

NEPAD: What is it? What is missing?

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Introduction

The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) has gone by many names. NEPAD is typically depicted by architects and foremost proponents as an attempt to address Africa's vast development challenges. Some have even called it Africa's 'Marshall Plan'. More others see it as a development strategy and a programme of the African Union (AU).

Critics on the other hand depict NEPAD as a 'neo-liberal' project, clearly contrary to the views of its supporters who see NEPAD as a revolutionary plan. Critics have even called NEPAD the 'Africanisation of GEAR'. Whatever name and epithet one chooses, NEPAD has clearly generated a great deal of debate.

As a development plan, NEPAD sees a dialectical relationship between politics and economics. It explicitly makes a link between development, peace, security, governance and democracy. It has been taken seriously by supporters and critics alike NEPAD and it seems to have two clear rationales. One the one hand it wishes to inculcate into African politics a culture of democracy, accountability, and 'good' governance. On the other hand it seeks to a 'new', enhanced partnership with the countries of the industrialised North so as to involve them in efforts to underwrite such new African initiatives through debt relief, increases in levels of official development assistance, infrastructural development, and direct foreign investment. Thus, NEPAD is based on a trade-off: in exchange for African leaders holding each other accountable, the industrialised powers of the world would recommit themselves to Africa's development.

In order to gain a proper understanding of what NEPAD is, we have to ask the question: what prompted NEPAD? From whence does NEPAD come? NEPAD is in a real sense quite visionary. It seeks to bring about a paradigm shift in both Africa's international relations and intra-African politics. NEPAD was triggered by the post-Cold War reality of power imbalances between Africa and the northern industrialised countries. It is trying to react to western military and political disengagement from the continent, and outside powers shirking in their historical obligations toward the continent. NEPAD is also an attempt to change around negative perceptions of Africa. If the outside world were to respond positively and constructively to NEPAD, their re-engagement of the continent would help to arrest growing poverty and inequality on the continent, and assist in transforming the political, economic and social landscapes in Africa.

Even before assuming the position of president, Thabo Mbeki made plain his determination to tackle Afro-pessimism in the quarters of the developed world. He wanted to shun the image amongst western observers, governments and even investors that Africa was a continent inhabited mainly by a bunch of kleptocratic regimes that are typically dictatorial, with a strong penchant for violating human rights and democracy.

But NEPAD is not only attempt to turn around Africa's image abroad. NEPAD is also targeting African constituencies, most notably African governing elites. NEPAD's hope is that Africans should break with the culture and attitude of victimisation. It sees itself as pursuing a very 'mature' approach by breaking with a perceived tendency of blaming the outside world for all of Africa's ills. It hopes to do so by inculcating into African politics a culture of 'taking responsibility' for Africa's own mistakes, and by becoming more self-critical of African political development. The view about the west in Africa in turn was that of a club of powerful white governments who are racist towards Africa, and who viewed Africa as having lost its strategic significance after the Cold War. Such governments gradually shirked in their economic and political obligations towards the continent as they saw little point in sending their troops to far-off countries in the 'Dark Continent' of which they knew little about and cared even less.

There was a dialogue of the deaf between these two blocs. Leaders and pundits on both sides criticised one another and talked past each other. It's as if no one really listened.

Just as Mbeki set out to become the president of redress at home, so he set out to introduce the politics restoration and pragmatic justice globally. This he did especially with regard to African-Western relations, and North-South ties. To this end, Mbeki initiated 'a new Agenda for Africa'. Such an agenda could only come about through the building of new bridges between Africa and the outside world. For Mbeki, Africa and the industrialised countries had to be locked into a new and genuine partnership. Africa's states had to become more democratically accountable while northern states had to recommit themselves to participating in Africa's vast development challenges. The best way to extract commitments from both sides was to lock these opposing sides into a new pact; a new deal of sorts. Such a deal had to be based on 'genuine' partnership that would stress mutual responsibilities and mutual commitments on politics, democracy and socio-economic issues that would map out Africa's future. Of course the question arises whether in fact there could be 'genuine' partnership between unequals; whether western and other industrialised powers would really be willing to take Africa seriously and view it as a strategic partner that matters?

NEPAD is a bold and ambitious political project. It seeks to redefine and alter power relations between one of the world's poorest continent's – Africa – and the world most powerful and dominant actors – the industrialized North.

NEPAD: the African Renaissance Operationalised?

Before becoming president in June 1999, Mbeki and his South African colleagues in government and the African National Congress worked on articulating a vision of an

African Renaissance, that is African political, economic and social renewal. But they did not stop there; for Mbeki and others, the vision had to be translated into concrete policies and plans of action. This would be done by turning a 'new Agenda for African Recovery' on the basis of 'genuine partnership' into concrete plans of action. Such an agenda, policies and plans of action had to generate new forms of cooperation and articulate mutual interests between Africa and the developed world. The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) is a concrete manifestation of this 'new agenda'. NEPAD has its origin in this new Agenda for African Development.

The attitude of Africa's multilateral regional and sub-regional organisations had to be turned around so that they could support such a new agenda. But a plan based on a South African hegemonic diktat would clearly fail. NEPAD therefore recognised the need for partnerships amongst key African states. For example, in July 1999, the OAU summit in Algeria, as well as the OAU Extraordinary summit held in Sirte, Libya during September 1999, mandated three countries – Algeria in its capacity as chair of the OAU, South Africa in its capacity as chair of the Non-aligned Movement (NAM), and Nigeria in its capacity as the chair of the Group-of-77 within the UN – to engage the developed countries on the 'total cancellation of Africa's external debt' and promote efforts to close the digital divide between the continent and those industrialised countries. One year later, during the 2000 OAU summit in Togo, these three countries received a broader mandate to engage the developed North with a view to developing a constructive partnership for the regeneration of the Continent. Following from this, the three Presidents raised the issue of a partnership with the leaders of the G8 at their summit in Japan during July 2000. The work of developing a Millennium Africa Recovery Plan (MAP) then began in earnest as an extensive program on bilateral and multilateral engagement started. A presentation on MAP was made to the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland in January 2001.

While these countries worked on MAP, Senegalese president Abdulaye Wade and other francophone African countries worked on the OMEGA Plan, essentially an infrastructural development planⁱ. The OMEGA Plan was first presented at the Franco-Africa Summit in Yaounde, Cameroon in January 2001. It was also presented at the OAU Extraordinary Summit in Sirte.

However, concerned about a possible clash between francophone and anglophone states that would reinforce a false political divide, the MAP leaders mandated South African President Thabo Mbeki to interact with his Senegalese counterpart in order to bring about a merger between MAP and OMEGA. Just before the 2001 OAU summit Lusaka, Zambia, Wade visited South Africa, and the two leaders and their respective teams finalised plans and successfully merged MAP and OMEGA and named the integrated plan the New African Initiative (NAI)ⁱⁱ. The Lusaka summit endorsed NAI and mandated the leaders to fine-tune the new plan into a partnership between Africa and the industrialised powers of the world.

In October 2001, African leaders met in Abuja, Nigeria and launched NEPADⁱⁱⁱ. The NEPAD represents a vision by those African states, which signed on, together with the

OAU, to reposition Africa globally, eradicate poverty and to place the continent on the road to sustainable development. It is premised on the attainment of peace and stability through sound governance based on democratic values and principles.

As stated above the overall purpose of NEPAD is to give practical effect to the African Renaissance vision. NEPAD is a comprehensive plan to foster 'genuine partnership' between Africa and the industrialised powers, based on mutual interest and benefit, shared commitment and binding agreement, under African leadership. It is premised on the idea of a pact, a trade-off: that in exchange for Africa's governing elites holding each other politically and economically accountable, the industrialised powers of the world will supplement Africa's peacemaking and peacekeeping efforts, and their attempts to eradicate poverty, by renewing their commitments to greater flows in official development assistance (ODA), debt relief, enhanced flows in private capital (foreign direct investment), and investing in infrastructure, information technology, human resource development – notably in education and health – and providing greater market access for Africa's trading goods to the North. In short, NEPAD is premised on the attaining of peace and stability in Africa through sound governance, based on democratic principles and values. This is to be reinforced by new commitments by Northern powers in the form of financial assistance and enhancing the continent's capacities to consolidate peace and democracy. Yet, in proposing the new partnership, NEPAD recognises that Africa holds the key to its own development.

The logic of NEPAD is thus to make a clear link between development and stability. NEPAD singles out three prerequisites for social and economic regeneration, poverty alleviation and empowerment: 1. Peace and Security; 2. Democracy and Political Governance; and 3. Economic and Corporate Governance. This is clearly illustrated by the dictum: 'no peace without development; no development without peace'.

NEPAD goes further and asserts that, of crucial importance to Africa and the rest of the world is the establishment and protection of a political order and system of governance that are:

- Legitimate and enjoy the support and loyalty of the African people;
- Strong enough to advance the interests of African people;
- Able to address the fundamental development interests of African people; and
- Able to engage effectively with various global processes that characterise the world economy.

NEPAD acknowledges that in those regions and countries marred by armed conflict, the overwhelming priorities are to achieve peace, to disarm and demobilise combatants, and to resettle refugees. Africa's capacity to prevent, mediate and resolve conflicts on the continent must strengthen, including, including the capacity to deploy African peacekeeping forces when necessary.

NEPAD recognises that if peace and security is to lead to sustained growth and development, it is of the utmost urgency that the capacity of the state in Africa to fulfil its

responsibilities be strengthened. These responsibilities include poverty eradication and development, entrenching democracy, human rights and respect for the rule of law, creating a conducive environment for private sector mobilisation, and responding appropriately to the process of globalisation.

Only if the state is equipped with the capacity to deliver, can it provide an unambiguous and tangible indication that good governance offers a better alternative to the practices of the past. It is therefore vital for the industrialised powers to realise that a new partnership between themselves and African multilateral institutions on the one hand, and African states on the other, are vital to bring about peace, democracy and development in Africa.

The Governing Structure of NEPAD is composed of an Implementation Committee of Heads of State and Government; a Steering Committee and a Secretariat. President Obasanjo has been elected Chairman of the Implementation Committee, and presidents Bouteflika and Wade as his deputy chairmen. The Midrand headquarters of the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA) was chosen as the location of the NEPAD Secretariat.

NEPAD members have worked on elaborating Action Plans for five sectors:

- The Peace, Security, Democracy and Political Governance Initiatives;
- The Economic and Corporate Governance Initiative;
- Bridging the Infrastructure Gap;
- The Human Resource Development Initiative, especially Education and Health; and
- The Market Access Initiative.

These efforts include the establishment of political and economic Good Governance Peer Review Mechanisms, those sets of norms, values and criteria by which African elites commit to hold each other accountable^{iv}. Both Peer Review Mechanisms stress the need to generate the necessary political will to keep the core values, commitments and obligations of NEPAD and other legal instruments. The mechanisms pledge to empower people and institutions within civil society to ensure an active and independent civil society that can hold government accountable; to adhere to the principles of constitutional democracy, the rule of law and the strict separation of powers; to promote political representivity; ensuring the periodic democratic renewal of leadership; ensuring impartial, transparent and credible electoral administration and oversight systems; ensuring the effective participation of women, minorities and disadvantaged groups in political and economic processes; combat and eradicate corruption.

For example, the initial drafts of the Political and Good Governance Peer Review Mechanism^v stress the importance of 'political will' to keep to core values, commitments and obligations on democracy, human rights and good governance. It recognises the need to 'empower people and institutions of civil society' so as to ensure an active and independent civil society that can hold government accountable to the people'. It stresses the need to 'adhere to principles of a constitutional democracy, the rule of law and the strict separation of powers, including the protection of the independence of the judiciary'.

It hopes to ensure ‘the periodic democratic renewal of leadership, in line with the principle that leaders should be subjected to fixed terms in office’. It is committed to the ‘freedom of expression, inclusive of a guaranteed free media’.

Importantly for those who work in electoral administration, the Peer Review Process commits those signed-up members to ensuring ‘impartial, transparent and credible electoral administration and oversight systems’. It promotes a ‘dedicated, honest and efficient civil service’, and wishes to ‘establish oversight institutions providing necessary surveillance, and to ensure transparency and accountability by all layers of government’. It is also strongly in favour of creation and strengthening of ‘institutional capacity to ensure the proper functioning of democratic institutions and instruments’.

The Economic and Corporate Governance Peer Review Mechanism^{vi} on its part goes beyond just neo-liberal economic and fiscal dictates. It recognises that good political good governance is a prerequisite for good economic and corporate good governance. It says the ability of the state to deliver on its promises is key. The peer review singles out a number of areas in need of institutional reform. These include: administrative and civil service; strengthening parliamentary oversight; promoting participatory decision-making; adopting effective measures to combat corruption and embezzlement; and undertaking judicial reforms. It states that the key factors which enhances good governance of economies are transparency, accountability, an enabling environment for private sector development and growth, and institutional capacity and effectiveness.

NEPAD’s convergence with SADC and ECOWAS restructuring, to mention two sub-regional examples, is allowing for it to influence and become incorporated into the new emerging SADC framework at the same time that Pretoria is about to host the launch of the AU. These convergences place South Africa in an advantageous strategic position to manage the development of synergies between these different initiatives which, in turn, provide the UN an excellent opportunity to reinforce this process starting with SADC restructuring and South Africa’s role involvement in those changes.

NEPAD’s view on the global political-economy

Contrary to much criticism that NEPAD only foc us on partnership with the outside world, and does not talk enough about intra-African partnerships, NEPAD does have clear political economy perspectives on the African dimension itself. NEPAD points out that the building of cross-border and trans-African road networks, railways and other means of transport and communication, and the consolidation of joint energy, water and other systems will be far more effective and beneficial than ‘economies of scale. NEPAD calls for the creation of ‘essential regional public good’ in order to ‘enhance regional co-operation and trade’.

NEPAD clearly placed a great deal of stress on ‘capital flows’ within Africa and from abroad. In NEPAD’s own words, there is ‘...an urgent need to create conditions that promote private sector investment by both domestic and foreign investors’. NEPAD encourages ‘the promotion of intra-African trade and investments’ through ‘the

harmonisation of economic and investment policies and practices'. NEPAD offers 'great opportunities for investment', especially through 'public-private partnerships', as well as 'lowering the risks facing private investors'.

NEPAD proposes the establishment of a Financial Market Integration Task Force to 'speed up financial market integration'. NEPAD further calls for 'the deepening of financial markets within countries, as well as cross-border harmonisation and integration'. The 'co-ordination of national sector policies and effective monitoring of regional decisions', and 'the promotion of policy and regulatory harmonisation', according to NEPAD, is necessary) 'to facilitate cross-border interaction and market-enlargement'.

NEPAD aptly recognises that most African economies are vulnerable because of their dependence on primary production and resource-based sectors'. African economies have 'narrow export bases' and they are in 'urgent need to diversify production'. It is vital, says NEPAD, that African countries 'pool' or combine their resources within regional production strategies, and stimulate 'cross-border interactions among African firms', as well as cross-border inter-sectoral linkages'.

NEPAD speaks out against the 'absence of fair and just rules' as far as the global trading system is concerned, and seeks to address the 'unfavourable terms of trade' facing Africa. It also speaks out against 'biases in economic policy and instability in world commodity prices' that affect Africa negatively. As such, NEPAD seeks 'a new global partnership' and declares that international multilateral institutions and the world's most industrialised nations have an 'obligation' to negotiate more favourable terms of trade for African countries within the multilateral framework'. NEPAD further encourages African states to actively engage the multilateral system of rule and regulations being created and implemented under the World Trade Organisation (WTO). NEPAD also recognises 'the new trading opportunities that emerge from the evolving multilateral trading system.

On globalisation, NEPAD

From planning to implementation

Between December 2001 and June 2002, African leaders and their delegations rushed frantically to put together action plans so as to engage the leaders of the G-8 industrialised powers. African leaders put together actions plans on infrastructural development, debt relief, market access, and capacity development. African leaders also finalised their Political Good Governance and Economic and Finance Good Governance Peer Review Mechanisms. The hope was that, with demonstrating seriousness on their part, the G8 would respond by showing commitment to the principles and practice of mutual responsibility and mutual accountability. In other words the G8 would make commitments in favour of debt relief, OAD reform, market access, and resources for capacity building and consolidation.

However, if the outcome of the June 2002 G-8 Summit in Kananaskis is anything to go by, then two problems are clearly exposed: a gap between promise and delivery on the part of western powers; and a clear unwillingness to engage in mutual accountability; a process through which both Africans and industrialised powers will have to live up to commitments made.

When considering the G-8-Africa Action Plan that was adopted at the Kananaskis Summit^{vii}, the G-8 merely stated that they would be 'looking for ways' to help Africa resolve conflicts; offer technical and financial assistance to sub-regional organisations for capacity development; assist in combating illicit weapons; assist to help combat corruption and embezzlement; help to bridge the digital divide and the use of technology for socio-economic and political development; support access for African agricultural products; etc.

The G-8 countries were deliberately vague in the commitments they made^{viii}. They were particularly non-committal on issues pertaining to debt cancellation, market access, infrastructural development and improved ODA. Indeed, the lack of concrete commitments on the part of the G-8 was pronounced. There was not even talk of the important idea of a Peer Review Mechanism for the G-8 so as to ensure that they are held accountable to deliver on the promises made.

Criticism from African constituencies

Apart from the weaknesses on the part of the G-8-Africa Action Plan, NEPAD faced a more serious challenge in Africa. Criticisms against NEPAD came in two forms. NGOs and other civil society organisations (CSOs) complained about the lack of consultation with this sector and that NEPAD was a top-down process. This sector was also highly critical of what they saw as the 'neo-liberal' economic prescriptions embedded in NEPAD which, according to them, smacked of a self-imposed structural adjustment programme. On a more positive note, many CSO organisations came out in support of the political aspects of NEPAD, in particular the insistence on democracy, accountability, and good and democratic governance.

The second challenge came from other African governments. Just like CSOs, many such governments also complained about the lack of consultation by the NEPAD architects. Concerned was also expressed that some supporters of NEPAD wished to see NEPAD as some super program outside the confines of the African Union (AU). To be sure, many autocratic African governments were critical of NEPAD because they were visibly threatened by NEPAD's strong emphasis on democratic and accountable governance.

In the end, a revised NEPAD was adopted by the AU as the 'economic programme' of the union, and the NEPAD steering committee was increased from 15 to 20 African states during the official launch of the AU in Durban, South Africa in July 2002.

Conclusion

The paper has argued that NEPAD has its origins in the African Renaissance discourse, which was in vogue between 1994-99. The paper argued that, while critics saw this call for an African Renaissance as a shallow vision devoid of content, in reality it was a simple call for action. It was an appeal for African leaders to commit themselves to clean and accountable governance, democracy and to respect the basic tenets of human rights. It was a quest to reintegrate Africa back into the global economy through free-market dictates.

The paper further argued that NEPAD became the plan of action of the African Renaissance. NEPAD rightly accepted that development is impossible in the absence of true democracy, respect for human rights, peace and good governance. Therefore, with NEPAD, those members who have signed up and are committed undertakes to respect the 'new' African standards of democracy, including political pluralism, allowing for the existence of several political parties, workers' unions, and fair, open and democratic elections that are periodically organised.

The paper posited that it is not only Africans that would have to show seriousness in committing themselves to new commitments and obligations. The countries of the industrialised North would also need to respond to Africa's willingness and efforts to put in place these aspects of responsible government by opening their markets for Africa's basic trading commodities and to help end the continent's vast debt burden of some \$300 billion. However, it came as little surprise when many such powerful states failed to respond in a really serious way to the call for 'genuine' partnership.

Just like we should appreciate that NEPAD is an extension of the African Renaissance – a concretisation of the African Renaissance, in essence the vehicle through which the renaissance would be delivered – so the challenge of implementing NEPAD will be a long and sustained challenge. While NEPAD is based on a straightforward deal, a trade-off as it wishes to end the dialogue of the deaf by locking both African leaders and G-8 and other industrialised powers into a partnership, realising this partnership is by no means guaranteed. There clearly is a need for a pact: that in exchange for Africa holding itself politically and economically accountable, and thereby creating conditions for the attraction of foreign capital to the continent, the industrialised powers will give Africa greater access to its markets, reduce and more ideally end the massive debt burden, and guarantee greater AID flows to Africa. Such resources would help to build infrastructure, revamp health and education systems that the continent so badly needs. Indeed, African leaders have determined that it will require an astronomical 7% economic growth rate per

annum across the board on top of a whopping \$64 billion to help turn the continent around.

But there is a crucial point that many analysts in this country and abroad tend to miss conveniently. It is not only African states that will hold one another accountable. The northern (white) states will also make new commitments to help end deadly poverty in Africa. They too need to be held accountable. It is not only Africa that will put in place peer review criteria in which the peers (leaders) will constantly review (accountability) each other. Here are the questions that we have to answer?

Let's now conclude with some questions. How will Africans hold each other accountable? Can governments really be trusted to hold each other accountable? Who will hold the north accountable? What about power politics in Africa? Will this not again bedevil this project? Can Mbeki and his NEPAD partners take most African states along with them? Will we not see that some states will inevitably form counter-NEPAD alliances; particularly those that are threatened by the governance and democracy contours of NEPAD? How do we ensure that the northern powers go beyond rhetoric and beef up commitments with real plans?

These questions should not be avoided. They merely suggest that the real work only now starts. Instead of raising unrealistic expectations we should realise that turning the African tanker will be a very long road with many roadblocks and potholes.

ⁱ see *The OMEGA Plan*, Dakar, Senegal, February 2001.

ⁱⁱ See *The New African Initiative (NAI)*, a Merger of the Millennium African Recovery Program (MAP) and the OMEGA Plan, Pretoria, South Africa, July 2001.

ⁱⁱⁱ See Organisation of African Unity (OAU), *The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD)*, October 2001.

^{iv} See Communiqué issued at the end of the Second Meeting of the Heads of State and Government Implementation Committee of the NEPAD, Abuja, 26 March 2002.

^v See Draft document 'NEPAD: Democracy and Political Governance Initiative', Pretoria, South Africa, February 2002.

^{vi} See Economic Commission for Africa, 'Draft Codes and Standards for Economic and Corporate Governance in Africa: Summary of Key Issues and Declaration of Principles', Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, March 2002.

^{vii} See G-8-Africa Action Plan, G-8 Kananaskis Summit, Canada 2002.

^{viii} For a critique of the G-8 Africa Action Plan, see the comments by some OECD countries even before the summit. These are contained in the 17 May 2002 reports of the NEPAD Steering Committee and Personal Representatives meeting, held in Maputo, Mozambique.