African leaders think aid cuts could break old habits of dependency. By Jesse Chase-Lubitz, Devex Invested, 15 July 2025

As the initial shock of the official development assistance cuts from the U.S. and other major donors subsides, new conversations are emerging on how to fill the gaps.

On the African continent, while many in the aid sector responded with alarm, some leaders and analysts are **now calling this moment "a necessary pain,"** writes my colleague Ayenat Mersie. They argue that the deepening crisis could force governments to break old habits of dependency and begin charting their own course.

"There has been an aid trap," one Somali official tells Ayenat, describing a system where foreign funding became a kind of "opium." Others, such as former Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta, mocked the handwringing over U.S. cuts, saying it's time African countries stopped crying over decisions made in Washington and started asking: "What are we going to do to help ourselves?"

Still, **the effects of the cuts are being felt most acutely in sub-Saharan Africa**, where countries such as Ethiopia, Nigeria, South Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo have long relied on aid flows to fund everything from health care to disaster relief. About 54% of Malawi's health budget comes from foreign sources.

From Ethiopia's new domestic taxes to Somalia's efforts to tap financing from Persian Gulf States and broaden the tax base, governments are scrambling to fill this gap. But while some moves may yield results, many are politically risky or simply insufficient in the long term.

Across the continent, finance ministers are now under pressure to mobilize more of their countries' own resources — and to finally address deep-rooted issues that aid has long papered over, from illicit financial flows to overreliance on external sources.

This reaction seems to be a trend. From multilateral development banks to international funds, the development world is accepting its fate — and many people are seeing a silver lining.