrial Revolution. However, the flooding of Africa with cheap European steel ensured that the ingenious process employed by the Haya people of Africa to produce high-grade carbon steel was almost lost to time. Fortunately, anthropologist Peter Schmidt helped recreate the Hayan process for steel before those who knew it had passed from life and memory (Shore, 1983: 157-162). Additionally, African ingenuity was evident in the study and employment of herbs for medical applications and the construction of bridges, roads, and other such civil

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Antiquity and try to pass that off as a scientific approach. The ancient Egyptians were Negroes. The moral fruit of their civilization is to be counted among the assets of the Black world. Instead of presenting itself to history as an insolvent debtor, that Black world is the very initiator of the “western” civilization flaunted before our eyes today. Pythagorean mathematics, the theory of the four elements of Thales of Miletus, Epicurean materialism, Platonic idealism, Judaism, Islam, and modern science are rooted in Egyptian cosmogony and science.

engineering works. In his famous(or infamous) book *How Europe Under Developed Africa*, Walter Rodney (2011)notes that the “art of Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia was known to the rest of the world at an early date.”

Furthermore, Matthew Ashimolowo (2007: 51) asserts that in times past, Africa’s vast and sometimes legendary wealth had earned it the name of “the ‘Golden Continent.’” There were records of the wealth of Egypt, Ethiopia, Timbuktu, and South Africa from as far back as 2000 BCE to CE 1500” (Ashimolowo, 2007: 54-57). Prior to the recent discoveries of oil in a number of the African states, the continent had been reputed to be endowed with exceedingly vast mineral resources, including gold, silver, diamonds, cobalt, beryllium, chromium, manganese, vanadium, titanium, lithium, platinum, uranium, copper, zinc, phosphate, granite, quartzite, dolerite, marble, limestone, gypsum, bitumen, iron, lead, petroleum and so on (Ashimolowo, 2007: 58). Ashimolowo adds that “the wealth of Africa was so great” that European colonisers fought among themselves for possession of these vast stores of wealth. One such struggle led to the “Boer War when the British fought the Dutch settlers from 1899 to 1902 over who owned what in Africa” (58).

Unfortunately, despite all the facts and reality about Africa, the continent is still arguably the world’s poverty capital. The continent has become the dumping ground for Western consumerism. Ali Mazrui (n.d.) notes, “Africa is producing what they do not use and using what they do not produce.” What could have been the cause? Rodney (2011: 27-28) offers one opinion when he asserts that:

The question of who and what is responsible for African underdevelopment can be answered at two levels. Firstly, the answer is that the operation of the imperialist system bears major responsibility for African economic retardation by draining African wealth and making it impossible to develop the continent’s resources rapidly. Secondly, one has to deal with those who manipulated the system and those who are either agents or unwitting accomplices of the said system. The capitalists of Western Europe were the ones who actively extended their

exploitation from inside Europe to cover the whole of Africa. In recent times, they were joined, and to some extent replaced, by the capitalists from the United States, for many years now, even the workers of those metropolitan countries have benefited from the exploitation and underdevelopment of Africa.

Scholars of this school of thought believe colonialists should be held responsible for African destitution and underdevelopment. Others argue that failure in accountable leadership significantly affected Africa's backwardness. Former Liberian President, the late Charles Taylor, once said in an interview with BBC World Service (December 10, 1998), 'I am an African leader, and I can do as I wish.' Many Africans would probably refer to the lack of accountability of African heads of state if they were asked to explain the continent's political problems. The many presidents who have stolen and squandered vast sums of money, changed constitutions to perpetuate their rule, and ruined their countries for a few more years in power are too well known to need repeating. Although leaders with scrupulous respect for the law do not appear to advance in African politics quickly, this does not mean that all of the continent's political leaders lack integrity. Like other politicians globally, some have made terrible mistakes with the best intentions. Nevertheless, whether or not they are temperamentally inclined to be tyrants, Africa's heads of state have been surrounded by courtiers, relatives, and supporters whose interests they cannot ignore (Ellis and Gerrie Ter Haar, 2004: 141).

Lack of credible leadership has increasingly become the critical inhibitor to African development and, therefore, the primary cause of poverty and underdevelopment in the continent. Maxwell (2011) asserts, "Everything rises and falls on leadership." Therefore, if Africa will rise, the leadership development of African citizens must be prioritised. While affirming Acemoglu and Robinson's thoughts, Adeyemi (2022) asserts that the significant variation between developed and developing nations is political evolution. Developed nations have political and economic structures that are inclusive and offer opportunities for most people to create wealth. If Africa is to come out from crippling poverty, then leadership development needs to be prioritised because the political structures that are prevalent now must be renewed. Adeyemi (2022) further notes that cultivating leaders with exceptional

character and skills is critical to Africa's development. The ineptitude in leadership evident in most African nations is not only a problem of the political class who leech off government appointments; it also reflects a decayed leadership culture.

## **Biblical Framework for Breaking the Cycle of Poverty in Africa.**

The Evangelical perspective adopted by this study views the Bible as the word of God and the wisdom He decided to share with humanity (Deut. 29:29) and acknowledges that it is packed with strategies and wisdom for times such as these in Africa. In the following section, this study intends to offer a biblical framework for developing leadership and ending poverty in Africa from an analysis of Genesis 41:33-40.

### ***The Context of Genesis 41:33-40.***

Genesis is the title given to the first book of the Old Testament, and the name was taken from the first word in the book בְּרֵאשִׁית, which the Septuagint Γενεσις translates as 'Genesis.' The book, traditionally ascribed to Moses, provides significant insight for an understanding of the other books of the Bible. Kenneth Mathews (1996: 31) asserts that:

Genesis stands second to none in its importance for proclaiming 'the whole will of God.' It presents the literary and theological underpinning of the whole canonical Scripture. If we possessed a Bible without Genesis, we would have a 'house of cards without foundation or mortar. We cannot ensure the continuing fruit of our spiritual heritage if we do not give place to its roots.

The entire book reveals the beginnings of everything that God created, and it unfolds the record of the beginning of the world, human history, family, civilisation, and salvation. It is the story of God's purpose and plans for his creation. As the book of beginnings, Genesis sets the stage for the entire Bible. It reveals the person and the nature of God, the value and the dignity of human beings, the tragedy and the consequences of sin, and the promise and assurance of salvation (NIV, 2011: 2). The book is divided into six different

narratives (stories); the story of creation 1:1-2:3; Adam 2:4-5:32; Noah 6:1-11:32; Abraham 12:1-25:18; Isaac 25:19-28:9; Jacob 28:10-36:43; and Joseph 37:1-50:26 (NIV, 2011: 3-4).

Eventually, the passage under review falls into the last section, Joseph's story. Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers and unjustly imprisoned by his master. The primary lesson offered by the narrative of Joseph is that Yahweh is sovereign even over suffering and that suffering, no matter how seemingly unjust, can develop leaders with characters of steel. It is also instructive to note that Africa plays a prominent role in the Joseph narratives.

### **Exposition of Genesis 41:33-40.**

Text and Translation:

33 וְעַתָּה יִרְא יַרְעָה אִישׁ נָבוֹן וְחָכֵם וַיְשִׂיתָהּ עַל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם:

34 וַיַּעֲשֶׂה פַרְעֹה וַיִּפְקֹד פְּקֻדִים עַל־הָאָרֶץ וַחֲמֹשׁ אֶת־אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם בַּשָּׁבַע שָׁנֵי הַשָּׁבַע:

וַיִּקְבְּצוּ אֶת־כָּל־אֲכָל־הַשָּׂנִים הַטֹּבֹת הַבָּאֹת הָאֵלֶּה וַיִּצְבְּרוּ־בָר תַּחַת יַד־פַּרְעֹה אֶכָּל בְּעָרִים  
35 וַיִּשְׁמְרוּ:

וְהָיָה הָאֶכָּל לְפִקְדוֹן לְאֶרֶץ לְשָׁבַע שָׁנֵי הָרָעָב אֲשֶׁר תִּהְיֶינָה בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם וְלֹא־תִכְרַת הָאָרֶץ  
36 בְּרָעָב:

37 וַיִּיטֵב הַדָּבָר בְּעֵינֵי פַרְעֹה וּבְעֵינֵי כָּל־עַבְדָּיו:

38 וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶל־עַבְדָּיו הֲנִמְצָא כָּהָ אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר רֹחַ אֱלֹהִים בּוֹ:

39 וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶל־יוֹסֵף אַחֲרַי הוֹדִיעַ אֱלֹהִים אוֹתָךְ אֶת־כָּל־זֹאת אִין־נָבוֹן וְחָכֵם כָּמוֹךָ:

40 אֶתָּה תִּהְיֶה עַל־בֵּיתִי וְעַל־פִּיךָ יִשָּׁק כָּל־עַמִּי רַק הַכֶּסֶף אֶגְדֵּל מִמֶּךָ:

<sup>33</sup> Now then, let Pharaoh select a man *who is* discerning and wise, and let him set him over the land of Egypt. <sup>34</sup> Let Pharaoh do *this*, and let him appoint supervisors over the land, and let him take one-fifth from the land of Egypt in the seven years of abundance. <sup>35</sup> Then let them gather all the food of these coming good years and let them pile up grain under the hand of Pharaoh *for* food in the cities, and let them keep *it*. <sup>36</sup> Then the food shall be as a deposit

for the land for the seven years of the famine that will be in the land of Egypt, that the land will not perish on account of the famine.”<sup>37</sup> And the plan was good in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of all his servants.<sup>38</sup> Then Pharaoh said to his servants, “Can we find a man like this in whom is the spirit of God?”<sup>39</sup> Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Since God has made all of this known to you there is no one as discerning and wise as you.”<sup>40</sup> You shall be over my house, and to your word all my people shall submit. Only *with respect to* the throne will I be greater than you.”

### Textual Analysis

1. The text features Joseph as a budding visionary leader with gifts of both foretelling (Vv. 25-32) and forth-telling (Vv. 33-36). He speaks to the future and the present. For instance, he suggests, always speaking to the Pharaoh in the third person, that Pharaoh appoints an intelligent נָבִין and wise חָכָם man over the land of Egypt. Later, Pharaoh uses these two words to describe Joseph himself (v. 39). They also appear together in Deut. 4:6; Hos. 14:10; Prov. 10:13; 14:33; 16:21. The “intelligent and wise man” is “capable of planning and carrying through important economic measures” (Westmann, 1984).

It is not apparent that Joseph is pointing to himself here: “An intelligent and wise man — myself!” However, by using חָכָם, the narrator may be implying a bit of sarcasm. Pharaoh has already consulted with the best of Egypt’s חֲכָמִים (“cleverest” magicians, v. 8), and they failed him miserably. Let the Pharaoh not make the same mistake twice!

The second part of Joseph’s plan is that this individual will have a cadre of overseers throughout the land who will oversee the storing of grain in granaries during the years of prosperity. The store city would be where storage houses were built to stockpile various government supplies. In the OT, they are always mentioned in connection with the royal activity (Frick, 1977: 136, 168, 312). Knowing the unpredictable behaviour of people facing starvation and trying to cope with existence, Joseph urges that such supplies be protected from public access and possible looting.

Some scholars have suggested that this part of chapter 41 has some literary problems. In v. 33, Joseph recommends the appointment of a single official

over Egypt. However, in v. 34, he suggests a group of overseers. In v. 34b, Joseph urges Pharaoh to “take one-fifth of” (the literal translation of Mexi) the harvest. In contrast, the following verse urges the gathering of the entire harvest for Pharaoh (Skinner, 1910: 468-69). Such analysis is hardly correct. Joseph first suggests the appointment of one person (v. 33). who will be supported by a vast network of employees spread throughout the country (v. 34). As noted above, Mexi means dividing into five parts. Hence, verse 34 does not conflict with verse 35.

2. Application of תִּכְרַת *perish* (v. 36). Interestingly, the verb Joseph uses to describe Egypt’s future if Pharaoh disregards his advice is the Niphal of כָּרַת. One may be familiar with this verb in this stem, especially in cultic literature like Leviticus and Numbers, describing a person being “cut off” from the community for violating community standards. It had been used twice in Genesis (9:11; 17:14) to describe a potential exclusion from the community for either moral sins (9:11) or cultic sins (17:14). Joseph does not say that Egypt will “die (of starvation),” but rather, Egypt “will be cut off.” The consequence of rejecting Joseph’s counsel is judgment. This moves Joseph’s words to Pharaoh out of the options category and into a mandate.

3. The phrase וַיִּיטֵב הַדְּבָר בְּעֵינֵי פַרְעֹה וּבְעֵינֵי Pharaoh ... *found the suggestion acceptable*. Nowhere does Pharaoh respond to Joseph’s interpretation of his dream(s). One might have expected a statement from him between Joseph’s interpretation (vv. 25-32) and Joseph’s counsel (Vv. 33-36). It appears that he is as impressed, if not more, with Joseph’s counsel (Vv. 33-36) as with his interpretations (Vv. 25-32), and the advancement in political office he bestows on Joseph is stimulated by Joseph’s suggestion to reorganise the Egyptian bureaucracy. To Joseph’s credit, his contribution is interpreting Pharaoh’s dream, including the revelation of a forthcoming and frightening seven-year famine, and then some practical counsel on preparing for those seven years and thus avoiding mass starvation and death throughout the land. Joseph is a dream interpreter, sage, and counsellor.

4. The reference to אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים בּוֹ: –*a man in whom is God’s Spirit?* Pharaoh suggests that it is most unlikely that a nationwide search for a viable candidate for this ad hoc position be launched since a more competent occupant for that office than Joseph could not be found. The Spirit of God that

soared over the watery mass (1:2) rests upon and stands in Joseph (Wold, 1979:1-45).

The unwitting description of Yahweh in Pharaoh's speech should likely be read as a theological statement on understanding pneumatology. It demonstrates that Pharaoh understood Joseph's skills manifested via his rhetorical declarations: Joseph had no intrinsic ability to explain his practical insight and counsel. For Pharaoh, Joseph had been divinely equipped and gifted. That Pharaoh's exclamation follows Joseph's guidance rather than his clarification of the dream infers that Pharaoh identifies God's Spirit more with the former than with the latter. Therefore, on Pharaoh's lips, the expression "God's Spirit" denotes an "outstanding ability in the areas of political economy and statesmanship" (Westmann, 1984: 93).

5. The statement of Pharaoh אַתָּה תְהִיָּה עַל־בֵּיתִי *Pharaoh tells Joseph: You shall be over my palace.* The word בֵּיתִי means "my house," This is the third "house" in which Joseph has been placed. He has gone from Potiphar's house to the jailhouse to Pharaoh's house. Only one thing is withheld from Joseph's possession — Pharaoh's throne. Thus, Joseph's relationship with Pharaoh parallels his relationship with Potiphar. Potiphar placed Joseph over his house, except for his food (the narrator's version) and his wife (Joseph's version).

That Joseph was placed over Pharaoh's house may mean he was given control over the king's estates. Concerning the entire land of Egypt, Pharaoh says וְעַל־יְשָׁרְךָ כָּל־עַמִּי *and all my people shall follow your word.* A literal translation is: "And on your mouth, all my people shall kiss (you)." Some modern scholars have looked to the Egyptian language for clarification. One Egyptian idiom for "eat" was "kiss one's food." So understood, the phrase would be read as "According to your word shall my people eat" (Adcock, 1956: 383). Others have appealed to the Egyptian idiom, literally, "kiss the earth," meaning "render homage." So understood, the phrase would be read, "According to your commands shall all my people kiss (the earth in submission)" (Kitchen, 1957: 30). Redford (1978:113-19) avoids Egyptian analogies altogether and identifies פִּיךָ with שִׁוְךָ and by your command shall my people order themselves.



## **Inferences and Strategies for Breaking the Cycle of Poverty in Africa**

The passage offers several practical inferences for the African society and government to end the cycle of ravaging poverty that appears synonymous with Africa. As stated earlier, Africa is richly blessed with natural and human resources, which the continent must learn to utilise for its rehabilitation and growth. Here are some of the deductions from the initial analysis of the passage.

### ***Accept, recognise and identify one's challenges and seek solutions.***

One of the apparent truths revealed in the passage is the act of acceptance, recognition, and identification of reality by Pharaoh. He had an unusual dream, which he did not take as an ordinary nightmare; instead, he understood it for what it was: an impending doom awaiting the nation. Subsequently, he was restless until the solution was found. Africa and her leadership must be humble enough to accept that the continent is locked in a vicious cycle of extreme poverty, conflict, and underdevelopment. Accepting this fact should lead Africa's leaders to seek authentic, long-lasting solutions to Africa's perennial problems.

Kwame Nkrumah, a statesman of Ghanaian descent, delivered a speech in Addis Ababa on May 23, 1963<sup>10</sup> during the founding of the Organization of African Unity. He believed that the people of Africa supported the various fights for independence "because they believed that African governments could cure past ills in a way that could never be accomplished under colonial rule. If, therefore, now that we are independent, we allow the same conditions to exist that existed in colonial days, all the resentment which overthrew colonialism will be mobilised against us."

He believed that Africa had the resources to develop herself. He argued, "It is for us to marshal them in the active service of our people. Unless we do this by our concerted efforts, within the framework of our combined planning, we shall not progress at the tempo demanded by today's events and the mood of

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<sup>10</sup> <https://newafricanmagazine.com/3721/>

our people”.<sup>11</sup> Seeing the future of Africa 59 years ago, Nkrumah declared, “The symptoms of our troubles will grow, and the troubles themselves become chronic. It will then be too late for pan-African unity to secure stability and tranquillity in our labours for a continent of social justice and material well-being”.<sup>12</sup> This statement is now a reality. If Nkrumah were to be alive today, possibly, he would have confessed like Job (3:25, NIV) and claimed, “What I feared has come upon me; what I dreaded has happened to me.” Africa must accept the reality of her condition and realise that the former ways of doing things that have proven counter-productive in the past must be jettisoned for new solutions. Africa’s development is bolstered by its abundant natural and human resources, a growing population, and a diverse ecosystem. However, the continent faces poverty, political instability, and inadequate infrastructure. Africa needs to adapt and embrace new ideas and strategies to overcome these. Innovative solutions, such as renewable energy, improved education, and entrepreneurship, can help overcome these issues. Collaborating with other nations and international organisations can contribute to Africa’s growth. Effective governance and leadership are crucial for realising Africa’s potential. With the right strategies and commitment, Africa can realise its potential and improve its people’s well-being.

### ***The need to seek, identify and develop new leaders.***

According to Eckert and Rweyongoza (2015: 2; Ugwuegbu, 2001), the demand for effective leadership and systematic leadership development in Africa is growing more rapidly. A critical shortage of upcoming leaders is responsible for the underdevelopment of organisations in many African countries. They are underperforming compared to their potential and could improve their performance by strengthening their leadership. Pharaoh began to search for a solution from within by inviting Egypt’s magicians. Eventually, when they all failed, he still found one whose only apparent weakness was that he happened to be a prisoner. Against all odds and prejudices, Pharaoh was humble enough to listen despite Pharaoh’s status concerning Joseph. He allowed Joseph to do the one thing he did better than anyone he had encountered until that point – lead with courage, ingenuity, and wisdom.

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<sup>11</sup><https://newafricanmagazine.com/3721/>

<sup>12</sup><https://newafricanmagazine.com/3721/>

Africa is blessed and endowed with men and women such as Joseph (Moti, 2019:483-504). The old ingenuity and skill of ancient Africa still run true in the veins of this generation. Africa needs once again authentic leaders such as Pharaoh who will look beyond themselves and seek, find, identify, and partner with God in developing the next generation of African leaders who are born of God, forged like steel in character and disposition, tempered by suffering, and dignified by wisdom, when these leaders are ready for service rather than craving to be served, the Pharaohs of Africa who are blessed with an understanding of the times will use their influence to provide platforms of service for the Josephs of a new Africa.

***The need for trustworthy, visionary, and God-fearing leaders.***

Lack of vision kills and destroys (Taylor et al., 2013: 566-583). Joseph did not hide the truth from Pharaoh; instead, he told him to take urgent action, or the land would perish. Joseph told Pharaoh to look for intelligent and wise men who could be trusted with the public coffers for the gathering and tending to what belonged to the public. Without a doubt, Africa needs the kind of leadership characterised by a dependence on the leadership of the Spirit of God. If Africa's leadership issues had been adequately addressed, Africa would be on the verge of eradicating poverty and providing prosperity and a dignified existence for her people. Indeed, Africa is in particular need of trustworthy and visionary leadership.

***Electoral processes need to be open and accommodating for everyone.***

One thing that remedied Egypt's dire situation was the openness of Pharaoh to everyone. After all the magicians failed to interpret his dream, he listened to his cupbearer and Joseph without considering the relative status levels at play within this narrative. African ingenuity means that someone somewhere who perhaps has been excluded from the power structures of self-perpetuation by greed and corruption may possess the knowledge and skill necessary to transform Africa (Dare, 2013:11-18; Olu-Adeyemi, 2012: 167-171). Like Pharaoh, authentic African leaders must strive to break down such structures of exclusion and promote inclusion and equity in Africa's social, political and economic discourse. Only through a commitment to inclusiveness can African ingenuity be unleashed once again.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Africa is too blessed to be shattered and scattered. Africans must be reminded once again of their rich heritage and, therefore, find in such stories of African ingenuity, power, and glory the courage to confront the existential challenges that face the continent today. That all development must necessarily rise and fall on leadership should spur authentic African leaders to seek, find, recognise, and partner with God in developing new leaders for a new Africa. This study considers the Biblical framework from Genesis 41:33-40 provides essential principles for breaking Africa's poverty cycle, emphasising long-term planning, leadership, economic diversification, resource allocation, collaboration, education, and compassion. By applying these principles in a contemporary context, African nations can work towards sustainable development and poverty reduction. Indeed, African history demands that a new generation of African leaders detach themselves from the failed cultures and policies of the past and engage in the global struggle to eradicate poverty. Only when Africa becomes a model for prosperity and dignity can it be acknowledged that a new Africa has emerged to take its place at the forefront of global progress and development.

Therefore, breaking the cycle of poverty through a biblical framework, particularly referencing Genesis 41:33-40, offers valuable insights, principles and recommendations for development in Africa, which, when properly applied, will enhance Africa's development and liberate her from the shackles of poverty:

First, long-term planning and preparedness (Genesis 41:33-36). Joseph advises Pharaoh to appoint a discerning and wise man to oversee the collection and storage of food during the years of plenty. This principle emphasises the importance of planning for the future. Governments and organisations should invest in strategic planning and resource management in Africa. This includes building infrastructure, storing surplus food, and diversifying the economy during times of abundance to prepare for periods of scarcity. Infrastructure investment, including economic growth, trade, and transportation, is crucial for long-term planning and preparedness. It is also essential for efficient movement of goods and services, especially during scarcity periods. Promoting sustainable agriculture and supporting local farmers contributes to long-term

food security. Diversifying the economy by developing multiple sectors can cushion economic fluctuations and provide additional revenue during scarcity. Preparing for natural disasters like droughts and floods requires early warning systems and resilient infrastructure. Prioritising sustainable resource management ensures critical resources are available for future generations and reduces vulnerability to scarcity.

Second, leadership and governance (Genesis 41:37-38). Pharaoh recognises Joseph's qualities and appoints him to lead the efforts. This highlights the significance of wise and competent leadership. In Africa, effective governance and leadership are essential for sustainable development. Leaders who prioritise the welfare of their people, combat corruption, and make informed decisions can contribute to poverty reduction. Wise and competent leadership, as demonstrated in Genesis 41:37-38, is essential for sustainable development in Africa. Effective governance and leadership that prioritise the welfare of the people, combat corruption, make informed decisions, and promote inclusive and long-term development can contribute to poverty reduction, economic growth, and improved living standards for the continent's population. Africa's potential for growth and progress depends significantly on the qualities and actions of its leaders and their commitment to the well-being of its people.

Third, resource allocation (Genesis 41:49-53). Joseph manages the distribution of resources to ensure they reach those in need. In the African context, equitable distribution of resources, access to education, healthcare, and social safety nets can play a crucial role in breaking the cycle of poverty. The equitable distribution of resources and access to education, healthcare, and social safety nets are essential elements in the fight against poverty in Africa. Effective resource allocation, good governance, and policies addressing the root causes of poverty can contribute to breaking the cycle of poverty and fostering sustainable development in the continent. Joseph's example of managing resources during times of abundance and scarcity in Genesis 41 is a valuable lesson on the importance of efficient and equitable resource allocation to meet the population's needs.

Fourth, an international collaboration (Genesis 41:54-57). The famine affected Egypt and the surrounding nations. This encourages cooperation and trade

during times of crisis. The importance of international collaboration, trade, and regional partnerships in addressing everyday challenges like food scarcity and economic instability. African nations can benefit from working with neighbouring countries and international organisations to build resilience, ensure food security, and promote economic stability during difficult times. Africa can better address the continent's complex poverty and development issues by fostering cooperation and implementing effective policies.

Fifth, education and skills development (Genesis 41:38-45). Joseph's appointment was based on his wisdom, knowledge, and administrative skills. This underlines the importance of education and skill development. In modern Africa, investing in education and skill training can empower individuals and communities to escape the cycle of poverty by increasing their employability and entrepreneurial opportunities. Education is crucial to modern workforce development, promoting employability, productivity, and economic growth. It equips individuals with the necessary knowledge, skills, and capabilities, fostering entrepreneurship and innovation. Higher education levels often lead to higher-income jobs, improving earning potential and enabling individuals to support their families and invest in their communities. Education is linked to poverty reduction, as a well-educated population is more likely to escape poverty, leading to improved living standards, better health outcomes, and reduced dependence on social safety nets. Education empowers women and promotes gender equality, allowing them to participate more fully in economic activities. Lifelong learning and skill development are essential for sustainable poverty reduction.

Sixth, compassion and welfare (Genesis 41:55). The famine brings excellent suffering, and people come to Pharaoh for help. This emphasises the moral responsibility of leaders to care for the vulnerable. African governments and organisations can implement social welfare programs to support vulnerable populations, such as the elderly, disabled, and families in need. These programs can include cash transfers, food distribution, and other forms of social support. Investing in healthcare infrastructure, improving access to services, and ensuring affordability can protect the population's well-being during crises and reduce the financial burden of health emergencies. Implementing poverty reduction policies, prioritising vulnerable communities, and promoting education about social welfare programs are essential.

Collaboration with NGOs and community-based organisations can enhance the impact of welfare efforts. Ensuring transparency, accountability, and good governance in welfare program management is crucial to prevent corruption and ensure resources reach those in need.

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