

NEPAD: A NEW AGENDA OR ANOTHER RHETORIC IN AFRICA'S POLITICAL ADVENTURISM?

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African states have passed through many stages of developmental metamorphosis since independence. Each stage has marked a political milestone for which a disproportionate amount of political inertia has dealt decelerating blows to development. This article examines the challenges facing the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). NEPAD was born against the backdrop of widespread political imbroglio involving civil wars, human rights abuses, and limited financial resources for development in Africa. NEPAD is perceived to have made considerable progress in agriculture, infrastructure, environment, and African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) implementations. The development partners, however, are accused of having failed to meet their financial and other commitments, a condition that African leaders branded "a letdown by donors who failed to live up to their pledges." This article argues that the ability of NEPAD to deliver Africa out of the current political and economic limbo depends largely on how well it can galvanize the political will of African state agents and the moral conscience of local and international partners to implement the NEPAD strategies.

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Introduction

The merger of the Millennium Partnership for the African Recovery Programme (MAP) and Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade's Omega Plan gave birth to what is today the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). Developed by five African heads of state (South African President Thabo Mbeki; Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo; Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika; Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak; and President Wade) as its principal architects, NEPAD is nurtured and marketed as Africa's organic political product designed to pull the continent out of its past developmental limbo by setting it on the path to democracy, good political and corporate governance, and respect for the rule of law. NEPAD is envisioned as a homegrown strategy by which Africa claims ownership to its own development agenda. The initiative is therefore perceived as the bridge that will link the continent and its development partners — mainly developed countries, multilateral institutions, the private sector, and civil society — in a cooperative effort to achieve development, based on mutual responsibility and respect.

Africa sees NEPAD as an instrument for weaving together many of its numerous domestic predicaments such as poverty, lack of investment capital, political instability, corruption, and general economic downturn. The global dilemmas facing Africa, such as limited access to international markets and globalization, compel member states to adopt strategies that would contrive the realization of economic growth and sustainable development. The continent through NEPAD plans to eradicate extreme poverty, hunger, and disease as part of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); accelerate the pace of economic growth; place Africa and individual African countries solidly in the global arena; halt the marginalization of the continent in the world social and economic orders; empower

women and other socially disadvantaged groups; and build the requisite infrastructure for sustainable development (Obasanjo 2004).

This article discusses the prospects of using NEPAD to achieve these objectives and thereby set the stage for Africa's growth and development. It explores the stability and propensity of NEPAD to tower above the diametrically opposing views held by its architects and those of its critics. The discourse attempts to realistically assess the NEPAD initiative with objectivity without falling victim to the optimism of its proponents or the pessimism of its detractors. The pessimists still see NEPAD as a utopian top-down and politically motivated agenda that came out of the exuberance of a few political leaders and heads of state. To this group, NEPAD was conceived without due consultations with the majority of the stakeholders and not enough planning was injected into the implementation strategy. The apparent impasse facing NEPAD today in attracting sufficient funds and in speedy implementation of projects seems to lend credence to the prognosis of these skeptics.

This article begins by discussing the mission and vision of NEPAD. It then presents strategies for using NEPAD to achieve the specific objectives and the long-term goal of sustainable development in Africa. The article then highlights the expectations of African leaders before addressing ways of developing Africa's infrastructure. The report next focuses on the role of the development partners and the major challenges facing NEPAD. The article concludes by presenting the way forward.

NEPAD's Mission and Vision

NEPAD's agenda is predicated on the realization that Africa has been riding a political roller coaster since the era of independence. This state of political limbo spanned more than half a century. Prior to the formation of NEPAD, the prospects of Africa ever

extricating itself from this quagmire were improbable. Under NEPAD, Africa nurses high hopes and sets pertinent but seemingly ambitious goals for development. This is set against the backdrop of her past performance, which has been marked by a preponderance of political instability and the raging tenacity of leaders to remain in power by resisting attempts at using constitutional means to bring about change in leadership.

African leaders see NEPAD as the instrument for solving the nagging problems that have continuously hindered Africa's development. Leaders have acknowledged that there are conditions necessary for the attainment of sustainable development, and they set out to institutionalize them. They acknowledged that sound democracy, peace and security, and good governance are vital in the pursuit of sustainable development. Accordingly, the leaders rapidly pursued the formation of The Peace and Security Council (PSC), Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC), and the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) as organs of NEPAD to explicitly demonstrate their commitments to implementing the development agenda. The institutionalization of these organs is a giant stride in bringing about peace and security and in boosting investor's confidence in the continent. African leaders have repeatedly reaffirmed their belief that it is their primary responsibility to prevent, manage, and resolve conflicts in the continent. The APRM is designed as a mechanism to further establish Africa's preparedness to institute democracy and good political governance.

NEPAD assumes a unique status compared to past development agendas in the sense that Africa lays claim to ownership and responsibility for its origin and creation. Upon NEPAD's implementation, the continent acknowledges its economic limitations and seeks technical and financial support from her development partners. This commitment is

regarded as the first time Africa has presented “ownership” and “governance” to the world as the basic principles of African development (Enoki 2002).

Theoretical Framework and Hypothesis

This article builds on the assumption that NEPAD possesses the key to unlock capital, which currently resides with the local and foreign development partners. The discourse posits that without NEPAD, Africa and the developed world would remain isolated, and the capital that is currently embedded in the latter would be unavailable to Africa for her much-needed development. This condition is depicted in Figure 1, where the development strategy of Africa is an empty set, the goal is undefined, and development funds are held by the development partners and are not flowing into Africa. While the overseas partners have the bulk of the development funds and can release them in the form of official development assistance (ODA) and foreign direct investment (FDI), there are other development partners within the continent, including the civil society and the private sector.

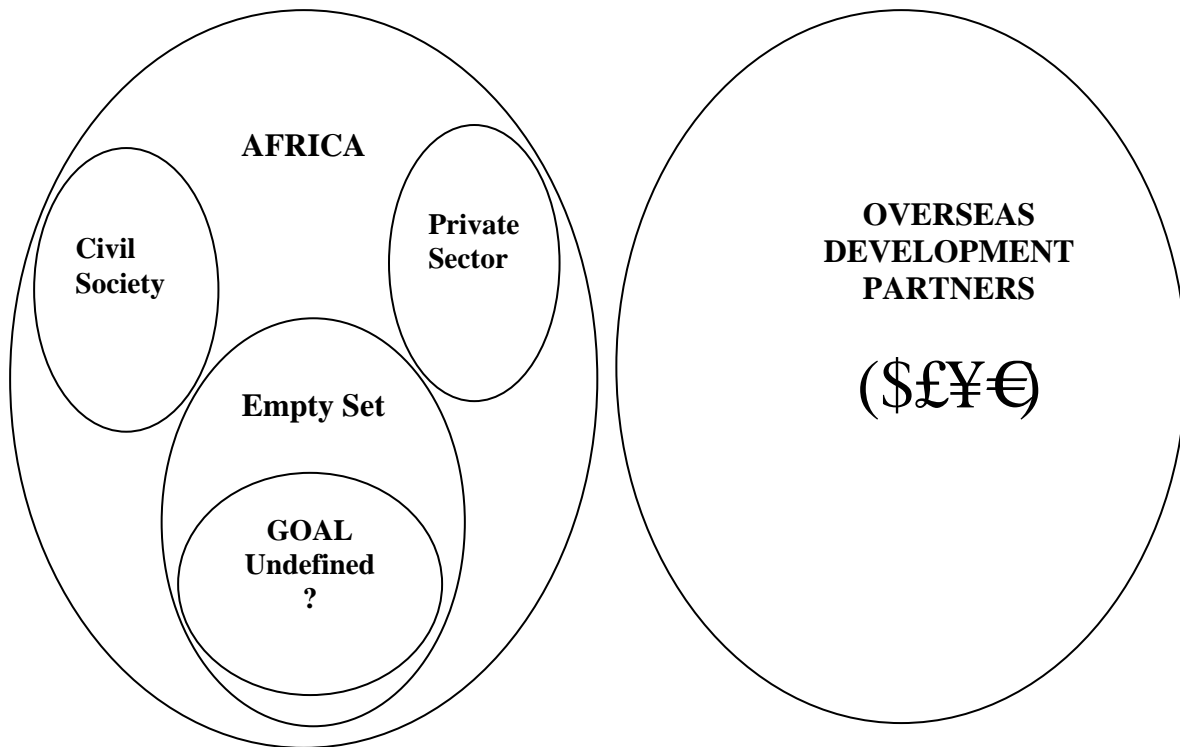


Figure 1: Separated Worlds of Africa and Development Partners without NEPAD

With NEPAD, the continent hopes to liberate funds from their entrapment in the developed world and channel them into NEPAD for use in the implementation of its programs. In the process, civil society, the private sector, and other stakeholders will become involved and contribute to the goal of sustainable development (see Figure 2).

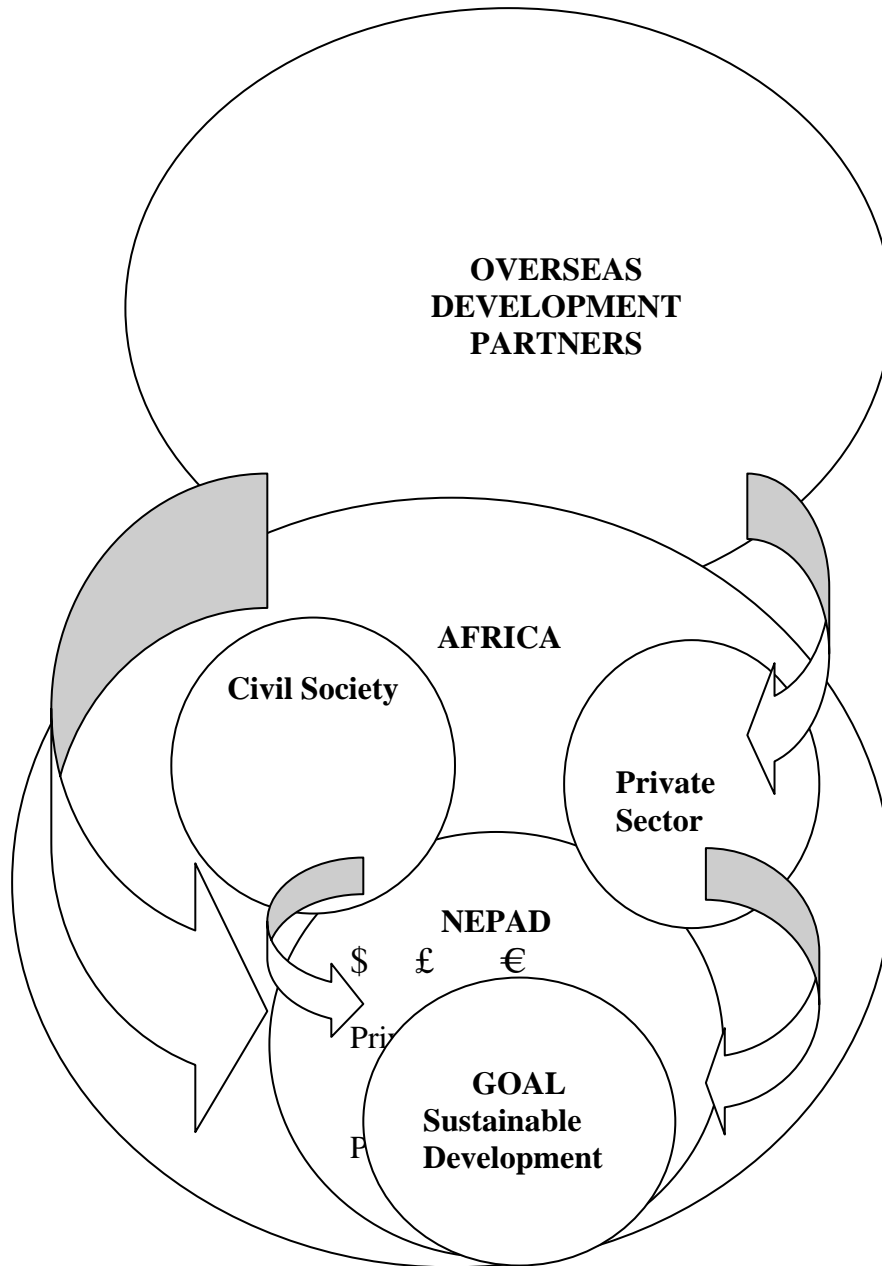


Figure 2: Perceived Structure between Africa and Development Partners with NEPAD

The extent to which this capital release will contribute to growth and sustainable development in Africa will depend on the political will of the African leaders to create an environment in which the monies will be used for the purpose for which they are intended.

On the other hand, achieving accelerated growth and sustainable development through the financial support of the development partners will depend on the timeliness and amount of the release from the development partners.

Commitments of African Leaders Revisited

Peace and Security

African heads of state and governments at the First Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the African Union (AU) in Durban, South Africa, in July 2002 adopted the protocol relating to the establishment of the Peace and Security Council (PSC). The protocol later came into force in December 2003 and was then launched on 25 May 2004. The PSC is designed to act as a standing, decision-making organ for security as well as the prevention and resolution of conflicts. It does this through a system of collective action and early warnings to facilitate timely and efficient responses to the mounting political conflicts, social malaise, and economic challenges that remain common experience in Africa. Among the objectives of the PSC are to promote peace, security, and stability in Africa and to guarantee the protection and preservation of life and property and the well-being of the African people and their environment as well as the creation of conditions conducive to sustainable development. The PSC would also anticipate and prevent conflicts and in circumstances where conflicts have occurred, shall have the responsibility to undertake peace-making and peace-building functions for the resolution of these conflicts (African Union 2002).

The council *inter alia* in conjunction with the chairperson of the commission, can institute sanctions whenever an unconstitutional change of government takes place in a member state. It should also take appropriate action within its mandate in situations where

the national independence and sovereignty of a member state is threatened by acts of aggression. However, J. Cilliers (2003) documented that “State security in most of Africa is not threatened by conventional threats of armed attack by other countries, but by more insidious measures, many of which are determined by the very weakness of the state and absence of control over its own territory.” In other words, many of Africa’s conflicts are internally fomented by citizens of the respective countries.

The United Nations (UN) Secretary-General, Kofi Annan in his address to African heads of state in Lusaka in 2001 admonished that “Africa must reject the ways of the past and commit itself to building a future of democratic governance subject to the rule of law” (Annan 2001). According to Annan, “such a future is only achievable on the condition that we end Africa’s conflicts without which aid or trade, assistance or advice, will not make any difference” (Annan 2001). The UN Secretary-General had earlier stated that “for too long, conflict in Africa was seen as inevitable or intractable or both.... But it is neither; instead conflict in Africa, as everywhere, is caused by human action and can be ended by human action” (Annan 1998).

Africa has made commendable strides in the pursuit of peace and security with successful interventions in Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Cote d’Ivoire, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau, Sao Tome and Principe, Sudan, and now Togo. However, some of these interventions are only temporary reprieves that are followed by the sporadic eruption of more conflict. It is in the light of this fragile peace without permanent stability that the chairperson of NEPAD’s Heads of State and Government Implementation Committee (HSGIC) lamented that a number of challenges still remain, despite the progress that has been made in implementing NEPAD. He outlined the need for immediate support

for the peace efforts in Burundi, the DRC, Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia, and Sierra Leone (Obasanjo 2003). The same challenge faces NEPAD in other African countries where peace might have been temporarily secured but remains fragile and unsustainable, as in Somalia, Sudan, DRC, Burundi, and Togo. NEPAD ties its ability to maintain peace to the availability of funds, and lack of funds has been cited as the main reason for the difficulties facing the AU peacekeeping force in Darfur. The mission is reported to face severe shortages of manpower and resources, making it difficult to reach out to the hungry and starving people in the region. In order to succeed, the mission requires funds from the international community for motor vehicles, helicopters, and ambulances, and this is where NEPAD looks upon the foreign partners for assistance.

Economic and Corporate Governance

Regional and sub-regional economic integration is prescribed as the strategy for achieving rapid economic growth and sustainable development in Africa. The regional economic communities (RECs) are to be used as building blocks for regional integration. Common markets that link member states and foster interregional economic cooperation contribute to the actualization of this goal. The Common Market for East and Southern Africa (COMESA) is one of such formations that engender regional and interregional trade and economic cooperation. Basing economic integration on geographic location is not without its problems. It often leads to the questioning of the rationale regarding the inclusion of members from outside the geographic vicinity. For example, Egypt's membership in COMESA always raises the question of the relevance of the membership of a North African state to an eastern and southern Africa organization. At the same time, the

nonmembership of South Africa in the organization raises questions among the proponents of regional economic integration on the propriety of such exclusion.

Promoting intra-African trade and cooperation through trade liberalization are strategies geared toward improving Africa's limited access to the world market. Such cooperation and integration would give Africa the bargaining chips and strength it needs for trade negotiations in global market forums such as the World Trade Organization (WTO). South Africa has been successfully competitive and has carved out a niche for itself in the African and global markets in consumer goods and information and communication technology (ICT). But, the rest of the member states of the continent are suffering from technological backwardness, which compels them to merely export primary agricultural commodities with consequent low export earnings.

NEPAD is also geared toward establishing an enabling environment for FDI in the continent. Political crises and instability have been blamed for increased decline in FDI flows into Africa. It is natural that investors are risk-averse and will only commit funds in risk-free economies. The continent's share in the world's FDI inflows continues to decline and dropped to below 1 percent in 2000 (UNCTAD 2001). The aggregate decline amounted to US \$1.4 billion in 2000 and contrasted sharply with the US \$2.2 billion rise in Angola, Morocco, and South Africa, the principal recipients of FDI in the continent (UNCTAD 2001). Note the paradox of high FDI flows into Angola in spite of the long period of political crises as demonstration of the positive influence on FDI of the presence of extractive minerals: oil in the case of Angola.

Domestic Savings and Potential to Raise Investment Capital

Africa lacks the capacity to increase domestic savings and boost investment mainly due to the preponderance of poverty. Many states are further impoverished by limited resource endowments and natural obstacles such as droughts and flood disasters. Other factors that exacerbate this poverty condition are man-made, such as political unrest and full-scale wars. In their annual joint symposium, the African Diplomatic Corps in Japan (ADC) and the United Nations University (UNU) attested to Africa's state of poverty and underdevelopment when they reported that thirty-two of the forty-eight least developed countries in the world are located in Africa (ADC and UNU 2002).

Improved public revenue and expenditure management is one of NEPAD's proffered solutions to the rampant graft and corruption that have hindered development on the continent. Responsive African states have set up anticorruption squads and campaigns against corruption. This is intended to flush out the "bad eggs" within the government and to set the pace for expanding the anticorruption movement to civil society. Despite the apparent concern and action of some of these governments, civil society, donors, and development partners still show skepticism about these governments' sincerity of purpose, their commitment, and their ability to successfully fight corruption in the continent.

Furthermore, serious capital flight is a common characteristic of many African states that is often attributed to these states' political leadership. Money generated in the domestic economy, the bulk of which is government revenue, is often misappropriated and stashed away in foreign banks. While some recoveries have been made in recent times, the amounts recovered have been comparatively low and represent mere tips of the iceberg in comparison with the amount of outflow. Furthermore, the recoveries have not been made at the

instance of NEPAD. Instead, they have been more due to the bilateral negotiations between the concerned countries and the overseas partners or collaborators.

Given the enormity of debt owed by African countries, debt reduction and forgiveness are pursued through NEPAD as avenues to lessen Africa's debt burden, combat poverty, and release capital for development. Africa commands a lion's share of members applicable for the Heavily Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) process; eighteen of the twenty-two countries that qualify under the enhanced HIPC come from Africa. Africa's more than US \$200 billion debt burden is the single biggest obstacle to the continent's development. Most of this debt is illegitimate, having been incurred by despotic and unrepresentative regimes. African countries spend almost US \$14 billion annually on debt service (Africa Action 2006). These debt repayments divert money directly from basic human needs and services such as health care and education and fundamentally undermine African governments' attempts to fight the AIDS pandemic and promote sustainable development. According to the U.S. Treasury, the HIPC process would reduce the debt level of qualifying countries to 30 percent of the debt they originally held and would significantly stimulate growth. It is further argued that the money spent in debt repayment to creditors can be channeled toward combating poverty in Africa and speed up the momentum of development. Whether this expectation will prove true will depend on the proficiency and prudence of the state finance management apparatus in turning the gains from debt reduction and cancellation into increased investment to stimulate growth.

Democracy and Political Governance

The APRM was adopted as an instrument by NEPAD to demonstrate a commitment to economic and corporate governance. Currently, twenty-three of the fifty-

three member states of the African Union have acceded to the review, and four countries — Ghana, Kenya, Mauritius, and Rwanda — are already undergoing the review process. Ghana launched its peer review process with the opening of the National Stakeholders' Forum in Accra in May 2004 (Kajee 2004). The APRM is not intended to police the actions of the acceding governments but to assist them in their will and commitment to good governance. It is to help countries improve their policy-making capacity, adopt optimal practices, and comply with established standards, principles, and codes. The peer review process examines all levels of government, parliament, and the judiciary as well as the private sector. The private sector is included on the premise that some large private corporations exploit the greed of political leaders to advance their business interests. Africa's stagnation and indeed retrogression in the socioeconomic development sphere can be attributed largely to the levels of chronic poor governance experienced by many states. Previously, African states regarded their sovereignty as sacrosanct, and this gave impetus to corrupt regimes to perpetuate corruption and prolong their terms in office at the expense of the interest and well-being of their citizens (Kajee 2004). Despite its limitations, APRM, if followed through with sincerity, could help translate NEPAD rhetoric into concrete and measurable results at the national level. Given that the signing of the memorandum of understanding (MOU), acceding to APRM, and submitting to the peer review are voluntary and there are no sanctions placed upon faulty governments, how can we expect that African leaders, many of whom have held positions in politics since the era of independence, will welcome any changes that could potentially threaten their hold on power? Such leaders would rather die in office than leave voluntarily. They also nurse the fear that if they leave office, they run the risk of being exposed for their corrupt practices by succeeding governments. In their attempts to perpetuate themselves in power, they often undertake unconstitutional and

violent measures, such as suppression of the opposition and the positioning of close relatives and allies to protect them in the unlikely event of their forcibly vacating office.

The debate on peer review has opened up considerable room for African civil society organizations to seek out and establish parallel processes to hold African governments and leaders accountable to their stated commitments and decisions (Cilliers 2003). This is partly in retaliation for the alienation and marginalization of civil society at the formative stage of NEPAD and partly due to the empowerment and authority of civil society organizations upon the launching of the ECOSOCC. The Third Ordinary Session of the AU Summit in Addis Ababa in July 2004 adopted the statutes of ECOSOCC. Launched on 29 March 2005, ECOSOCC became a fully fledged organ of the AU with responsibility for bringing the insights of African civil organizations into action as a medium of engagement of these civil society organizations with the African Union and its other organs including NEPAD (AU 2005).

It is this empowerment of the civil society in the democratization process that K. Matlosa (2003) of the Electoral Institute of South Africa alluded to when he proposed that civil society should monitor energetically and on its own terms the promise of African leaders to change the dysfunctional economies aggravated by poor leadership and corruption in many countries. Matlosa further stated that:

“There should be a shadow process by civil society organizations (CSOs) so that if they cannot participate in the formal process, they have their own process to keep it honest. As civil society, agencies must interrogate peer review, conduct research and share information with others.”

APRM is the most concrete and innovative development of NEPAD to date. Its *modus operandi* is to use peer pressure rather than sanctions to bring about democracy and political governance, economic and corporate management, and socioeconomic development. How this can come about is anybody's guess in a continent where members of trade unions are not given clearance to travel into another state to give voice and support to sister organizations within the same REC or custom union. Zimbabwe's repeated denial of entry to representatives of South Africa's trade union organization to monitor performance and give support to a sister organization in Zimbabwe is an example of a major problem resulting from NEPAD's protection of the sanctity of the state sovereignty. Given that the APRM is supposed to demonstrate transparency, accountability, and the rule of law under the aegis of NEPAD, it is expected that both should work together as organs of the AU to restore the rule of law and people's rights in a member state. This was the expectation in the run-up to the 31 March 2005 parliamentary elections in Zimbabwe. Unfortunately this was not the case as dissenting members of the opposition and the civil society were denied fair treatment and access to state organs like the media and financial resources.

Bridging the Infrastructure Gap

Africa lags behind the rest of the developing world continents in its level of sophistication and infrastructural development. The limited infrastructure, especially in roads and communication, hinders interstate trade and distribution of commodities and services. Building infrastructure is capital-intensive and requires high initial outlays. It also demands substantial capital in recurrent maintenance expenditures. All these conditions greatly exceed the internal capacity of many African states. Hence, Africa is left with no

other option than to seek the financial support of development partners to help fulfill this purpose through NEPAD.

The deplorable state of infrastructure in Africa is further exacerbated by shifts in regional and thematic focus by donors, financial institutions, and development partners. The diversion of development funds that were originally marked for Africa into other regions such as the Middle East, South Asia, Afghanistan, and South America is no secret. It is believed that the United States' commitment to fight terrorism, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as the drug war in South America have caused serious diversion of investment capital and aid flows that would have otherwise come to Africa. Furthermore, shifts in focus from physical infrastructure like roads, railways, ports, power generation, and water for industrial and agricultural production to services such as ICT further distract interest from the overall goal of infrastructural development. While Africa is still grappling with the basics of developing physical infrastructure, the world has moved on to higher levels of technological sophistication. Africa therefore has a lot of catching up to do and is racing against the odds of limited financial resources and human capacity, high rates of human capital flight, eroding investor confidence, and donor fatigue.

To some extent, Africa's infrastructural development weakness has met with donor sympathy, and many have pledged support to varying degrees. The World Bank has made a commitment of US \$500 million in agriculture for renewal of research and technology development to enhance agricultural productivity. The European Union (EU) Commission earmarked €10 million for four water basin projects in Africa. Furthermore, an agreement has been reached to establish an EU Water Facility costing one million euros in support of water initiatives across the continent (Nkuhulu 2004). Through the G8 Action Plan for

Africa unveiled in Kananaskis in Canada in 2002, the G8 countries collectively and individually have made several far-reaching commitments toward Africa's infrastructural development that range from physical infrastructure to ICT and education. For example, the G8 has encouraged private-sector investment in infrastructure in thirteen African countries through the following (G8 2003):

- The establishment of an infrastructure-related project preparation facility within the African Development Bank (AfDB)
- The provision of additional funding for basic education in Africa through the Education for All Fast-Track Initiative of the World Bank

Japan has made a commitment of more than US \$1 billion for infrastructure development in Africa commencing in 2003. In the same vein, United Kingdom support to the Emerging Africa Infrastructure Fund stands at US \$100 million. This fund has attracted as much as US \$205 million in increased private-sector investment in Africa's infrastructure (G8 2003).

Building Global Partnerships

Africa wants to exercise ownership rights of NEPAD and seeks the support of development partners in providing the financial resources for its implementation. However, when an aspect of the program, especially the means of its execution, rests wholly on the whims of the outside community, ownership and control are sacrificed. While they submit to African ownership claims, the development partners tend to have reservations regarding making disbursements that are unmindful of the risk of financial mismanagement by African states whose past records attest to a high likelihood of mismanagement. Therefore, if past

performance of African states is anything to go by, the fear of corruption and instability that causes a diversion of financial resources from their intended uses is real.

Donor Skepticism

Donor concerns regarding Africa's past records of financial mismanagement possibly fuel donors' reluctance to make good their financial commitments to NEPAD. In light of the new agenda, the development partners formulated alternatives to loans and grants and adopted different policy instruments. As a risk-minimizing measure, they resorted to the use of trade and investments to foster sustainable development through deregulation, removal of controls, and creating a favorable investment climate. Concurrently, the developed countries continue to subsidize their farmers. These subsidies make African products uncompetitive in the international commodity markets. As a result, while African commodities lack access to international markets, the developed world's commodities continue to dominate the markets, courtesy of heavy subsidies to the farmers. Chris Talbot (2002) reported that the support of US farm bills to farmers amounts to US \$180 billion over three years, while the EU's annual support to farmers amounts to US \$100 billion.

It is also on record that the United States subsidizes each farmer by an average of US \$21,000 per annum, while the EU provides about US \$16,000 per farmer, which is many times the annual per capita income of farmers in Africa (Talbot 2002). Such subsidies remain a topic for hot debate and dialogue between Africa and developed countries.

In addition to tight control over their financial resources, development partners further attach strings to their financial support to Africa. Sometimes these conditions are too stringent to be met by receiving countries given the prevailing adverse economic conditions that face many African countries. For example, the United States and Canada stipulate

conditions to be met by intended beneficiaries of their financial support (Chreti n 2002). These conditions were expressed by the former Canadian prime minister when he stated that they would: “Focus on those countries that demonstrate a commitment to democracy, good governance and human rights or accede to the APRM.” He further stated: “We will match the efforts of African leaders with our own action to strengthen African institutions that encourage responsible and accountable governance” (Chreti n 2002).

Hennie Kotz  and Carly Steyn (2003) perceived the partnership with the West in the same light when they wrote that the partnership with the developed world and the subsequent conditionalities contained in the agreements could be described as a “slick begging bowl” that could hamper Africa’s aims of rejuvenation. The development partners have had their fair share of the bluff, more so as they recognize the financial limitations that African states inevitably face in the implementation of the NEPAD initiative. Africa has proudly branded NEPAD as an agenda that will facilitate engagement with its development partners on equal terms and mutual respect. It is already dawning on the architects of NEPAD that the development partners do not see mutual reciprocity when Africa relies wholly on the developed countries for much of the money needed to implement NEPAD initiatives including the fund for setting up the NEPAD Secretariat.

Disappointment of NEPAD Operatives

African leaders, especially those driving the NEPAD agenda, have blamed the development partners for the seeming stalemate in the implementation of NEPAD programs. During the Extraordinary Summit of the AU in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, in 2004, the chairman of the AU, Nigeria’s president, referred to development partners as “those who have failed to live up to the commitments they have made” (Obasanjo 2004).

This statement castigates the developed world and blames them for most of the stalemate facing the implementation of the NEPAD programs.

Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi registered his own perception of the attitude of the development partners who seem to impose stringent conditions at the inaugural summit meeting of the AU in Durban in 2001 by saying about G8 assistance, “We accept help but we refuse conditions, we are not beggars.” Under NEPAD, African leaders demanded financial support to the tune of US \$64 billion as a necessary condition if they were to achieve the growth rate of 7 percent per annum needed for sustainable development. Instead, they received only US \$6 billion, which is a far cry from their target. An Oxfam spokesman described the amount as “repackaged peanuts” (Talbot 2002). Further skepticism of the truism of development partners’ sincerity of purpose has been expressed even by the UN Special Envoy to Africa Stephen Lewis, who wondered whether the G8 promises would turn out to be “orchestrated hype rather than reality”(Harsch 2002).

Challenges Facing NEPAD and the Unresolved Issues

NEPAD is criticized as an initiative, conceived and hatched by a handful of African heads of state. As a top-down political strategy, its critics claim that it ignores the relevance and contributions of the grassroots, civil society and a host of other stakeholders in its formulation (Al Sherbini 2003).

Cilliers (2004) recalls that NEPAD is not the first continental initiative to try to extricate African states and continental Africa from the malaise of underdevelopment and exclusion in a globalized world. Others before it include: the Lagos Plan of Action for Economic Development in Africa (1980-2000), the African Alternative Framework to

Structural Adjustment for Socio-Economic Recovery and Transformation (AAF-SAP) (1989), and the African Charter for Popular Participation for Development (1990).

Other critiques of NEPAD argue that it is a state-centric initiative whose conceptualization did not involve the people for whom it is designed. The realism of this statement remains the major accusation unleashed against NEPAD. Critics argue that this is the bane of the apathy that characterizes the attitude of civil society to the initiative. Further criticisms leveled against NEPAD are its perceived capitulation to the global capitalist market, its elite inception, and its large-scale concession to the precepts of the neoliberal orthodoxy. This orthodoxy, critics argue, perpetuates an unfavorably skewed distribution of resources, wealth, and power and does not allow the free markets to play a role in allocating public goods and services (Fakir n.d.). NEPAD is widely considered to be a closed system that has shut its doors against *bona fide* stakeholders including academics, technocrats, civil society organizations, students, and other service providers. The organization is still undergoing an acceptability test from the African citizenry who were not consulted at the formative stage of the initiative and who still nurse the wounds from the initial neglect.

Contrary to this widely held view of NEPAD, some analysts depart from this castigation route to argue that NEPAD is only a blueprint provided by African leaders, and it is the civil society and the people who must respond urgently to the opportunity to participate in the implementation of the NEPAD programs (M'boge and Doe 2004). Paradoxically, the NEPAD operatives continue to blame lack of capacity as the primary predicament and main contributor to their underachievement. It is as incredulous as it is unfathomable that Africa, as a repository of intellectual versatility and known for the vitality and dexterity of its people, lacks the quantum of intellectual sufficiency and critical mass of

technocrats needed to implement NEPAD programs. Informed opinions believe that it is more due to the isolationism of the actors of the NEPAD implementation system rather than lack of skilled manpower that has been the bane of the implementation calamity facing the organization. This culture of exclusivity has mystified the implementation of the programs thereby making it look intractable and unattainable.

The political systems in many African states portray clear deviations from the NEPAD objectives of democracy, good political and corporate governance, respect for human rights, and the rule of law as experienced in Zimbabwe, Cote d'Ivoire, DRC, and Togo. Corruption remains the rule rather than the exception in many African countries with Nigeria in particular always ranked among the top three most corrupt countries in the world. The damage to investor confidence and therefore the flow of investment funds in the form of FDI and ODA into Africa can be phenomenal and damaging.

The degree of corruption in Africa has reached alarming proportions and has transcended African boundaries to become a global phenomenon that generates international recognition and debate globally. Hence, when Africa's foremost statesman and Nobel Laureate Nelson Mandela gave his famous Trafalgar Square address and appealed for funds to fight poverty in Africa in February 2005, some unsavory remarks to the effect that Africa is impoverished by its own leaders rented the air.

The state of infrastructure in Africa, especially ICT, is substandard. Furthermore, the existing infrastructure continues to depreciate and is becoming dilapidated, yet there is no discernible effort to rehabilitate it. The present resources cannot support the new development initiatives of NEPAD. Although infrastructural development is one of the key

objectives of NEPAD, its implementation will depend almost entirely on foreign partner support, which cannot be guaranteed.

Which Way Forward for NEPAD?

In the minds of strategic thinkers and Afro optimists, NEPAD is the right strategy at the right time for Africa's development, especially in the absence of a better alternative. It should serve as a guiding start and a vector, with both magnitude and direction. It enjoys significant followership especially from the political elites on the continent. For the Afro pessimists, NEPAD is not the answer to Africa's nagging problem of underdevelopment occasioned by bad political and corporate governance epitomized by unending political crises and deep-seated corruption. Widespread leadership crises and political instability have dealt devastating blows to the economies of African states to degrees beyond quick and total recoveries. Therefore, under highly depleted economies, increasing human rights abuse, limited infrastructure, poverty, unemployment, hunger, and the ravaging effects of HIV/AIDS, Africa's economic recovery becomes a dream rather than an achievable reality.

Embracing foreign donors as development partners requires that Africa address governance problems on the continent. While the APRM provides the framework for addressing this leadership vacuum and the political imbroglio to boost investors' confidence, it is still repudiated by the same states that it is intended to assist.

The top-down design and implementation strategy of NEPAD still sends chilling ripples down the central nervous system of civil society whose contributions at the inception of NEPAD were disregarded. In the bid to protect their ego and portray the flaws in planning the initiative, they continue to dissociate themselves from NEPAD and its programs and remain very critical of its structure and conduct. How far they can go with the

dissent and uncompromising attitude remains a big question. The impasse between NEPAD operatives and civil society is further worsened by the aloof attitude created in the implementation process. Limited knowledge, if any, leaks out on the initiative's progress and prospects of delivering Africa from its perennial state of underdevelopment. Transparency and accountability are repeated as the watchwords for Africa's emancipation. At the same time, NEPAD, which represents the embodiment of sincerity by African states to imbibe these moral and political values for Africa's development, sidelines these instruments of good governance to adopt the obnoxious attitude of exclusivity. NEPAD should strive to regain the confidence of the African people by devolving power to low levels and participation to the citizenry, as they are the major partners in development and the beneficiaries of the programs. It is only when a wide channel of communication and friendly embrace is extended to the majority stakeholders through partnerships at the grassroots level that the ideals and objectives of NEPAD can be realized to the benefit of many. NEPAD blames lack of capacity for its failure to implement its programs. But others see it as a failure to tap into the immense human resources available on the continent and in the diaspora.

The development partners are influenced by the uncertainty and instability of the political scene and markets. There is also the uncommitted attitude of African states to democracy and good governance, which further exacerbates the political instability and economic downturn. As a result, development partners exercise extreme caution in dealing with states with such high propensity for volatility. This attitude places African states, many of which are incapable of self-financing, in a state of limbo. In the absence of alternatives, countries in desperate need of funds sacrifice much of their liberty to attract funds and investment. NEPAD is supposed to be the avenue through which African countries already trapped and those that are likely to join are liberated from the debt trap.

NEPAD has gone far in its establishment and the implementation of its agenda. Aborting the process now is no longer an option. Whatever weaknesses it has must be looked upon as avenues for strengthening rather than destroying it. Efforts currently geared toward undermining NEPAD should be directed to salvage it. If the top-down design and implementation structure is the primary reason for criticism, unfortunately, NEPAD has already become a reality, and modalities for successfully implementing its programs as designed should be sought. Let the aggrieved, mainly the civil society, create a mechanism by which they would build a ladder from the bottom to link up with the top and contribute meaningfully to the NEPAD process.

Conclusion

This article argues that while NEPAD is perceived as a feasible avenue to propel Africa's economic growth and development agenda forward, there still exists a big chasm in understanding between the architects of the initiative and civil society. The misgivings between the proponents and critics also translate into gaps between the actual and potential achievements of NEPAD thus far. This gap is attributed equally to the much-exaggerated optimism of its architects and the pessimism of the skeptics. The latter constitute the majority stakeholders whose contributions were not solicited *ab initio*. The misconception by African leaders that voicing their commitments to democracy, good political and corporate governance, respect for human rights, and the rule of law would provide sufficient conditions for development partners to embark on a massive rollout of funds has failed the test of time. On the contrary, development partners accept that the commitments would serve as necessary but not sufficient conditions for financial disbursements in the massive scale that Africa desires. They insist on matching commitments with sincerity of purpose

and genuine desire and political will to comply with the commitments. African leaders have not convincingly and collectively demonstrated genuine willingness and ability to exhaustively and decisively address many of the vices that have incapacitated them and delimited their chances of accelerating the pace of development on the continent.

The development partners for their part capitalize on the lapses that continuously linger in the African political arena such as the ever-rising political temperatures, the erupting political volcanoes, and the pre- and post-conflict impasse that respectively fails to prevent or resolve conflicts between opposing groups. The stalemates that mar conflict prevention and resolution efforts in Africa tend to justify the apathy and hesitation of donors, investors, and development partners to commit financial resources in Africa. They therefore withhold money going into the development financing pool for fear of mismanagement. When they decide to release funds, they do so under well-stipulated conditionalities, many of which are hard to meet, especially by the poorer and more politically battered states of Africa.

The extent to which Africa can claim ownership of NEPAD deserves interrogation since the continent has depended so much on outsiders or local nongovernmental agencies for its financing. What factors determine ownership — the formulation or the execution of the policy? It is a generally accepted dictum that “No idea is a good idea unless it is put into practice,” and this is why NEPAD should be given a chance. The question of “ownership” is crucial for a better understanding of the concept in the NEPAD context. Is it the NEPAD agenda formulators or those who will provide funds for its implementation that have legitimate right of ownership? There is therefore a paradox arising from the dichotomy between formulating an agenda on the one hand and providing the means of implementation on the other.

The commitment to take NEPAD forward and use it as a tool to accelerate Africa's growth and set it on the path of sustainable development remains high on the agenda of African leaders and her development partners. As long as Africa relies heavily on the overseas partners for the implementation of the NEPAD agenda, and as long as Africa cannot look inward and develop mastery in harnessing the local resources both human and material for her development, the hope of Africa's development hangs on a thin line. The chairman of the AU Commission expressed a similar view during the launching of the PSC in May 2004 when he said: "I am convinced that the more we mobilise ourselves within the continent, the more the international community and our traditional partners will support us and increasingly we shall solve our problems in honour, dignity and consideration for others" (Konare 2004). Until both parties forge a common understanding nurtured through genuine commitment, sustainable development through NEPAD will remain the aberration of a mirage, which appears simplistic and within the near proximity but in reality is nowhere in the vicinity but far away in the distant extremity.

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