Globalization and Politics of Transformation in Africa: NEPAD and Pitfalls of Transnational Elite Developmental Projects

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Abstract
This article examines the New Partnership for Africa’s Development initiative launched in 2001. The article discusses the political and economic conjuncture that resulted in the adoption of this initiative. In the main, the analysis demonstrates the ways in which the initiative dovetails well with the global neo-liberal project and, consequently, contests the claims by African ruling elites and their counter-parts in the global North that it represents a transformative framework for economic and political change for national social formations in Africa.

La globalización y las políticas de cambio en Africa: NEPAD y los fallos del desarrollismo elitista transnacional
Este artículo examina la iniciativa de la Nueva Alianza para el Desarrollo de Africa lanzada en 2001. El artículo analiza la coyuntura política y económica que resultó de la adopción de la iniciativa. En su conjunto, el análisis demuestra la forma en que la iniciativa casa bien con el proyecto global neoliberal y, en consecuencia, rechaza la pretensión de las élites africanas y sus contrapartidas en el Norte global. Esta iniciativa representa un esquema transformador para el cambio político y económico en la sociedad africana.

Globalisation et politiques de transformation en Afrique: NEPAD et dangers de développementalisme d’une élite transnationale

Keywords
neoliberalism, development, NEPAD, democracy

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Introduction

Current discourses on international political economy generally contend that the decade of the 1970s generated significant shifts in economic, intellectual and political spheres that continue to shape national and global developments. On the economic level, these discourses claim that the period saw the emergence of a serious global recession characterized by decline in production, high inflation, crisis of profits for the majority of firms, technological developments, rise in government deficits and massive layoffs for workers. These economic developments and major changes in the political landscape of major countries in the global North in the late 1970s and early 1980s – the rise of Margaret Thatcher in the UK, Helmut Kohl in Germany and Ronald Reagan in the United States – and intellectual shifts that called for the dismantling of the global Keynesian economic framework are highlighted as core factors that ushered in a new phase of globalization underpinned by neo-liberal economic discourse.

In the context of African countries, analysts argue that these global economic, political and intellectual shifts have had a significant influence on the continent’s development process. In the economic realm, for instance, the core features of the neo-liberal economic globalization are said to have contributed to an economic downward spiral in most African countries. These countries, however, are not the only ones that have faced major economic crisis, for as John Rapley has argued, the crisis of capital accumulation has been a core feature of the current phase of globalization in all parts of the world.1 In essence, the onset of this phase of globalization marked the end of the post-1945 ‘golden age’ of global capitalism which had seen significant economic growth in the global North and various parts of the global South. In Africa, the crisis of postcolonial capitalism was characterized by a serious economic crisis, evidenced by decline in economic surplus, levels of investment and savings, inability of African states to meet their debt obligations to public and private lenders, and failure of these states to maintain what Yusuf Bangura has termed the post-colonial social contract.2

The developments that emerged globally in the 1970s have, over the years, seen states institute various economic and political strategies in efforts to address the economic crises and other contradictions generated

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2) For detailed discussions of the various elements of this crisis see, Ihonvbere 2000; Bangura 1992.