Research report

Forum: General Assembly 6

Issue: Implementing legal frameworks to combat neocolonialism in post-colonial states

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Introduction

Neocolonialism, not to be confused with colonialism, is the influencing and/or controlling of independent states through means including; conditional aid, economic imperialism and globalisation. Typically resulting in political, economic and financial dependence on other states, it differs thus from standard aid and globalisation. Neocolonialism is practiced not only by national governments, but also by multinational corporations.

The term was first used to address European countries' strong influence on African states undergoing decolonisation in the 1960s also holding strong meaning during the Cold War, and unfortunately still remains an unresolved global issue. Particularly post-colonial states such as the former Belgian Congo, British Raj and French West Africa, suffer from Neocolonialism, due to their rapid decolonisation causing political and economic dependence on their former occupants. While often disguised to be beneficial, in the long-term the state neocolonialism brings nations to is unfathomable, with economic and financial ruin plaguing populations and political instability fueling corruption.

While the UN recognises and condemns all forms of neocolonialism, promoting frameworks to combat the issue, it does not accuse nor sanction any member states, despite outside accusations. The UN does however, provide platforms for nations perceiving neocolonialism to address their concerns, where states often accuse and organisations frequently condemn.

Definitions of key terms

Neocolonialism

The practice of political, economic, cultural and other forms of pressure to influence or control independent states, particularly peripheries and former colonies, without direct military rule. Neocolonialism relies on economic superiority, political influence and intricate dependencies to uphold uneven relationships, benefitting the more developed (often formal colonial) country .

Colonialism

The practice of extending and maintaining rule forcefully over territories and its peoples politically, economically and culturally for the betterment of one's own nation.

Multinational Corporation

A corporation operating in one or more countries outside of its home country.

LEDC

An LEDC (Lesser Economically Developed Country) refers to a country with lower economic output, low living standards, poverty and an overall lower quality of life.

MEDC

An MEDC (More Economically Developed Country) refers to a country with high economic output, high living standards and an overall higher quality of life.

Sovereignty

Sovereignty is the total control of a state and its peoples. The term is commonly used in the context of a nation's right to sovereignty, where an independent nation has the right to govern itself under its own accord and beliefs.

Capitalism

Capitalism is a socioeconomic system based on the rights of private ownership in use for a gain of profit. Individuals and corporations work, invest and lend services in a search for profit and personal gain.

Third World Debt

Third World Debt is a term used to address the entire debt of all Third World Countries (Developing countries/LEDCS). Mostly the term is used specifically to address the debt TWCs owe to foreign MEDCs and corporations.

Post-Colonial state/nation/country

This refers to countries previously plagued with colonial rule during the ages of colonialism, such countries often fall victim to weaker economies, loss of culture, and stolen natural resources. Post-colonial nations are the primary “targets” for neocolonialism, but not exclusively.

General overview

First coined by Kwame Nkrumah (1960-1966 President of Ghana) the term appeared in his book: “Neo-Colonialism, The Last Stage of Imperialism” where he criticised Monopolistic Capitalism in post-colonial Africa and expressed that, however independent a state may officially be, if it is economically dependent on outside investors, genuine sovereignty and political independence cannot exist. Nkrumah also noted that, in his opinion, Neocolonialism has potential to exceed the levels of ruin caused by the earlier age of colonialism.
Today, Neocolonialism, while occurring in many forms, is most recognisable in large scale loans and ***possible*** debt-trapping, particularly in post-colonial Africa. Both the IMF (International Monetary Fund) and World Bank Group have been criticised for their extensive loans in post-colonial states and their refusal to waive debts of LEDCs, though not legally proven to be malicious, these institutions have been criticised by scholars and affected populations for reinforcing structural dependence. Similarly the People’s Republic of China has criticisms of their Belt and Road Initiative (BRI); while the initiative promises improved infrastructure and potential economic growth, critics warn of long-term debt risks and reduced national sovereignty. China however, rejects these claims, stating that the BRI is a mutually beneficial initiative aimed at development.

Beyond financial mechanisms, forms of neocolonialism are to be found in cultural spheres as well. Post-Colonial states often remain reliant on the languages of former colonisers in governments, education and institutions, limiting access for many speakers of (ex)native tongues. With legacies of colonising cultures left behind, foreign ways can be perceived as superior, unintentionally reinforcing cultural differences within nations, and increasing the influence of the (ex)coloniser within a post-colonial state. Although difficult to apply to a cultural dynamic, frameworks protecting and promoting indigenous languages, heritage and culture are highly beneficial, strengthening national and cultural identity.

Furthermore, however simple it may seem to point fingers; it is crucial that member states address the issue at its roots as, while delegates accuse, cultures are lost to foreign influence and innocent civilians suffer due to a post-colonial history and neocolonialism burdening their states and governments with unsustainable debts, cuts in investments affecting healthcare, education and more. Others face unlivable wages and poor living standards while multinational corporations and foreign powers reap undeserved rewards. Innocent people suffer due to the misuses of power and capitalisation of the aftermath of an unfair and bloody age gone by.

Major parties involved

The People's Republic of China

In 2013 the PRC adopted the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), an immense scale global infrastructure project predicted to increase trade flows by 4.1% and reduce costs by 1.1% as estimated by studies conducted by The World Bank. With many large scale investments across numerous LEDCs, some, including western governments, have accused the PRC of debt-trap diplomacy and possible Neocolonialism.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF)

The International Monetary Fund provides extensive loans to post-colonial African nations, aimed at improving economic stability. However, many such post-colonial nations currently face criticism that high debt repayments have hindered growth rather than improve economic positions, this has sparked debates on the IMF's role in these dependencies.

The World Bank Group

The World Bank Group is a major provider of long-term loans in post-colonial states. While its goal is to reduce poverty and fuel sustainable growth, some argue that the loans often lead to structural dependence, with foreign investors favoured at the cost of local industries.

BRICS (Brazil, Russia, China, India and South Africa)

Brics is an economic and political bloc acting as an alternative to “western” financial institutions such as the IMF and World Bank Group with their NDB (New Development Bank). The NDB claims to offer loans without the “political conditions” sometimes associated with western institutions. BRICS and its supporters see themselves as an alternative to the “neocolonialistic” economic structures, however, critics warn that some BRICS members themselves participate in neocolonialistic activity.

France

France faces controversy for its significant influence within Françafrique. With the continued use of the CFA Franc, guaranteed by the French Treasury and pegged to the euro, the influence carries over into the continued use of French by the many peoples of Françafrique, some argue of means of cultural neocolonialism. Politically and economically France also holds strong ties to the nations of Françafrique causing more speculation of neocolonialism. On the contrary however, France ensures its role as one of guarantee, a guarantee of security in an unstable and underdeveloped region.

Timeline of Key Events

1965 *“Neo-Colonialism, The Last Stage of Imperialism”*

Kwame Nkrumah publishes *“Neo-Colonialism, The Last Stage of Imperialism”* after coining the term 2 years earlier. He is one of the first to highlight the dangers of Neocolonialism and economic dependence with his book.

May 1st, 1974 *Declaration on the Establishment of a New International Economic Order*

At the 2229th plenary meeting the *Declaration of the Establishment of a New International Economic Order* (NIEO) was adopted, the resolution addressed economic inequalities caused by roots of damaging colonialism and demanded fairer trade between post-colonial and colonising states and more control over national natural resources.

1970s-1980s *Debt Crises in Post-Colonial Africa*

After large oil shocks and a global recession, many (post-colonial) African nations accumulated large foreign debts. Following this payments were diverted from economic development, healthcare and education toward debt servicing, intensifying reliance on foreign parties highlighting the vulnerabilities caused by the colonial era.

June 11, 2005 *Debt Cancellation*

At a traditional meeting of G8 finance ministers in London before the Gleneagles G8 summit, an agreement was reached to write off the entire US$40 billion debt owed by 18 Heavily Indebted Poor Countries to the IMF, World Bank Group and others. Other LEDCs fighting corruption would also become eligible for debt relief; however, an agreement was not reached. Many African governments criticised the plan as inadequate, as the plan proposed by, then Chancellor of Exchequer and Prime Minister, Brown and Blair affected only a small portion of the Third World Debt.

September 7th, 2013 *Inception of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)*

The PRC’s BRI promises significant infrastructure development and beneficial investments, but opposing parties warn of debt traps risking compromised sovereignty for the 151 members. The project sparks debates on possibilities of neocolonialism by non-ex-colonialist powers.

Previous attempts to solve the issue

A multitude of attempts have been made to address the rising debts of post-colonial states, with the IMF, World Bank Group and African Development Fund all offering debt reliefs, none,

unfortunately, have been deemed large successes, certainly not on intercontinental scales. During the COVID-19 global pandemic the G20 temporarily suspended all debt for eligible LEDCs to allow crucial funding for health services and economic betterment through the Debt Service Suspension Initiative in 2020 (DSSI). Suspending US$12.9 Billion of debts in over 45 LEDCs the project was unfortunately not permanent, coming to a close in December 2021, so, while the project was welcomed, it did not address the issue of long-term debt and sovereignty concerns.

Earlier in September 2013 the UN passed the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), the resolution defined the rights of indigenous peoples, such as those in post-colonial states, allowing also the protection of their Indigenous intellectual property e.g. cultures, traditions and beliefs. While not addressing neocolonialism directly, the resolution helped protect the inhabitants of nations affected by neocolonialism.

The UN Special Committee on Decolonisation (C-24) has drafted numerous resolutions on decolonisations and indigenous peoples, none though on neocolonialism, as the committee still focuses on nations currently governed by foreign governments.

Possible solutions

Neocolonialism, an issue of great importance and yet one not yet directly assessed by the United Nations, has had its lasting complications addressed by other committees, with none however tackling the entire spectrum.

Structural long-term debt through foreign investors is the current most detrimental issue for post-colonial states, with, as stated before, funding shifting from important public fields and economic growth toward debt payments, effectively worsening conditions to before investments and loans. Clear and effective debt relief and/or cancellations are essential to revive economic growth, frameworks preventing such long-term structural debts are imperative and tackle neocolonialism head on. Political instability inevitably follows economic downfall, meaning that factoring in possibilities of corruption is highly necessary.

Cultural neocolonialism, also mentioned earlier, is an aspect often seen as unimportant with the severity of economic and political complications, but is far from it. Due to foreign influence from colonialistic governments and investors, cultures, ideologies and beliefs are either negatively influenced or oppressed. In extreme cases western means of living are prized above those of original inhabitants and seen as of greater importance while traditions are looked down upon. Other frameworks protecting cultural rights to belief and governance, must be implemented.

Only when all factors of neocolonialism are accounted for and frameworks prevent corruption, can this issue be properly addressed by the committee.

Further reading

- Neo-Colonialism, the Last Stage of imperialism Kwame Nkrumah
- Neocolonialism - Wikipedia
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