NEPAD and the African Civil Society

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Abstract

NEPAD is a principle based African plan, envisaged to address the key social, economic and political priorities of the continent in a coherent manner. Since its inception and approval by the OAU Heads of State and Governments in 2001, its promoters have been marketing it on the international arena, particularly to popularise it to donors. Against this background, little has been done to popularise NEPAD among the civil society in Africa, at least until the late 2002. When NEPAD was introduced to the civil society for the first time, it was met with rejection and criticisms, by both the governments and civil society organisations. The most critical areas included its African Peer Review Mechanism (the political review component), its relationships with the African Union and other key African organisations, and the question of ownership as many Africans felt it is a foreign imposed initiative. Despite these drawbacks in the early development of NEPAD, the reaction to criticisms is a positive one, indicated by a number of adjustments made. NEPAD is now being integrated into AU Structures to make it a real Development arm of the AU; the political governance peer review is now to be conducted by the AU, while NEPAD remains with economic and corporate governance parts; and finally, NEPAD is being intensively debated by both governments and the civil society all over Africa. NEPAD is also left with a high mountain to climb, as it has to negotiate for market access for African products (the collapse of Cancun trade talks provides an example of how difficult this task is) and development partners are also demanding what Africa could not fulfil until so far.
Acknowledgements

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Table of contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................... i
Acknowledgements ......................................................................................................................... ii
Disclaimer ....................................................................................................................................... ii
Table of contents ............................................................................................................................ iii
List of abbreviations ....................................................................................................................... iv

1. Introduction ................................................................................................................................. 1
2. Trade reforms and market access ............................................................................................... 2
3. The concept of Good Governance ............................................................................................ 3
4. Rejuvenation of the NEPAD plan ............................................................................................. 5
5. The question of NEPAD ownership .......................................................................................... 7
6. The role and accountability of donors ..................................................................................... 8
7. The way forward ......................................................................................................................... 8
8. Conclusions ................................................................................................................................. 9
9. References .................................................................................................................................... 10
**List of abbreviations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>APRM</td>
<td>African Peer Review Mechanism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AU</td>
<td>African Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAP</td>
<td>Common Agricultural Policy</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSO</td>
<td>Civil Society Organisation</td>
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<td>CSSDCA</td>
<td>The Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation in Africa</td>
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<td>DRC</td>
<td>Democratic Republic of Congo</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECOWAS</td>
<td>Economic Community for West African States</td>
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<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<td>G8</td>
<td>Group of Eight</td>
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<td>HSGIC</td>
<td>Head of State and Government Implementation Committee</td>
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<td>NEPAD</td>
<td>The New Partnership for Africa’s Development</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organisation</td>
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<td>REC</td>
<td>Regional Economic Community</td>
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<td>WTO</td>
<td>World Trade Organisation</td>
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1. Introduction

The New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) is an African plan that is envisaged to address the key social, economic and political priorities of the continent. It is not a continent-wide plan, but based on principles, having set conditions that African countries need to satisfy in order to become effective members. Since the ratification of NEPAD in Lusaka, in July 2001, much has been happening in form of workshops, conferences and seminars on NEPAD plan. Most of such activities have been however for the government officials along with representatives of donor agencies and other members of international community with a wide variety of interests in the plan.

From the late 2002 through 2003, these seminars and conferences have not only increased in number, but also expanded to include other stakeholders such as the private business sector and the civil society at large. Here the civil society refers to any organised interest groups such as Trade Unions, Churches, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) etc. This paper focuses mainly on the discussions from the workshop entitled The New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) and Civil Society, which took place in Sandton City (near Johannesburg) in South Africa, from the 1st to the 3rd of November 2003. This was part of the workshop series facilitated by Hanns Seidel Foundation, aiming at promoting dialogue and cooperation between African Governments and the civil society, between Africans and their development partners, and thereby helps all sides to reach a common understanding of what NEPAD is and what it has to offer. Preceding workshops were already held in Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Democratic Republic of Congo and in Namibia. Such workshops invite representatives of African Governments, African civil society and development partners to come together and discuss issues regarding the development of Africa through NEPAD.

This paper also summarises deliberations on trade reforms and market access for NEPAD countries in chapter 2 and the issue of good governance in chapter 3 as discussed at the NEPAD conference that has taken place from 1st to 3rd November 2003, in South Africa. The paper takes a look at proposed adjustments to the NEPAD plan in chapter 4, especially on its relation with the African Union and on its peer review system. Chapter 5 looks at the question of ownership for NEPAD, who are the owners of NEPAD? Chapter 6 looks briefly at the role and accountability of
donors with respect to NEPAD, while chapter 7 reflects on the expectations and the way forward for NEPAD, then I concluded in chapter 9.

2. Trade reforms and market access

In its policy document of October 2001, NEPAD has realised that African Economies are vulnerable because of their dependency on primary production, on resource-based sectors and their narrow export bases. There is therefore an urgent need to diversify production and exports, and to increase value addition activities in agricultural and mineral production. This is to be accomplished through negotiations with industrialised countries and other trading partners of Africa, for them to remove trade barriers on typical products that African countries along with other developing countries around the world have a comparative advantage in.

The European Union (EU) has the largest common market in the world and it is one of the biggest producers and marketers of agricultural goods worldwide. It currently accounts for around 15% of the world’s agricultural exports and around 20% of world imports, just before its planned enlargement scheduled for 2004 (Malzbender, p1). For most of developing countries, the most critical concern remains that of poverty, underdevelopment and disease. Word leaders have realised these challenges and have made commitments to address them when they agreed to improve living standards of the poor by the year 2015, through the implementation of Millennium Development Goals. The Doha Development Agenda has recognised that there are critical links between trade liberalisation, the more efficient functioning of global markets, economic development and poverty alleviation (Ismail, p3).

The fate of developing countries is partially in their hands as they need to adjust economic policies to fit in with globalisation, and it is also an accepted responsibility of the developed world to assist poor countries in getting their way out of poverty. Under pressure by its WTO commitments, the EU has started to reduce export subsidies and lower intervention prices for basic commodities such as beef and cereal, but has shifted more towards the system of direct payments to its farmers (Malzbender, p1). The EU’s Common Agricultural Policy has many other anti-competition tools, including the use of trade quotas and the system of tariff escalation whereby higher tariffs are imposed on value added products than on unprocessed raw materials. To be fair, reforms in the CAP of the EU has been increasingly improving over the last decade, but a lot need to be done in order to address poverty in developing countries. Agriculture has more weight in improving
the lives of people in developing countries compared to their developed counterparts. Two thirds of all poor in developing countries depend on agriculture, compared to a less than 5% of the population who work in the agricultural sector in the EU, accounting for around 4.3% of EU output and employment. The slow progress in international market reforms and the recent collapse of trade negotiations in Cancun, Mexico, in September 2003 gives a rough idea about the toughness of NEPAD’s task to get market access for African products. This is mainly emanating from the fact that economic partners around the world have different economic powers, with developing countries asking for more favours. The Johannesburg workshop on NEPAD and civil society has emphasised this point and called on the Hanns Seidel Foundation to be our partners in pushing for agricultural market reforms within the EU.

3. The concept of Good Governance

A good political governance initiative as enshrined in NEPAD policy document of October 2001, calls on African governments to respect the global standards of democracy, which include political pluralism, allowing for the existence of several political parties, workers' unions, and fair and open democratic elections periodically organised to enable people to choose their leaders freely. The second type of governance is the economic and corporate governance, which is emphasising the importance of capacity building for the state. This is to enable national governments to play their roles more effectively in driving economic development, through proper regulation and implementation of poverty reduction programmes. Good governance has been recognised as one the pre-condition for development and forms the basis for the peer review.

The progress in priority sectors, in particular, health, education and infrastructure, will depend on improvements in governance and on regional collaboration (Gelb 2002, p27). As he further wrote:

"Governance improvements are at the heart of the development agenda for the continent – in the arena of economic governance, this means reducing corruption, increasing transparency and accountability in the collection and use of public resources, enhancing regulation in the financial system and promoting sound accounting and auditing practices in the private sector; in the political governance arena, it means resolving violent conflict in countries and establishing peace and security for citizens, enhancing democracy and the rights
and obligations of citizenship, and establishing respect for human rights and the rule of law in the criminal justice system.

The most controversial part of NEPAD is probably the political review of its African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), firstly, it was met with resistance and criticism by many African politicians, and secondly, the APRM was again criticised by NEPAD's development partners for excluding the political review. What are the appropriate actions that can be taken if one African country or a NEPAD member country fails to maintain a good standard of governance? Firstly, we have already NEPAD member countries which are offensively involved in conflicts e.g. Rwanda, a member of NEPAD has intervened in war inside its neighbouring country, the Democratic Republic of Congo. There are pleads that if there is an unqualified country within NEPAD, it should withdraw in order to give NEPAD a chance to succeed. Secondly, Africans and their development partners appear to be divided on the type of actions to be taken if one African (not only NEPAD) country misbehaves. Some Africans are demanding that donors should continue with their assistance to other African countries and stop aid flows to backsliding countries only. One G8 representative replied strongly (not necessarily representative for the whole G8) by saying “we cannot support NEPAD, while ignoring bad governance within or in the neighbourhood of NEPAD”.

Some writers, both from Africa and from developed countries actually agreed that NEPAD has been tested and failed so far, based on some reality check points. Firstly, South Africa was requested (by major donor countries) to condemn Zimbabwe on its internal crises, but South Africa did not. Not only because South Africa respected the national sovereignty of Zimbabwe, but also because the South African president, Mr. Mbeki wanted to secure support for NEPAD from other Africans as well. This point is also perceived as a failure, at least from donor’s view. The second test for NEPAD was the military conflict in DRC, whereby Rwanda participated militarily, despite being a member of NEPAD and in fact, NEPAD said nothing about it. The inclusion and an apparent removal of the political and human rights review from NEPAD's APRM represent another test and failure. The fourth checkpoint is probably not a test, but one of the hurdles in the way, NEPAD used the 5 AU groupings of Africa, which do not fully correspond with the Regional Economic Community groupings on the continent. Due to some of these drawbacks described above, there is a lack of credibility and confidence in NEPAD from donors and investors, combined with little knowledge and support from the civil society at
home. As a result, NEPAD secured little money and economic growth still has not picked until so far.

4. Rejuvenation of the NEPAD plan

The initial structuring of NEPAD made it look like it is an institution which has to work hand & hand with the African Union (AU) rather than being part & parcel of the AU. With such initial structures, one of the stumbling blocks preventing its success and acceptance by the civil society was the question of its legitimacy as an African institution and whether it can have any powers over national governments. With few exceptions, the main role players within NEPAD are also the main role players in the whole of Africa (in the AU, in the RECs etc.), but for NEPAD to start operating independently from the AU could not be in favour of many. The leadership of NEPAD has realised the need to incorporate it into AU structures, with its Head of State and Government Implementation Committee (HSGIC) falling directly under The Assembly of the AU.

Figure 1: The Structure of NEPAD

The Abuja Head of State & Implementation Committee meeting on the 3rd of November 2002 had already clarified some of the discrepancies between NEPAD and the AU, particularly by asserting that the NEPAD Secretariat is not a permanent structure, but it will be integrated into AU commission. The integration of NEPAD into AU structures has been coming already. However, the overlapping of functions
remains an issue when it comes to the functions of NEPAD’s Peace and Security Initiative and those of the Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation in Africa (CSSDCA). In practical terms, it is difficult for leaders in bigger countries like South Africa to run to institutions, with similar objectives without giving more weight on one at the expense of another.

The African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) is generally considered the most innovative aspect of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD). The purpose of the APRM is to foster the adoption of policies, standards and practices that lead to political stability, high economic growth, sustainable development and accelerated sub-regional and continental economic integration through sharing of experiences and reinforcement of successful and best practice, including identifying deficiencies and assessing the needs of capacity building (Cilliers J, 2003). Following several suggestions and criticisms by African governments, the civil society in Africa and by several writers, the APRM has been revised to suit the demands of Africans. Given that NEPAD is to be run as an integral part of the AU, the Peer Review System is to be divided into two parts:

1) The African Peer Review is based on existing commitments and will cover Democracy and Political Governance. The African Union will carry out the review through its existing and future institutions and such a review is obligatory to all African countries.

2) The NEPAD Peer Review is based on new codes and standards and it will cover the Economic and Corporate Governance. NEPAD will initially undertake the peer review process, but later it will be done by NEPAD together with the African Development Bank and other African economic institutions. This part will remain voluntary to African countries.

The Peer Review is necessary since even donors are accountable to their taxpayers for any resources they give to Africa and they should have something to prove that such resources are well spent. An effective and credible system of Peer Review will also provide more accurate information about Africa and change the negative image of the continent as it is currently publicised in the international press as a continent of crises. While waiting for the implementation of the two types of peer review above, some 16 countries have already signed up for the current African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). These countries are Algeria, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Congo, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Kenya, Mali, Mauritius, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa and Uganda. Egypt is the only one of the
first five members of NEPAD not to have signed for the APRM, while countries like Congo and Rwanda, which are not members of NEPAD, have signed up as well.

In addition to the changes above, NEPAD has also decided to increase its membership from 15 to 20 members. The additions are Angola from Southern Africa, Kenya from East Africa, Ghana from Central Africa, Libya from North Africa, while the 5th country is still not decided upon, but it will come from West Africa.

5. The question of NEPAD ownership

The South African President, Mr. Thabo Mbeki presented NEPAD to the G8 for the first time because he and other promoters (initiators as called) of NEPAD believe that Africa can only develop through partnership and cooperation. This was to get support for NEPAD from developed countries, which they in fact got. Given the expectation that $56 of the $64 needed by NEPAD every year is to come from donors who are based outside the continent (though ambitious), it made sense for donors to be consulted first, but it doesn’t make up an excuse for implementing something before it is not well known and supported by its owners, the African civil society. Is NEPAD fully implemented? The answer is rather no, NEPAD has a Secretariat based in Pretoria, South Africa, but still, it is not wrong to refer to it as an African plan rather than an institution. NEPAD is in the implementation process and it will start to function as a sub-organ of the African Union. Donor demands that may be considered excessive by Africans can come via a lot of venues, but that is not unique to NEPAD. Here the main challenge is how to participate and make an impact, improve on weaknesses and contribute to the development of Africa. The Johannesburg conference on NEPAD and Civil Society has strongly urged representatives of Governments and Civil Society to go back to their countries and think about strategies to bring the NEPAD concept to the Civil Society and to implement such strategies. Some of already identified strategies include the translation of NEPAD documents into local languages in order to deliver the message to the majority of the civil society, the grassroots people¹. This is to provide answers to questions and wide-spread perceptions that NEPAD is not African, that it is for the elite or that it is simply Mbeki’s plan.

¹ Grassroots people should be the poor, people living in shanty towns in cities & villages etc.
6. The role and accountability of donors

Compared to other development plans for Africa, NEPAD has gone a distance further in terms of getting the support it needs to operate. We have the G8 Representatives to NEPAD, who are there to monitor the progress in achievement of conditions set out in the G8 Africa Action Plan and they report back to the G8. Big countries like Germany are also in the process of domesticating their foreign policy rather than continuing to leave it to the wider Europe. All this indicates the magnitude of interest that NEPAD has attracted. Donors need to monitor any project or institution which they support. They need to know as to who benefits from their resources and on what items such resources are being spent in order to analyse the efficiency with which their resources are being used. Of course, there are no free resources, the scenario of donor and recipient may be just idealistic, because even developed countries need to benefit from Africa as Africa benefits from them.

7. The way forward

Apart from the initiators of NEPAD, we have countries like Kenya and Ghana which are very pro-active in embracing the NEPAD plan. NEPAD should be understood as a facilitator rather than a rich club that will bring development to Africa, it is not all the projects that can be funded through NEPAD. What is required is for African countries and Regional Economic Communities to take into account, the NEPAD objectives and priorities when formulating their national/regional policies. Kenya, for instance, has established NEPAD structures at the national level, which will then moderate and guide regional and continental structures of NEPAD, while in the West Africa, countries have established a special fund with ECOWAS to fund regional projects in line with the priorities of NEPAD. In the future, there will be competition over the resources, every country would like to do well and take a lead towards greater development. The fact that non-member countries of NEPAD such as Congo and Rwanda have signed for the APRM is a clear indication that an African economic plan is not limited to 20 members, these are simply regional representatives on its structures and the competition will be between all African countries which are willing to do well, economically and politically.

There are a lot of benefits that can be reaped from NEPAD, including improvements in governance, increased credibility of policies, improved regional neighbourhood, promoting diversification of production and mobilisation of resources. Even if
NEPAD is being criticised as an institution that imposes conservative economic policies, that may not be suitable for developing countries, this criticism is not applicable to Namibia because the NEPAD strategy does not imply any departure from the set of economic policy that Namibia is following anyway (Hansohm 2003). It has to be noted that one cannot substitute the support or endorsement of NEPAD by the civil society with a peer review or with an endorsement by donors in the first place, and that countries cannot be forced to sign up for NEPAD membership or for its peer review.

8. Conclusions

The apparent integration of NEPAD into AU structures and moving the responsibility of political peer review from NEPAD to the AU is taken as a positive move by many African governments and the civil society. Though Namibia has not indicated whether it will join the APRM or not, the country indicated its acceptance of NEPAD as a development arm of the AU.

With very few exceptions, there is little knowledge about NEPAD among the civil society all over Africa. The series of NEPAD workshops facilitated by Hanns Seidel Foundation are in themselves very helpful and country representatives are being urged to bring NEPAD to the civil society through the basic and inclusive media such as leaflets in local languages, radio programming etc. So, NEPAD need to be known and to be supported by the majorities of the civil society in Africa.

The Regional Economic Communities (RECs) are the building blocks of NEPAD, especially when it comes to regional economic integration in Africa, and their full support for NEPAD is necessary. One of the problems that NEPAD is facing is that the AU’s regional groupings of African countries are not compatible with the economic groupings in form of RECs.

One of the constraints to the speedy development of Africa is slow reforms in international trade policy. The progress in trade negotiations, towards the removal of many kinds of trade barriers will highly determine the success or failure of NEPAD’s quest to get market accesses for African products.
9. References


The G8 Africa Action Plan, Policy document released by the Group of Eight, 27 June 2002, Kananaskis, Canada