

Developing Country Studies

ISSN 2224-607X (print)

ISSN 2225-0565 (online)

Vol.5 No.10

2015



International Institute for Science, Technology & Education
Accelerating Global Knowledge Creation and Sharing

Vol 5, No 10 (2015)

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Culture and the Nepad Project: Towards an Understanding of a Vital Missing Link

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Abstract

Africa's search for appropriate models of development has a long history behind it. Interestingly, most of the approaches to development failed even before they took off. Thus, when the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) was initiated it was felt globally that, at last, workable answers may have been found for the myriads of Africa's development challenges. NEPAD was formulated to comprehensively address the many problems facing Africa. Beautiful and well articulated as the NEPAD document is, it is obvious that it omitted culture as a vital component of the development process. In such areas as health, agriculture, law and governance, conflict resolution, poverty alleviation and more, the originators of NEPAD failed to incorporate culture as an important factor in driving development. It concludes on the note that until this is done NEPAD will be another false start.

Keywords: NEPAD, Development, Development Challenges, Culture.

CULTURE AND THE MISSING LINK IN THE NEPAD PROJECT

Background

At the dawn of independence in the 60s, the immediate problem which faced newly independent African countries was how to fast track development. The aim at that time was, the resources of Africa, hitherto exploited and siphoned abroad would be used to develop Africa. Perhaps, that was what prompted Kwame Nkrumah, former President of Ghana, as quoted by Buka Bukarambe when he stated that 'If we gain self government, we will transform Gold Coast into paradise in ten years'.² Kwame Nkrumah was not alone in his belief that the independence of Africa from colonial rule would usher in a new era marked by progress for the generality of African peoples. Though, the desire and urge of Africans to take their destinies in their own hands, and transform their independence beyond the political realm was not equal, there was nonetheless a consensus that Africa should move forward developmentally.

There were African leaders who were more radical in their approach and wanted change immediately. In this category were Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Sekou Toure of Guinea including the then leaders of countries like Algeria, Morocco, Egypt and Libya. These were known the Casablanca group. On the other hand, there were others who thought it could come gradually. These were the conservatives and were represented by the likes of Nigeria's former Prime Minister, Tafawa Balewa, Sedar Senghor of Senegal, Hailie Selessia of Ethiopia and a few others⁸ So, at independence, Africa before the formation of the Organization of African Unity was torn apart by ideological differences⁹

A culmination of the desire for unity and development found expression in the formation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963. From inception, it was clear that the OAU could not proffer adequate and workable solutions to the problems of Africa. Thus, the search for paradigms that would promote development in Africa continued. Such moves included the Lagos Plan of Action that was formed in 1980, the Final Act of Lagos, Africa's Priority Programme for Economic Recovery (APPER), the African Alternative Framework to Structural Adjustment, and the African Charter for Popular Participation for Development that was formed in 1990.¹

There were many such other programmes and policies adopted by Africa's political leadership to put her on the path of growth and development. Common to these policy statements was the recognition that, in most fundamental areas, the countries of Africa were in dire straits. For instance, Africa has the highest infant and maternal mortality rates in the world. The world's poorest countries are also in Africa. In the same vein, the Gross Domestic Product and Per Capita Income are frightfully low. Unemployment is high and growing almost at an exponential rate and Africa's share of world trade stands at only two percent. For the avoidance of doubt, according to the World Bank records infant mortality rates for some Africa countries in 2012 stood at: Mali 108.7, Ethiopia 60.9; Ghana 40.9.² These compare very unfavourably with some European countries which have the following figures: Denmark 4.19, European Union 4.49, and Germany 3.51. The figures of maternal mortality for 2010 stood as shown below Nigeria 630, Burundi 800, Lesotho 620 and Cameroon 690. These

¹ Awoonor, K. 2001, A Socio Cultural Proposal for African Development *Journal of Black and African Arts and civilization*. Vol. 1 No.1 Pg 9

² Bukarambe, B. 2004, Historical Overview of Africa's Development Efforts *In NEPAD in the Nigerian Dock Lagos.*, Nigerian Institute of International Affairs Pg14

contrast sharply with figures from some non African countries as United States 21, Puerto Rico 20, and South Korea 16 (The above figures are per 100,000).

Similarly, the same source put the figures for per capita income of some African countries between 2011 and 2012 as follows: Nigeria \$1,452:00; Cote d'Ivoire \$1,054:00; Senegal \$1,057:00. See how these figures compare with the figures from some other countries Brazil \$11,640:00, China \$8,400:00 and Iran \$11,508. It must be noted also that internet sources (<http://www.mapofworld.com/worldtoptenpoorestcountries> accessed on 24/4/13) showed all the top ten poorest countries of the world are in Africa (www.wikipediafreeencyclopaedia).

The economies of African countries operate as appendages of the economies of the Western countries in a relationship of exploitation that is skewed unfavourably against Africa. It is a tragedy that Africa is still a producer of primary products which are exported cheaply overseas, processed and imported back to Africa at highly exorbitant prices. Africa's abundance of human and material resources have not been utilized and translated into good life for her teeming populace. For example, in spite of her vast arable land and the availability of manpower, hunger and food insecurity in the continent defies understanding. Life expectancy in Africa is tragically low at 53 while for Japan it is 83.3. Worryingly, for countries like North and South Korea, Malaysia that were at par with Africa at independence, the life expectancy and other indices of development far exceeds that of African countries.

More intriguing, is that African culture under the ravaging and rampaging influence of globalization is fast eroding. While Africa attempts, albeit unsuccessfully to imbibe Western cultures she has continued to neglect and relegate her cultures. Africans continue to ape the Western world in virtually everything. Africans must dress like westerners, eat like them, and design their political and related institutions like them, speak western languages and bear western names. In the field of education, the curriculum have little cultural or afro centric content and, it is a poor and unsuccessful mimicry of Euro-American educational systems. To sum it up, Africa is another bye word for poverty, dependency and underdevelopment.

Unfortunately, most of the earlier policies and projects geared towards African development could be described as mere statements of intentions. They could be dismissed as documents that appreciated Africa's development challenges, but the leadership of African states have failed to do anything positive about. The reasons for the limited achievements are, the lack of political will to act in concert, the over arching influence of western powers and poor policy options by its political leadership.

Gratifyingly, the proposal by a few of Africa's political leadership for the formation of the New Partnership for Africa's Development was accepted after the merger of two earlier initiatives. These are the Millennium Partnership for Africa's Development and the Omega Plan. With NEPAD, it could be stated that, for once African leaders may have come to terms with the problems of the continent. Indeed, NEPAD was a well articulated and comprehensive programme geared towards addressing the myriads of problems facing Africa developmentally. This may have prompted the African Development Bank when it defined NEPAD as 'a holistic integrated strategic development plan to enhance growth and poverty reduction in Africa by addressing key social, economic and political priorities in a coherent and balanced manner'.

In summary, NEPAD aims to promote ownership and management of Africa's vast resources for the development of Africa. Furthermore, it was hoped that, with NEPAD, partnership would be promoted within African countries but more importantly between Africa and the developed countries of the globe. If successfully implemented, the assumption was that NEPAD holds the promise of bringing Africa back to the mainstream of humanity. It will equally alter the global scenario in which Africa is a helpless victim of the rampaging influences of globalization. In the long run, it was believed that, Africa must come to the table of humanity as equal partners with the other races of the world.

Culture and Development: Exploring the Relationship

The importance of culture in driving development has since been recognized that the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) which designated and dedicated a whole decade to the use of culture in driving development. They tagged this decade as the world decade of cultural development. The import of this decade is that meaningful development cannot take place outside of culture. It has been demonstrated especially by the South East Asian countries that rapid development takes place if it is conceived in cultural terms.

Thus, if Africa will progress into the league of developed continents, then the totality of her belief systems, values, laws, norms, religion, language and all her customary practices regarding agriculture, technology, education, politics and industry must be harnessed. African cultures are very resilient and it is only in the area of culture that Africa has comparative advantage over other races. Therefore, to expect that Africa will be like the West overnight might translate into wanting to achieve everything in one fell swoop but may at the end achieve nothing.

Some of the Vital Missing Links

Comprehensive and well articulated as the NEPAD document is, with alluring prospects for a new continent, yet it is obvious that NEPAD may not have been sufficiently well crafted in such a way to put Africa on the path of accelerated development because the NEPAD document has a few vital missing link. It is the contention in this paper that culture is one of such vital missing links.

Perhaps, the reason for what could be described as an unfortunate omission could be attributed to the fact that, the generality of African peoples were not carried along in the formulation of the NEPAD agenda. Interestingly, it is clear that the formulators of the NEPAD document recognized, abinitio, the pivotal role of the African peoples and by implication their culture in the successful implementation of NEPAD. Thus, the whole of section IV is devoted to appeals to African peoples to be aware of their critically relevant role in the NEPAD implementation process. In paragraph 51 of the document, it states

The New partnership for Africa's Development will be successful only if it is owned by the African peoples united in their diversity.

In paragraph 55 it comes out more clearly when it equally states:

This is why the political leaders of the continent appeal to all the peoples of Africa, in all their diversity, to become aware of the seriousness of the situation and the need to mobilize themselves in order to put an end to further marginalization of the continent and ensure its development, bridging the gap with the developing countries.

If paragraph 55 was serious, then paragraph 56 was passionate in soliciting the support of the masses of African peoples when it states:

We are, therefore, asking the African people to take up the challenge of mobilizing in support of the implementation of this initiative by setting up, at all levels, structures for organization, mobilization and action.

It is difficult to reconcile these appeals with the failure of African leaders to involve their peoples in the initial planning and preparation of NEPAD. It boils down to the top-bottom approach of African states to development which has hitherto proved unsuccessful.

According to A.T. Simbine,

Observers have criticized NEPAD and its propagators for not educating and enlightening Africans whom the programme is supposed to be for and benefit. In the first place, the NEPAD ... is very little known about among the generality of the citizenry, being that it is more a programme emanating from African leaders, and a few of them at that. At least, when the citizens – men and women alike are sufficiently grounded in it, they can support their leaders and work towards the attainment of its goals and objectives.³

If the generality of the peoples were carried along, they would have brought in their belief systems, their values, their norms, mores, and folkways, in one word, their cultures as their input into the NEPAD agenda. This reason accounts, that in some critical areas of NEPAD, the relevance of culture was not appreciated. This is surprising because in the fourth component of the tenth paragraph of the document it recognizes the importance of culture when it states as follows:

The richness of Africa's culture and its contribution to the variety of culture of the global community.

To reinforce the above, paragraph 143 further states:

Culture is an integral part of development efforts on the continent consequently, it is essential to protect and effectively utilize indigenous knowledge that represents a major dimension of the continent's culture and to share this knowledge for the benefit of humankind.

In some key areas, it would have been expected that the important role of culture in driving development would have been highlighted explicitly. The first of such key areas is agriculture. It is beautiful and indeed gratifying that the formulators of NEPAD recognize the key role of agriculture in the process of African growth and development. Though it acknowledges that the majority of African peoples live in the rural areas and the involvement of the leadership of local communities (paragraph 132 and 136 NEPAD document) in policy formulation and implementation, it is the view of this writer that it falls short of clearly enunciating the role of Africa's cultural practices (in relation to agriculture) in fostering agricultural revolution and guaranteeing food security in the continent. Thus, by merely referring to the leadership of communities and their involvement in policy formulation is superficial, because it failed to openly state that traditional practices or culture should be incorporated into agriculture.

³ Simbine, A.T. 2004, NEPAD, Gender and Africa's Development *NEPAD in the Nigerian Dock* Lagos, Nigerian Institute of International Affairs Pg4

With the examples from Nigeria, it has been empirically shown that large scale farming, especially under the auspices of the government cannot succeed. For instance, Nigeria has experimented with Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), the Green Revolution, and the Agricultural Development Projects. It is painful, yet true that, results from all these projects were disappointing and less than modest. In some instances, it led to wanton wastage of public funds and loss of lives as the attempt to acquire people's land (under the land use act) for agricultural purposes met with stiff opposition. To facilitate agricultural development and enhance food security requires updating the skills of local farmers, encouraging them to increase the acreage cultivated and the provision of other facilities such as credit and subsidy, marketing outlets and getting them to be aware of the outcome of research in agriculture so long as the bedrock remains the peasant small scale African farmer. Moreover, only a few individuals with the resources can venture into large scale farming. Nonetheless, the government should only come in under a Public Private Partnership arrangement and, only in some key areas. In addition, mechanized farming could sometimes work against Africa's communal land ownership system. Attempts by governments to acquire land by force was resisted in places like Nigeria and Zimbabwe.

Another defect of NEPAD, not only with regards to agriculture, is that in the original document the development objectives were not broken into short, medium and long term arrangement. With regards to agriculture, there are products which could be produced in months, some in one or two years and others would take much longer time. Much as it may sound good to produce cash crops for industries at home and abroad, Kofi Awoonor's suggestion that, a more pragmatic approach would be to give priority attention to food crops as a way of addressing Africa's biting food crisis which deserves some urgency in the effort to ameliorate.¹

Beyond agriculture, the culture of African peoples is also relevant in the field of education. The NEPAD document may have missed the point when it states in paragraph 119 section II titled Bridging the Education Gap as follows

- To work with donors and multilateral institutions to ensure that MDG of achieving Universal Basic Education by 2015 is realized.
- To work for improvements in curriculum development, quality improvements and access to ICT.
- To expand access to secondary education and improve it to Africa's development.
- Promote networks to specialized research and higher education institutions.

It could be easily seen from the above that NEPAD's arrangements for bridging the education gap is a euphemistic way of reinforcing and promoting the dependent colonial educational policy which Africa's colonial masters foisted on the peoples of the continent. Without prejudice to the recommendations made in the NEPAD document, it would have gone just a little further to articulate how the educational curriculum in Africa could be decolonized. Put in a simpler language, the educational curricular of all levels of education in Africa should be made culturally relevant. Regrettably, not even a passing reference was made to Africa's ways of life, their belief systems and heritage in NEPAD's proposal to bridge the educational gap.

In no area is this shortcoming more pronounced as in the area of African languages. Research by UNESCO has shown that some African languages are endangered and going into extinction. Duro Oni while quoting Orimogunje states that it has also been empirically demonstrated that children learn faster if they are taught in their mother tongue.⁴ But the relevant paragraphs of the NEPAD document were silent on this. If Africa is serious about development in general and educational development in particular, then she must of necessity accord prominence to the development of African languages. The recommendation is that, at the primary school level, pupils should be taught exclusively (where possible) in their mother tongue. Colonial languages should be taught and used, but not as the medium of imparting knowledge at the initial stages of the educational system.

From the examples of the Asian Tigers, the relevance of indigenous languages in the educational process has been demonstrated time without number. Africa and her peoples are so far the only people that want to attain development in foreign languages. Because of cultural diffusion, French, English, and Portuguese languages could now be considered as African languages, but they are only secondary and non indigenous languages. Moreover, it is very difficult for most Africans to fully understand and attain proficiency in any of the languages listed above. Africa is a plural society with so many languages. This paper posits that there should be an in -depth study of these languages and use them to teach pupils for the first six years of education.

Another area where the role of culture has been ignored by those propagating NEPAD is in the area of democracy and political governance initiative. In paragraph 79... it states:

It is now generally acknowledged that development is impossible in the absence of democracy, respect for human rights, peace and good governance... Africa undertakes to respect the global standards of democracy, transparency, accountability, integrity, respect for human rights and promotion of rule of law.⁶

⁴ Oni, D. 2011, Reinventing Nigeria's Cultural Heritage for Sustainable Development: *The Role of The Youth in Owosanoye, B. and Olayinka Akanle Youth and Nigeria's Intangible Cultural Heritage*, Lagos HDI and CBAAC P20

Interestingly while this paragraph emphasizes efforts to adhere to global standards of democracy, it is completely silent on marrying democratic principles and practices to Africa's cultural heritage.

The concept and practice of democracy has grown very complex, with countries that⁵ practice it adapting it to suit the peculiarities of their socio-cultural and historical experiences. It is because of this adaptation that, while a country like Britain practices parliamentary democracy, with an unwritten constitution, the United States of America opted for Presidentialism. There is no gainsaying the fact that in these societies, democracy is consolidated. Beyond USA and Britain, in Canada, India, France and in many other places there have been a successful adaptation of democracy not only to traditional political practices but it has been altered in such a way that the people's belief systems, values, and overall ways of life are not compromised.

But the scenario in Africa is totally different. In most parts of Africa, be it in Nigeria, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Ivory Coast and many others we have witnessed either the sit tight syndrome of leaders, election rigging, gross human rights violations and abuse of the rule of law. There are also endemic and widespread corruption, the disconnect between state and society which are all indicative of lack of democratic consolidation. The search for democratic consolidation will remain a mirage till it is made people centered, people driven and culturally relevant.

This will naturally dovetail into a discussion of conflicts and conflict resolution and management strategies. Across Africa, there has been one tale of conflict or the other, at least in the last decade of the inception of NEPAD. From Mali to Ivory Coast, Sudan to Kenya, Egypt, Tunisia and Nigeria it is either communal or ethno-religious conflicts. These have gravely unpleasant consequences for the development of the different countries where conflicts occur. If they are summed up, it gives a picture of a continent that is in turmoil. That is simply stating that NEPAD may have failed in its peace and good governance initiative. Yet, in paragraph 72, under the second component, it stipulates 'Building the capacity of African institutions for early warning as well as enhancing African Institutions capacity to prevent, manage and resolve conflicts'.

This paragraph is vague as the mechanisms and dynamics for capacity building, conflict resolution, and management were not clearly spelt out. Again, like in the previous instances, no mention was made of using Africa's traditional methods of conflict management and resolution methods to address the many conflict situations arising in Africa almost on a daily basis.

The poverty reduction strategies of NEPAD are another area where the document fails to bring the issue of cultural and traditional practices to the front burner.⁷ Indeed, the reduction of poverty among the masses of Africa is one of the cardinal objectives of NEPAD. But in paragraphs 118 and 119 that are dedicated to the objectives and actions to address poverty reduction, nothing was said of culture. This is not to say that the objectives and the supposedly needed actions are unacceptable but these are long term measures. In the short and medium terms, the emphasis should be on cultural industries such as ceramics, pottery, 'tie and dye' brewing of local alcoholic beverages, cloth weaving, blacksmithing etc. There are other cottage industries that are based on culture but the NEPAD document does not take cognizance of these. Africa should borrow a leaf from India. This writer has shown elsewhere that, in that country, unemployment is low because of the many cottage industries that are culturally based.⁶ Moreover, some of these cultural industries are not capital intensive but at the same time their capacity for employment generation is very high.

The medical and healthcare systems were clearly stated in NEPAD, unfortunately no mention was made of Africa's traditional healing methods. References to indigenous knowledge did not link it with the provision of health services to Africans. It has been demonstrated that, African herbal techniques are efficacious in the treatment of some diseases and ailments. For example, traditional bone setting technology in a place like Nigeria is a development that beats the imagination of the world. The expectation from NEPAD is that, there would have been research into some of these techniques to know how to move the continent forward in the area of health care delivery. Africa is a continent of rich and complex biodiversity which should be researched into, further explored and incorporated into the health care delivery system. The deficiencies associated with some of our traditional healing methods are well known but this does not in any way remove the fact that they have therapeutic values. What should be done is to study and evaluate the traditional healing practices and integrate them into orthodox healing methods.

⁵ Tajiri H. 2010, New Partnership for Africa's Development: *NEPAD strategic Response to The Globalization Challenge*. Global South (Sephis Magazine), Vol. 6 No2, April 2010, Pg 41

⁶ Ochie, O, 2004, NEPAD: The Challenges of Democracy and Good Governance NEPAD in the Nigerian Dock, Lagos Nigerian Institute of International Affairs.

⁷ ZO, R. 2003. NEPAD, Gender and the Poverty Trap: The Challenges of Financing for Women Development in Africa. Obadare, E. and Dapo Oyewole: *The New Partnership for Africa's Development Challenges and Development* Lagos: Centre for Democracy and Development.

⁸ Amate, C..O.C. 1986, Inside the OAU PanAfricanism in Practice. *London Macmillan*.

⁹ Elias, Taslin Olawale, 1965, The Charter of the Organization of African Unity. *American Journal of International Law* (59) pg 43-67.

In another aspect, NEPAD has displayed a dismal failure to appreciate Africa's rich culture in the area of manufacturing. In paragraph 161, it states:

To increase the production and improve the competitiveness and diversities of the domestic private sector especially in the agro-industrial, mining and manufacturing sub-sectors, with potential for exports and employment creation.

In the paragraph quoted above the words "domestic private sector" should not lead anyone to thinking that the indigenous or cultural practices of the peoples of Africa was being referred to. If culture was being referred to, the document would have emphatically stated culturally based agro-industrial, mining and manufacturing sub-sector.

To buttress the fact that traditional practices could come in handy in the areas of technology and manufacturing, some examples from Nigeria would suffice. This contributor has demonstrated at another forum, that during the Nigerian civil war, the peoples of Biafra manufactured bombs based on local technology with which they fought the civil war. Secondly, in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria, the 'theft' and refining of petroleum products, based on local technology is ongoing at the time of this presentation. Thirdly, in some northern states, where solid minerals exist there are illegal mining activities going on based on local technology. At this stage, the local technologies could be classified or may be considered crude, but they are serving the purposes of the local populace. The challenge is to evaluate these local technological practices and update them where possible. NEPAD recognizes the technological backwardness of Africa. It also recognizes that it is one of the contributory factors to the general underdevelopment of the continent. Therefore, it appreciates the urgency of manufacturing especially on a large scale to bail the countries of Africa out of importation and dependency. But viewed critically, NEPAD want to achieve everything in one fell swoop but if care is not taken it might end up achieving nothing. Though paragraph 161 addresses the 'diversification of the domestic private sector', it falls short from stating that indigenous methods and technologies should be incorporated into the overall process of manufacturing and technological advancement.

If NEPAD is to achieve its set objectives it must of necessity pay attention to the development of her institutions. Tijani captures it succinctly when he stated that 'institutions in Africa have to be restructured and structures re-institutionalized with a view to making African states strong'. I dare add with a view to taking culture into account.

One may be tempted to believe that it may have been subsumed under democracy, good governance and the rule of law, but the issue of legal and judicial institutions are too serious that they are deserving of separate consideration. In most African countries, the contents of legal and judicial processes are reflections of the common laws of the colonial masters. Viewed dispassionately, the common laws of the colonial masters contain the cultural practices of the colonial masters as it relates to the maintenance of law and order. It was introduced into African countries because, at that time, countries of Africa were seen as extensions of colonial empires of the West. Fifty years after independence, judicial and legal process of Africa should be completely decolonized in such a way that the cultures of Africa become their bedrock. NEPAD may have failed in not giving consideration to this all important institution.

An assessment of NEPAD's operation after more than a decade would indicate that it is far cry from the dreams of its founding fathers, thus going the way of previous development blueprints. This may be due to the fact that, Africa may still be looking up to her previous colonial masters for aid which normally comes with herculean conditionalities.

New research directions should be to explore the possibilities of a totally Africa owned programme of development. This is because considering the enormity of Africa's development challenges and bearing in mind that all efforts to find solutions have not been successful, it means that further scholarly interrogation is still needful

Conclusion

NEPAD is a good and ambitious programme; but Africa has had a surfeit of beautiful programmes in the past. The missing link has been how to muster the political will on the part of African leaders to translate their dreams into reality. More often than not, the overdependence on foreign donors has proved to be an albatross. The expectation that multilateral agencies such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank will come to the rescue has turned an optimist dream into a nightmare. Worryingly, however, is that in both old programmes crafted to bail Africa out of grips of underdevelopment and under NEPAD it is obvious that some old but avoidable mistakes are about to repeat themselves. None has sufficiently addressed the cultural imperatives of development. Yet, both United Nations and United Nations Education and Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) have long recognized that culture should be made the bedrock of all development efforts if it is to be meaningful and realizable. Failure to do this will amount to another false start.