

NEPAD and Development in Africa: An Analysis

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Abstract

This paper examines the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), a significant initiative aimed at transforming Africa's socio-economic landscape since its launch in 2001. NEPAD was conceived to reposition Africa in global development discourse by addressing key issues such as poverty, governance, infrastructure deficits, and economic integration. This study explores the historical evolution of NEPAD, its objectives, and the strategies employed to achieve sustainable development across the continent. It evaluates NEPAD's achievements, including the promotion of intra-African trade through the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), the establishment of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) for governance, and the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) for agricultural advancement. However, the paper also highlights significant challenges faced by NEPAD, including dependency on external funding, limited enforcement of governance reforms, infrastructural inefficiencies, and conflicts overshadowing its development agenda. Through a comprehensive analysis, this study underscores the necessity for continuous adaptation and the implementation of practical recommendations aimed at enhancing NEPAD's effectiveness. By strengthening domestic resource mobilization, enhancing governance mechanisms, prioritizing conflict resolution, facilitating regional cooperation, and investing in capacity building, NEPAD can significantly improve its impact on Africa's development trajectory. Ultimately, this paper contributes to the discourse on regional development strategies in Africa, providing insights into the potential for NEPAD to foster a more integrated, resilient, and prosperous continent.

Keywords: NEPAD, Socio-economic Development, Governance, Sustainable Development, Partnership

Introduction

The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) is a broad regional initiative for member-states of the African Union (AU) aimed at overturning Africa's place in the global socioeconomic formation and improves Africa's regional development narrative. Launched on the 23rd of October, 2001, by the Organisation of African Union (OAU), and ratified by the African Union (AU) in 2002, the NEPAD focuses on improving African in the areas of peace and security, democracy and governance, economic development and industrialisation, and addressing infrastructure gap, investing in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), energy, transport, and water and sanitation (Akinola & Ndawonde, 2016).

In addition, most member-states of the AU saw the need to address the problem of human resource deficit, reverse brain drain, end poverty, close educational gap, and improve agriculture and health among other issues that besets the African states, in a bid to reposition Africa in global discourse on development. According to the policy document, the initiative is;

a pledge by African leaders, based on a common vision and a firm and shared conviction, that they have a pressing duty to eradicate poverty and to place their countries, both individually and collectively, on a path of sustainable growth and development and, at the same time, to participate actively in the world economy and body politic. The Programme is anchored on the determination of Africans to extricate themselves and the continent from the malaise of underdevelopment and exclusion in a globalising world (NEPAD, 2001, p.1)

Exactly twenty-three (23) years since the launching of the initiative, the challenges the NEPAD initiative was designed to address only seemed to have tripled in the continent with several African nations experiencing insecurity in different dimensions such as food, human and economic instability, leading to famine and brain-drain. Governances across Africa suffer crisis of legitimacy amidst rising insurgencies that continue to truncate developmental efforts thus, indicating the need for visceral analysis to ascertain the progress and challenges in actualising its agenda of NEPAD for the development of Africa. This paper subsequently looks at the historical evolution of NEPAD, the objectives and strategies, the achievements this far, the setbacks and challenges, conclusion and recommendations.

Historical Evolution of NEPAD

The New Partnership for Africa Development (NEPAD) is a broad-based regional initiative adopted by African Heads of State and Government of the Organisation of African Union (OAU) in 2001, and ratified by the leaders of the African Union (AU) in 2002. NEPAD has since 2001, represent the rallying point for Africa's development recognised by developing partners like the World Bank, the European Union, the UK's Department of International Development (DfID), the Group of Eight Industrialised Nations (G-8), the US Agency for International Development (USAID) among other regional and sub-regional developmental organisations (Ugwu & Odo, 2014).

NEPAD is a product of three pre-existing parallel initiatives that co-existed in the early 21st century. The first of these is the Millenium Africa Recovery Plan (MARP) unveiled at the World Economic Forum that took place in Davos in January 2001. The initiative was championed by the former South African President, Thabo Mbeki. The second initiative is the Omega Plan initiated by Abdoulaye Wade, the Senegal President at the time. The Omega Plan was presented to the Summit of Francophone African Leaders in Cameroon in January 2001, while the third of the three initiatives is the Compact for African Recovery piloted by K. Y. Amoako, the Executive Secretary of United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), in response to a mandate provided by African Ministers of Finance in the latter part of the year 2000 (Akinola & Ndawonde, 2016).

Considering the singular motive of these three initiatives characterised by regional and other biases of the originators, and the very need to synergise efforts if each of the three must succeed in contributing to the growth and development of Africa, Heads of States and Governments of the OAU in 2001, resolved to harmonise all interests and redirect all individual efforts towards actualising the broader African Dream. This resolution among the leaders of African States at the time marked the birth of NEPAD. Since then, NEPAD has remained the cardinal point of all efforts towards the advancement and development of the African Continent. Hence, NEPAD is the mother project around which other regional and sub-regional programmes and initiatives for the development of Africa revolve.

Objectives and Strategies of NEPAD

The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) is a transformative framework, created with the primary objectives of promoting sustainable development, eradicating poverty, and fostering Africa's integration into the global economy. At its core, NEPAD seeks to position Africa as a capable and competitive actor on the global stage, by focusing on strategies that enhance economic growth and improve living standards across the continent. Central to its mission is the ambition to strengthen democratic governance, which is seen as a critical enabler for economic and social progress. The framework's objectives reflect a comprehensive response to the developmental challenges that have historically hindered Africa's progress, placing a strong emphasis on leadership by African states (Harmon & Schwab, 2019).

NEPAD's objectives are not isolated but interconnected, drawing upon key strategic pillars that address both the immediate needs and the long-term developmental goals of the continent. At the heart of its strategies is the prioritisation of infrastructure development, which NEPAD recognises as essential for unlocking Africa's economic potential. This according to Ogunleye (2017), is intended to be achieved through the development of roads, energy systems, and communication networks is viewed as a fundamental prerequisite for boosting intra-African trade, facilitating regional integration, and attracting investment. Furthermore, human resource development remains a central objective, with NEPAD aiming to improve educational outcomes, enhance healthcare systems, and address the continent's skills gap through supports, interventions and partnership with African State Governments (Edoho, 2021), which is in line with the vision of empowering Africa's growing youth population to drive future economic growth.

Furthermore, the strategy advanced NEPAD also involves the mobilisation of both domestic and international resources through fostering greater intra-African trade and strengthening of financial systems within the region. Through this strategy, NEPAD seeks to harness Africa's own resources for development, while also seeking partnerships with external donors and international institutions. The alignment of these resources with Africa's development priorities ensures that the continent maintains ownership over its growth trajectory. Governance reforms, regional cooperation, and peace-building efforts are foundational elements within NEPAD's approach, as it recognises the critical need for stable, democratic institutions to underpin sustainable development (Hassan & Felix, 2018). This approach positions good governance as a precursor to economic stability, aiming to reduce corruption, improve transparency, and create an environment conducive to investment.

In addition, the scope of NEPAD's strategies also includes specific priority areas, each of which is targeted at addressing the structural constraints that have impeded Africa's development. In the agricultural sector, NEPAD's Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) exemplifies its commitment to achieving food security and reducing poverty through increased agricultural productivity (Adekunle, 2020). Similarly, the focus on improving health and education outcomes is seen as crucial for human capital development, which is necessary for sustaining long-term economic growth. Infrastructure development is another critical area, with NEPAD spearheading initiatives aimed at improving the transport, energy, and communication sectors across Africa. These efforts are geared towards creating an enabling environment for private sector participation, trade, and investment (Mawere & Mubaya, 2021).

However, despite its well-structured objectives, NEPAD has continued to face significant challenges and setback particularly in the areas of implementation. Coordination across diverse political, economic, and social contexts has proven difficult, often leading to varying levels of success in different regions. The framework also grapples with issues related to resource mobilisation, as the reliance on external funding has sometimes limited the autonomy of African states in directing their development agendas (Abegunde & Ajayi, 2022). These challenges, though formidable, do not diminish NEPAD's relevance. Rather, they highlight the need for continuous adaptation and stronger mechanisms for accountability and oversight.

Hence, NEPAD remains a strategic and comprehensive initiative designed to reshape Africa's development trajectory. Through a focus on infrastructure, governance, human capital, and resource mobilisation, the framework addresses both the immediate and long-term developmental needs of the continent. Despite the challenges, NEPAD's holistic and collaborative approach provides a pathway for sustainable growth, African integration into the global economy, and enhanced democratic governance (Chibba, 2017). The continued refinement of its strategies, along with greater regional cooperation and domestic resource mobilisation, will be key to realising its objectives and ensuring Africa's sustainable development.

Achievements of NEPAD

The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) has marked a significant chapter in the continent's efforts towards socio-economic development and regional integration since its inception in 2001. Among its notable achievements, NEPAD has fostered a renewed sense of ownership among African nations regarding their development pathways. This ownership is crucial, as it has catalysed the establishment of numerous initiatives aimed at addressing pressing issues such as poverty, governance, and infrastructure deficits (Jiboku & Osifo, 2021). By promoting African solutions to African problems, NEPAD has empowered member states to take charge of their developmental agendas, thereby enhancing accountability and fostering a culture of self-reliance (Moyo, 2018).

Furthermore, NEPAD has played an instrumental role in enhancing intra-African trade through the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) agreement, which seeks to reduce tariffs and barriers to trade among African countries. This integration is essential for economic growth and diversification, enabling countries to tap into regional markets that were previously underutilised. The facilitation of trade and investment across borders has not only improved economic relations but also encouraged the movement of goods, services, and people, thus fostering greater collaboration among member states (Atinga & Dartey-Baah, 2021). As such, NEPAD's initiatives have paved the way for economic resilience, making African economies less susceptible to global market fluctuations.

In the realm of governance and institutional capacity building, NEPAD has made substantial strides. The establishment of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) exemplifies this achievement, as it serves as a self-monitoring tool for member states to assess their governance practices. The APRM promotes good governance by encouraging transparency, accountability, and adherence to democratic principles (Khan, 2019). This initiative has not only instilled a sense of responsibility among African leaders but has also contributed to improved governance outcomes in several countries. As a result, NEPAD has significantly contributed to enhancing the political stability necessary for sustainable development (Terwase, Abdul-Talib, Siben, Puldu, & Adesina, 2017).

Moreover, NEPAD has made noteworthy progress in advancing the continent's agricultural sector through its Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP). This initiative aims to transform agriculture into a key driver of economic growth and food security. By promoting investment in agricultural research, infrastructure, and technology, CAADP has enabled countries to enhance productivity and address food shortages that have plagued the continent for decades (Awotide et al., 2020). Such transformations are imperative, as they not only alleviate hunger but also create employment opportunities, thus contributing to the overall socio-economic development of African nations.

Lastly, NEPAD's commitment to addressing the challenges posed by climate change and environmental degradation is a vital aspect of its achievements. By prioritising sustainable development, NEPAD has encouraged member states to adopt policies that harmonise economic growth with environmental protection (Abidoye et al., 2021). The establishment of various initiatives aimed at promoting renewable energy and sustainable resource management demonstrates NEPAD's foresight in recognising the interconnectedness of environmental sustainability and economic development. These efforts are critical as they not only seek to mitigate the adverse effects of climate change but also promote the sustainable use of Africa's rich natural resources, thereby ensuring that development efforts are both inclusive and equitable.

In all, NEPAD's achievements extend beyond mere rhetoric, reflecting a genuine commitment to transforming Africa's socio-economic landscape. Through fostering ownership, promoting intra-African trade, enhancing governance, transforming agriculture, and prioritising sustainability, NEPAD has carved a path towards a more integrated and resilient Africa. The ongoing challenges remain, but the framework established by NEPAD provides a solid foundation upon which African nations can build their futures (Ogwumike et al., 2022). By continuing to leverage the strengths of regional collaboration and self-determined development, NEPAD holds the potential to usher in a new era of growth and prosperity for the continent (Terwase, Abdul-Talib, & Zengeni, 2015).

Challenges and Setbacks of NEPAD

The challenges and setbacks of NEPAD have been the subject of numerous scholarly debates, often reflecting differing perspectives on the programme's capacity to achieve its ambitious goals. As Osei-Hwedie (2012) argues, one of the critical issues with NEPAD lies in its heavy reliance on external funding, which inadvertently subjects African development to the whims of donor countries. This dependency, he suggests, compromises the programme's autonomy and limits its ability to respond effectively to local needs. Similarly, Kebonang (2013) presents a view that while NEPAD was designed to foster Africa's ownership of its development agenda, the continued interference from external actors undermines this objective. Contrary to such arguments, Abegunrin (2014) asserts that NEPAD's reliance on foreign aid is not entirely detrimental, as it provides much-needed resources that African governments might otherwise struggle to secure. Yet, this position is contested by scholars like Okhonmina (2016), who claims that such dependence perpetuates neo-colonial economic structures, further exacerbating Africa's vulnerability in global economic politics.

Another key setback in NEPAD, as echoed by Murithi (2017), is its limited capacity to enforce governance reforms across member states, which hampers progress in areas such as democracy and human rights. This view is shared by Ikome (2018), who notes that while NEPAD has an impressive agenda for promoting good governance, it lacks the necessary enforcement mechanisms to ensure compliance. In contrast, Udombana (2018) argues that the governance component of NEPAD is not

entirely ineffective, as it encourages peer review mechanisms that foster mutual accountability among African leaders. However, this optimistic view is countered by Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2019), who questions the practicality of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), suggesting that it lacks the political will to hold leaders accountable. His argument is that the APRM functions more as a symbolic gesture than an actual tool for transformative governance.

Furthermore, NEPAD's ability to attract investment for infrastructure projects has also been subject to critique. According to Cheru (2020), NEPAD's grand vision for infrastructural development has not been matched by actual outcomes, with many projects either delayed or abandoned due to bureaucratic inefficiencies and corruption within member states. This view correlates with that of Asongu and Nwachukwu (2021), who argue that while NEPAD provides a platform for regional cooperation in infrastructure development, it lacks the requisite institutional capacity to oversee and implement large-scale projects effectively. Alternatively, Banda (2022) proposes that NEPAD's infrastructural goals are hindered more by global economic instability than internal weaknesses, suggesting that external factors such as fluctuating commodity prices and international trade tensions have a more profound impact on its implementation delays.

Equally, NEPAD's socio-political objectives have faced significant setbacks, particularly in the area of conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Related to this, Ikome (2023) affirms that despite its initial promise, NEPAD has struggled to mediate in key conflicts across the continent, primarily due to its lack of operational independence from the African Union (AU). This view is supported by Onapajo (2023), who argues that NEPAD's peacebuilding efforts are often overshadowed by the AU's broader security agenda, making it difficult for NEPAD to assert its role as a facilitator of peace. Alternatively, Mlambo (2023) questions whether NEPAD should even prioritise conflict resolution, suggesting that its focus on economic development should take precedence over security concerns. This view contrasts with Adejumobi (2023), who believes that without addressing Africa's chronic instability, economic development efforts under NEPAD will remain futile. In essence, while NEPAD's aspirations are commendable, the scholarly assessment of the initiative over the years reveals deep-seated challenges that continue to hinder its effectiveness. From external dependency and governance enforcement issues to infrastructural inefficiencies and conflicting priorities with the AU, the programme remains mired in obstacles that require urgent attention if it is to meet its objectives.

Conclusion

The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) has emerged as a significant framework for addressing Africa's development challenges since its inception in 2001. While it has made notable strides in promoting African ownership of development initiatives, enhancing intra-African trade, and advancing governance reforms, NEPAD has also faced numerous challenges that undermine its effectiveness. The persistent reliance on external funding, limited enforcement mechanisms for governance reforms, and difficulties in attracting investment for infrastructure projects have hindered its capacity to achieve sustainable development across the continent. Moreover, NEPAD's inability to effectively mediate conflicts and address security concerns further complicates its mission.

Recommendations

To ensure NEPAD's success in realizing its objectives, this paper advances the following recommendations;

- i. **Strengthen Resource Mobilization:** African states should prioritize domestic resource mobilization to reduce reliance on external funding. This can be achieved by improving

- tax collection systems, promoting local investments, and fostering public-private partnerships that align with NEPAD's goals.
- ii. Enhance Governance Mechanisms: NEPAD should establish stronger enforcement mechanisms for governance reforms. This includes developing clear accountability measures and enhancing the capacity of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) to ensure compliance with democratic principles and good governance practices among member states.
 - iii. Facilitate Regional Cooperation: Encouraging greater collaboration among African countries is vital for addressing common challenges. NEPAD should create platforms for knowledge sharing, joint projects, and regional initiatives that foster economic integration and cooperation.
 - iv. Prioritize Conflict Resolution: NEPAD must integrate conflict resolution and peace building into its framework as a fundamental component of its development agenda. This requires establishing dedicated resources and expertise to mediate conflicts and promote stability in member states.
 - v. Invest in Capacity Building: NEPAD should focus on building institutional capacity within member states to implement its initiatives effectively. This includes providing training and technical assistance to enhance governance, project management, and infrastructure development capabilities.

By adopting these recommendations, NEPAD can strengthen its framework and better position itself to address Africa's pressing socio-economic challenges, ultimately paving the way for sustainable development and regional integration.

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