

NEPAD and Namibia

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"The New Partnership for Africa's Development" (NEPAD) is a strategy document, which reflects a new constellation on the African continent at the beginning of the 21st century. With the transfer to democratic majority rule in South Africa and the collapse of the military dictatorship in Nigeria, two relevant new actors emerged in terms of the continental political agenda. Having both considerable economic weight as regional power houses, their combined annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP) represented in 1999 more than half (57%) of the total GDP of Sub Saharan Africa.

South Africa and Nigeria were the main architects, protagonists and stakeholders in the process resulting in NEPAD and advocating it as the blue print for Africa's development. Their combined economic and political relevance gave weight to their initiative, which was actively supported by Algeria, Egypt and Senegal as other core countries in the initiative.

Critical observers question if this is once again old wine in new bottles. And indeed, its catalogue of socio-economic proposals offers hardly any new conceptual approach. It is largely reflecting in a rather uncritical way the dominant neo-liberal paradigm and discourse of the international financial institutions (World Bank and International Monetary Fund). It hence offers no alternatives to the current trends of economic globalisation but instead adheres to the underlying concept of liberalised trade regimes and the dogma of the private economy.

Rather, it seeks to identify and occupy a niche to seek gains from the existing (though grossly unequal and discriminating) structures of the world market. Adebayo Olukoshi, Executive Secretary of the Dakar-based Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) recently summarised some of the substantial critique among African scholars towards the socio-economic essentials of NEPAD during an Africa Day, organised by the African embassies in Denmark in September 2002 at the University of Copenhagen: "Arguably, the essentially neo-liberal framework that informs the economic principles and direction spelt out in the NEPAD document represents a set back in the African quest for a return to the path of sustained economic growth and development."

The new quality of NEPAD as a blueprint for Africa's future lies not in its economic policy approach but in the hitherto unprecedented claim by the political leaders for collective responsibility over policy issues. One should not lose sight of these substantial policy issues amidst the variety of pressing demands for socio-economic progress in terms of material

delivery. The notion of "good governance" is explicitly recognised as a substantial ingredient to socio-economic development. NEPAD welcomes that "across the continent, democracy is spreading, backed by the African Union, which has shown a new resolve to deal with conflicts and censure deviation from the norm".

It states further that NEPAD "has, as one of its foundations, the expansion of democratic frontiers and the deepening of the culture of human rights". Its strong emphasis on democracy and governance does indeed make NEPAD genuinely different from earlier initiatives to promote, propagate, and seek external support for African development within a continental perspective. Conflict prevention, democracy and governance are considered of primary importance. Critics fear, however, that this is not necessarily a tool contributing towards more emancipation alone. As Adebayo Olukoshi warns, "the democracy initiative of NEPAD is not so much the basis for a new social contract between the state and society, the rulers and those whom they govern but a repackaging, under purported African 'ownership', of the governance programme which the international financial institutions developed within the framework of orthodox structural adjustment."

Despite these concerns it is realistic to assume that the extent to which NEPAD will become the relevant framework for African emancipation at the beginning of the 21st century will depend on the degree of the political will and commitment within the ranks of the newly established African Union (AU). Like in any other regional or global body bringing together state actors, the AU operates within the potentially conflicting - if not contradictory - parameters of the principle of national sovereignty and a commonly defined denominator of collective responsibility.

The AU Constitution confirms in article 4(g) its adherence to the principle of non-intervention or non-interference in the internal affairs of member states. Article 4(h) in contrast concedes the right to intervene pursuant to a decision of the AU Assembly in respect of grave circumstances. These are specified as war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity. This is a far cry from the possible enhancement of the commitment to "good governance" as postulated by NEPAD. The latter notion certainly requires essentials such as legitimacy, constitutionality and legality of a political system maintaining the rule of law. Between these requirements for "good governance" and the basic failures spelled out in the AU Constitution as a prerequisite for intervention lie more than just nuances in deficiencies of political systems presently existing on the continent.

The challenge to reconcile conflicting postulates (national sovereignty versus collective responsibility) is of course not confined to Africa. It is tested and contested in the arena of changing international norms elsewhere too. Former Yugoslavia, the Kosovo, the events on and after September 11th 2001 and the escalation of the conflict between Israel and Palestine come to mind as some of the more extreme examples, which require decisions on the nature and degree of outside interventions. Current attempts to prevent the world's only remaining super power from pursuing an unilateral military interventionist strategy of "appeasement" in its own way despite different approaches by the United Nations is another case in point. The positions arrived at operate within a framework of values and norms, which are often contested notions themselves. This illustrates also that while NEPAD is a

regional document, it touches upon global issues of common concern and poses a challenge to collective responsibility within the framework of a commonly defined denominator.

To turn NEPAD into a success story, however, the challenge is not only with the African main actors, who rightly so claim ownership over their development. It also is a duty by other states in support of NEPAD outside of the continent to reduce and ultimately eliminate undue external interference such as the unabated exploitation of natural resources without adequate compensation (not only of parasitic elites but the majority of the people - which again, of course, relates to the issue of "good governance" and involves Africans themselves). Along similar lines, arms deals and especially exports of weapons into conflict zones should be strictly prohibited and punished by both national and international laws. The same should apply to any corruption practice.

The challenge to be met is to contribute from the outside towards sustainable development by offering the African partners a globally conducive environment to secure their fair share in the world economy and the international policy making processes. In his statement at the public meeting on NEPAD with several ministers from African and the Nordic countries in Stockholm's Old Parliament Building on 8 January 2002, the Foreign Minister from Botswana has used "fairness" as a keyword in the context of negotiating benefits for Africa through NEPAD. To turn this into an "African century", as suggested at the same meeting by South Africa's Foreign Minister, therefore requires due recognition of African interests by the powerful ones outside of the continent in both the political and economic spheres.

Taking such a responsibility seriously, the G8 and other OECD countries would have to stop the pursuance of their protectionist trade policies. Agrarian subsidies and other distorting interventions in the economic spheres should come to an end as an initial contribution towards less unfair trade relations and a more competitive general environment. The subsidisation of agriculture in the EU and the US markets exceeds currently by far the total amount of money allocated for development cooperation with the rest of the world. The removal of trade barriers would at least reduce (though certainly not eliminate) unfair intervention by the powerful ones and in itself create gains by African countries. Their trade surplus from this administrative step would exceed the 64 billion US\$, which NEPAD seeks as additional investment per year for turning the socio-economic blueprint into a reality through particular developmental initiatives and projects.

Instead, the G8 Summit in mid-2002 in Canada had little more to offer than verbal commitment towards NEPAD and the promise to further material support in a much more limited dimension than asked for. On the other hand, this rather passive response corresponds with the perception that NEPAD should be considered a deal in which the African and OECD partners give and take. With regard to NEPAD's future, consequently, one insight ought to be unquestioned: If its message is confined to the paper and the philosophy remains another "toothless tiger", the efforts to propagate the document on the basis of its declamatory merits deserving more financial support by the industrialised countries shall be in vain. - You cannot eat the cake and keep it, and the sceptical voices outside of the African continent have dramatically increased

since double standards were so obviously applied with regard to the controversial Presidential elections in Zimbabwean earlier in 2002.

On the other hand scepticism has also been increasingly articulated by those who felt suspicious over the particular concern expressed by the outside world in the Zimbabwean affairs. For these, NEPAD seeks an alliance bringing neo-colonialism and imperialism back on the continent's agenda. Adebayo Olukoshi articulated the reservations among many on the continent: "the manner of formulation of the principle of reciprocity between Africa and the developed countries that underpins the NEPAD conceptualisation and operationalisation of partnership makes it conceivable that NEPAD itself could become a source of conditionality in the relations between the donor community and the continent."

This resentment to external expectations imposed upon political systems in Africa is echoed by a number of political leaders on the continent even more bluntly. Namibia has been part of those countries raising political concerns over the NEPAD approach. On occasion of the African Union (AU) Summit in July 2002 in Durban, when the Heads of States endorsed NEPAD as an AU document, Namibia's Foreign Minister (now Prime Minister) pointed out that NEPAD was never discussed except in the context of Africa's own commitments: "We want to be looked upon as a continent that is itself undergoing meaningful transformation for African people. What was a robust idea in Lusaka (the OAU Summit in mid-2001, H.M.) is now a fixture of globalisation and neo-liberalism", Theo-Ben Gurirab told Namibia's state newspaper "New Era" then.

Namibia's Head of State went a step further, when he addressed the SWAPO Elders Council Congress at the end of July 2002: "As we hear that any government that wants assistance must have so-called good governance, democracy and human rights", President Sam Nujoma stated with regard to the industrialised countries of the West and their expectations into NEPAD. He then objected: "These people cannot teach us about human rights and good governance." Namibia's President pursued the matter further in his widely acknowledged and controversial speech at the World Summit for Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg in early September: "We are equal to Europe and if you don't think that, then to hell with you. You can keep your money. We will develop our Africa without your money", he stated among others to the surprise of many in the audience in a rather blunt and un-diplomatic way.

And upon return from Johannesburg he told the newly appointed Prime Minister and Foreign Minister: "I told them off. We are tired of insults (from) these people. I told them they can keep their money. That these political good governance, human rights, lesbians, etc, that they want to impose on our culture, they must keep those things in Europe." The October 2002 issue of the magazine "New African" found this appearance in particular by Sam Nujoma, but also by the Zimbabwean and Ugandan heads of state Robert Mugabe and Yoweri Museveni reason enough to title its lead story on the Summit with "The Africans steal the show". Their interventions underscored that the leaders of the African continent do neither agree among themselves nor with the outside world on what Africa's perspectives are and how they could best be achieved.

NEPAD is just one recent and relevant initiative. It meets a lot of objections both among different stakeholders in the respective countries of its intellectual origin, among other countries in Africa but also outside the continent, though for various reasons and based on different (if not colliding) perspectives. The dominant attitude among Namibia's political leadership in government seems at best reserved and reluctant, if not dismissive towards the initiative. Part of the lack of enthusiasm might result from the fact that NEPAD was shaped without any degree of participation and consultation among the majority of African countries and their leaders, including the Namibian government. Many among those in political power in African states will find it difficult to identify immediate gains from the commitment and question the approach.

The policy issues brought forward provoke suspicion if and to what extent conditionalities are once again introduced as a political yard stick by the Western industrialised countries to impose certain concepts of a political culture upon African societies and those in control of political power there. This might be a valid objection. On the other hand, certain substantive issues do qualify without any compromise as being in line with the essences of democracy and human rights. Compliance with such essentials - such as the core values already enshrined and reflected in Namibia's Constitution and the guiding principles of its legal system - would be a prerequisite for good governance whatever socio-cultural reasons might exist to justify deviations.

Hence, as long as the policy makers in a country like Namibia, where the required framework is already in place, adhere to the values and norms they had originally agreed upon themselves when being adopted at Independence, no outside authority would have any legitimate basis to question the country's good governance. Scepticism towards the NEPAD credo would consequently be simply unnecessary: a stable democracy honouring the protection of human rights of all citizens and ensuring their full civic participation in the country's matters has no reason to be afraid of any notion in NEPAD.

As a good governance initiative (though admittedly less so for its uninspiring socio-economic orientation) NEPAD might contribute towards rehabilitating the continent currently perceived as a cradle for despotic rulers, nepotism and other forms of abuse of power. To achieve the overdue correction of the negative image would in turn exert at least moral (and hence political) pressure on the external actors to offer more meaningful support to a new partnership, which aims to reduce the continued marginalisation of a whole continent through unfair global structures. The "Peer Review Mechanism" (PRM) designed for implementation among the countries willing to adhere to the NEPAD principles, originally promised to offer a control instrument reaching beyond the smallest denominator agreed upon in the AU Constitution. It defined as an aim to implement and supervise an operational framework to ensure compliance with a set of agreed virtues and norms exercised by governments.

The question remains (as so often in contested matters) again, however, who among the stakeholders will hold the ultimate power of definition and be in control over the implementation process. In late 2002, at a time when NEPAD had managed to gain at least the formal acceptance through the AU member states and some degree of support by the external actors represented in the G8, the EU and other OECD countries of the industrialised world, the

criticism articulated in the continent towards executing any degree of political normative control over affairs of other states seems to have resulted in a serious set back to the credibility of NEPAD. It looks as if the PRM will concentrate more on the monitoring of socio-economic performance and will at best with some reluctance even of NEPAD member states undertake any co-ordinated assessment of policy issues related to the notion of "good governance". The controversy and confusion over the extent of the NEPAD review mechanism with regard to policy issues shows that the relationship between collective responsibility and individual sovereignty among the African states is far from being defined and agreed upon but remains a contested issue.

Despite all original optimism concerning the political credo advocated by NEPAD, therefore, the blue print seems to offer in terms of its implementation procedures hardly any new approach in the practices of African political leaders. In that sense, while it might be more than old wine in new bottles, NEPAD might well turn out to be new wine in old bottles. The effect, then, might unfortunately be the same. Prof. Patrick Chabal, a well known scholar in African Studies, has articulated the growing suspicions in a recent contribution to the renowned journal "International Affairs": "Unless the lessons of the past are learnt, there is very little reason to believe that the nature of politics in Africa will change simply because of the (admittedly admirable) ambition displayed by NEPAD", he concludes. "NEPAD must, in large measure at least, be understood as a commitment on the part of the current (and not so new) elites in Africa to the present 'democratic orthodoxy' in order to guarantee a transfer of resources to Africa: a continuation with, rather than a break from, the type of relations that has guided the continent's engagement with the international community since independence."

But as Thabo Mbeki, the South African President and one of the decisive architects of NEPAD has already warned at the opening of a NEPAD work-in-progress workshop in January 2002: "If we cannot unite through an initiative that can permanently reshape this continent and bring about sustained improvement in the lives of our people, then we would have lost an opportunity that will not arise for some time."

Notes

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