COMPETITIVE DIPLOMACY IN A GLOBAL MARKETPLACE: THE ROLE OF STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP MARKETPLACE (SPM) IN REDEFINING INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Bashir Malam, Ph.D[1] and Yakubu, Elisha Nyam[2]

[1]Department of Department of Political Science, Gombe State University, Gombe
[2]Department of International Relations, Skyline University Nigeria, Kano

ABSTRACT

In an era of globalization and complex interdependence, developing nations face cycles of dependency, exacerbated by skewed power dynamics in diplomacy and international economics. This paper introduces the Strategic Partnership Marketplace (SPM) as a framework empowering these nations to redefine their international engagement. It critiques traditional diplomacy for perpetuating power asymmetries and economic vulnerabilities. The SPM model emphasizes demand-driven, competitive bidding, enabling weaker nations to set non-negotiable criteria aligned with their development goals. Through transparency, accountability, and competition, SPM aims to reduce dependency, protect sovereignty, and maximize economic benefits from foreign partnerships. By fostering equitable partnerships and leveraging multipolar global dynamics, including alternatives like BRICS+ and South South cooperation, SPM provides a pathway for developing nations to reclaim agency in international relations. The paper at the end calls for further research to validate SPM's effectiveness in preserving sovereignty and promoting sustainable economic growth, offering a vision for equitable global engagement.

KEYWORDS

Globalization, Dependency, Strategic Partnership Marketplace (SPM), Sovereignty, Accountability, Equitable Partnerships and Sustainable Growth.

1. INTRODUCTION

Developing nations face persistent and complex challenges, particularly in their ability to chart a course for their future. These states often find themselves in repeated cycles of dependency that colonialism helped to produce. Globalization, along with economic integration and wider exposure to international markets, intensifies such vulnerabilities.

While globalization has created unprecedented opportunities for economic integration, it has also entrenched structural inequalities that disadvantage developing nations. The inability of traditional frameworks to address these imbalances perpetuates dependency cycles, limiting the autonomy of weaker states in shaping their developmental agendas (Keohane & Nye, 1977). This calls for a paradigm shift that prioritizes equitable partnerships tailored to the unique needs of these nations.

Globalization heightens what Keohane and Nye describe as complex interdependence. However, this interdependence is skewed in favor of advanced nations, intensifying the dependency of developing nations. As Carvalho (2021) notes, dependency in international systems prevents weaker states from fully exercising their sovereignty, leaving them vulnerable to foreign powers' conditionalities.

One of the most obvious manifestations of this dependence is the way military and economic superiority define and determine diplomatic exchanges. As argued by Bermúdez Tapia (2020), military capabilities of powerful states allow them to dictate the terms of international engagement, often at the expense of less powerful nations who concede in pursuit of economic or security advantages. This unequal power dynamic undermines the capacity of developing nations and ingrains structures of international relations that perpetuate the influence of powerful states.

Apart from military influence, international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank hold immense sway in dictating policy direction in weaker nations. These dictated policy directions often demand economic reforms that are contrary to the interests of developing nations. As Tsai (1999) argues, such conditionalities effectively erode economic sovereignty because weaker nations, in their eagerness for critical financial support, accept externally imposed policy directions. This results in conditional sovereignty, imposing significant constraints on the policy autonomy of developing nations and reinforcing cycles of dependency.

Traditional diplomatic frameworks further limit the ability of weaker states to negotiate favorable terms. Cohen (2004) opines that, although states voluntarily enter agreements, the concessions required often compromise sovereignty and economic independence. These arrangements reinforce unequal relationships that perpetuate dependency rather than fostering true partnerships for mutual benefit.

Existing alternatives such as South-South cooperation and BRICS+ present opportunities for developing nations to diversify partnerships. However, these frameworks often lack mechanisms to empower weaker states to set the terms of engagement. For instance, while BRICS+ initiatives emphasize collaboration, their outcomes are frequently constrained by competing interests of member states and the absence of enforceable mechanisms for equitable engagement (Stuenkel, 2015). This gap highlights the need for models like the Strategic Partnership Marketplace (SPM), which prioritize demand-driven, transparent, and competitive international relations.

The Strategic Partnership Marketplace (SPM) model seeks to revolutionize how developing nations interact with foreign powers. Unlike traditional diplomacy, where weaker nations often accept terms set by more influential states, the SPM model places these nations at the center, enabling them to set their own terms for foreign partnerships.

It is the aim of this paper to present the Strategic Partnership Marketplace (SPM) as a new paradigm that strengthens developing countries' negotiating capability in international diplomacy. Through a shift from traditional dependency-based bargaining to a competitive and open system, it aims to emphasize how SPM can reduce asymmetrical power relationships and promote sustainable economic partnerships.

To achieve this objective, the study employs a qualitative method anchored in a critical review of academic scholarship, case studies in history, and policy studies. The study borrows from landmark academic sources in international politics, economic diplomacy, and global governance and focuses particularly on dependency theory and multipolarity in international politics. Based on a consideration of the shortcomings in existing paradigms in diplomacy and a review of alternative possibilities, the study constructs a conceptual framework for SPM as a transformational platform for international interaction.

This paper contributes to the discourse on international relations by introducing the SPM model, which emphasizes proactive engagement, transparency, and accountability, addressing the limitations of traditional and contemporary diplomatic structures (Colombo, 2007). By advocating for competitive, demand-driven frameworks, the SPM model empowers weaker nations to leverage multipolar competition to advance their interests and reduce dependency.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Traditional Diplomacy and Sovereignty

Diplomacy refers to the formal practice where nations interrelate with one another through their representatives like ambassadors, foreign ministers, and heads of state to negotiate and dialogue so as to resolve conflicts, to build alliances, and to promote their respective national interests (Arsovski, 2022). Diplomacy is highly favoured as the best mechanism through which states achieve their national interest peacefully (Wasike et al., 2016). Negotiation is central to traditional diplomacy, which is a structured process of communication and bargaining between parties in order to reconcile interests or achieve mutually beneficial agreements (Çiçek, 2022; Rimanelli, 1995). Effectively, traditional diplomacy involves dialogue, compromise, and strategic decision-making to reach a consensus while balancing competing objectives (da Silva and Picinini, 2015). It particularly involves strategic efforts to secure favourable outcomes by leveraging on political, economic, cultural, or military might (Çiçek, 2022). In such an arrangement, states with enormous capabilities always swing the tide to their favour.

As Colombo (2007) suggested, the traditional form of diplomacy was hitherto effective; the global arena was solely dominated by isolated state actors. But with the increasing globalization, not state actors are significantly shaping global happenings, as such, traditional forms of diplomacy are diminishing in potency. It has been argued that the traditional models of diplomacy, based upon the preservation of sovereignty as their operational premise, may in fact actually hinder a state's ability to successfully manage transnational issues (Keohane & Nye, 1973, Stankiewicz, 2010)

The notion of sovereignty within the context of traditional diplomacy can be keenly observed to be further complicated by historic power dynamics. Tarusarira (2020) recounts how legacies from colonialism continue to inform and dictate the practice of diplomacy, most especially between former colonial powers and post-colonial states. In such an arrangement, the practice of traditional diplomatic engagement has kept power imbalances rather than fostered genuine sovereignty. In most international negotiations, the sovereignty of post-colonial states is usually compromised and shaped by the condition of dependency on former colonial masters and also on global institutions.

2.2. International Political Economy and Economic Diplomacy

A critical aspect of international political economy is economic diplomacy which focuses on how states leverage activities such as trade and investment to secure their interests and enhance their global standing. It is the economic diplomacy that states employ to navigate complex economic interdependencies that globalisation has caused (Bergeijk et al., 2011). According to Zirovcic (2016) it is also the economic diplomacy that states use to advance their respective lofty economic interests internationally, whether through trade negotiations, economic aid, or strategic alliances. Ruffini (2016) describes economic diplomacy as a critical mechanism through which states link their corporate investment strategies to national policy goals. This linkage becomes especially important for developing nations, as they attempt to attract foreign investment through it to boost economic growth. However, Ruffini highlights that while economic diplomacy can offer competitive advantages, it also exposes states to risks of economic dependency because economic diplomacy often requires negotiating terms that safeguard national interests and prevent exploitative practices.

On a positive note, Bergijk, Okano-Heijmans, and Melissen (2011) argued that economic diplomacy helps weaker states to maneuver through international economic relations by establishing frameworks that protect against asymmetrical dependencies. They argue that developing nations can leverage economic diplomacy to attract foreign investment on terms that align with their national interests. If managed and used properly, economic diplomacy could foster economic growth and also act as a mechanism to preserve sovereignty and mitigate vulnerabilities that may arise within the broader context of international political economy. Through such diplomatic efforts, developing nations can better position themselves in the global market, balancing growth with the need for economic autonomy (Bergijk et al., 2011).

Turvey (2014) adds a perspective relating to the relationship between economic diplomacy and economic security, arguing that diplomatic strategies must be aligned with a nation's broader economic security goals. He suggests that for weaker nations, economic diplomacy must be used to secure economic sovereignty amidst the constraints of the global economy. He further contends that the success of economic diplomacy is contingent upon skilled negotiation and strategic management which unfortunately, weaker nations often lack the leverage of more powerful states.

2.3. Challenges in Post-Colonial Economic Engagement and Gaps in Current Diplomatic Models

One fundamental gap relating to the traditional diplomatic model is the limited ability it provides to protect the sovereignty of weaker nations. Bilateral and multilateral agreements often operate on power asymmetries, allowing stronger states to impose terms that may restrict the policy options and limit the autonomy of less powerful countries to actively participate in the process. According to Wolfe (1998), though resident ambassadors sit on the driver's side in maintaining international order, their efforts are often constrained by the unequal diplomatic power held by the countries they represent. This disparity means that, while ambassadors of weaker states can negotiate and drive discussions on behalf and for their states, they often unfortunately lack the wherewithal to ensure sovereign-friendly deals. As a result, these states are often compelled to make concessions that undermine their national sovereignty (Wolfe, 1998).

The limited leverage was noted by Chaturvedi (2012) when India engaged in global initiatives like Antarctic policy. He argued that weaker, particularly post-colonial nations face structural, resource-based and diplomatic challenges in asserting influence within global governance systems like the Antarctic Treaty System. These frameworks are often dominated by historically powerful nations in such a way that there is limited ability by weaker states to shape decision-making that involves them.

Another observed gap in the current traditional diplomatic model is the absence of tangible mechanisms to support competitive engagement for weaker nations. The model places a premium and often prioritizes efficiency and adherence to established norms that favours big powers over fostering a level playing field. According to McCann (2020), post-colonial economic agreements such as the Lomé and Yaoundé Conventions, although designed to promote equity, often fell short in empowering weaker states to engage on competitive terms. Instead, these agreements perpetuated dependency by failing to establish mechanisms that would allow weaker nations to set terms favourable to their long-term development goals.

Bourbousson (2022) explored how developing nations fare in economic diplomacy particularly when dealing with big powers. Her exploration suggests that existing diplomatic model is grossly inadequate in providing a flat ground for all; often without participatory mechanisms, and without recourse to the unique economic priorities of developing nations. Such lacunae constraints weak nations to uptake reactionary roles where they adapt to pre-established terms rather than proactively setting their engagement criteria. Such a model also neglects the potential for competitive, demand-driven structures that could enhance economic diplomacy by fostering mutually beneficial partnerships for all (Bourbousson, 2022).

Furthermore, the historical legacy embedded in the traditional diplomatic model towered a rigid structure that disadvantages weaker nations. Castryck (2020) argues that during the interwar period, Belgian and British colonial powers used inter-colonial and inter-imperial cooperation to modernize administration, exploit resources, and maintain control amid crisis. These efforts reinforced colonial dominance but left lasting frameworks that constrained the economic independence of post-colonial nations, perpetuating dependency and global inequality. These models lack the flexibility required to address the evolving needs of developing nations and are ill-suited for fostering true independence and competitive engagement (Castryck, 2020).

Relatedly, Freixo (2018) brought to fore how during the Cold War, Portugal's economic diplomacy with its former colonies was patterned and structured in such a way that it maintains huge influence and only serves its own strategic interests. The post-colonial agreements were made to prioritise Portugal's economic recovery and geopolitical goals at the expense and detriment of the developmental needs and sovereignty of its newly independent territories. This trend has left a legacy of economic models that continue to bind the post-colonial weaker nations to the economic policies of former colonial powers; creating a suffocating environment where weaker nations cannot autonomously shape their engagement.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Theoretical Basis for the SPM Model

The conceptualization of the Strategic Partnership Marketplace (SPM) model is deeply informed by a thorough examination of scholarly literature on dependency theory, economic diplomacy, and global inequalities. These areas provide a robust theoretical foundation to critique existing global systems and justify the need for a transformative model like SPM.

Dependency theory, as articulated by Prebisch (1950) and Frank (1966), lays bare the structural imbalances in the global economic system. This theory explains how developing nations, often situated on the periphery of the global economy, are systematically exploited by core nations. Peripheral countries are primarily relegated to exporting raw materials and low-value goods while importing high-value finished products, thereby perpetuating their economic subordination. Cardoso and Faletto (1979) extended this theory by highlighting the role of domestic elites in collaborating with foreign powers, further entrenching cycles of dependency. These dynamics are exacerbated by globalization, which, while promoting economic integration, has reinforced structural inequalities. As dependency theorists argue, international financial institutions like the IMF and World Bank often exacerbate dependency through conditional loans that prioritize neoliberal reforms over the developmental needs of recipient nations (Stiglitz, 2002).

Dependency theory, while offering an insightful critique of global economic inequalities, has faced substantial criticism for its proposed solutions and theoretical limitations. One of the most contentious aspects is the strategy of delinking from global capitalism, which critics argue is impractical in an increasingly interconnected world. As Pieterse (1994) explains, delinking risks isolating developing nations, depriving them of critical access to technology, capital, and markets essential for economic growth. In a globalized economy where integration often determines competitiveness, the feasibility of such isolationist approaches is severely limited.

Additionally, dependency theory is often critiqued for oversimplifying the dynamics between core and peripheral nations. Grosfoguel (2000) argues that dependency theorists assume all economic interactions between these groups are inherently exploitative. This perspective fails to acknowledge cases where integration into the global economy has fostered significant development. For example, nations in East Asia, such as South Korea and Singapore, have successfully leveraged global trade and investment to achieve rapid economic growth and development, challenging the core assumptions of dependency theory (Herath, 2008).

Another significant criticism is the theory's failure to provide actionable and practical solutions beyond the broad notion of delinking. Gülalp (1998) points out that dependency theory offers little guidance on how nations might navigate global systems to their advantage while addressing structural inequalities. While delinking emphasizes autonomy, it overlooks the interdependence necessary for sustainable development, as Blaney (1996) highlights. Developing countries often rely on global networks for resources, markets, and technology, and delinking could further exacerbate their economic challenges.

Moreover, the Eurocentrism embedded in dependency theory has also been challenged. Gülalp (1998) critiques the theory for failing to account for the diverse historical and cultural contexts of non-Western societies. This limitation results in overly generalized solutions that may not be universally applicable. Kiely (2010) echoes this concern, arguing that dependency theory's rigid structuralist framework fails to recognize the agency of peripheral nations to innovate and negotiate more favorable terms of engagement within the global system.

Finally, dependency theory has been criticized for its inability to explain the success of nations that have integrated into the global economy. Herath (2008) notes that countries like South Korea and Singapore have effectively used globalization to their advantage, thereby contradicting the assumption that integration into global systems necessarily perpetuates dependency. These examples suggest that dependency is not an inevitable outcome of global engagement and that nations can exercise agency to redefine their role in the global economic order.

While dependency theory provides a critical lens for understanding global inequalities, these criticisms underscore its limitations in offering viable strategies for development. Instead of delinking, adaptive frameworks such as the Strategic Partnership Marketplace (SPM) may offer more pragmatic approaches by addressing the structural deficiencies identified by dependency theorists while engaging with the realities of globalization.

4. THE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP MARKETPLACE (SPM) MODEL

The Strategic Partnership Marketplace (SPM) is a conceptual model conceived to redefine how developing nations engage in international relations and maximize gain in the process. Against the traditional diplomatic frameworks, which often couch and constrain weaker nations into accepting terms set by powerful states, SPM is conceived as a demand-driven marketplace where countries can proactively determine the directions and conditions for foreign engagement. The model not only empowers weaker nations to actively own their decision-making process, it also allows them to set explicit, pre-defined engagement terms and invite competitive proposals from foreign partners.

Furthermore, SPM is envisioned as an open, structured platform where nations articulate their specific needs—be they in infrastructure, technology, healthcare, or other sectors—and invite proposals from foreign governments, organizations, and investors. More specifically, SPM operates on market principles, where the environment brings together and accommodates multiple foreign entities to meet and compete on marketplace issues on specified terms. This framework empowers developing nations in particular to outline non-negotiable conditions based on national priorities. In this way, SPM enhances the ability of developing nations to have control over foreign partnerships and engagements and also reduce dependency and lnerability.

The marketplace concept of SPM is simply a platform or environment designed to facilitate long-term, mutually beneficial arrangements as against skewed collaborations between developing nations and big powers. The concept is built on the idea that partnerships should not be predicated and dictated by stronger states, but must be tailored to meet up with mutual interests of the states involved. This approach allows countries to leverage their resources, geographical position, or other strategic assets to actively shape their destinies; shaping the terms of their engagement rather than passive recipients of pre-set conditions. SPM is not only promoting a system where developing nations drive negotiations, but ensures that international engagements align with long-term development objectives of all stakeholders.

4.1. Key Principles of SPM

There are certain core principles embedded in SPM, these are as follows:

4.1.1. Demand-Driven Engagement

In this model, host nations pre-set and tower their national priorities by clearly defining the type of foreign partnerships they seek. The list of the prioritised needs could encompass several issues from education, technology, healthcare, or infrastructure. Based on the predetermined list, nations set the terms that align with their strategic goals. The ultimate goal is to ensure that foreign engagement meets the actual needs of the host nation rather than being based on the interests or conditions of the foreign partner.

4.1.2. Competitive Bidding Process

Unlike traditional diplomacy, where agreements are often reached through negotiations that favour stronger states who often possess leverage against weaker ones, SPM introduces a system where foreign partners must compete to offer the most favourable terms. Through a transparent, structured and marketplace bidding process, foreign entities submit proposals that meet the host nation's criteria. Based on the marketplace processes, the best proposals that align with national interests and developmental needs of the host nations get selected. This principle not only flattens the playing field but also reduces the risk of exploitation; as foreign partners are motivated to propose mutually beneficial terms to secure the partnership.

This bidding process is incredibly important because it provides developing nations with a broader range of options to select from. Ultimately, the marketplace diversity in choice empowers these nations to make decisions based on the best possible terms.

4.1.3. Transparency and Accountability

In traditional diplomatic engagements, agreements are often shrouded in secrecy, leading to concerns about corruption, mismanagement and lack of public trust especially in developing countries. The requirement for transparency and accountability as a principle in SPM addresses these issues such that at every single stage of the partnership process, checks and tracking are made by all stakeholders against the pre-set needs of a nation.

This principle is not one sided, but for both the host nation and foreign partners. By making partnership terms trackable, SPM creates a system where foreign entities are held accountable for their commitments and the citizens and governments are kept in the loop of the processes. The host nation on the other hand is forced to ensure that international engagements and agreements align with national interests.

Furthermore, transparency and accountability in SPM increases public awareness and support for foreign partnerships; as citizens can observe how these partnerships contribute to national development. This public tracking mechanism can also deter corruption since all agreements are subject to scrutiny. Strict adherence to this principle invariably reduces significantly the likelihood of under-the-table negotiations or secret clauses that could undermine national sovereignty.

4.2. Objectives of the Strategic Partnership Marketplace (SPM)

SPM is particularly with three primary objectives to obliterate inherent lacunae in traditional diplomacy that favours powerful nations at the detriment of developing nations.

4.2.1. To Reduce Dependency

In the traditional diplomatic model, developing countries are disproportionately disadvantaged where they are overly reliant on foreign powers for essential resources, financial support, or infrastructure development. This dependency not only limits their options in the international arena but can also trap them in cycles of economic vulnerability and political influence from foreign powers.

By providing a competitive, demand-driven marketplace, SPM reduces the need for developing nations to depend on single or monopolistic sources of foreign aid and investment. Through SPM, host nations can invite multiple foreign partners to bid on various projects. This diversity empowers nations to select partnerships that best align with their needs without over-reliance on any one partner.

4.2.2. To Protect States' Sovereignty

Oftentimes, conditions are arbitrarily imposed when negotiation involves weaker nations and more powerful states. The conditions may include political, social or economic stipulations that could force host nations to implement policies aligned with the foreign partner's interests, often at the expense of local priorities and sovereignty. Such arrangements can erode the ability of nations to independently control their domestic affairs. Through SPM, developing nations can clearly define what they want, what they are willing to compromise on, and what are no-go areas. This structured approach ultimately safeguards against foreign entities exerting undue influence over the host nation's domestic policies and resources.

4.2.3. Maximizing Benefit from Foreign Partnerships

Foreign aid and investment are often characterised as a result of entrenched, vested and imbalanced agreements that are disproportionately favouring the stronger foreign partner, leaving the host nation with limited gains. Oftentimes, such arrangements may provide short-term gains without practical and palpable contribution to meaningful, sustainable and long-term growth. SPM seeks to reverse this imbalance by enabling host nations to carefully evaluate and select partnerships based on long-term benefits. Also, through marketplace competitive bidding processes, foreign entities are incentivized to propose terms not just on their absolute gain, but relatively so as to provide real value to the host nation, which is a win-win situation.

4.3. Key Components of Strategic Partnership Marketplace (SPM)

SPM model is conceptualised with components that structure and operationalize the engagement between host nations and foreign partners. These components ensure that partnerships are aligned with national priorities, transparently evaluated, and held to high standards of accountability. The following are the key components of SPM:

4.3.1. National Needs and Priorities Portal

The national needs and priorities portal is a structured platform hosted by the host nations that clearly define and communicate their specific needs and goals to international actors. This portal is not necessarily a digital space but rather a formalized process or framework where a nation can list priority areas, such as infrastructure, technology, healthcare, education, environmental sustainability, and economic development. Within each sector, the nation sets clear, actionable goals and desired outcomes, establishing a comprehensive list of priorities for foreign engagement. The portal is meant to enable host nations to communicate their development goals directly in a centralized manner.

4.3.2. Competitive Bidding and Proposal Evaluation

Once a host nation outlines its needs and priorities via its portal, it invites interested foreign entities— such as governments, multinational corporations, or NGOs—to submit proposals that address the specified criteria and requirements. This mechanism of competitive bidding transforms foreign engagement into a marketplace where multiple partners vie for the opportunity for engagement.

In the competitive bidding process, foreign partners are expected to provide proposals with attractive terms, such as favourable financing options, technology transfers, or local employment commitments. Each proposal is evaluated based on its adherence to the criteria defined in the national needs and priorities portal. The proposal evaluation process will typically involve a structured assessment where each submission is reviewed against a scoring framework, prioritising criteria like alignment with national goals, financial terms, sustainability measures, and projected long-term impact. This will enable the host nation to objectively select the proposal that best meets its needs; minimising the influence of political or economic pressures that could compromise the quality of the partnership.

4.3.3. Pre-Defined Engagement Criteria and Trade-Offs

To ensure that partnerships align with national interests, the SPM model is conceived to incorporate a pre-defined engagement criteria and trade-offs. This component could allow host nations to establish clear, non-negotiable terms for any foreign partnership. The pre-defined criteria may include requirements for technology transfer, local workforce utilization, environmental standards, transparency in financial transactions, or any other critical parameters that safeguard the host nation’s priorities and values. Setting these criteria upfront prevents intending foreign partners from dictating terms that might compromise the nation’s sovereignty, economic stability, or environmental sustainability.

4.3.4. Compliance Monitoring and Accountability Measures

The compliance monitoring and accountability measure is simply a mechanism for tracking the progress and compliance of foreign partners with the terms and commitments outlined in their proposals. The measure is particularly aimed to ensure that all parties remain accountable to the agreed-upon terms, and that partnerships continue to serve the host nation’s interests throughout the duration of the engagement.

Key tools for compliance monitoring may include regular performance audits, progress reports, and independent evaluations by third-party agencies or civil society organizations. Any deviations from agreed-upon terms are flagged for corrective action, and in cases of significant non-compliance, the host nation reserves the right to renegotiate or terminate the partnership.

To further ensure transparency, the measure requires for all data to be publicly accessible to all stakeholders and be open to public scrutiny. This transparency helps to deter corruption or exploitative practices, as both the foreign partner and the host nation are aware that their actions are visible to stakeholders.

4.4. Benefits of the Strategic Partnership Marketplace (SPM)

The benefits of SPM are varied, but are particularly beneficial in empowering developing nations to engage in international partnerships on their own terms. Ultimately, the benefits may include the following:

4.4.1. Enhanced Sovereignty and Control

SPM fundamentally empowers nations to maintain their sovereignty by setting the terms of foreign engagement rather than adapting to conditions imposed by stronger states. In traditional models, developing nations often find themselves agreeing to foreign terms that may not align with their own developmental needs or values, potentially compromising their sovereignty in exchange for financial support or investment. However, with SPM, host nations clearly define non-negotiable criteria for partnerships upfront, including specific standards for social, economic, and environmental considerations.

This proactive approach allows the host nation to remain in control of the partnership’s scope, reducing the risk of undue influence from foreign powers and minimizing the pressure to conform to external agendas

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4.4.2. Optimized Economic Value Extraction

A significant plus of the SPM model is the competitiveness it engenders in driving foreign partners to offer the best possible terms to secure partnerships. By creating a marketplace where multiple foreign entities can bid on projects or sectors, SPM encourages competition that maximizes economic value extraction for the host nation.

As each entity attempts to differentiate itself and stand out, the host nation gains leverage, selecting proposals that offer the highest economic and social returns. By optimizing economic value extraction in this way, SPM enables the host nation to benefit not only from direct investment but also from long-term gains that contribute to economic resilience and self-sufficiency.

4.4.3. Alignment with Long-Term Development Goals

Traditional foreign engagement models often prioritize immediate gains, such as quick financial returns or short-term infrastructure boosts, which may not align with sustainable national development. In contrast, SPM requires foreign entities to adhere to criteria that reflect the host nation's strategic goals, such as sustainable resource use, local employment, and technological advancement. Through SPM, partnerships are tailored to support the host nation's long-term development objectives, fostering growth that is sustainable and contributes to broader economic stability. This focus on long-term goals promotes a balanced and future-oriented approach to international relations.

4.4.4. Transparency and Public Trust

Unlike traditional diplomatic agreements that may be negotiated behind closed doors, SPM emphasizes openness and public visibility throughout the entire partnership process. By making partnership terms, compliance data, and performance reports publicly accessible, SPM fosters a culture of transparency that allows citizens to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of foreign engagements.

Public tracking of partnerships through SPM also ensures that both the host nation and its foreign partners remain accountable for their commitments which reduces the likelihood of corruption or exploitative practices. This transparency also encourages foreign partners to act responsibly, knowing that their performance and adherence to the agreed-upon terms are subject to public scrutiny. For the host nation's government, transparent partnership practices enhance public trust, as citizens can observe that foreign engagements are aligned with national interests and managed in a way that benefits the broader population. Furthermore, transparency in SPM allows for an informed public dialogue around foreign partnerships, empowering citizens to contribute feedback and hold their government accountable.

4.4.5. Reduced Dependency and Diversified Foreign Relations

By creating a marketplace that attracts multiple potential partners, SPM importantly encourages diversification in foreign relations such that host nations do have the ability to select from a broad array of partners who meet their criteria. This diversification mitigates the risks associated with over-reliance on any one foreign entity, which can lead to economic and political vulnerabilities.

By reducing dependency through diversification, SPM provides a platform for host nations to cultivate more balanced and mutually beneficial international relations. This, in turn, strengthens the nation's economic resilience, enhances its global standing, and minimizes the likelihood of exploitation or coercive influences from dominant foreign powers.

4.5. Potential Challenges of the Strategic Partnership Marketplace (SPM)

While the SPM model offers a transformative approach for host nations to engage in foreign partnerships on favourable terms, there are legions of challenges that could affect its implementation and success. These challenges include the following:

4.5.1. Resistance from Foreign Powers

Powerful states are accustomed and tactful in exerting considerable influence over less powerful nations through direct financial assistance, foreign investment, or trade agreements that are skewed to favour their own strategic interests. The competitive nature of the SPM model disrupts these conventional dynamics and frantic effort would resist such arrangement.

Resistance may manifest in several ways. Foreign powers could opt out of engaging with SPM entirely, choosing instead to pursue partnerships with nations that are more open to traditional, top-down approaches. Others may attempt to undermine the model by lobbying for concessions or adjustments that could dilute SPM's demand-driven principles. Additionally, powerful nations may apply diplomatic or economic pressure on host nations to deter them from fully implementing the SPM framework, particularly if their interests are directly challenged by this new model.

To address this resistance, host nations implementing SPM may need to strengthen their diplomatic strategies and form coalitions with other countries adopting similar models. By collaborating and aligning with other nations focused on transparent and demand-driven engagement, they can collectively support the SPM model and can significantly reduce the leverage of resistant powers.

4.5.2. Political Commitment of Weaker Nations

Weaker nations may struggle with internal political pressures that can undermine SPM's effectiveness. For instance, local elites or political factions with ties to foreign powers might advocate for more traditional engagement models, especially if they personally benefit from established diplomatic arrangements. Furthermore, financial pressures or immediate economic needs may lead governments to consider offers that do not align with SPM's competitive bidding process, particularly if those offers promise rapid economic relief.

For SPM to be successful, host nations must demonstrate a strong and consistent political commitment to the principles of the model. This involves not only adopting SPM but also upholding its values of transparency, accountability, and demand-driven engagement, even when faced with attractive offers from powerful nations that may deviate from the structure of the model. Maintaining this commitment can be challenging for several reasons, including political pressure, short-term financial incentives, and changes in government leadership that may deprioritize SPM.

4.5.3. Balancing Immediate and Long-Term Needs

Developing nations often face urgent demands, such as infrastructure gaps, high unemployment, and health crises, which create a need for rapid foreign investment and resources. But in the SPM model, foreign partners are selected based on their ability to meet predefined criteria, which are typically aligned with the host nation's long-term interests. However, this prioritization may mean that some immediate opportunities are missed, especially if those partnerships do not meet the high standards set by SPM.

To manage this tension, host nations can use SPM's structured framework to categorize projects by urgency and alignment with national priorities. By creating tiers within the National Needs and Priorities Portal, for instance, nations can set aside certain projects for expedited review, allowing flexibility for short-term solutions without compromising the integrity of the SPM model. Also, host nations could explore mixed funding models, such as public-private partnerships or blended finance arrangements, where short-term projects receive financing that does not compromise future goals.

4.6. Why the Strategic Partnership Marketplace (SPM) Would Work?

SPM could offer an effective, timely approach to foreign engagement in a changing trend in international relations.

4.6.1. The Changing Nature of Global Power Structure: The Waning of U.S. Hegemony and the Rise of China

The structure of global power has evolved significantly, with the United States gradually relinquishing its position as the sole power. The rise of China as a major economic and geopolitical force has created a more multipolar environment, where influence is increasingly contested. This shift provides opportunities for developing nations to leverage competition between powers, as they can evaluate partnership offers from both Western and Eastern sources. The expanding influence of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) particularly in Africa, Latin America and Asia illustrate the opportunity for developing nations. According to Ikenberry (2018), the emergence of China and other regional powers has introduced new dynamics into the global system, such that nations can negotiate more balanced agreements by engaging with multiple powerful states. With SPM, developing nations could choose partnerships from the highest bidder.

4.6.2. The Alternative Provided by BRICS+

BRICS+ (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, with expansion to include other emerging economies) presents another significant alternative to Western-dominated alliances. BRICS+ embodies a multipolar approach to global governance, epitomised by South-South cooperation and a focus on reducing reliance on traditional Western powers. This realignment promotes a competitive international landscape so that developing nations can diversify their partnerships. Also, The SPM model is compatible with the values promoted by BRICS+, as it supports competitive, demand-driven partnerships that prioritises the host nation's development goals.

Stuenkel (2015) argues that BRICS has catalysed a new era in international relations by engendering cooperative platforms that challenge the unipolar dominance of the West. BRICS nations, with their diverse economies and experiences navigating post-colonial relations, are positioned to support a model like SPM, where partnerships are built on equitable terms.

Additionally, BRICS+ provides a supportive environment for nations to exercise agency and demand transparency in foreign engagement, both of which are central to the SPM approach.

4.6.3. The Re-Emergence of Nationalism and Policies such as "America First"

The resurgence of nationalism, particularly in Western countries, further supports the viability of the SPM model. In recent years, countries like the United States have prioritised national interests over international commitments, as seen in "America First" policies that favour domestic economic growth and reduced foreign aid. This inward turn creates a window of opportunity for developing nations to diversify their partnerships and reduce reliance on traditional Western powers.

Kagan (2018) explains that nationalist policies, particularly in the United States, have led to a retreat from global engagement, reshaping alliances and prompting developing nations to seek alternative partnerships. This shift has incentivised nations to assert greater control over their foreign engagements, an approach that aligns closely with SPM's emphasis on sovereignty and competitive engagement.

CONCLUSION

SPM offers a significant advancement in the field of international relations; focused on addressing long standing challenges that have limited the sovereignty and developmental autonomy of developing nations. It particularly establishes a demand-driven, competitive framework for foreign partnerships that empowers weaker states to set their own terms for engagement. This model stands in stark contrast to traditional diplomatic frameworks, which often place developing nations in reactionary roles, constrained by terms dictated by powerful states or multilateral institutions. Through SPM, host nations are equipped to select partnerships that provide the highest economic and social returns, reducing dependency on single foreign powers and enhancing their sovereignty.

In emphasizing principles such as competitive bidding, transparency, and accountability, SPM not only optimizes economic value extraction but also ensures that foreign engagements are aligned with sustainable development objectives. The model's structured approach enables nations to reject partnerships that may lead to exploitative practices, instead fostering relationships that contribute meaningfully to the host nation's broader economic resilience and self-sufficiency. By prioritizing transparency, SPM builds public trust in foreign engagements, allowing citizens to observe and evaluate the effectiveness of partnerships in advancing national interests. In doing so, SPM challenges traditional diplomatic norms and creates an environment where weaker nations can proactively shape their international relations based on demand-driven engagement.

Future research on the Strategic Partnership Marketplace could explore various aspects to deepen understanding and practical application of the model. Empirical studies examining the impact of SPM on sovereignty preservation and economic growth would provide valuable insights into its effectiveness. Further research might also investigate best practices for implementing SPM, particularly in diverse political and economic contexts, to guide nations in adopting and adapting the model to their specific needs. Additionally, exploring the potential of SPM's principles in other diplomatic contexts—such as regional alliances or trade agreements—could open new avenues for competitive and equitable engagement in international relations, beyond traditional bilateral and multilateral frameworks.

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AUTHORS

Bashir Malam is the Head of the Department of Political Science at Gombe State University and serves as the Editor-in-Chief of the Jewel Journal of Politics (JJOP). He earned his PhD from the University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka, and holds Master's and Bachelor's degrees in Political Science from Bayero University, Kano. His research interests include International Politics, Regional Integration, Peace and Conflict Studies, and Comparative Politics. He has attended numerous workshops and conferences and co-authored several publications in his field.

Nyam Elisha Yakubu is a faculty member at Skyline University Nigeria (SUN), Kano, and the Acting Head of the Department of International Relations. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Political Science and a Master of Science in International Relations and Strategic Studies, both from the University of Jos, Nigeria. Yakubu also has a Postgraduate Diploma in Education ((PGDE) from Usman Danfodio University, Sokoto. Currently, he is pursuing a PhD in Peace and Conflict Studies at Gombe State University. His research interests include Peace and Conflict, Strategic studies, Foreign Policies, Sustainable development and Sustainability.