

# **The African Crisis, ‘Development Partnerships’ And The African Diaspora: Constructing The Synergies**

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*I have said on many occasions that I believe Africa is the scar on the conscience of the world, and I think it is right that we continue to treat this as an absolute priority over the coming years.*

-Tony Blair British PM.

## **Introduction:**

The African crisis, what Colin Leys has called the African Tragedy (Leys:1994), the quandary Africa’s developing nations since the advent of flag independence—ubiquitous poverty, political instability, civil wars, declining living standards, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, child-soldiers, *warlordism*, a declining share of global trade, burgeoning international debt, political marginalization, failing states, stunning institutional atrophy, corruption, brain drain, and bad governance—has proved intractable and unrelenting for the most of the past four decades.

Africa’s contact with Europe in many ways marked the beginning of its descent into the abyss of chaos, decline, and despondency through infusion of the *Whiteman’s* culture, disruption of hitherto cohesive social life, abrogation of the more egalitarian subsistence economy, and monetization of economies. Worse were the increasingly detrimental trade relations, beginning with the epoch of the slave trade and continuing in

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the form of violent colonization, licensed pillaging of Africa's resources and manpower, and the dubious integration of African nations into the global economy in the post-colonial period as very peripheral, commodity producers and finished goods importers—victims of what has been referred to as the 'imperialism of trade' (Ake: 1981, Brown & Tiffen 1992, Madden & Maddeley 1993). Onimode observes that: 'No other region in the world has been plundered as horrendously and for as long as Africa' (Onimode 2000: p. 77).

The domestic dimensions of the African situation are no less worrisome. Corrupt, inept leadership has become the recurrent bane of Africa. Despotic regimes, military juntas, militarized civilians, and general misrule have characterized governance for most of the post-independence period. Endemic corruption, lack of vision, misadministration in terms of policy choices, capital flight, and ruthless repression of both political opponents and the general citizenry are the common traits of leadership in most of Africa. The predatory African political elite, having failed to transform their character and review their strategies—in stark contrast to equally opportunistic elites elsewhere who stem protests by ensuring the basic welfare of the mass of society—still employ primitive accumulation, social exclusion, and repression as *modus operandi*.

In this paper, I have tried to navigate the maze of controversy over the African crisis, contending that Africa's vibrant diaspora offers an ameliorative confluence in 'partnership,' the most recent coinage in development parlance with regards to Africa since the millennium. Then, I offer a fourfold classification of the African Diaspora and propose, in conclusion, their specific roles in Africa's development.

## **Two Traditions And Trends In Africa's Developmental Process.**

During the late 70s and early 80s declining commodity prices and trade reductions seem to have coincided, resulting in national deficits and the weakening of democratic institutions, strongly suggesting that Africa never recovered from the first oil shock of 1974/75. As the golden decade of commodity export<sup>i</sup> evaporated, healthy growth rates recorded by African economies suddenly vanished, and increasing numbers of skilled professionals emigrated from the continent in search of greener pastures.

Several explanations have been espoused for Africa's socio-economic quagmire but these can be broadly grouped into two traditions, exogenous-liberal and endogenous-riposte theories. The former tradition is composed of Northern analytic and prescriptive discourses. Churned out by scholars and observers mainly from the North, marked by their ahistoricity, static methodology, and eurocentrism, these theories are invariably teleological (Barongo: 1983, Toyo: 1983). Y. R. Barongo, in particular, argues that these theories refuse to press their enquiries beyond the confines of Africa and are, therefore, static.

According to Thandika Mkandawire, this school, is "...characterized by the casualness with which assertions... are made, and the deterministic and aprioristic nature of the discourse rarely based on analysis of the actual experiences, but merely on first principles, ideological conviction, or faith" (Mkandawire 1998: 2). The vintage relic of this school is *Towards Accelerated Development In Africa*, otherwise known as the Berg report, published by the World Bank in 1981. Found obnoxious throughout Africa, the report, nevertheless, became the pivot for Western and multilateral policy formulation towards Africa. Characterized by tendencies to hold Africa totally or primarily

responsible for the crisis of underdevelopment and to exonerate the culpable mechanism of international economic relations and other non-African interventions, it was the immediate progenitor of SAPs (Structural Adjustment Programs),

Endogenous theories,<sup>ii</sup> on the other hand, were developed by scholars from South Africa and Latin America especially as reactions to earlier metropolitan scholarship. Especially the earliest of these riposte theories, being little more than angry retorts, were as deficient as the liberal models. In their unbridled radicalism, they laid the blame for Africa's underdevelopment solely at the steps of the international system and international capital ignoring the culpability local actors. This position, however, was followed by denunciations against the domestic bourgeoisie (the *comprador* class) working in collaboration with the capitalists of Europe and America, denunciations epitomized by Raul Prebisch's Centre-Periphery analysis. A further revision of the endogenous models emerged in the argument of the new political economists, who pointed out not only the grievous shortcomings of earlier strategies of class formation but also the role of the social relations of production in the African crisis.

Balanced accounts that have not been skewed by ideological prejudice are beginning to emerge from Mkandawire/ Soludo (1999) and Arrighi (2002). They expose the solid, mechanistic connection between the ideologically narrow scope of the discourses diagnosing the crisis and the self-serving developmental paradigms that each ideology tends to adopt. Thus, western liberal proposals—which tend to argue that the roots of Africa's developmental dilemma are not external but internal—have produced blueprints which emphasize domestic readjustments, reconstruction and restrategizing. Structural Adjustment Programs and Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) are

some examples. According to Arrighi, these ‘internalist’ models, typified by the Berg Report, argue that the African crisis ensued because African governments and elites:

undermined the process of development by destroying agricultural producers’ incentives to increase output and exports. Overvalued national currencies, neglected peasant agriculture, heavily protected manufacturing industries and excessive state intervention. (Arrighi 2002: p2)

The solutions proffered included:

Substantial currency devaluations, dismantling industrial protection, price incentives for agricultural production and exports, and substitution of private for public enterprise—not just in industry but also in the provision of social services. (Arrighi, *ibid.*)

African and Southern models on the other hand claim Africa’s predicament originates from asymmetrical international capitalist regimes, for instance the preamble to the LPA reads *inter alia*:

The effect of unfulfilled promises of global development strategies has been more sharply felt in Africa than in the other continents of the world. Indeed, rather than result in an improvement in the economic situation of the continent, successive strategies have made it stagnate and become *more susceptible than other regions to the economic and social crises suffered by the industrialized countries.*

These assessments have inspired developmental paradigms seeking international economic realignment, putting the onus for readjustments on western powers. They have at various times canvassed for a New International Economic Order (NIEO), a repudiation or reconstruction of the Bretton Woods Institutions, a renegotiation of UNCTAD and WTO trading arrangements, greater capital flows, ODAs and DFIs to Africa, abrogation of government subsidies for western farmers, greater access for African manufactures in the markets of the North, better commodity pricing etc.

## **Partnerships, NEPAD**

The African crisis is gaining new importance in international discourse; the North is truly perturbed by the deteriorating conditions of Africa because the growing interconnectedness of the world makes every remote corner, to some extent, part of the same economic jurisdiction. This perspective sharpens the contrast between Africa's economies and the runaway affluence of the North, reviving Northern feelings of historical guilt for culpability in the misery of Africans over many centuries while heightening Northern fears of the very glaring danger looming in the future as Africa's hungry masses grow restive. Not only does Tony Blair's proposal for creating the *Commission for Africa* bear eloquent testimony to this but also the report of Ernesto Zedillo,<sup>iii</sup> et. al. of the UN High-level Panel on Financing for Development argues that industrialized nations' "elementary self interest is at stake. In the global village, someone else's poverty very soon becomes one's own lost market and one's own illegal immigration, contagious disease, or terrorist problem.

According to James Harmon et. al.:

Serious commitment to Africa is now not only 'the preeminent moral and humanitarian challenge of this age' but also expedient in sustaining the luxurious, taken-for-granted comfort of the populations of the developed world; ensuring the political stability; stemming the wave of disaffection with the increasingly asymmetric global order and a potential violent uprising for the restructuring of global orthodoxy. Never has the contrast in the fortunes of the North and calamity of the South been more contrasting and glaring. (Harmon Report: p10)

A final reason for the renewed interest in Africa has to do with the increasing waves of global terrorism post 9/11, according to an opinion:

Africa is the world's soft under-belly for global terrorism. Porous borders, weak law enforcement and security institutions, plentiful and portable natural resources, disaffected populations, conflict zones, and fragile and failed states have made some African countries increasingly attractive safe-havens and

breeding grounds for al Qaeda and other global terrorist organizations.

Since post-bipolarity,<sup>iv</sup> there has been a major shift in the direction of the developmental agenda, the confluence of the strategies proposed by African governments and their ‘development partners’ (rather than the usual bickering) being the most relevant for this immediate purpose. African governments have acknowledged that Africa must not only accept the responsibilities for the state of the continent but, also take pole position in its resolution, and that the North, especially the OECD countries can only tag along as voluntary ‘partners.’ Thus, the New Partnership for Africa’s Development-NEPAD emphasizes a multi-layered partnership. The Cotonou Agreement (2000) between Africa-Caribbean-Pacific countries on the one hand and the European Union (EU) on the other hand is titled *partnership agreement* and bears incredible semblance to NEPAD. Stressing partnership as the new roadmap for African social-economic and political recovery, the United States’ Africa Growth and Opportunities Act (AGOA) and the Zedillo report (2000) commissioned by the United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan—the OECD’s Development And Cooperation Agency (2000)—are other extant schemes. The World Bank, in fact, insists that ‘reducing aid dependence and *strengthening partnerships* will have to be a ...component of Africa’s development strategy’ (“Can Africa Claim the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?” p. 5).

What explains this change in development thinking with regard to Africa and to the South generally? It is important to note that several African scholars and a substantial number of the development intelligentsia rue this change (see Olukoshi 2002, Aderemi 2002, Mbaye 2002).

One explanation is that the collapsed of communism and dismantling of the Berlin wall in 1989 were watershed events by which United States achieved virtual politico-military hegemony, resulting in a rather inexorable global political and economic agenda: the deeper integration of the Eurozone, the tidal wave of globalization, the unparalleled and hitherto unimaginable breakthrough in bio-technology- ICT, cloning, medicine etc.—

The hope of socio-economic and political emancipation in Africa hinges upon NEPAD: celebrated new developmental agenda for the millennium. The main goal of NEPAD is twofold: to achieve and sustain an average GDP growth rate of over 7% per annum for the next 15 years, so that the number of Africans living in absolute poverty (less than US\$ 1 per day) will be halved, secondly that the continent achieve the agreed Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as follows:

- To reduce the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by half between 1990 and 2015
- To enroll all children of school age in primary schools by 2015
- To make progress towards gender equality and empowering women by eliminating gender disparities in the enrolment in primary and secondary education by 2005
- To reduce infant and child mortality ratios by two-thirds between 1990 and 2015
- To reduce maternal mortality ratios by three quarters between 1990 and 2015
- To provide access for all who need reproductive health services by 2015
- To implement national strategies for sustainable development by 2005, so as to reverse the loss of environmental resources by 2015.

Whilst the overall vision and goals of NEPAD are very commendable, aspects of the initiative and principally its philosophy and assumptions are severely flawed. Although NEPAD is not, *strictu sensu*, the subject of this analysis and its shortcomings have been fully detailed elsewhere, it needs to be stated that the blueprint is unlikely to offer a solid path of sustainable development through the mire of the African crisis. One of the important deficiencies of NEPAD is its absent-mindedness with regards to the diaspora.

## **The nature of the African Diaspora and Its Role in African Development: A Fourfold Classification:**

The African diaspora is probably divisible into four groups, I propose this classification only for analytic purposes and overlaps may be possible. For want of better terms, I call the first group Second Generation Africans (SGA). This will include all Africans born outside the continent who do not hold **official** African citizenship or hold them secondarily, the preponderant number in this group are obviously African-Americans and all indigenes of the Caribbean. This group also includes Africans in Europe and elsewhere in the world.

The second group I call the Brain Drain Diaspora (BDD), African professionals, specialists and experts, born in Africa but forced to emigrate in order to escape frustration, enhance their careers, and improve the prospects of their families.

The third group, for which I have great sympathy are African Economic Migrants (AEM), Africans who have in most cases *escaped* to Europe and America and, compelled to survive on odd jobs. They are mostly illegal immigrants, live surreptitiously and work several odd jobs to keep body and soul intact. They are vital for a reason to which I will refer to subsequently.

The fourth group I call the Associate Diaspora (AD), Africans who live legally outside Africa but who are not favorably integrated in the host economies in terms of employment and income, this will include for instance political refugees and newly arrived Africans.

AEMs are already vital to the economies of several African countries, many of them are breadwinners for their nuclear and extended families back in Africa. The total volume of overseas remittance from this group and the BDD constitute a significant percentage of capital flows to several African countries.

SGAs can be among the most poorly informed about Africa; several may hold ill-conceived derogatory myths about Africa and Africans. Yet, others in this group are thoroughly familiar with and already engaged in the process of Africa's development. Some notable personalities in this category will include Ambassador Andrew Young, Jesse Jackson, Late Reverend Sullivan, Walter Carrington, James Harmon, Booker Salih. This category also includes groups such as the Congressional Black Caucus, NAACP, Constituency for Africa (CFA), African American Institute etc.

Each of the four groups have specialized, maybe overlapping roles to play in Africa's development process.

### **Bridge over troubled waters**

Most of Africa's developmental blueprint fails to articulate precise roles for diasporan Africans. Moreover, due to corruption, insecurity, and sheer chaos in certain cases, Africa appears a no-go zone even for some impassioned would-be developmental partners of the diaspora.

What can the diaspora do? In my opinion the greatest contribution that the diaspora, specifically the SGA, can provide for Africa is a strong lobby for pro-African policies especially with regards to debt cancellation, reparations, renegotiation of the extant trading regime and favorable microeconomic policies at national levels.

The Black Congressional Caucus was instrumental in the passage of the AGOA bill, and the US\$15 billion allocated by President Bush for the fight against HIV/AIDS in January 2003 but the corporate diaspora can do a lot more.

Frankly speaking, Africa's debts are illegitimate and insistence on their repayment is odious for many reasons, according to Booker:

Many of the loans being repaid by African countries today were disbursed for strategic purposes, to prop up repressive and corrupt regimes during the Cold War. They were given for failed and grandiose projects pushed by creditors, most of which did not benefit Africa's people. Yet Africa's people are today expected to pick up the tab. They are required to sacrifice their own health and education to ensure that these debts are repaid to wealthy creditors. (Salih Booker, Africa Action website June 14, 2002)

A second, perhaps more compelling, reason for the cancellation of Africa's debts is the fact that these debts have actually been repaid, several times over, what remains unpaid are the usury-rate interests and penalties. For instance Nigeria borrowed US\$ 19billion in total, Nigeria has repaid US\$ 21billion yet Nigeria is said to be indebted to the tune of US\$ 30billion, almost twice the principal minus the already paid US\$ 21billion!

African countries lack leverage because each must negotiate individually whilst creditor nations present a bloc front to re-negotiate debts. The diaspora should commence immediate advocacy in their respective domains to wage a widespread ethical war against debt repayments and also lobby in official quarters for its immediate repudiation. This is the only way Africa would stand the chance to eradicate poverty.

Also, the diaspora should canvas for reparations to Africa for the slave trade and, more importantly, for the massive looting of its resources during colonial rule. The Jewish diaspora for instance has forthrightly and successfully lobbied for the prosecution of Nazi criminals during the holocaust and the return of Jewish gold stolen during the

Second World War. The double standard applied to Africa is manifest in the recent negotiation of compensation for families of the victims of the PAN-AM Lockerbie crash; Libya was arm twisted into paying US\$ 10 million each, whereas the greater crimes of Slavery and forced colonialism against Africans remains uncompensated.

The African diaspora in the United States are probably the most crucial actors in the project of African renewal. It is estimated that the annual turnover of this group is a staggering US\$ 700 billion. Moreover: 'Over 100,000 US jobs are tied to exports to sub-Saharan Africa, which already buys at least \$6 billion of American products annually. Yet, the US share of the African market is small—only 7.9 percent, suggesting significant growth potential for the United States in the years to come'. The diaspora, especially African-American congressional representatives, can facilitate greater access for African commodities to the US market. Although AGOA is welcome, the scheme is actually giving back with the left what it takes with the right; what is required, instead, is fair access not necessarily concessionary access. The US \$2 subsidy on cattle in the US is a great impediment and, strictly speaking, illegal by the terms of international trade. The analogy drawn is that cattle in the US are 'richer' than more than 30% of Africans who survive on less than US\$1 per day.

The SGA and BDD can assist in providing relevant training for Africans to be more competitive technologically. The dynamics of globalization emphasize mobile capital—human and financial—over the fixed, natural capital (solid minerals, crude etc) in which Africa has an advantage; this is why Africa's abundant natural resources have counted for little in terms of international economic competitiveness. The Diaspora can

assist in this regard by provision of scholarships, fellowships, internships and finance for training and retraining Africans.

More than any other quarter, the diaspora is most likely to be genuinely concerned for African nations' economic developmental, even to the extent of raising the US\$ 64 billion annually required to run NEPAD. The quality of Africa's diaspora is capable of attracting Direct Foreign Investment to the continent, so the diaspora especially the SGA and BDD, should begin to invest in the different sectors of the economy. African governments should begin to give very privileged access to its diaspora and encourage them to take over the medical and ICT sectors of the economy; this in my opinion will stem the net-outflow of DFIs. More importantly, the diaspora should consider direct involvement in the political processes by becoming citizens of African countries and in time, making themselves available for political leadership.

### **Conclusions:**

For the past four years at Genoa, Kananaskis, Washington, and Paris, select African leaders have been invited to the G8 Summits to present Africa's developmental agenda and provide the platform for partnership with the OECD. In four years however, with cap in hand, African leaders raised only US \$2 billion in Washington towards the implementation of NEPAD which requires US \$64 billion annually, in spite of the lavish pledges of the G8.

Partnerships, AGOA, Cotonou, DAC or not, cynicism is unbridled in Africa and justifiably so, from lessons learnt over the past forty years and reinforced by the experience of the past four years with the G8. Northern commitment to Africa's

development, even of poverty alleviation is often little more than political correctness rhetoric. In spite of all the pledges, not a single member of the G8 has fulfilled its obligation to remit 1 paltry percent of its GDP in aid to the developing South under the Lester Pearson Commission of 1969. No other region of the world has been as faithful to global *laissez faire* as Africa in spite of the ‘economic omni-incompetence’ of the African post-colonial state, yet no other region of the world is so straitjacketed by the TINA (There Is No Alternative) ideology as Africa. It is obvious that unless Africans, including its rich diaspora, develop the continent, the 21<sup>st</sup> century may very well claim Africa.

I am of the opinion the African Diaspora is crucial to Africa’s development process and the onus lies on African governments to incorporate this very important constituency into future strategies for the emancipation of our much beleaguered continent.

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<sup>i</sup> This is not contradictory to the claim that the terms of trade between commodities and manufactured goods was always unequal but refers more to the fact that African exports retained the best ratio and prices in this period

<sup>ii</sup> some of the works in this school will include Baran (1957) *The Political Economy of Growth*, Fanon, F. (1967) *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frank, A. G. (1969) *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America: Historical Studies of Chile and Brazil*. Other scholars will include Paul Sweezy, Samir Amin, Arrighi and Saul, Furtado, Prebisch etc.

<sup>iii</sup> former president of Mexico

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<sup>iv</sup> my preferred terminology for the post-cold war era.