

Abstract

The thesis examines the design and implementation of African regional economic cooperation initiatives using the Lagos Plan of Action (LPA) and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) as comparative case studies. With regards to design, it focuses on the international political economy of the shift from the LPA's state-led, inward-looking, collective self-reliance model to NEPAD's outward looking, market-friendly orientations. Pertaining to implementation, it examines the domestic political economy of institutionalising compliance with regionally agreed policy prescriptions in the absence of an overarching central authority. It focuses on the level of implementation of the LPA and the prospects of implementing NEPAD.

The thesis pursues two main sets of arguments: First, it argues that African states' common concerns about their vulnerability in the global economy have informed the design of a number of ambitious regional initiatives. Within this context, the shift from the LPA to the NEPAD has been dictated by changes in global realities and circumstances. Second, it argues that individual African governments' concern with vulnerability nationally has been responsible for the low levels of implementation of regional economic initiatives. In this regard, the prospects for the sustained implementation of regional cooperation initiatives is structured by expectations of socio-economic benefits, the cost of compliance to states and the institutions to enforce compliance.

The study employs neo-liberal and nationalist perspectives of international political economy to explain how global realities have dictated Africa's economic cooperation options. To explain African governments' attitude towards regional initiatives, the thesis uses insights from comparative political economy. The thesis meanwhile employs insights from institutional economics and rational choice institutionalism to highlight the difficulties of institutionalising compliance with regional policy prescriptions.

To capture the differences in the contexts within which the LPA and the NEPAD were crafted and the variations in their orientations, the thesis uses a combination of 'historical explanation' and 'structured focused comparison' methodology that allows for two separate, but structurally linked accounts of the processes of design and implementation of the two initiatives.