

# **NEPAD: THINKING OUT OF THE BOX**

**Lecture**

**By**

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<sup>1</sup> UNDP: United Nations Development Programme. The views expressed in this paper are mine alone and should not be attributed to the United Nations or any of the Member States or Organs.

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## I. Introduction

***“Africa is beyond bemoaning the past for its problems. The task of undoing that past is ours, with the support of those willing to join us in a continental renewal. We have a new generation of leaders who know that we must take responsibility for our own destiny, that we will uplift ourselves only by our own efforts in partnership with those who wish us well.”***

Nelson Mandela

The contemporary context of development management has an objective and a subjective dimension (Ohiorhenuan 2002). Objectively, the context is defined by the phenomenon of globalization, manifest in the deepening of economic linkages among the stronger national economies and a tendency towards the marginalization of the weaker ones. In terms of policy responses, globalization is circumscribing the mediative role of the state in social and economic processes and changing the rules of the game governing the relevance and efficacy of economic policy instruments.

Subjectively, the contemporary context is one of broad consensus on what development should entail. In part, the Millennium Development Goals encapsulate this subjective apprehension of the desiderata of development. Less universally perceived, but at least as important as the goals and targets of development, are the requirements of successful development. While there is no globally accepted codification of these requirements of successful development, there is a considerable convergence of opinion that that development requires ownership, good governance, opportunism and improvisation(Ohiorhenuan 2000)

It is perhaps because so much seems to be known today about the development process that NEPAD is couched in such grand terms. Its proponents and champions have rather grand in their promotion and commentators have in

general tended to be equally sweeping in their criticisms. It is against this background that I have chosen to press the need to “think outside the box” about NEPAD; to approach it in less ambitious, more pragmatic terms.

Partly because of its evolutionary trajectory, NEPAD comes across as trying to be all things to all people. A “comprehensive integrated plan that addresses key social, economic and political priorities for the continent” is, in my view, too grand a project. It is such claims that elicit the radical critique that NEPAD is merely warmed-over neo-liberalism. We must go beyond giving a dog a bad name in order to hang it.

In the spirit of a more nuanced approach and, considering my time limitations, this presentation raises some practical questions around five themes which may be critical for the future of NEPAD. First, I look at the issue of authority in the roles of NEPAD versus the African Union (AU). Second, I address the recurrent question that NEPAD was not based on a consultative process. Third I deal with the related question of ownership in relation particularly to the G-8. Fourth, I look at the tension between ambition and capacity in NEPAD. Fifth, I examine the Africa Peer Review Mechanism as an area where all these questions converge.

## ***II. NEPAD, AU and the Question of Authority***

A twenty-second century history of NEPAD would read as follows: NEPAD is a merger of the Millennium Africa Recovery Plan (MAP) proposed by Presidents Mbeki (South Africa), Obasanjo (Nigeria) and Bouteflika (Algeria) and the OMEGA plan proposed by President Wade of Senegal. At the 37<sup>th</sup> OAU Summit held in Lusaka in July 2001, the merged programme was approved as the New African Initiative (NAI). It was endorsed by leaders of the G-8 the same month in Genoa. Its Policy Framework was agreed by the Heads of State Implementation Committee at Abuja in October 2001. The name NEPAD was adopted at that meeting.

A certain tension arises from the fact that NEPAD was initially envisaged as a club (membership of which must be earned), but ended up as an inclusive association (membership of which derives existentially from the OAU). The former image appears to be preferred by many of Africa's powerful external partners, some of whom tried to project the 2002 elections in Zimbabwe as a litmus test of NEPAD's credibility. In briefing the World Economic Forum at Davos in January 2001, President Mbeki had presented NEPAD (then MAP) implicitly as a club:

“Participating African leaders would form a compact committing them to the programme [with] a Forum of Leaders who would make decisions about sub-programmes and initiatives and review progress on its implementation”.

Indeed, there are several references in the NEPAD document to “participating countries” arising, perhaps, from this earlier perception of a “recovery plan” for Africa in which participation would be based on specific criteria.

When NEPAD was approved by the OAU in Lusaka, its status was not clarified. It is referred to in various documents as an “initiative” of the OAU, a “project” of the OAU or “the implementation mechanism” for the AU. At the April 2002 meeting of the Implementation Committee in Abuja, NEPAD was declared a “mandated initiative” of the African Union. This clearly suggests its subsidiary relationship to the AU. But, by urging greater cooperation and coordination between the AU and NEPAD Secretariats, the meeting implied a somewhat more co-equal relationship.

Since then, the formal relationship has been clarified. NEPAD is to be integrated into AU structures and processes. At the AU Summit in Maputo, it was agreed that “to sustain the momentum that NEPAD has created and to allow for the building of capacity within the AU Commission to manage NEPAD”, the HSGIC be mandated for three years to further elaborate the NEPAD Framework and ensure its implementation. Meanwhile it will continue to be financially supported by voluntary contributions from member states.

The formal clarification has not necessarily resolved the tension. Because the OAU is perceived as having achieved little in 40 years, there is considerable scepticism about the potential of its successor AU. There is also the feeling in some quarters that some “unworthy” African leaders play to active a role in AU. NEPAD therefore appears as a more discriminating vehicle for doing business in and with Africa. Against such a background it would be strange if the AU did not feel threatened. These tensions at the objective and subjective levels in the relationship between NEPAD and the AU are unlikely to be resolved without a further strategic narrowing of the scope of NEPAD based on its real comparative advantage.

### ***III. NEPAD, CSOs and the Question of Consultation***

Two years after NEPAD was launched the question of consultation remains a burning issue. And yet it could easily become an unproductive diversion. In his report at Maputo, President Obasanjo conceded as follows:

“In July 2001 at the Lusaka Summit of the OAU and the 2002 Inaugural Summit of the AU in Durban, it was resolved that each country should popularise both the constitutive Act of the African Union and NEPAD. However, the reality is that the majority of the people remain ignorant about both”.

From the very beginning, civil society has complained about a lack of consultation on NEPAD. Almost a year after the NEPAD launch, Yash Tandon, of the Southern and East African Trade and Information Negotiations Institute (SEATINI), commented,

“The latest effort to “do something for Africa” at the continental and international level, called NEPAD (New Partnership for African Development), claims its inspiration and legitimacy from the concept of the “African Renaissance”. African civil society and academia are gradually

waking up to this initiative. Although the document promises to be “people-oriented”, the people have not yet been consulted. ....” (Third World Network Africa. April 29, 2002).

Neville Gabrielle, of the Southern African Catholic Bishops’ Conference (SACBC) asserts that “local communities and civil society organisations had no meaningful opportunities to engage in the initial development of NEPAD”. He notes however, that this is now routinely acknowledged by African political leaders and NEPAD officials. He argues, therefore, that “the complete rejection of NEPAD by some CSOs based in its failure to engage CSOs directly is an unfortunate and inappropriate form of protest” (The Southern African MDGs Forum, Johannesburg, 2-4 July 2003).

Given the way in which NEPAD emerged, the criticism on the lack of consultation with civil society and broad based participation by the people is justified. However, it should be acknowledged that the NEPAD process was initiated by democratically elected African leaders. Such legitimacy confers some responsibility to provide a vision for the continent. While broader participation may have been useful, the fact that NEPAD is self consciously democratic in its roots and aspirations should earn it the benefit of doubt. And more recently, there has been increasing regional CSO activity on NEPAD and the African Union, partly as a result of the recognition by African leaders of the need to engage CSOs and encourage broader participation.

The recent CSO meeting on NEPAD, held in Maputo, ahead of the Summit of African Union Heads of State and Government, provided an appropriate forum for CSOs to discuss constructively the evolution of NEPAD and its likely challenges based on Africa’s past experiences. The meeting’s objectives were to share information between the CSOs and NEPAD on a wide range of issues around the evolution, content and implementation of the NEPAD programmes and projects; and

address perceptions that CSOs have with regard to NEPAD, particularly in relation to their participation.

The meeting recommended the representation and participation of civil society in all national platforms on NEPAD; improved relationships between CSOs and governments; a continuous review of NEPAD content and processes; and regular meetings between civil society representation and the NEPAD officials.

It is important to be realistic on the potential role of CSOs in NEPAD. Because of its extremely diverse nature it is unlikely that a single voice will emerge. Nor should this be expected. The strength of civil society lies more in holding governments and the “establishment” accountable in their promises to the people they govern. The expectations, therefore, should not be that civil society will implement NEPAD projects or programmes. Rather, it should be that it will continue to pressure NEPAD and African leaders to focus on issues of strategic importance.

#### ***IV. NEPAD, the G8 and the Question of Ownership***

NEPAD is explicitly predicated on African ownership. This theme runs through the NEPAD document and is constantly reaffirmed in statements of the NEPAD leadership. Africa’s external partners have unequivocally embraced the idea that Africa’s destiny lies in its own hands. And yet questions remain about the genuineness of this embrace.

At Kananaskis in 2002, the G8 adopted an Africa Action Plan in response to NEPAD. The Africa Action Plan sets out how each of the G8 partners, together and individually, will enhance their engagement with African countries in support of NEPAD. The G8 particularly welcomed the UN General Assembly resolution adopting NEPAD as the general framework around which the international community



including the United Nations system should concentrate its efforts for Africa's development<sup>2</sup>.

Even a cursory reading of the Africa Action Plan reveals considerable enthusiasm on the part of G8 for NEPAD. And while no large sums of money were pledged, it was clear that a significant part of the so-called Monterrey commitments would be assigned to NEPAD. However, it is also clear that the G8 was unlikely to embark on a major reassessment of its own usual procedures. According to the Action Plan:

“[NEPAD]” will lead us to focus our efforts on countries that demonstrate a political and financial commitment to good governance and the rule of law, investing in their people, and pursuing policies that spur economic growth and alleviate poverty.”

Furthermore, estimating that the Monterrey commitments will increase ODA by US\$ 12 billion per annum, the Action Plan declared that:

“Each of us will decide, in accordance with our respective priorities and procedures, how we will allocate the additional money we have pledged.”

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<sup>2</sup> During the year 2002, the United Nations General Assembly passed three resolutions formally accepting NEPAD as the framework for engagement with Africa after ending the UN-NADAF. Furthermore, the Secretary General has established the Office of the Special Advisor on Africa (OSAA) to coordinate the UN's support to Africa, guide reporting on Africa and coordinate global advocacy in support of NEPAD. At the Independent Evaluation of UN-NADAF, the modalities of UN future engagement with NEPAD were proposed. The UN will mainly focus on enhanced advocacy, undertaking technical cooperation for capacity building, mobilizing resources, monitoring and reporting on activities in support of NEPAD, and strengthened coordination in the delivery of programmes.

It also seems clear that the G8 commitment to implementation of the Africa Plan hinges heavily on governance issues. It is self-evident that without peace and security Africa will not realize the goals set in NEPAD. Beyond this, however, the implicit “governance reforms conditionality” of the Africa Action Plan tends to circumscribe the discretion of African leaders in determining their own parameters of acceptable governance. This is at least a plausible interpretation of the Implementation Report by Africa Personal Representatives to Leaders on the G8 Africa Action Plan, Evian, 1-3 June 2003. Paragraph 2 of the report states:

“In the Africa Action Plan, G8 partners reaffirmed a broad partnership with countries throughout Africa based on the commitments of G8 members to address core issues of human dignity and development. They also undertook to enter into enhanced partnerships with African countries whose performance reflects the NEPAD commitments, including a political and financial commitment to good governance and the rule of law, investing in their people, pursuing policies that spur economic growth and alleviate poverty. They stated that the African Peer-review process would inform their future decisions in this regard.”

Paragraph 8 of the same report states:

“Accountability is central to NEPAD and the Africa Action Plan: the accountability of African Leaders to their people and to each other as well as the determination of developed partners to match that commitment. Individually, G8 partners have begun to give practical expression to that – for example, in the decision of some G8 partners to include African participation in the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) peer-review process”.

Practically, therefore, the message from the G8 was that in responding to Africa’s priorities and commitments, it will do so on its own terms and is unlikely to

modify its priorities or shift significantly from the notion of development assistance essentially as an extension of foreign policy.

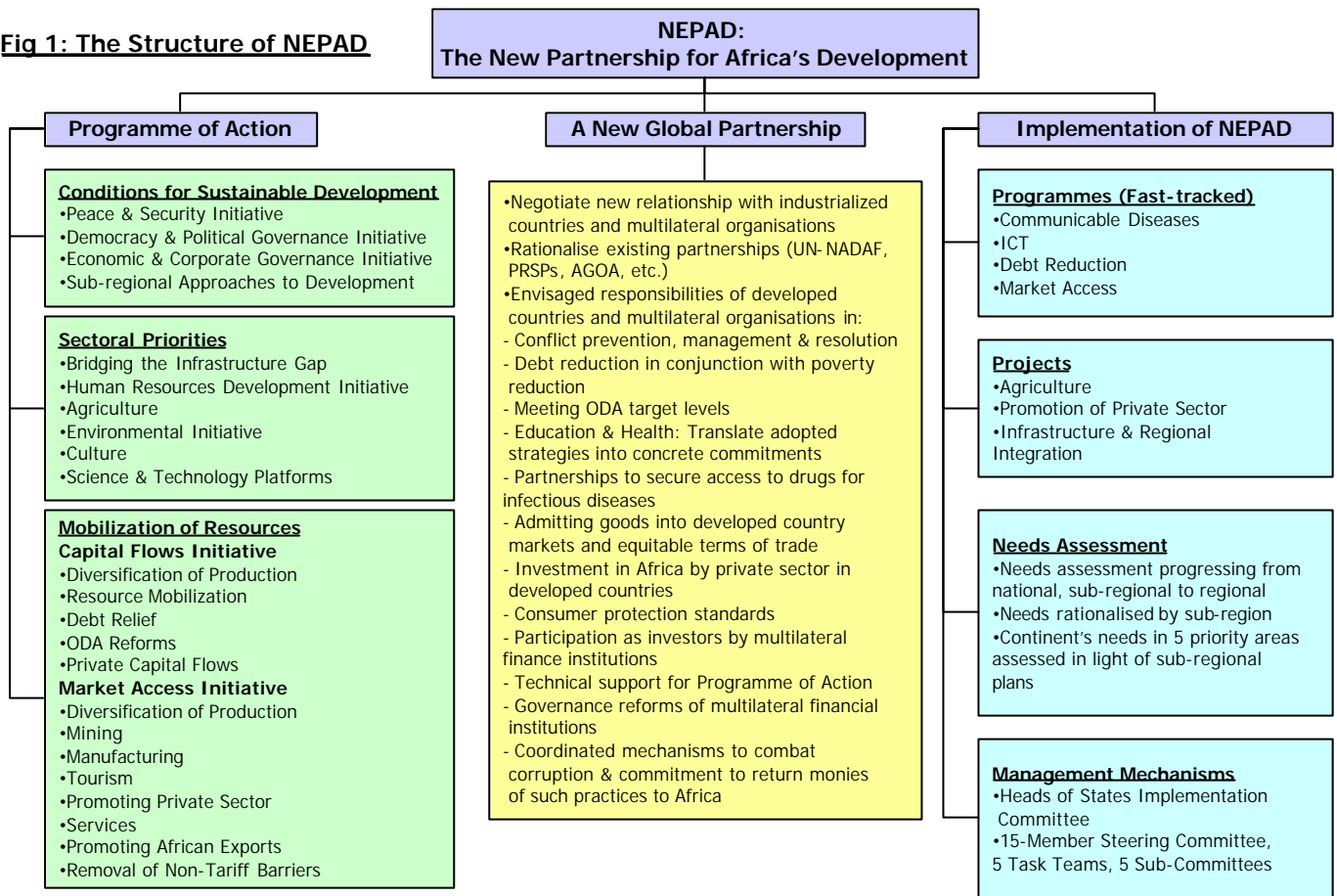
This is not so much a criticism as recognition of the asymmetry of power in Africa's partnership aspirations. As a practitioner put it thirty years ago, "a mere equality of opportunity to engage in dialogue cannot establish parity in decision making" (Patel 1971). The effective realization of G8 support to NEPAD and its acceptance of African ownership would require the better alignment of its assistance with African regional and country priorities than has been the case over the past fifty years.

#### ***V. Grand Ambitions: Weak Capacities***

Perhaps the most recurrent description of NEPAD is that it is the socio-economic development programme of the AU. The NEPAD document does indeed read in parts like a framework for a comprehensive development programme. The morphology of NEPAD, as shown in figure 1, reveals clearly the complexity and ambition inherent in NEPAD. Together its three parts, namely programme of action, partnership and implementation framework cover an extremely large number of socio-economic and political policy and programme issues. To be sure, a strategic framework is useful. But there is no particular value in NEPAD seeking to be a continental Ministry of Planning.

The complexity of NEPAD's programme description is at least at two levels: First, its specification of sectoral priorities includes virtually all sectors but provides no criteria for prioritisation. It also proposes a number of "fast-track" programmes relating to communicable diseases, ICT, debt reduction and market access with no suggestion that these have precedence. In the end, while its comprehensive intent is clear, the NEPAD programme does not present as a coherent set of activities implementable in the traditional development programming sense. Rather it presents the danger of ending up as no more than a shopping list.

**Fig 1: The Structure of NEPAD**



Based on information in:

(a) The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), Oct. 2001.

(b) NEPAD Background 1: Introducing the New Partnership for Africa's Development (<http://www.dfa.gov.za/docs/nepad1.htm>)

Second, inherent in the construction of the programme are severe problems of assignment and coordination. It is not clear who will be responsible for doing what. The programme consists not only of project activities but also of other actions such as research, analysis, negotiation and supervision. The role of the task teams and sub-committees in actually getting things done is also not clear.

Against the background of such ambition in design, must be juxtaposed a realistic assessment of the capacity to operationalise.<sup>3</sup> In his Maputo presentation, President Obasanjo acknowledged the weakness of the capacity to plan and implement socio-economic development programmes at country and regional levels.

<sup>3</sup> [“operationalise”, because the programme sketch must be followed by detailed work planning, large scale stakeholder consultation, and budgeting before the task of implementation can begin.]

The various NEPAD task forces have been busy designing programmes across a broad spectrum of themes and sectors. Obasanjo's address highlighted the Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Programme, and the Infrastructure Short-Term Action Plan, which includes "high priority" projects in energy, transport, water and sanitation, and ICT.

The real question however, is whether NEPAD can or should seek to acquire the comparative advantage to be effective as a continental planning agency. Africa's considerable expertise in development planning of the Sixties and Seventies has mainly disappeared as the continent moved into the era of liberalisation and structural adjustment. That capacity needs to be re-acquired, albeit with different competencies and emphases. Such practical considerations suggest that NEPAD should perhaps focus on those things that are clearly not better done at the country level. Meanwhile, efforts should be geared to re-building socio-economic management capacity at the country level. Indeed, one could question the validity, relevance, feasibility and sustainability of a continental programme that is not based on rigorous country programmes.

## ***VI. The African Peer Review Mechanism***

The issues of authority, consultation, ownership and capacity converge heavily in the Africa Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). The APRM is presented deceptively simply :

"a mutually agreed instrument voluntarily acceded to by member states of the African Union as an African Self-monitoring mechanism. Its mandate is to ensure that the policies and practices of participating states conform to the agreed political, economic and corporate governance values, codes and standards contained in the Declaration on Democracy, Political, Economic and Corporate Governance".

The APRM Base Document defines its primary purpose as:

“ to foster the adoption of policies, standards and practices that lead to political stability, high economic growth and 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.”

The Base Document envisages several steps in the APR process, including preparation of the development environment by the APRM secretariat, preparation of a country programme of action, country review visit by the panel, submission of report to and discussion by participating Heads of State and finally making the report public. Four types of review are envisaged: a base review; periodic reviews every two to four years, a special review requested by a member and a review initiated by Heads of State to help a country preempt a crisis. Sixteen countries<sup>4</sup> have acceded to the APRM and the initial panel of eminent persons has been appointed. The first peer reviews are likely to commence before the end of this year.

A few issues may be highlighted on the APRM. First it is expected to cover the areas of Democracy and Good Political Governance; Economic and Corporate governance, and; Socio-economic development. This breadth of coverage of the APRM is an issue of considerable significance. Unlike the OECD peer reviews which are mainly sectoral and therefore have obvious institutional anchors, the scope of the APRM poses an enormous problem for countries in designating appropriate anchors. Moreover the MOU on the APRM, approved by the HSGIC in March 2003, explicitly commits participating countries to extensive stakeholder consultation at all stages of the process.

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<sup>4</sup> Algeria, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Kenya, Mali, Mauritius, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, and Uganda.

Second, while the methodology for the peer review is not yet fully articulated, it is already clear that it will be quite complex. For each country, the peer review process may involve the following: a country self-assessment, a technical assessment by Partner Institution, the facilitation of the country Review visit. In intent, the APRM may be compared to the ISO certification model<sup>5</sup>. In essence, a country strives to achieve recognition for its performance in the areas meeting agreed standards. When it feels ready, it invites the external body (the APR) to undertake a review and certify attainment of requisite standards.

Against such analogy it is easy to apprehend the methodological complexity involved in the APRM. Perhaps more graphically, a visitor from mars might describe the APRM as:

A multi-objective process, defined by multiple criteria and standards, covering multiple countries, involving multiple stakeholders and reporting to multiple principals.

A third important issue relates to the signification of the APRM. What does it really signify? NEPAD documents are at pains to emphasise the voluntary nature of the APRM. The ISO analogy also implies such voluntarism. However, when the HSGIC decided to assign technical assessments in democracy and political governance to the African Union, there was strong disapproval from external partners. President Mbeki, in responding to one such expression of disapproval complained that Africa was being:

Invited to treat the AU...as a dangerous irrelevance with regard to its NEPAD offspring, whose connection with the latter may lead to the unraveling of our external partners (Mbeki 2002).

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<sup>5</sup> I owe this point to Jan Loubser (private conversation).

In spite of Mbeki's clarification on this and other occasions, it seems clear that the misgivings about the AU's role in the APRM will continue. What is not clear at the moment is how those misgivings will become manifest in donor responses to the outcomes of the first wave of reviews.

Several other questions could be raised about the APRM, such as the sequencing of processes, the time and financial resources, the capacity requirements and the financing of the venture at the country level. But the three issues raised seem enough to me to justify considering the possibility of narrowing the scope, and simplifying the methodological requirements. It is also important that the APRM be accepted by the key partners as being non-threatening in its implications.

## ***VII. Conclusion***

In this presentation, I have tried to place NEPAD in the contemporary context of development and raise a few questions relating to the inherent AU-NEPAD tension, the issues of consultation and ownership, the problem of capacity and the peer review process. My message may be summarized in three parts. First, African leaders must be in no doubt that partnership begins at home; while significant resource additionality from external partners would be welcome, the real sources of Africa's development capital lies at home. Relatedly, the leaders need to effectively commit to responsible governance, guarantee of basic freedoms, and the nurturing of their citizens' creativity, not because of any implicit or explicit donor conditionality but because the lessons of development experience do show that these are necessary conditions.

Second and relatedly, it must be underlined that while partnerships are important, aid is not a sustainable basis for real partnership. The crucial partnership in the end is that between governments and their people. Accordingly, consultation



and the broad participation of major civil society groups are crucial. However, consultation should not become an end in itself, nor must the legitimate democratic responsibilities of leaders to lead be circumscribed.

Third, NEPAD should perhaps focus on those areas in which it has the comparative advantage. Given its limited resources and unequivocal nature of its place in the AU, its effectiveness should, perhaps be sought in its being an agency of change and restraint. It could play the lead role in a limited number of globally significant strategic issues such as debt, market access and trade negotiations. It could facilitate coordination in cross-border initiatives where no other effective agency exists. And it certainly has a critical activist role in the setting of standards and advocacy for good political and economic governance, and the corresponding monitoring of performance. Beyond this, it would be futile and ultimately counter-productive for NEPAD to seek to become a continental Ministry of Planning and/or Governance.

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