

# From Nkrumah to NEPAD and Beyond: Has Anything Changed?

by

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## Introduction

Kwame Nkrumah's foresight lay in his understanding that historical and global patterns of exploitation would not be easily broken in post-independence Africa. Given that understanding of Africa's situation, many of his policies, from domestic development plans to Pan-Africanism, were intended to gain not only political but, most importantly, economic independence for Ghana and the continent. These views were related to Africa's position in the global economy and, in particular, its economic ties to the West. As such, a second aspect of that vision was the ability of the newly independent continent to de-link itself from past colonial masters and new neo-colonial ones. A third related and most significant component was the strength and feasibility of a unified continent. The complexity, wealth and foresight of Nkrumah's analysis of Africa's needs leave us a valuable framework with which to understand the challenges and related solutions for Africa.

The paper explores several questions related to that framework. As such, after providing some historical background in terms of Nkrumah's thinking and policies, the paper seeks to assess ways in which the global context, foreign interests and related responses in Africa have changed since his days in office. Where is the continent today, relative to that analysis and Nkrumah's related policy recommendations? Since the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) was launched in 2001, many have praised or criticized the extent to which this document would represent a break with the past. More specifically, the focus is on Sub Saharan Africa, natural resource exploitation and foreign investments. The paper begins with a brief discussion of some exogenous and endogenous factors of underdevelopment and Nkrumah's position relative to these. These highlights of Nkrumah's responses and visions for the continent are then compared to NEPAD's process, objectives and aspirations in the context of potential "new partners" in African development.

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## **Theories and Practice: Nkrumah's Foresight and Dilemma**

Over the decades since the wave of independence swept the Global South, two schools of thought have influenced development analysis and related policies. One is the historical structuralist school, associated with dependency, world system and Gramscian theories (Cohn, 2008), and the other is the liberal school associated with the 1950s and 1960s modernization theory of development. Among the numerous disagreements between the structuralist and liberal theories of development is the impact of colonialism on the economic development of colonized societies. Generally, theories lumped in the broad structuralist category take into account history and the way in which countries have been integrated into the global economy; colonialism is seen as one factor that resulted in North-South inequalities due mainly to the initial dependency of the Southern "periphery" on the Northern "core." Unlike the liberal school of thought which focuses upon current domestic impediments to development such as "irrational or inefficient" policies and which sees North-South relations as a "positive sum game" (Cohn, 2008: 85-86), historical structuralist theories take into account the long shadow of colonialism and its successor, neo-colonialism.

Nkrumah's understanding of Ghana's need to gain not only political independence but also economic emancipation brings his analysis of the challenges faced at independence and beyond closer to the structuralist school of thought. Nevertheless, as explained in this section, his analysis of the African situation at the outset of African independence led him to call for a cautious but realistic approach that included policy prescriptions related to both categories of development theories that is, one that included welcoming foreign capital needed to modernize the economy while at the same time shedding colonial and neo-colonial ties. Not only was this approach applied to Ghana's economic development, but Nkrumah also advocated that similar policies should be applied simultaneously continent-wide. As will be explained later, that objective could only take place through continental unity. While some have argued that Nkrumah's downfall lay in his attempt to achieve too much (Beckman, 1976: 18), an ongoing question is whether a more restrained approach, one limited to domestic considerations, was and is indeed realistic for Africa.<sup>1</sup>

## **Economic Development and the Need for Western Capital: A Catch 22 Situation**

As Beckman (1976: 15) observes: "Few African leaders have emphasized as strongly as Nkrumah the limitations of political independence and the necessity to struggle for economic independence if one kind of colonialism is not merely to be substituted for another." Addressing the challenges related to this structural understanding of the integration of Ghana and Africa in the world economy was central to Nkrumah's vision and objectives not only for Ghana but also for Africa as a whole.

As he wrote in *Neo-Colonialism, The Last Stage of Imperialism* (1965): “The result of neo-colonialism is that foreign capital is used for the exploitation rather than for the development of the less developed parts of the world. Investment under neo-colonialism increases rather than decreases the gap between the rich and the poor countries of the world.”

Nkrumah’s dilemma can be observed in the apparent contradiction between his writings and policies. While welcoming foreign investments to modernize and industrialize Ghana, he also expressed caution regarding the potential negative impact of foreign capital on Ghana and Africa.<sup>2</sup> As he stated when commenting on his 1964 economic plan: “We welcome foreign investors in a spirit of *partnership* (emphasis added). They can earn profits here, provided they leave us an agreed portion for promoting the welfare and happiness of our people as a whole....We expect, however, that such investments will not be operated so as to exploit our people. On the contrary, we expect such enterprises to assist in the expansion of the economy of the country in line with our general objectives” (quoted in Howell and Rajasooria, 1972: 111).

However, in spite of these warnings, foreign investments in Ghana were not to yield expected results. The most illustrative example of this reality, and the related political consequences, was the Volta dam project. As Boahen (1987: 101) pointed out, “one of the typical features of the colonial political economy was the total neglect of industrialization and of the processing of locally produced raw materials.... Africans were driven out of the mining industry as it became an exclusive preserve of Europeans.” Among Nkrumah’s development objectives for Ghana was the reversal of this trend. This would have allowed Ghanaians to obtain direct rewards from their own natural resources through jobs and the expected development benefits usually associated with the production of value-added products.

As Mikell (1989: 186) explained, in order to reduce Ghana’s dependence on cocoa exports, the Volta Dam project, which was proposed as early as 1952, was meant to use hydroelectric energy to increase the processing of locally extracted minerals. Not only would the dam provide cheap hydroelectric power to Ghanaians thereby raising standards of living and fostering industrialization, but also it was also intended “to smelt bauxite located in the eastern, western and Ashanti regions.” However, this was not to be as foreign investors “only wanted cheap power to turn their own semi-processed aluminium into refined bars in a way that would bring minimum cost and maximum profit to North American industries and offered the leanest possible margin for Africa” (Birmingham, 1995: 29). The first difficulty encountered was the lack of good commercial terms for loans to Ghana. In the end, the agreement through which Ghana obtained loans from the US, Kaiser Aluminium and the UK, with “enormous debt-servicing costs” also undermined African entrepreneurs’ access to the power produced by the dam (Mikell, 1989: 186). Indeed, as Mikell explains, not only was much of the expected supply of energy committed to Kaiser’s VALCO aluminum processing plant prior to the completion of the dam, but also VALCO’s reliance on “imported bauxite, and local ore deposits were never developed.”

Most significant in this “partnership” deal was the fact that Ghana’s loan from the UK, US and the World Bank was dependent upon the government reaching a satisfactory agreement with the private Western investors. The cost of the Volta River Project and the lack of return were partly responsible for development failures and debt: “while Ghana dipped heavily into its cocoa revenues and delayed other development projects to pay for the building of the Volta River Project, it received little in return” (Mikell, 1989: 186).

The story of the Volta Dam points out a typical example of the ways in which Ghanaians and Africans have been excluded from the exploitation of their own natural resources over time. As many have commented, this project was a remarkable feat for a young country that was looked upon by others who were seeking or gaining independence: “Ghana thereupon became one of the world’s few developing countries with more electricity than it could use” (Howell and Rajasooria, 1972: 112). Yet, it was not going to reap the rewards of such a feat, an example not lost on others.<sup>3</sup> As Birmingham (1995:29) pointed out: “In so doing the [Ghanaian] government discovered just how little international influence a small decolonized nation could wield and how strong were the financial and engineering forces controlled by the ‘neocolonial’ powers.”

As this brief discussion highlights, Nkrumah’s dilemma was that in attempting to move Ghana’s economy away from reliance on mono cash crop exports so as to distance his country from colonial patterns of economic development, he encountered the new mechanisms of neo-colonialism and the beginnings of debt dependence on the West. The example also shows that African wealth in natural resources was not going to be easily wrenched from Western interests. A vicious cycle of lack of capital that would enable Africans to benefit from their own natural resources remains an important issue today. That does not mean, however, that some Africans did profit personally from the situation, an eventuality Nkrumah predicted.

### **Endogenous Challenges: Elites vs. ‘The Masses’**

Nkrumah did not limit his analysis to external causes of underdevelopment. He also looked at domestic dynamics. He warned against the potential for elites’ collusion with external interests and the importance of listening to the African masses. As Mbonjo (1998: 34) explains, the importance of the masses in gaining national liberation was at the forefront of Nkrumah’s thought in his call for the “organization of the colonial masses.” The masses were the ones who, contrary to the domestic bourgeoisie who strived through colonialism, would prevent future neo-colonial exploitation. Thus in a speech he made at the May 1965 Afro-Asian Solidarity Conference that took place in Ghana Nkrumah explained: “the mass of the people can never become the agents or partners of neo-colonialism. The function of neocolonialism is to exploit...It is the people, therefore, and only the people, who can save an African or Asian State from neo-colonialism and imperialism” (quoted in Mbonjo, 1998: 39).

This indeed, has taken place over the decades since independence, albeit in diverse guises. From wealthy and corrupt dictators put in place by foreign governments, to transnational corporations and clandestine trade networks, a variety of exploitative dynamics have emerged, whereby ordinary citizens are left strapped with debts while lucrative resources such as oil, diamonds, cobalt, coltan, precious woods and gold are extracted from the continent to enrich the few. In these processes, a variety of local actors have colluded with outside interests to enrich themselves at the expense of ordinary Africans. What is relevant to point out in these domestic destructive dynamics of the past five decades, is the significant role played by outsiders — a factor often omitted in liberal explanations of underdevelopment (Caplan, 2008; Bond, 2006)

Without documenting and listing the numerous examples of such collusions, suffice it to say that ample studies have demonstrated that, in Caplan's (2008: 69) words: "In almost every case of egregious African governance, you can be sure to find Western influence playing a central role.... For decades the continent was seen by the West, above all by the US, as a major battleground where Cold War rivalries were played out." Europe for its part "was particularly anxious to call in all the imperial resources" to rebuild itself after World War II, and, subsequently its relations with Africa through the 1975 Lomé convention "aimed to protect European industry from shortages of tropical produce" (Birmingham, 1995: 89). The latter, was followed by the EU's Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) under the Cotonou Agreement, whereby an "even harsher regime of 'reciprocal liberalization' [is] to replace the preferential agreements that tied so many African countries to their former colonial masters via cash-crop exports" (Bond, 2006: 68).

These state-to-state neo-colonial relations were facilitated by mutually profitable relations between domestic elites and foreign interests. Caplan (2008: 76-82) concludes his overview of these mechanisms by stating: "the collective complicity of Western governments and banks, multinational corporations and African business and political leader in this massive fraud is a perfect example of the great conspiracy against the people of the continent" (ibid. p. 82).<sup>4</sup> A most recent example found online involves the Anglo Gold Ashanti consortium in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.<sup>5</sup>

As illustrated by Bond's (2006:1) following choice of quotes, liberal analyses of Africa's situation tend to disregard such causal factors of underdevelopment. The first quote reflects a "neoliberal" (or orthodox liberal) perspective and was extracted from Tony Blair's Commission for Africa 2005 report: "Africa is poor, ultimately, because its economy has not grown. The public and private sectors need to work together to create a climate which unleashes the entrepreneurship of the peoples of Africa ..."<sup>6</sup> The second one reflects a contemporary view closer to the dependency school of thought which takes into account history and exogenous factors: "Africa is poor, ultimately, because its economy and society have been ravaged by international capital as well as by local elites who are often propped by foreign powers. The public and private sectors have worked together to drain the continent of resources which otherwise - if harnessed and shared fairly - should meet the needs of the peoples of Africa."

As will be discussed later, Nkrumah's call for the inclusion of "the masses" into the decision-making of the continent's future is echoed today by African civil society's critique of its exclusion from the NEPAD process.

## **Delinking From the West**

Given his analytical framework, it followed that, for Nkrumah, economic independence also meant the ability for the country to decide for itself which countries would be its trading partners, based on its own interests and not dictated by external powers (Mbonjo, 1998: 95).

These choices required de-linking from colonial institutions, diversifying trade relations and blocking some corporate relations through which neo-colonial ties might continue past patterns of exploitation as described earlier.

At the level of colonial institutions, one of the clearest examples of this distrust of the old Western colonial ties was the Nkrumah government's withdrawal from the West African Currency Board. The Currency Board was identified as a neo-colonial institution "through which the British Treasury would continue to control the economies of British West Africa" including providing Britain the ability to conduct economic sabotage, "should Ghana elect to pursue independent policies" (Dumor, 1991: 75).<sup>7</sup> According to Dumor (1991), Ghana also broke up the West African Frontier Force, disintegrated the West African Cocoa Research Institute and the West African Court of Appeal, all seen as neo-colonial structures. Likewise, the Ghanaian government announced September 3, 1960 that its own state agency would ensure cocoa buying, a plan that included selling cocoa in both Accra and London rather than London alone (Howell and Rajasooria, 1972: 64).

In the area of trade, the Nkrumah government also acted on its intention to avoid neo-colonial ties on several levels. Not only were direct country-to-country ties altered, such as cutting back trade ties with Britain while increasing ties with Eastern Europe, but indirect neo-colonial ties through private business interests were also identified and cut. As Dumor (1991: 89-90) observed, "Ghana progressively reduced its concentration on Britain as a trading partner....by 1962, the United States had become the largest importer of Ghana's cocoa, superseding West Germany and Britain....During the early part of the 1960's, Ghana had simultaneously increased bilateral relations with USSR and China."

In addition, the Nkrumah government implemented a deliberate economic boycott of Britain in protest of Britain's lack of response to Ian Smith's Unilateral Declaration of Independence (Dumor, 1991: 78). Nkrumah also identified "interlocking networks of ...companies [that] gave Britain and South Africa extensive political and economic power by proxy" (Dumor, 1991: 76). An example he gives is that of the link between Union Minière in Zaire and Tanganyika (today's Tanzania) Concessions Limited.

While the latter was registered in London, it had “its nerve centre in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) under the chairmanship of Charles Waterhouse, Leader of the English House of Commons.” Similarly, the government began denouncing and blocking businesses that used front names in order to hide their South African origins (Dumor, 1991:76).

These policies along with Nkrumah’s announcements regarding a proposed socialist economy, his support of Patrice Lumumba in the ex-Belgian Congo, his ties with Moscow, his writings on socialism and his 1960 speech at the UN drew growing antagonism from the West. Christian A. Herter, U.S. State Secretary at the time, is quoted as stating that Nkrumah in his UN address had “marked himself as very definitely leaning toward the Soviet bloc” and that he sounded as though he was “making a bid for the leadership of ...a left-leaning group of African states” (Howell and Rajasooria, 1972: 66). As some have pointed out, economic retaliation from the West contributed to undermine Nkrumah’s political future. The best evidence of such Western manipulation is found in quotes from the then American Ambassador to Ghana, William Mahoney: “Western pressures were having their intended effect, exacerbating, if not causing, deteriorating conditions [in Ghana]. Popular opinion was running strongly against Nkrumah and the economy of the country was in precarious state.” Mahoney is quoted by the same source as saying that he had “supported the recommendation to deny Ghana’s forthcoming aid request ‘in the interests of further weakening Nkrumah...and the British would continue to adopt a hard nose attitude toward providing further assistance to Ghana” (quoted in Owusu, 2006: 127). Others have suggested that the disastrous cocoa prices which exacerbated the Ghanaian economic situation and development plans in the 1960s might have been due “to real *as well as engineered* (emphasis added) declines in commodity prices within the international market place” (Mikell, 1989: 250).

As democratically elected leaders in newly independent African countries such as Nkrumah and Lumumba sought political and economic sovereignty, they ignited concerns in the West that had more to do with great power Cold War competition than whether the newly independent countries were democratic, well governed and fair to their citizens. In the same way that the trade of the enslaved and the 19<sup>th</sup> century scramble for Africa had more to do with European power struggles and competition, the neo-colonial period of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was also about ways in which the African continent and its resources could provide either some geostrategic and/or economic advantages in the global power struggles.

To sum up in the words of Nkuzimana (2002: 135), Africa is (and has been) quite often “transformed into the theatre of fights for geostrategic influences or a safe haven for outside opportunists who, in complicity with some greedy African leaders, operate their ‘cynical pursuit of private interests.’” Nkrumah saw the real potential for such outcomes on the continent early on and tried to address this by, among others, de-linking from Western institutional ties and private business linkages that would contribute to these exploitative dynamics.

Not only did he do so for Ghana but in solidarity for struggles taking place elsewhere on the continent. Whether this was a realistic path at the time, given the context of the Cold War, is questionable. Nevertheless, today's situation relative to such concerns, changes in African policies and the changing global context need to be re-examined.

## **Nkrumah's Views and NEPAD: Continuity or Change?**

This section examines the relationship of Nkrumah's views, as discussed in part A of the paper, to NEPAD. The first question is whether NEPAD provides alternatives that address Nkrumah's concerns regarding the ability of Africa to gain economic independence from power centers and lead to development that benefits all Africans? The second and third questions are discussed jointly as they examine whether NEPAD promotes or promises true African unity both in terms of inter-state relations and through more inclusive state-society relations.

### **Financial Dependence on the West vs. Others: NEPAD and Global Politics in Africa**

One of the first aspects of NEPAD that does not diverge from Nkrumah's understanding of development is that it also espouses the objective of modernizing the economy. In fact, some have identified NEPAD's theoretical framework as representing a combination of dependency and modernization theories of development (Matthews, 2004) — an approach not dissimilar to Nkrumah's as stated earlier.<sup>8</sup> Although such an understanding of development has been criticized with some merit, the present analysis will take such development goals as a given. As already mentioned, the debate between these theories is how to implement such development objectives. Therefore, the question of relevance remains, as with Nkrumah's Volta project, where is the financing going to be coming from for such projects and at what cost?

Unfortunately, NEPAD does not offer much redress for this weakness. The first and most evident aspect is that the document makes it clear that the "partners" to the renewed African development plans are the industrialized West and multilateral organizations (Matthew, 2004:503; Abegunrin, 2009: 175; Biswas, 2004; Caplan, 2008; Bond, 2006). These are jointly described as Africa's development "partners" in Section VI titled "A New Global Partnership" (Matthew, 2004: 503). Interestingly, as illustrated earlier in this paper, Nkrumah also referred to foreign financiers as "partners" in his announcement regarding the role of foreign investors in Ghana's development.

Given the nature of this partnership, many question the likelihood of an equal relationship when one partner is dependent upon the other's resources to achieve her/his objectives. As reported by Matthew (2004: 505) and others, one of the critiques of NEPAD "is that it is the latest version of the 'age-old begging bowl, since its focus is about asking wealthy nations for generous financial assistance.'" As Schmidt's (2002: 6) early assessment of NEPAD pointed out: "The NEPAD envisages a bargain, whereby, Africa delivers peace and good governance and adopts appropriate policies of its own choosing, and the developed world delivers more resources, including aid, trade, investment, debt relief and aid reform." Included in the resources requested and expected as part of the partnership, is US\$ 64 billion of additional investment per year.

Furthermore, the way in which NEPAD was presented to the "partners" has also raised doubts regarding the notion of "partnership." The four main African initiators of NEPAD, Presidents Mbeki, Obasanjo, Wade and Bouteflika, presented their strategy for African renewal to the G8 leaders at the July 2001 G8 Genoa summit. Likewise Mbeki's attendance at the World Economic Forum in Davos, where he addressed the world's most powerful group of business and political leaders left little doubt as to who NEPAD's success was reliant upon and who would benefit from its implementation (Bond, 2006: 125). This African subservience to the West was not lost on African civil society and some African leaders. Thus the Gambian President Yahya Jammeh is quoted by Lokongo (2002: 18) as saying: "You come up with a program and depend on nothing but begging.... If NEPAD is an African project, why take it to the Westerners to approve it? ... Did G8 bring their agenda to Africa for us to approve it?"

Perhaps not surprisingly, NEPAD has yielded little relative to the expectations it had raised. The 2001 G8 promises seemed to have gained momentum and were repeated at the July 2002 meeting in Kananaskis (Canada). However eight years later, on the occasion of the G8 and G20 meetings hosted once again by Canada, the change in rhetoric was clear. Mbeki, now retired from the presidency of South Africa, expressed his disappointment at the lack of progress: "... in Canada in 2010, as opposed to Canada in 2002, the rich of the world conveyed the message that Africa had once again drifted to the periphery of the global development agenda" (quoted in York, 2010).

In this, unfortunately, Africa's situation is very similar to that of the early days of independence—its lack of financial resources which might give it the ability to use its own capital for the ends it sees fit render it vulnerable to outsiders' exploitation. This ongoing hope in receiving outsiders' respect is not only questionable given past experiences, but it is also problematic given the multilateral organizations' neoliberal approach to development, particularly their neoliberal approach and the imposition of Structural Adjustment Policies since the 1980s, which have been widely acknowledged as having undermined African development. Thus critics of NEPAD have warned that this document is "merely a homegrown version of the Washington Consensus" (Bond, 2006: 124). As such, in terms of its reliance on the West and the similarity between these policies and past ones imposed by the West, NEPAD appears to offer little in terms of alternatives that might offer a departure from past relations.

However, some hope that a number of changes in the global context might bring long-awaited opportunities for Africa. China and India represent alternative partners for African development. Taylor (2009: 2) reports that since the turn of the new century, Chinese-African trade began to accelerate with a 40 percent increase between 2001 and 2006, “from US\$4.8 billion in 2001 to US\$28.8 billion in 2006,” and that the exponential growth in this economic relation can be expected to continue given the early stage of this trend. Not only has trade increased but, according to Martyn Davies, director of the China Africa Network at the University of Pretoria, the Chinese are also the biggest builders of infrastructure in Africa and the biggest lenders (from French 2010: 60).

Other indicators of increased relations between Africa and these two emerging powers can be seen in diplomatic relations such as the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in November 2006, the January 2006 Chinese “Africa Policy Paper,” and the China-Africa Business Council. In addition to hosting African heads of state, the Chinese have built sports facilities in Africa such as the 60,000-seat national sports stadium in Tanzania, which was opened in February 2009 by President Hu Jintao (French, 2010: 60). For their part, the Indians have, among others, held the April 2008 India-Africa Forum in Delhi, issued a US\$200 million line of credit to NEPAD aimed at promoting African economic integration and a US\$1 billion investment in a joint venture with the African Union to build a Pan-African e-Network for telemedicine and tele-education (Naidu, 2010: 41).

Likewise, the diplomatic language and exchanges seem to reflect a tone more reminiscent of partnership than that of the West. As Cheru and Obi (2010: 4) point out, the warm African welcome extended to the Chinese and Indians has to do with more than economics and finance. Not only is there a growing number of Africans disenchanted with the West, but China and India refer to Africa as an equal partner and as a dynamic continent “on the threshold of a development take-off, with unlimited business opportunities that would serve Chinese, Indian and African interests” (ibid.). There is no doubt that such language and positive images of Africa will please Africans who have criticized Western depictions of their continent. Furthermore, the shared status of “developing country” and the success of these Asian countries provide potential models of development and hope for Africa.

However, as Cheru and Obi (ibid) warn, such positive language may be more rhetorical than genuine respect. Many wonder whether Africa’s relations with China and India will be any different from past Western motivations, interests and resulting patterns of exploitation. On one side of the debate are those, both in the West and Africa, who warn against a repeat of history and point to Chinese strategic interests that include its economic growth and the connection with competition for global power with the West. As an illustration of such underlying calculations some point to China’s desire to “circumvent the regional economic powerhouse, South Africa, and ultimately control the markets for key African minerals” (French, 2010: 64). Not surprisingly, South African President Thabo Mbeki was quoted as saying in 2006: “China can not only just come here and dig for raw materials [but] then go away and sell us manufactured products” (quoted in Taylor, 2009: 2).

Or, as formulated differently by a Congolese lawyer: “We remain under the same old schema: our cobalt goes off to China in the form of dusty ore and returns here in the form of expensive batteries” (quoted in French, 2010: 69). As Taylor (2009: 1) summed it “the accusation that China is a new colonizing power, exploiting Africa’s natural resources and flooding the continent with low-priced manufactured products while turning a blind eye to its autocracies is at the core of most critiques.” From this perspective, engagements with Asia as a reaction to the West have its own pitfalls.

On the other side of the debate are those who see the growing relations with Asia as a promising departure from the continent’s overreliance on the West. One African who sees the Asian-African relationship in a positive light is Dambisa Moyo, the London-based Zambian economist who wrote the book *Dead Aid: Why Aid Is Not Working and How There is a Better Way for Africa*. From an economic development perspective Moyo believes that “China offers a way out of the mess the West has made,” particularly through its “subsidized lending” (French, 2010: 60). From a diplomatic perspective others see the emerging relationships as part of a global power shift termed “the rise of the un-West” and Africa as a player who is accumulating “asymmetric power “aimed at changing old exploitative relationships” (Samasuwo, 2007).

## **NEPAD and African Unity: Inter-State and State-Society Relations**

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The issues and policies mentioned in part A of the paper came together in Nkrumah’s belief in the necessity of African Unity, another example of his foresight and long-lasting intellectual impact. As he wrote in his 1961 paper titled *I speak of freedom*: “It is clear that we must find an African solution to our problems, and that this can only be found in African unity. Divided we are weak; united, Africa could become one of the greatest forces for good in the world.” Today, this sentence and related questions resonate even more loudly given the launching of NEPAD and its relationship the new organization of African Unity (AU).<sup>9</sup> As Cheru and Calais (2010: 222) remind us: “From the early days of decolonization to the present moment, the aim of African unity and integration has been the same: to end Africa’s marginalization in the world economy and to chart an independent development path through collective self-reliance.” Even contemporary critics of Nkrumah’s attempt at African unity recognize the ongoing relevance of this question: “By evoking Nkrumah’s failed, yet noble and remarkable, attempt and juxtaposing it with the intractable heterogeneity of Africa, my intention is to remind readers that the question of how to foster African unity and reinforce Africa’s own development capabilities and resources remains tremendously important and unresolved” (Nkunzimana, 2002: 129).

As others have pointed out, Nkrumah's vision of African unity covered three areas: economic, military and defense strategy, foreign policy and diplomacy (Owusu, 2006; Mbonjo, 1998). Given NEPAD's relationship to the newly created African Union, its ability to provide a common African response to the challenges mentioned above through common economic, foreign policy and diplomatic relations needs to be examined. The above begs the question as to whether NEPAD can provide the kind of African consensus/unity in terms of common economic policies that will prevent past patterns from reemerging. Thus two questions related to NEPAD's future role emerge: does it enable Africa to negotiate from a common position of strength and does its development model allow national economies to accumulate wealth and be protected from external forces? Several paradoxes, contradictions and fissure emerge when we look at NEPAD as a policy guide for Africa and the reality of what is happening on the continent.

Many have pointed out the difficulties related to NEPAD's ties to the promise of "good governance" and the "peer review mechanism" as these conditions have already created divisions within Africa and difficulties in terms of delivering on Western expectations. Among these are the concerns related to Zimbabwe and Sudan in particular. Not only are there divisions related to the implementation of these political objectives, but also the Chinese partnership with these countries has further undermined African unity. As Taylor (2009: 98) pointed out: "The PRC's [People's Republic of China] policies arguably jar with Africa's increasing attempts to promote human rights and good governance, as crystallized in NEPAD." Taylor's (ibid. 99) quote from the *African Research Bulletin* reveals African concerns regarding this issue: "in some countries China's involvement appears benign, in others its approach undercuts the efforts by the African Union ... and Western partners to make government and business more transparent and accountable." Division between "the old guard" such as Kadafi, and Mugabe and the initiators of NEPAD has been observed. As Cheru and Calais (2010: 98) point out, the multiplicity of agreements and multiplicity of partners are "hardly a sign that an authentic and unified African development agenda is on the horizon."

Once again Africa seems caught between two polar sides while trying to secure capital for its development. How to navigate this dilemma without undermining African Union is a delicate matter that reminds us of the original stumbling blocks Nkrumah faced: global power politics, state sovereignty, vested interests and the balkanization of Africa. Thus on the one hand the new global context provides Africa with choices in partners, thereby diminishing its vulnerability in terms of the sources and associated costs of capital, but on the other this new context also puts pressures on its ability to remain united.

Furthermore, while the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) has recommended that NEPAD become the umbrella organization under which these multiple agreements should be renegotiated as regional ones, Cheru and Calais (2010) argue that, at the moment, the organization is too weak, both in terms of capacity and authority to provide such a service to African unity.

These authors explain that NEPAD does not have the ability to harmonize national policies at the regional level. In terms of capacity, they compare the European Union's bureaucracy of 13,000 civil servants with that of 750 for the African Union and NEPAD. Thus Cheru and Calais (2010: 227-236) argue that while it is not too late for Africa to engage the multiplicity of external actors "on an equal footing" through NEPAD, the organization will have to be transformed.

Not only does NEPAD not provide the mechanisms for strong African economic policy but also the philosophy that underlies the program further erodes Africa's ability to prevent a repeat of past patterns. For critics of neoliberal policies, NEPAD provides nothing new from the Washington Consensus. As such, they have dubbed the project as "neocolonialism by invitation" (Chantu and Calais, 2010: 237). The critique once again relates to Nkrumah's policies in terms of seeking to develop a strong autonomous domestic economy that would be able to compete on global markets. The solution in this case would be a stronger developmental state under the label of "strategic integration" which is modeled after the example of East Asian developmentalism and Latin American neostructuralism (ibid.). According to such critiques, by minimizing the role of the state in the economy, NEPAD further undermines African development. Whether and how NEPAD could/would be transformed in that manner is questionable. More importantly, the ideological debates that surround NEPAD polarize rather than unite Africa in terms of two different development models.

Although the governance objectives of NEPAD can mean a more inclusive role for "the masses," the neoliberal approach to development espoused by NEPAD has raised doubts regarding the inclusion of civil society. Many African civil society groups have not only expressed concerns regarding the top-down process through which NEPAD was arrived at, but they also argue that the type of economic policies proposed leave little room for public debates in terms of issues related to the environment, distributive justice, intellectual property rights, health care and other issues of public interest. Nevertheless, Samasuwo's (2007: 75-86) optimistic understanding of the new African diplomacy offers some hope. His analysis of African collective and/or individual accumulation of "tools of asymmetric power aimed at changing old exploitative relationship" deserves further examination. As he sees it: "increasingly, a number of African countries, sometimes with the help of civil society or prompted by internal resistance against the International Monetary Fund's Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs) are starting to question the 'received wisdom' of prevailing neo-liberal orthodoxy." Future developments and analyses will determine whether such state-society relations eventually wins over inter-state divisions in terms of disagreements over NEPAD's economic and political model.

## Conclusion

As Kwame Nkrumah feared, in spite of achieving political independence, Africa's aspirations have been impeded due to external/global interests and ongoing neo-colonial patterns of exploitation. This paper has focused on the issues related to Africa's challenges as it has had to rely on foreign capital to exploit its resources. The challenge has been how to respond to this reality "from a position of strength," to use Cheru and Calais's expression (2010: 221). From independence onwards, the legacy of colonialism-- in terms of the lack of African capital necessary to extract continental resources-- has rendered its interests and aspirations secondary to those of foreigners. The paper looked at some of the related challenges Nkrumah had identified and some solutions he sought in order to solve this riddle of post-independence Africa. The argument made in the paper is that similar conditions are still present.

Nevertheless, global power transformations and new policy formulations for Africa have been added to this initial issue. These changes need to be examined in order to assess the conditions that may repeat past patterns or provide opportunities to break new ground. Among the new policy tools that have been initiated in Africa the paper questioned whether NEPAD provided the appropriate tools to deal with the new conditions in a manner that would break past patterns and achieve African visions for its future.

On the one hand, the ongoing patterns of global power relations that vie for African resources could supercede, once again, Africans' interests and goals. While the multiplicity of new partners from the Global South may be used to Africa's advantage, they could also repeat the past. One such challenge has been identified as "the new scramble for Africa" —will the need for crucial African natural resources, such as oil and cobalt, mean that Africa and its resources are once again pawns in a new global power game? Another challenge resides in the disagreements that exist, within the continent and with its multiple partners, regarding policies of economic and political liberalization as paths to development. These disagreements render Nkrumah's desires of African unity and reliance on the masses as challenging today as in post-independence. As is, NEPAD seems too weak and too biased to be the bridge necessary to reconcile the multiple new economic partnerships and approaches to African development.

Nkrumah's identification of challenges in terms of creating a continent that is not only politically independent but also economically independent, given the lack of domestic capital is still present. The wealth of African resources and outsiders' thirst has not waned. As French (2010: 69) recently observed in the *Atlantic* issue of May 2010: "the question remains: How does [Africa] overcome a pattern of extractive foreign engagement ... that is still discernible today?" One thing that changed is the relative weakening of the West. Is that sufficient to transform African problems? While optimism in terms of displacing past exploiters is completely warranted, caution should nevertheless be exercised in terms of expecting newcomers to behave differently given global conditions and in particular the need for oil and other minerals.

NEPAD has been promoted as African renaissance, an African-made solution for African problems that comes under the new African Union. On the surface then, Nkrumah's beliefs in and aspirations for a united Africa are still alive. Those who disagree with NEPAD's orientation reject it as the answer to African unity and development. However, such rejection begs the question: if not NEPAD, then what? The discussion that followed the presentation of this paper at the Kwame Nkrumah International Conference opened the door for more research and discussion on these issues. How might Africa develop an investment regime that fosters cross-border investments by its own investors? Would such a continental regime be less exploitative? Related to the latter were observations of unique African values and the need to tailor such policies to these values. Are there indeed such common values that can bring about a unified African vision and attendant policies?

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## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> While Beckman and others (Berg, 1971) refer to the financial aspects related to the number of economic development projects and the government's over-reliance on cocoa revenues for these, others refer to the drain on Ghana's finances related to the growth of Nkrumah's executive office and related Pan-African matters, such as supporting groups in other countries (Guyer, 1970), or Nkrumah's foreign preoccupations and consequential inattention to urgent budgetary matters (Kraus, 1970).

<sup>2</sup> Lest we think that Nkrumah lacked clarity in his thinking, this contradiction appears in development theories as well. Indeed, as many have observed, while modernization and dependency theories disagreed on many causes and solutions of underdevelopment, proponents of both schools saw modernization and industrialization as a desired long-term objective. How this was going to take place was and still is the subject of much debate. For liberal thinkers, the solution to Africa's underdevelopment lies in opening up African resources to foreign investors who have the capital and know-how for efficient extraction, processing and marketing of such resources. Critiques of this approach, the contemporary structuralists, warn against such policies as simply resulting in the ongoing exploitation of Africa.

<sup>3</sup> As Nugent (1995: 10) pointed out: "Ghana has always exerted a greater influence over African affairs ... than its limited size and population ... might lead one to expect. The reason is that the country has repeatedly served as a social laboratory for the continent as a whole. During the 1950's, Ghana was the testing ground for British strategies of decolonization. After 1960, Nkrumah's efforts to break the links of external dependency were regarded as significant for other African countries similarly afflicted by the colonial legacy."

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<sup>4</sup> One of these examples concerns the smuggling of gold out of the Congo that implicates Ugandan officials and multinational corporations using local rebel militias. “The Western companies that were cited [in the 2005 Human Rights Report titled ‘The Curse of Gold’] included high-profile giant mining corporations based in South Africa and Sweden, which in turn are partnered with other resource extraction companies based in the UK and Canada. The boards of these companies are chock-a-block with the Western world’s political elites and retired politicians who are household names” (Caplan, 2008: 76).

<sup>5</sup> Ashanti Goldfields Company (AGC) was established in London in 1897. AGC started underground mining in Ghana, Obuasi in 1907. The planned DRC gold mine project is undertaken in partnership with OKIMO the DRC state-owned mining company under the joint venture called Ashanti Goldfield Kilo (AGK) in Ituri a town recently ravaged by civil conflict. AGA holds 86.22 per cent shares while OKIMO holds 13.78 per cent. For a critical report of this project see the CAFOD report at <http://www.cafod.org.uk/news/anglogol>

<sup>6</sup> Other recent publications in that vain include Martin Meredith’s 2005 publication of *The Fate of Africa*; John Schram “Where Ghana Went Right” in the July/August 2010 edition of *The Walrus*; *The Trouble with Africa* by Robert Calderisi published in 2006.

<sup>7</sup> This kind of distrust is further understandable given that, in the immediate post-war period, “large bank reserves of colonial Ghana were not used to pipe water to African villages but for metropolitan reconstruction, and the groundnut plantations of colonial Tanzania were not aimed at enriching the farming poor in Africa but at providing margarine rations in the British welfare state” (Birmingham, 1995: 89).

<sup>8</sup> Thus NEPAD seeks to alleviate poverty and improve health and education through wealth generated from the modernization of African economies. As an example of modernization projects cited in NEPAD Abegunrin (2009: 179) mentions: “building a hydroelectric dam at Inga on the Congo River, and the introduction of new farming techniques, especially mechanized system.”

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<sup>9</sup> The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) is the product of a series of processes and meetings among African leaders. NEPAD is the result of a merger of two different plans. The Millennium Action Plan (MAP), launched in February 2001 by South Africa's President Mbeki, Nigeria's President Obasanjo and Algeria's President Bouteflika, was merged with the Senegalese President Wade's OMEGA plan. This merger was named the New African Initiative (NAI) and endorsed at the July 2001 African Summit in Lusaka, Zambia (Abegunrin, 2009). Shortly after, on July 9, 2002 in Durban (South Africa) the leaders of 43 African countries met to replace the OAU with the AU. As Biswas (2004:793) and Bond (2006: 126) explained, NEPAD is the new AU's pragmatic counterpart and official development plan. Although not yet fully under AU wing, a recent meeting of the Heads of State and Government Orientation Committee (HSGOC) in Kampala (Uganda) at the end of July 2010 was to produce the document through which NEPAD would cease to exist independently and would become an African Union entity (O'kademeri, 2010).