

*Effect of the Correction of the African Map: Examining the Conceptual Imperative to Reframe its
Position within the Sustainable Development Discourse*

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Abstract

This paper critically examines the effect of correction of the African map on the continent's position within the Sustainable Development discourse. The paper observes that the Resolution by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) to correct the world map in order to accurately display Africa's size is key towards acknowledging and redressing the disproportionate geographic representations that have had a significant impact on the continent's development. In particular, the paper observes that the inaccurate representation of Africa's true size has had educational, cultural, geopolitical and socioeconomic effects thus undermining Africa's position within the Sustainable Development discourse. As a result, the paper discusses how correction of the African map can reframe and strengthen the continent's position within the Sustainable Development discourse.

1.0 Introduction

Sustainable Development provides an effective approach towards peace and prosperity by taking into account the needs of both humanity and nature and present and future generations. Sustainable Development has been described as a key ideal and principle that focuses on meeting human development goals and needs while at the same time ensuring the ability of nature to provide the natural resources and ecosystem services upon which the economy and society depends¹. In particular, Sustainable Development has been defined as development that meets the needs of the present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs². The United Nations observes that Sustainable Development envisions how we must live today if we want to ensure a better tomorrow, by meeting present needs without compromising the chances of future generations to meet their needs³.

In particular, promoting Sustainable Development is a key agenda towards ensuring harmony between humanity and nature in Africa. It has been observed that Sustainable Development in Africa refers to the approach of fostering economic growth while ensuring environmental protection and social equity across the continent⁴. However, despite continued socio-economic

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¹ Mensah. J., 'Sustainable Development: Meaning, history, principles, pillars, and implications for human action: Literature review' *Cogent Social Sciences*, Volume 5, Issue 1

² World Commission on Environment and Development., 'Our Common Future.' Oxford, (Oxford University Press, 1987)

³ United Nations., 'Sustainable Development' Available at <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2023/08/what-is-sustainable-development/> (Accessed on 14/09/2026)

⁴ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization., 'Sustainable Development in Africa' Available at <https://www.unesco.org/en/query-list/s/sustainable-development-africa#term-definition> (Accessed on 14/09/2026)

growth in several parts of Africa, progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) remains uneven⁵. It has been observed that the current pace of progress in Africa is insufficient to achieve the global SDGs by 2030⁶. For instance, challenges such as poverty, inequality, hunger, food insecurity, drought, wars and conflicts, water scarcity, climate change, poor governance and unemployment contribute to underdevelopment in Africa⁷. In light of these concerns, it has become necessary to strengthen the pursuit of Sustainable Development for people and planet in Africa. It has been correctly observed that Africa possesses a rich reservoir of cultures, resources, human capital and resilience that can be harnessed in order to strengthen the continent's position in the Sustainable Development discourse⁸.

This paper critically examines the effect of correction of the African map on the continent's position within the Sustainable Development discourse. The paper observes that the Resolution by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) to correct the world map in order to accurately display Africa's size is key towards acknowledging and redressing the disproportionate geographic representations that have had a significant impact on the continent's development. In particular, the paper observes that the inaccurate representation of Africa's true size has had educational, cultural, geopolitical and socioeconomic effects thus undermining Africa's position within the Sustainable Development discourse. As a result, the paper discusses how correction of the African map can reframe and strengthen the continent's position within the Sustainable Development discourse.

2.0 Correction of the African Map and its Impact on the Continent's Position within the Sustainable Development Discourse

UNGA recently adopted a *Resolution*⁹ on 4th September 2026 to promote map projections that more accurately reflect the true size of continents especially Africa. The UNGA Resolution recognizes that certain cartographic distortions of sizes of continents, inherited from history, have

⁵ United Nations Development Programme., '2026 Africa Sustainable Development Report' Available at <https://www.undp.org/africa/publications/2026-africa-sustainable-development-report> (Accessed on 14/09/2026)

⁶ United Nations Economic Commission for Africa., '2025 Africa sustainable development report' Available at <https://www.uneca.org/2025-africa-sustainable-development-report> (Accessed on 14/09/2026)

⁷ African Development Bank., 'The way Forward to Achieving Sustainable Development in Africa.' Available at https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Publications/ADR15_chapter_8.pdf (Accessed on 14/09/2026)

⁸ AUDA-NEPAD., 'Unleashing Africa's Potential: A Path to Sustainable Development' Available at <https://www.nepad.org/blog/unleashing-africas-potential-path-sustainable-development> (Accessed on 14/09/2026)

⁹ United Nations General Assembly., 'Correct the map": rebalancing global cartographic representation and promoting equitable representation of the world's regions, particularly Africa' A/80/L.104., Available at https://docs.un.org/en/A/80/L.104?_gl=1*11fol9s*_gcl_au*NjE3MDg3MzMzMjU0ODgyNzU0OQ..*_g_a*MjAxODM2NjgyNC4xNzQzNTU2MjMw*_ga_S5EKZKSB78*_czE3ODg4MjY4NTkkbzEkZzEkdDE3ODg4MzA0MjgkajU5JGwwJGgw (Accessed on 14/09/2026)

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contributed to their incorrect perceptions, leading in particular to a symbolic minimization of Africa in collective imaginations and knowledge systems¹⁰. In particular, the Resolution notes that the Mercator projection, which was designed in the 16th century for navigational purposes, remains the widely used world map in educational, media, digital and official materials, despite its considerable distortion of landmasses especially Africa¹¹. In order to address the distortion of landmasses under the Mercator projection, the UNGA Resolution declares that the Equal Earth cartographic projection offers a more accurate representation of the sizes of continental landmasses and consequently, it is a relevant option for improving the accuracy of the cartographic representation of the world especially the African continent¹². In addition, the Resolution encourages states, international organizations and other relevant entities to adopt, disseminate and use the Equal Earth cartographic projection and equal area map projection methods, which are more accurate in reproducing the actual areas of the continents, where their sizes are critical¹³. The Resolution also encourages development of international standards aimed at ensuring more accurate representation of sizes of continents in digital and printed mapping tools¹⁴. Further, the UNGA Resolution urges technology companies and digital actors, as appropriate, to promote transparent and inclusive practices in the representation of continental sizes, taking into account applicable principles, standards and guidelines of the United Nations and international law¹⁵. The UNGA Resolution also urges member states to promote the use of cartographic representations that more accurately reflect continental sizes and geographical realities and integrate the critical teaching of cartography into school curricula to raise awareness of more accurate continental sizes¹⁶.

Adoption of the UNGA Resolution is an important development towards reframing Africa's position within the Sustainable Development discourse. It has been observed that the Resolution challenges the Mercator projection, a map designed for European sailors in the 16th century which has, over generations, distorted not only the geography but perceptions of Africa¹⁷. The Mercator projection shrinks the true size of Africa. For example, it has been observed that Greenland often appears as big as Africa on a Mercator map, when in reality Africa is nearly 14 times larger¹⁸. In addition, many countries in the North Pole such as Russia and Canada look comparable in size

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Ibid

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ United Nations General Assembly., 'Correct the map': rebalancing global cartographic representation and promoting equitable representation of the world's regions, particularly Africa' A/80/L.104., Op Cit

¹⁷ United Nations., 'Victory for Africa as UN Votes on Resolution to "Correct the Map"., Available at <https://www.un.org/osaa/en/news/victory-africa-un-votes-resolution-correct-map> (Accessed on 14/09/2026)

¹⁸ The True Size of Africa., Available at <https://www.reuters.com/graphics/AFRICA-MAP/lgpdagrdyvo/> (Accessed on 14/09/2026)

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to Africa when they are in fact much smaller in land mass¹⁹. Under the Mercator projection, Northern Europe and North America are magnified in comparison to equatorial regions with landmasses appearing increasingly enlarged the farther they are from the Equator²⁰. The UNGA Resolution notes that distortion of landmasses under the Mercator projection contributes to minimizing the perceived sizes of Africa, Latin America and South Asia, and perpetuating an unbalanced view of the world²¹.

The Mercator map therefore distorts the true size of continents and countries since it was designed to accommodate for the curvature of the Earth by making countries near the equator seem smaller than they are, with countries nearer the poles appearing larger²². It has been observed that the distortion of the true sizes of continents under the Mercator projection leads to the development needs and potential for countries near the equator to be minimised²³. In particular, by shrinking Africa's true size, the Mercator projection has weakened Africa's position within the Sustainable Development discourse. For instance, it has been observed that inaccurate representation of continental sizes contributes to an unfair view of the extent of socioeconomic realities, infrastructure needs, development potential and prosperity in Africa and the Southern regions, and that this distortion can fuel prejudices and discrimination in the environmental, geopolitical and security fields²⁴. According to the UNGA Resolution, distortions of Africa and other continental sizes under the Mercator projection has cognitive, educational, cultural, geopolitical and socioeconomic impacts and constitute historical biases that undermine the development needs of equatorial regions²⁵. In particular, the historical distortion of Africa's true size has led to incorrect perceptions of the continent and its marginalization in collective imaginations and knowledge systems²⁶.

Africa's position within the Sustainable Development discourse has therefore been undermined for many centuries due to distortion of the continent's true size under the Mercator projection. The use of the Mercator projection has significantly shaped international relations and power dynamics by minimising the physical presence of Africa and the Global South and

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ United Nations., 'UN tells the world: Stop making Africa look small' Available at <https://news.un.org/en/story/2026/09/1168284> (Accessed on 14/09/2026)

²¹ United Nations General Assembly., 'Correct the map': rebalancing global cartographic representation and promoting equitable representation of the world's regions, particularly Africa' A/80/L.104., Op Cit

²² Mukhwana. T., & Muia. W., 'UN votes to adopt new world map to reflect Africa's true size' Available at <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/ce30vp55dnlo> (Accessed on 14/09/2026)

²³ Ibid

²⁴ United Nations General Assembly., 'Correct the map': rebalancing global cartographic representation and promoting equitable representation of the world's regions, particularly Africa' A/80/L.104., Op Cit

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Ibid

visually inflating the size of the Global North²⁷. This distortion has perpetuated injustices and reinforced systemic biases in international trade, development priorities and educational frameworks with negative impacts on Sustainable Development in Africa and the Global South²⁸. For example, the Mercator projection has downplayed Africa's vast resources including the continent's land and natural capital thus misrepresenting the continent's development potential, needs and priorities²⁹. Adoption of the UNGA Resolution to correct the African map is therefore a pivotal moment towards reframing Africa's position within the Sustainable Development discourse.

3.0 Implementing the United Nations General Assembly Resolution towards Reframing Africa's Position within the Sustainable Development Discourse

Adoption of the UNGA Resolution which urges states to move away from the Mercator projection and adopt, disseminate and use the Equal Earth cartographic projection and equal area map projection methods is a vital step towards redefining Africa's position within the Sustainable Development discourse. It has been observed that the UNGA Resolution which was spearheaded by Togo on behalf of the African Union, redresses nearly 450 years of cartographic injustice by recognizing the distortion of the world especially Africa as mapped through the Mercator projection³⁰. Correction of the African map is critical towards reshaping the continent's position within the Sustainable Development agenda since maps play a key role in influencing the world not only through their representation of the size of continents and countries, but also through the kinds of information they emphasize in education systems, the technologies they mobilize, the businesses and investment opportunities they promote, and the borders they draw³¹.

It has been observed that correction of the African map is not merely a technical adjustment. It is a matter of justice, fairness and equity since it restores the continent's rightful place in global imagination and power dynamics and redresses the wrong story that has been told about the continent in education systems, global relations and the media³². Correction of the African map is key towards empowering both present and future generations in Africa to have a positive outlook on the continent and reclaim its rightful position within the Sustainable Development agenda. The UNGA Resolution urging states to adopt, disseminate and use the Equal Earth cartographic projection is therefore key in bolstering Africa's voice in global geopolitics and

²⁷ UN votes to adopt new world map that shows Africa's true scale., Available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2026/sep/04/un-vote-world-map-mercator-equal-earth-africa> (Accessed on 14/09/2026)

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ Mukhwana. T., & Muia. W., 'UN votes to adopt new world map to reflect Africa's true size' Op Cit

³⁰ Correcting the map: How a UN resolution marks a step toward decolonizing world maps., Available at <https://theconversation.com/correcting-the-map-how-a-un-resolution-marks-a-step-toward-decolonizing-world-maps-291348> (Accessed on 15/09/2026)

³¹ Ibid

³² Correct the Map., Available at <https://www.speakupafrika.org/program/correct-the-map/> (Accessed on 15/09/2026)

relations since it has geographical, educational, cognitive, symbolic and cultural significance³³. According to the UNGA Resolution, correcting cartographic distortions of continental sizes under the Mercator projection is an act of cognitive justice and memorial reparation since it promotes accurate geographical knowledge, as well as historical truth, education and awareness-raising, and promotes mutual understanding among all people and nations³⁴. Due to the negative cognitive, educational, cultural, geopolitical and socioeconomic impacts that the Mercator projection has had on the Global South, correction of the African map is key towards promoting recognition, justice, equity and development in the continent³⁵.

It is therefore necessary to implement the UNGA Resolution in order to correct the African map for justice, equity, fairness and development. In particular, the United Nations urges governments, schools, international organizations and technology companies to use the Equal Earth cartographic projection in order to capture a true and balanced view of the world³⁶. In particular, there is need for states to promote the use of maps that more accurately reflect continental sizes with emphasis on the Equal Earth cartographic projection. In addition, states have been urged to integrate the critical and accurate teaching of cartography into school curricula in order to raise awareness and consciousness of more accurate continental sizes³⁷. In addition, due to the vital role that technology plays in the modern era, there is need for technology companies to promote more accurate cartographic representations, including the Equal Earth cartographic projection, on technology platforms and digital tools in order to ensure justice, equity and fairness in the digital era³⁸. International organizations including the United Nations can also support the development of international standards and guidelines aimed at ensuring more accurate representation of sizes of continents in digital and printed mapping tools³⁹. Promoting international cooperation including through North-South, South-South, and triangular cooperation is also key towards adopting, disseminating and using the Equal Earth cartographic projection and building the capacity of Africa and the Global South in the field of mapping and geospatial information⁴⁰.

³³ Shenai. D., 'Hello Equal Earth: what the UN's new world map will change' Available at <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-026-02820-x> (Accessed on 15/09/2026)

³⁴ United Nations General Assembly., 'Correct the map": rebalancing global cartographic representation and promoting equitable representation of the world's regions, particularly Africa' A/80/L.104., Op Cit

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ United Nations., 'Victory for Africa as UN Votes on Resolution to "Correct the Map" Op Cit

³⁷ United Nations General Assembly., 'Correct the map": rebalancing global cartographic representation and promoting equitable representation of the world's regions, particularly Africa' A/80/L.104., Op Cit

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ United Nations General Assembly., 'Correct the map": rebalancing global cartographic representation and promoting equitable representation of the world's regions, particularly Africa' A/80/L.104., Op Cit

⁴⁰ Ibid

4.0 Conclusion

Correction of the African map is a global milestone towards redressing the injustices, discrimination, prejudices and inequalities caused by distortion of the continent's size under the Mercator projection. This move is key towards reframing Africa's position within the Sustainable Development discourse due to its geographical, educational, cognitive, symbolic, socioeconomic and cultural significance⁴¹. It is therefore imperative for states, international organizations, schools, technology companies and other actors to implement the UNGA Resolution by adopting, disseminating and using the Equal Earth cartographic projection and other equal area map projection methods in order to capture true and accurate sizes of continents especially Africa for justice, equity, fairness and inclusivity in the Sustainable Development discourse.

⁴¹ Shenai. D., 'Hello Equal Earth: what the UN's new world map will change' Op Cit

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