

Nepotism is stealing Africa's future

By [Bertie Jacobs](#), issued by [North-West University \(NWU\)](#)

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- Nepotism is not limited to isolated cases in Africa, but a trend throughout the continent.
- Allowing nepotism practices through family, friends and those least qualified to occupy leadership positions is tantamount to stealing Africa's future from its young generation.
- The liberation movement of the 1960s has not succeeded in addressing nepotism successfully as we see today that the post-colonial project has failed to resolve many socio-economic issues.



Prof Kedibone Phago

Zimbabwean President Emmerson Mnangagwa recently raised eyebrows – and elicited no shortage of criticism – when he appointed his son, David Mnangagwa, as deputy finance minister. What further irked opposition parties was the appointment of his nephew Tongai Mnangagwa as deputy tourism minister, with a number of claims that neither possess the necessary skills or experience for their respective positions.

In 2020, President Félix Tshisekedi of the Democratic Republic of Congo, appointed his son Félix Tshilombo Tshisekedi as the head of the state-owned mining company, Gécamines. In Equatorial Guinea, President Teodoro Obiang Nguema have long been accused of nepotistic practices, and the same can be said of Cameroon President Paul Biya. These are not isolated cases, but a trend throughout the continent. South Africa is not exempt from this, with nepotism rearing its ugly head from the root to the top of the public sector tree.

According to Prof Kedibone Phago, director of the North-West University (NWU) in South Africa's School for Government Studies, Africa's needs to buck this trend, and it needs to do so with haste.

"Allowing nepotism practices through family, friends and those least qualified to occupy leadership positions is tantamount to stealing Africa's future from its young generation. This is because if resources are not properly managed to benefit Africans, but are only used to serve the interests of small political elite groups, the trap of a vicious cycle would remain intact and perpetual."

According to Prof Phago, there are a number of reasons for why nepotism is so prevalent in Africa.

"Nepotism is a form of spoils system that rewards elections winners and their associates. It is closely associated with a system of cadre deployment and are both ideal to help us realise who is getting rewarded and who is not especially after a favourable election outcome (or even military take-over). This is indeed prevalent in most African countries and appears in various forms because there is a need to reward loyalty over competence.

"In most cases this is not done based on a political ideology but merely based on loyalty and greed to plunder resources for individual gain. We also need to remember that this is a historical problem which was one of the modus operandi of the colonial project which sought to put pliant leaders and their families in positions of power. The liberation movement of the 1960s has not succeeded in addressing this successfully as we see today that post-colonial project has failed to resolve many socio-economic issues, bar only political emancipation," he explains.

This has dire consequences for Africa's growth.

“The issue of Africa’s economic growth or a lack thereof is imperative to be considered on this conversation because this is required to ensure that Africa’s Agenda 2063 is achieved along with the UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030. The AU Agenda 2063 and Sustainable Development Goals 2030 need to be some of the critical guiding instruments to ensure that African governments remain focused on critical developmental initiatives. This is because without any meaningful progress and development, these problems would be perpetual and difficult to address,” says Prof Phago.

What then is the cure for this infection that is severely affecting the continent’s health?

“Since this is a historical matter and many leaders are highly insecure, nepotism is considered a soft landing for them. This is because it rewards loyalty to the leader and help them to evade accountability from the relevant governance structures in place such as Parliament. There have been many attempts in the past that were directed towards addressing this matter and it remains an albatross on our governance systems because it is propped up by political and even military power.

“This requires a strong mobilisation of the various sections of the society to get involved in influencing public policy in an active manner. Sectors such as civil society, academia and media need to join hands in setting an agenda which could exert an additional pressure and bring such matters on a spotlight as a way of making a case of ethical conduct as a basic requirement among leaders within the public sector. Perhaps we should consider continuous revision and provide better protection to whistle blowers and other citizens that report these malpractices to law enforcement agencies. The other problem here is also that some of the institutions lack capacity to investigate and lead to prosecution of these cases as they are usually pitted against political power.”

Change is needed, and until accountability is prioritised, progress will remain more of a hope than a reality.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bertie Jacobs is an award-winning journalist who has been published extensively in a variety of national media publications. He is an alumnus of the North-West University where he completed his honours degree in journalism. He enjoys writing about current affairs, everything sociological, human-interest stories and sport. Bertie is a history and popular culture fanatic and spends most of his free time indulging in one of these pursuits... or traveling. Contact Bertie: [[Bertie.Jacobs@nwu.ac.za]]

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