

African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET)

The New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD): a brief gender critique

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Background

The political-economic context in which the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) has arisen is important to understand. This is a context of increased regional initiatives as a result of increased democratisation across the continent and in response to globalisation and Africa's weakened position in a globalising world. The means by which African states have collectively responded to this context varies. And their varied responses is affecting the manner in which the NEPAD has been received by African states and the extent to which certain African states are pushing (or not pushing) for its implementation.

Of note among these regional initiatives are:

- the Constitutive Treaty for the Establishment of the African Union (AU), adopted by the former Organisation of African Union (OAU) at its Heads of State Summit in May 2001 in Lusaka, Zambia which has led to the transition from the OAU to the AU. The elaboration and adoption of this Treaty was primarily due to the advocacy by Libya;
- the revival and adoption by the then OAU of the Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation Agreement (CSSDCA) at the Heads of State summit in 2000 in Lome, Togo. The CSSDCA was primarily backed by Nigeria; and
- the Map and Omega regional economic development plans, mooted by South Africa and Senegal respectively. The NEPAD has resulted from the merging of the Map and Omega plans.

The (muted) inter-African jostling for positioning around the NEPAD is obvious from the above. But the real question is whether or not the NEPAD is positive for Africa.

Broad outlines of the NEPAD

The NEPAD defines itself as a 'new framework for interaction with the rest of the world...based on an agenda set by African peoples.' It is essentially a programme for action on Africa's development to be addressed by a 'new partnership' with the overdeveloped world. It prioritises collective negotiation by the region with the overdeveloped world to resolve (among other things) the problems of multiple reporting and tied aid on sub-regional and regional development programmes and projects.

The NEPAD sets goals, targets and indicators for African development, including an annual seven per cent economic growth rate and the achievement of the international development goals (IDGs) set out in the United Nations (UN)'s Millenium Declaration. It

is to be implemented by the Heads of State Implementation Committee under the auspices of the AU, with a Secretariat based in South Africa.

The NEPAD's background lays out the reasons for and impact of Africa's historical and contemporary impoverishment. It defines Africa's 'comparative advantage' as being in its minerals, ecology; archaeology/history and culture and presents this comparative advantage as an opportunity for Africa. And finally, it makes an appeal to African peoples to participate in the implementation of the NEPAD.

More importantly (or substantively), the NEPAD also elaborates a fairly broad Programme for Action. Concrete actions are proposed to address:

- three conditions for sustainable development (peace, security and political governance; economic governance; and sub-regional and regional development approaches);
- six sectoral priorities (infrastructure, including energy, information technology, transport and water; human resources, including poverty reduction, education, the 'brain drain' and health); agriculture; the environment; culture; and science and technology); and
- two resource mobilisation strategies (capital flows, including domestic debt, aid and investment); and market access, including diversification, mining, manufacturing, tourism, services, private sector, exports and non-tariff barriers).

African women, gender and the NEPAD

There is, of course, already an abundance of general critique around the contents of the NEPAD. The NEPAD is formulated from a neo-liberal economic perspective and based on a modernist approach to development. As we all know, a body of critical literature addressing both neo-liberalism and modernism, particularly as they impact upon African women, already exists. The NEPAD makes no attempts to respond to such critique.

In addition, the NEPAD's 'appeal to African peoples' urges us, as African citizens, to 'regain...confidence' and supports our 'mobilisation' to achieve the NEPAD's goals. This ignores the fact that our mobilisation around issues addressed by the NEPAD are still stifled--particularly in the rural areas where African state control is strong--by some of the AU's member states and that Africans continue to pay high prices for attempts at such mobilisation in those states.

There is some recognition of the need to address women's needs and existing gender gaps in the region's development through the implementation of the NEPAD. In the NEPAD, for example, African leaders are urged to take responsibility for (among other things) 'promoting the role of women in society and economic development' through 'education and training,' 'access to credit' and 'assuring women's participation in political and economic life.'

However, there is only a limited recognition of the systemic barriers and discrimination faced by African women in every sector addressed by the NEPAD. Emphasis is placed on the need for self-development and self-improvement of African women rather than on the need for African states to remove these systemic barriers and address systemic discrimination against African women. The NEPAD is thus essentially

premised upon the Women in Development (WID) rather than the Gender and Development (GAD) approach to gender mainstreaming in development.

The NEPAD also includes some IDGs which explicitly relate to African women, such as:

- eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by the year 2005;
- reducing maternal mortality rates by three quarters by the year 2015; and
- ensuring access to reproductive health services by the year 2015.

However, the actions proposed under the second sectoral priority, human resources, which covers education and health, are gender-blind and have nothing to do with these IDGs. It is unclear therefore how implementation of the NEPAD will assist in achieving these IDGs.

Generally speaking, the actions proposed are not based on a gender analysis of the problem being addressed and therefore do not include actions specifically setting gender objectives, targets and indicators. It is therefore likely that the implementation of such actions will not address existing gender gaps in the sectors addressed and indeed, may compound or deepen these gender gaps.

More specifically, with respect to the three conditions for sustainable development, under the basket on peace, security and political governance, the actions proposed focus on the revival of the former OAU's mechanism for the prevention, management and resolution of conflict. The need to mainstream gender within the structure, mandate and operations of this mechanism is ignored, as is the need formally clarify the link between this mechanism and the former OAU's committee on women and peace.

Under the basket on economic governance, the focus is on developing partnerships with the private sector, with no distinction being made between the African private sector and the external private sector. No mention is made of small and medium size enterprises, within which African women are dominant, and of the ways in which they could benefit from being involved in the implementation of the NEPAD. And little attention is paid to the need to address and fundamentally reform the underlying macroeconomic framework through concrete gender-responsive recommendations and tools.

Under the basket on sub-regional and regional development approaches, the focus is on the provision of regional 'public goods and services,' with implementation being placed within the hands of African Ministries of Finance and Treasuries. African women's participation and representation in these institutions is low and no recommendations are made to ensure that gender will be effectively addressed during implementation.

With respect to the six sectoral priorities, under the basket for infrastructure, the focus is on large-scale development projects (for example, the building of dams to address water supply) with no recommendations to ensure that basic community participation principles are adopted in all stages of such project. and that environmental assessments are pre-requisite for such projects.

Under the basket for human resources, no attention is paid to the link between existing macroeconomic frameworks and policies and the deterioration in access to education and health. The roles of African women in health provision is not recognised or

addressed. No specific attention is paid to poverty among African women and the link between the household, micro and macro economies is not made.

Under the basket on agriculture, there is no recognition of African women's roles as primary producers. And the need to assure African women's access to and control over land (and benefits from land) as an economic resource is not addressed.

Under the basket on culture, sketchy actions are proposed which do little to address the acknowledgement of African culture as being part of Africa's comparative advantage. A return to 'traditional' African cultures is urged rather uncritically in view of the prevailing use of culturally nationalistic arguments made to justify and legitimise African women's inequality. No mention is made of the need to re-interpret African cultural documentation from a gender-responsive perspective.

Finally, implementation is to fall under the authority of the Heads of State implementation committee of the now AU. There are no female Heads of State in Africa. And there is therefore need to ensure that women are effectively included in the implementation mechanism and that that implementation mechanism's structure, mandate and operations effectively take gender into account.

Conclusion

The intention of the NEPAD to address the developmental needs of African women is noted. But unfortunately, as shown above, that intention is not well reflected in the NEPAD's proposed actions. It is therefore unclear how the NEPAD's proposed actions can indeed achieve the stated objectives and goals vis a vis African women.

In general, in the few places that African women are specifically mentioned, it is in the context of interventions and strategies at the micro- rather than macro-level. There is no attention paid to the need to fundamentally re-orient the economic development approach and strategies currently adopted by most African states to address developmental gender gaps.

For the NEPAD to be truly relevant to African women, there is therefore an urgent need for:

- a clear mechanism for African women's representation within the implementation mechanisms, mandates and operations of the NEPAD;
- a clear mechanism for African civil society (and women's) engagement with the NEPAD; and
- the development of gender-specific objectives and corresponding actions, with clear gender targets and indicators.

I thank you.

This presentation was developed for a panel on the NEPAD convened by Women in Law and Development in Africa (WILDAF) during the 46th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women held from March 4-15 in New York, the United States. L. Muthoni Wanyeki is the Executive Director of the African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET).