NEPAD and the African Civil Society

Rehabeam Shilimela

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Abstract

This paper takes a look at the latest developments in the implementation process of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) since its inception and approval by the OAU Heads of State and Governments in 2001. Little has been done to popularise NEPAD within the civil society in Africa, at least until the late 2002. When NEPAD was introduced to Africans for the first time, it was met with criticism and rejection by many. The most problematic areas included its African Peer Review Mechanism (the political review component), its unclear relationship with the African Union and other key African organisations and the question of ownership, as many Africans perceived it as a foreign-imposed initiative. Despite such drawbacks, NEPAD has now been integrated into AU structures; the political governance peer review is now to be carried out by the AU and it is now being intensively debated upon by governments, the civil society and the business sector all over Africa. NEPAD is, however, still faced with non-easy tasks ahead – getting rid of African governance problems, getting the much needed resources and negotiating market access for African products.
Acknowledgements

The main basis for this paper is the conference entitled The New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD), organised by the Hanns Seidel Foundation in Johannesburg, from the 1st to the 3rd of November 2003. The Author would therefore like to thank The Hanns Seidel Foundation for facilitating the conference and all the conference participants for their contributions. Special thanks go to my Director, Dr. D. Hansohm for his guidance and peer review, Shrilly Wood for language editing and to the Administration staff of NEPRU for technical editorial work on the document.
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<tr>
<td>APRM</td>
<td>African Peer Review Mechanism</td>
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<td>AU</td>
<td>African Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>CAP</td>
<td>Common Agricultural Policy</td>
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<td>CSO</td>
<td>Civil Society Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSSDCA</td>
<td>Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation in Africa</td>
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<tr>
<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 aims to address the key social, economic and political priorities of the continent. It is not a continent-wide plan, but based on certain principles with set conditions that African countries need to satisfy in order to become effective members. Since the ratification of NEPAD in Lusaka, in July 2001, there has been much activity in the form of workshops, conferences and seminars on the NEPAD plan. Participants have largely been government officials, representatives of donor agencies and other members of the international community with an interest in the plan.

From late 2002, these activities not only increased in number, but also expanded to include other stakeholders such as the private business sector and civil society at large. Here ‘civil society’ refers to any organised interest groups such as trade unions, churches, civil society organisations (CSOs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The main focus of this paper is discussions from the workshop: ‘The New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) and Civil Society’, which took place in Sandton City (near Johannesburg) in South Africa in November 2003. This formed part of a series of workshops facilitated by the Hanns Seidel Foundation, aimed at promoting dialogue and cooperation between African Governments and civil society, and between Africans and their development partners, thereby helping all sides to reach a common understanding of what NEPAD is and what it has to offer. Preceding workshops had already been held in Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Democratic Republic of Congo and Namibia.

This paper 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 November 2003 NEPAD conference in South Africa. The paper examines the proposed adjustments to the NEPAD plan in chapter 4, particularly on its relation with the African Union and the peer review system. Chapter 5 looks at the question of ownership for NEPAD; chapter 6 looks briefly at the role and accountability of donors with respect to NEPAD; chapter 7 reflects on expectations and the way forward for NEPAD, then chapter 9 forms a conclusion.
2. Trade reforms and market access

In its policy document of October 2001, NEPAD points out 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-added 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 for products where African countries have a theoretical comparative advantage.

The European Union (EU) has the largest common market in the world and 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 (Malzbender, p1). For most developing countries, critical concerns are poverty, under-development and disease. World leaders have acknowledged these challenges, and 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 in their own hands to some extent, as they need to adjust economic policies to fit in with globalisation. It is also a generally-accepted responsibility of the developed world to assist poor countries in overcoming poverty. Under pressure in the form of its WTO commitments, the EU has started to reduce export subsidies and 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, the reform process in the CAP of the EU have been progressing steadily over the last decade, but much still needs to be done in addressing poverty in developing countries. Agriculture has a far greater significance in improving the lives of people in developing countries than in the case of their developed counterparts. Two thirds of the poor in developing countries depend on agriculture, compared to 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 of the scale of NEPAD’s task in getting market access for African products. The Johannesburg workshop on NEPAD and civil society emphasised this problem and called on the Hanns Seidel Foundation for assistance in pushing for agricultural market reforms within the EU.
3. The concept of Good Governance

A 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. The second type of governance is economic and corporate governance, which emphasises the importance of capacity-building for the state. This is to enable governments to play their roles more effectively in driving economic development, through proper regulation and the implementation of poverty-reduction programmes. Good governance has been recognised as a pre-condition for development, and forms the basis for the peer review.

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 component of NEPAD is probably its African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). It was met with resistance and criticism by many African politicians, and was 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? There are already NEPAD member countries that are involved in conflicts - e.g. Rwanda - a member of NEPAD that has intervened in the war of its neighbouring country, the Democratic Republic of Congo. It has been suggested that if there is a country within NEPAD that doesn't meet a criterion, 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 action to be taken if an African (not only NEPAD) country fails to adhere to the conditions. Some Africans are demanding that donors should continue with their assistance to other African countries and halt aid only to countries that don’t qualify. One G8 representative replied strongly (though this is not necessarily representative of the entire G8) by saying “we cannot support NEPAD, while ignoring bad governance within or in the neighbourhood of NEPAD”.

Some writers have expressed the opinion that NEPAD has been tested and failed. Firstly, South Africa was asked (by major donor countries) to condemn Zimbabwe on its internal crises, but did not do so. This was perceived as a failure, at least from the perspective of some donors. The second test for NEPAD was the military conflict in the DRC in which Rwanda participated militarily despite being a member of NEPAD, and to which NEPAD made no reference. The apparent removal of the political and human rights review from NEPAD’s APRM represent another test and failure. The fourth is less a test than a hurdle, wherein NEPAD used the 5 AU groupings of Africa, which do not fully correspond with the Regional Economic Community groupings on the continent. For these reasons, there is a lack of credibility and confidence in NEPAD amongst donors and investors. This, combined with scant knowledge and support from civil society, has resulted in NEPAD securing meagre funding; moreover economic growth has not yet met expectations.
4. **Rejuvenation of the NEPAD plan**

The initial structuring of NEPAD indicated that it would work hand in hand with the African Union (AU), rather than forming a part of it. With such a structure, a stumbling block to its success and acceptance within 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, the RECs and so on), but for NEPAD to start operating independently from the AU would not be a popular option. The leadership of NEPAD has recognised 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](image)

At the Abuja Head of State & Implementation Committee meeting on the 3rd November 2002, some of the discrepancies between NEPAD and the AU were clarified, particularly with the assertion that the NEPAD Secretariat is not a permanent structure but will be integrated into the AU commission. The integration of NEPAD into AU structures has begun, though the overlap of some functions remains an issue – for instance regarding 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, problems can be
encountered in cases where a number of institutions share similar objectives. It is
difficult for leaders in bigger countries such as South Africa to run two institutions
with similar objectives without giving more weight to 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 the sharing
of experiences and reinforcement of successful and best practices, including
identifying deficiencies and assessing the needs of capacity building” (Cilliers J,
2003).

Following suggestions and criticism from African governments, civil society in Africa
and a number of writers, the APRM has been revised to meet some of these
demands. 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 will
cover Economic and Corporate Governance. NEPAD will initially undertake
the peer review process, but later this will be done by NEPAD, together with
the African Development Bank and other African economic institutions. This
will remain voluntary.

The Peer Review is necessary since even donors are accountable to their taxpayers
for any resources they give to Africa, and they need 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 improve the negative image of the
continent, which is currently portrayed in the international press as a continent of
crises. Whilst awaiting 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 done so, while countries such as Congo and Rwanda, which are not members of NEPAD, have signed up.

In addition to the changes above, NEPAD has decided to increase its membership from 15 to 20 members. To date the additions are Angola from southern Africa, Kenya from east Africa, Ghana from central Africa and Libya from north Africa, while the 5th country has not yet been determined, but will be a west African country.
5. The question of NEPAD ownership

The South African President Mr. Thabo Mbeki presented NEPAD to the G8 for the first time, as he and other promoters (also-called initiators) of NEPAD believe that Africa can only develop through partnership and cooperation. This was to seek support for NEPAD from developed countries, which they appear to have secured indeed. Given that $56 billions of the $64 billions needed annually by NEPAD is expected to come from outside the continent, it was important that donors be consulted first, though this doesn't excuse the implementation of NEPAD before it is well known and supported by its owners, African civil society.

Is NEPAD fully implemented? The answer is no. Although NEPAD has a Secretariat based in Pretoria, South Africa, it is not an implemented agency: thus it is not wrong to refer to it as an African plan rather than an institution. NEPAD is in the implementation process and will start to function as a sub-organ of the African Union. Donor demands that may be considered excessive by Africans can come via many avenues, but that is not unique to NEPAD. The main challenges are how to participate and have 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 consider strategies to bring the NEPAD concept to civil society, and to implement such strategies. Some of the strategies already identified include the translation of NEPAD documents into local languages in order to deliver the message to the grassroots\(^1\). This is to provide answers to questions and widespread 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

In comparison to other development plans for Africa, NEPAD has gone further in terms of getting the support it needs to operate. The G8 Representatives to NEPAD are there to monitor progress in the achievement of conditions set out in the G8 Africa Action Plan and to report back to the G8. Countries such as 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 who benefits from their resources and on what 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 stereotypical scenario of donor and recipient is unrealistic, as even developed countries need to benefit from Africa as Africa benefits from them.

7. The way forward

Like the initiators of NEPAD, countries such as Kenya and Ghana have been very pro-active in embracing the NEPAD plan. NEPAD should be seen as a facilitator that will bring development to Africa, rather than as a ‘rich club’. 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 national level, which will then moderate and guide the regional and continental structures of NEPAD, while in 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 is no doubt that there will be competition for the available resources, as every country would like to do well and take the lead in terms of development. The fact that non-member countries of NEPAD such as Congo and Rwanda are signatories to 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 that are willing to do well, economically and politically.

There are many benefits to be reaped from NEPAD, including improvement in governance, the increased credibility of policies, an improved regional neighbourhood, the diversification of production and the mobilisation of resources. Even if NEPAD is being criticised as an institution that imposes conservative
economic polities that may not be appropriate for developing countries, this criticism does not apply to Namibia as the NEPAD strategy does not imply any departure from the economic policies that Namibia is following anyway (Hansohm, p.10). It has to be noted that the support or endorsement of NEPAD by civil society cannot be substituted with a peer review or with an endorsement by donors in the first instance, 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 transferring the responsibility of political peer review from NEPAD to the AU have been perceived as positive moves by many African governments and within civil society. Though Namibia has not indicated whether it will join the APRM or not, the country has indicated its acceptance of NEPAD as a development arm of the AU.

With very few exceptions, there is little knowledge about NEPAD in civil society all over Africa. The series of NEPAD workshops facilitated by the Hanns Seidel Foundation have made a significant contribution to a greater understanding, and country representatives are being urged to bring NEPAD to their civil societies through such basic media as leaflets in local languages, radio programming and so on. NEPAD needs to be widely known and supported by 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 crucial. 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 the form of RECs.

One of the constraints to the speedy development of Africa is slow reform in international trade policy. Progress in trade negotiations towards the removal of various trade barriers will determine the success or failure of NEPAD’s quest to secure market access for African products.
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