



Taught by Dr. Chris A. Foreman
for students of *Come & See Africa*

What is the most fundamental economic consideration in the majority of African societies? The distribution of economic resources so that all persons may have their minimum needs met, or at least they may survive. This distribution is the African social security system.

What is the one most fundamental economic consideration in Western society? The accumulation of capital and wealth: capitalism.

USE OF RESOURCES

General Practices:

1. The financial need that occurs first has first claim on the available resources.
2. Resources are to be used, not hoarded.
3. Money is to be spent before friends or relatives ask to “borrow it”.
4. If something is not being actively used, it is considered to be “available”.
5. Africans are very sensitive and alert to the needs of others and are quite ready to share their resources.
6. The fact that most people are over-extended financially produces profound effects on society.

The social use of resources:

7. Being involved financially and materially with friends and relatives is a very important element of social interaction.
- 7W. Westerners distrust friendships that regularly include financial or material exchanges.
8. Africans assist their friends who are in financial need as a form of investment for those future times when they themselves might have needs. This arrangement constitutes a virtual banking or savings system.
9. The financial implications of friendship and solidarity go beyond immediate friends to include secondary relationships.
10. Not all Africans follow the normal and accepted financial principles of the sharing that society dictates, but people who do not do so pay a very heavy social price.
11. Many people buy meals at canteens set up on many street corners, outside of factory gates, and at other convenient locations.
12. Africans readily share space and things but are possessive of knowledge.
- 12W. Westerners readily share their knowledge but are possessive of things and space.

The role of recipients

13. The person requesting a thing or money from a friend or relative has a dominant role in determining whether his or her need is greater than that of the potential donor, and consequently, of whether or not the potential donor should donate.
- 13W. To a Westerner if a person has a virtual right to take someone else’s good, or to unilaterally change the designation of spending of entrusted funds, it amounts to socially sanctioned theft.
14. A person to whom money or other resource is entrusted has a major say in how that money or resource will be used.
- 14W. The designation of how funds or other resources are to be used that is made by the provider must be followed by the recipient or trustee. Only if the provider agrees, and before the resources are used or spent, may the resources be used for another purpose.
15. People who have many possessions or a “surplus” of money are prejudged to be selfish egoists who are insensible to the needs of others.

Budgeting and accounting

16. Precision is to be avoided in accounting as it shows the lack of a generous spirit. Most Africans practice a “one pocket” system rather than a “two pocket” system”.

16W. Precision is essential in accounting; laxity, leniency, permissiveness or flexibility will in the long run be perilous for the individuals and for society at large.

17. Budgeting, in a formal accounting sense, is not an accepted way of handling personal finances.

18. Africans do not budget for special events; rather, they spend as much money and other resources as they can marshal for each one.

19. Personal spending is quite categorized.

20. Living beyond one’s means and income is accepted as normal, and is almost universally practiced.

21. When someone goes on an errand to make a purchase for another, if he is given a bill or coin that is greater than the amount of the purchase, the person running the errand will normally keep the change unless asked for it.

21W. A Westerner expects that if a person makes a purchase for him, any change is considered to belonging to the Westerner, and is automatically required to be returned unless he expressly says “keep the change”.

Other patterns of resource use

22. Many African institutions are well-supported financially.

23. Fund raising is frequently done on a neighborhood basis for neighborhood financial needs.

24. Many products are purchased in very small amounts even though the unit cost is much higher than for purchases in larger quantities.

FRIENDSHIP

25. A network of friends is a network of resources.

25W. Disinterested friendship is the ideal in the West. Any friendship that includes material considerations is suspect.

26. People constantly work at maintaining and enlarging their network of friends.

27. Friendships and other relationships are built and maintained with gifts.

28. Visiting is concentrated on friends and acquaintances who are actively part of a person’s economic network.

29. Most networking is done horizontally or “up” and seldom “down” socially or economically.

Etiquette

30. Africans are more hospitable than charitable.

30W. Westerners are more charitable than hospitable.

31. Compliments are frequently given indirectly in the form of requests for gifts or loans and are often formulated as questions.

31W. Westerners are not accustomed to compliments being formulated as requests, and easily misinterpret them and take offense.

32. If a Westerner has a misunderstanding about finances with an African friend, it is virtually impossible to straighten it out directly with the offended individual.

33. Africans prefer to apologize symbolically, rather than verbally, when they have made a mistake or feel personal shame.

34. Many Africans in need are very discreet about asking for assistance, only hinting at their needs.

35. Africans find security in ambiguous arrangements, plans, and speech.

35W. Westerners find security in clearly defined relationships, arrangements, plans, and speech.

THE ROLE OF SOLIDARITY

36. Showing solidarity with friends at such times as funerals, feast days, and weddings is extremely important. This is primarily done by attendance at these events and by contributing financially.

37. A great many economic needs in Africa are met or alleviated through the solidarity and generosity of relatives and friends.

37W. Westerners greatly admire the high degree of solidarity and generosity they see between African friends and relatives, but they find it difficult to become full economic participants in the society.

38. When people ask for help, they will usually be content with being given a part (sometimes even a small part) of what they are asking for.

39. Offers or exchanges of gifts, food or hospitality may involve unspoken obligations; likewise failing to accept gifts, food or hospitality may have negative implications.

40. Giving preference to the employment of kin over non-kin is a normal expression of family responsibility and solidarity.

41. In many rural communities, and less so in urban neighborhoods, people are afraid to accumulate more goods, or property than their neighbors and kin, for fear of creating jealousy which may lead to reprisals being carried out against them on an occult level.

42. Money "corrupted" is not expected to be paid back; accountability is not enforced; restitution is not practiced.

44. A major function of government is to provide money and other resources to those members of society who are in power or have a close relationship to those in power.

45. An unjust settlement of a dispute is better than an offended complainant.

45W. For the Westerner settlements need to be based on a fair interpretation of the terms of the relevant law or contract. Personal feelings or other subjective considerations should be subordinated to objective facts.

SOCIETY AND PEOPLE OF MEANS

46. The place in society assigned to people who are perceived to have ample financial resources is that of givers and/or loaners and not of receivers.

47. People typically receive satisfaction from being asked for financial help, whether or not they are disposed to provide it.

47W. Westerners are largely annoyed by requests for help, and find it hard even to imagine receiving enjoyment from being solicited, or from taking the role of patron.

48. The reputation of people of means is enhanced through frequent visits of their clients.

48W. Foreigners are typically frustrated and inconvenienced by frequent, uninvited visits of African friends and acquaintances.

49. Leaders in society (religious, political and business) are expected to be people who have a retinue of followers, who distribute resources and in other ways provide for their followers when they have needs. They also ideally have commanding personalities.

50. A person or organization with financial means is basically expected to pay a higher price or make a larger contribution to individuals or society than is a poor person or organization.

51. Success in life is attained through personal relationships, through connections with people in positions of power and authority and through spiritual means.

51W. Success in life is attained through ability, hard work, education, and delayed gratification, established within the framework of a just society.

52. People who are without ample financial resources typically seek to have a long-term client relationship with as many people, patrons, as possible from among those with resources.

53. Financial matters involve a great amount of strategizing and gamesmanship.

54. When a person has a financial need the most appropriate and likely candidate is mentally selected and then approached for help.

55. People with moderate to extensive means can be divided into the “hidiers” and the “revealers”.

56. The only means of accumulating savings that is available to many employees are cash advances from their employers against future work.

LOANS AND DEBTS

57. When an African has a need for money or some good, the normal and acceptable way to get it is to ask for it from a relative, friend, or acquaintance who has it.

57W. Asking someone for money or some material object is considered impolite or an imposition. People are expected to take care of their own personal needs.

58. Old debts are forgotten and are not expected to be repaid, neither by debtor nor by the lender.
59. There is a strong sense in which people want to be owed money by their friends.
60. There is some sense in which people want to be without money so that they can more easily refuse a request for a loan.
61. The unwritten rules governing the loaning and sharing of money and goods, and the extreme social pressure on individuals to conform to these rules or face sanctions, serve as leveling mechanisms to keep people from getting ahead of others.
62. The value of a development project is not to be measured by its long-term success.
63. A loan is eligible to be repaid when the creditor's need becomes greater than the debtor's need.
64. The repayment of loans is a subjective matter involving the weighing of economic, social and time factors.
- 64W. For a Westerner the repayment of a loan is due objectively on the terms agreed upon when the loan was made.
65. The collection of debts is primarily the responsibility of creditors, not of borrowers to volunteer payments.
- 65W. The repayment of loans and the payments of rents are responsibilities of borrowers and renters.
66. Many people live with outstanding debts that they never expect to repay.
67. The risk of a loan not being paid back is largely assumed by the lender.
- 67W. For a Westerner the borrower assumes the risk of repaying a loan.
68. The use of the word "loan" when requesting money from someone is often a euphemism for "gift".
69. Loans of goods or things are tantamount to gifts.
70. The response, "no" to a request for money, a loan or a material object, is understood as an insult, indifference to need, a lack of respect, or a sign of rejection of the petitioner.
- 70W. The simple response "no" is meant to tell the petitioner in the most economic terms possible that the request is denied, for whatever reason.

BUSINESS MATTERS

Role of relationships

71. Before attempting to do business with an African, it is essential to establish at least minimal personal basis for carrying on the transaction.
72. The relationship between a seller and buyer may well affect the price asked and the price paid for a good or a service.
73. Bargaining for a better deal in any transaction involves important social as well as economic factors.
74. Employers are expected by society and even by governments to provide advances to employees in certain family situations for certain holidays.

Negotiating

75. Final payment is final settlement; any subsequent business or adjustment is considered to be a new transaction.

76. Any financial matter is subject to renegotiation until final settlement, that is, until final payment is offered and accepted.

77. A request for money from a government functionary or other provider of services may be a request for a “pre-tip” rather than for a bribe.

Business strategies

78. Many people will choose a sure and immediate benefit over a potentially larger long-term benefit. This is the spirit of “just getting by”.

79. People tend to accept immediate, cheap, or even quasi-legal solutions when dealing with business matters, rather than take care of matters properly, deal with technicalities or delays, or incur additional expenses.

80. When an occasion provides the opportunity to make a large profit, it is typically seized upon. There is little concept of a reasonable, or just, or ethical price, or of price gouging; rather, the accepted practice is to charge whatever the buyer will pay.

81. Inaction or delay in carrying out a matter may constitute a well-considered, un verbalized message, and not just be the result of mere inaction, inertia, or delay caused by unforeseen events.

82. Once money is exchanged in a business transaction there is very limited recourse in such matters as mistakes, damaged merchandise, breakdown, and not meeting contractual stipulations.

83. When a problem is encountered in trying to complete or carry through with a transaction involving finances or other matters, the problem will seldom be clearly admitted at the outset, but will typically only be revealed over a period of time.

83W. Westerners find it very frustrating to have Africans appear to be unclear, indirect and uninformative.

84. When a customer is told that an ordered article or service will be ready on a specified time or date, it is unlikely to be ready at that time.

84W. The Western customer expects to be given a reasonable date, and that barring extenuating or unusual circumstances, the thing or service will be ready as specified. Consequently, when it is not, the Westerner considers the service provider to be unreliable or even untrustworthy.

85. Admissions of a personal lack of knowledge or resources, or admissions of personal shortcomings are considered to show weakness and should be avoided if at all possible.

86. The amount shown on a receipt (facture) may not correspond with the amount paid for goods or services.

87. When a problem is encountered in trying to complete or carry through with a transaction involving finances or other matters, the problem will seldom be clearly admitted at the outset, but will typically only be revealed over a period of time.

88. Having the correct amount of money for a business transaction is the responsibility of the buyer. It is not the seller's responsibility to provide change.

89. When giving a tip to several people the donor should apportion it out. Giving a lump sum to one person expecting him to divvy it up with the others is unfair and unsatisfactory.

90. People of all cultures act logically unless they are mentally retarded or mentally disturbed.