

**NEW PARTNERSHIPS FOR AFRICA'S DEVELOPMENT (NEPAD)
AND MALAWI CIVIL SOCIETY IN RETROSPECT**

By

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INTRODUCTION

I feel greatly privileged and humbled by the opportunity to present an understanding of my brief for this Winterschool, hinging on bringing a comparative Malawian perspective. This, I believe, is a fair assignment since I could not reasonably be expected to have an intimate knowledge of the other African countries that can only be acquired by close proximity, as is the case with all the colleagues from the other countries. This is not to suggest that I will not touch on African perspective; rather it is to underscore that I will do so tangentially and in full deference to the expertise and intimate knowledge of Africa assembled here. I will be drawing heavily on NePAD not as a bracing tonic for African patriotism but to underscore it in the context of the development path of Africa – particularly with a focus on the Malawi scenario, alongside the sharing of experiences on how Malawi can effectively play a role in bringing people of Africa to participate in their own development agenda.

I would not dwell much on whether the NePAD process was as participatory and/or as consultative enough (or not) in harnessing the real African input as the other processes such as Poverty Reduction Strategy formulation, among others have been, but rather on the role the ordinary people of Africa enshrine us all in, in ensuring participation in the formulation and implementation of effective alternatives to development paths for Africa.

NEPAD - AFRICA'S ONLY HOPE?

The world continues to treat Africa just as harshly as it has in the past. In today's global human community, Africa is like *'Lazarus surviving on the crumbs of the rich man's table...'* (South African Council of Churches). Hampered by global economic forces beyond their control and a colonial legacy of weak states and unresponsive systems of governance, most African nations are ill equipped to overcome these problems. Africa exports 30% more today than it did in 1980, but it receives 40% less income from these goods. After more than 20 years of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), sub-Saharan Africa still has a total foreign debt of more than \$170 billion and pays creditors \$40 million a week to service debts accumulated as a result of the cold war, apartheid, and failed projects. Unemployment rates across the continent are estimated to be well above 40%. Despite some remarkable African efforts at reconciliation, endless wars and genocide have ravaged the continent without the world being too concerned. Unscrupulous companies have plundered natural resources, destroying

whole ecological and social systems. Even still, Africa's people have hope that a better life is possible in the 21st Century.

The above situation shows that Africa's social, economic and political relations urgently need to be transformed through a focused and determined international effort if Africa is to be lifted out of the poverty trap. NePAD is thus being presented as a dynamic and visionary initiative designed by a nucleus of new-generation African leaders and capable of transforming Africa into a continent of peace and prosperity. It proposes to make this the African century a success by forging a new relationship between Africa and the rest of the world.

Conceived and developed by a core group of African leaders, NePAD describes itself as a 'comprehensive integrated development plan' that addresses key social, economic and political priorities for the continent'. It includes a commitment by African leaders to African people and the international community to place Africa on a path of sustainable growth, accelerating the integration of the continent into the global economy. It calls on the rest of the world to partner Africa in its development based on Africa's own agenda and programme of action. These highlights just give a bit of the historical background of NePAD, which I feel is important if all of us have to clearly see the implications of such a historical perspective.

A CRITIQUE OF NePAD

According to scores of assessments of NePAD by Churches, NGOs, academicians, development workers, civil society, among others, NePAD is not the first development plan put forward by African leaders. There have been other plans, such as the Lagos Plan of Action (1980), that have not mustered the international political will necessary for implementation. Leaders of industrialized countries have been more willing to accept NePAD because:

- NePAD's language and assumptions are more consistent with those of donor governments;
- NePAD prioritizes foreign direct investment (FDI), which is seen as a more lasting solution to Africa's problems than Official Development Aid (ODA).
- Current socio-economic trends in Africa are likely to thwart the achievement of the Millennium Development Goal of halving world poverty by the year 2015; and
- NePAD enjoys broad 'ownership' across the African continent;

Nor are the issues addressed by NePAD entirely new. Over the past eight years, international institutions and national governments have debated many of the issues that NePAD identifies as key areas for Africa's recovery. Much of the discussions have focused on the economic

and political relations between countries. NePAD proposes a "partnership" model for North-South relations which amount to a pragmatic "middle way" that blurs clear choices between, for example, immediate poverty eradication programmes and the long-term economic growth strategies or debt cancellation and sustained debt servicing.

Civil society NePAD concerns in Malawi

Representatives of the civil society organisations (CSOs) in Malawi, with a leading role by Malawi Economic Justice Network (MEJN) - a coalition of over 71 member organisations, have closely followed the unfolding developments on NePAD and they have had meetings to discuss the role of CSOs with respect to the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NePAD), of course overriding the initial reservations over its lacking transparency, consultative and participatory approach in the formulation process.

The Civil Society has welcomed the development as a landmark in the process of shared aspirations for African unity, on the continent and in the diaspora. It has raised many critical concerns about the NePAD initiative around its proposed principles and strategies, legitimacy, process and outcomes but it still remains hopeful that genuine NePAD, as an initiative, will be a manifestation of the African renaissance, with common strategies for overcoming impoverishment, and achieving gender equity on the continent, as well as playing a major role in facilitating economic viability for Africa in the global economy.

The growing engagement between the OAU/AU and CSOs, as manifested in the two OAU-CSO meetings held in Addis Ababa in June 2001 and June 2002, as well as the Symposium on the AU convened on 3rd March 2002 in Addis Ababa has also been welcomed. Applauding the democratic principles underpinning the Constitutive Act of the AU, members agree with the symposium's call upon the NePAD Implementation Committee to engage with African CSOs on a similar basis of full consultation and participation.

Discussions have been wide-ranging and passionate, prominent among which is the recognition that democratization and civil society are a reality that cannot and/or need not be ignored. The demands for greater participation of all are deemed as being of paramount importance throughout.

However, CSOs in Malawi acknowledge that much more needs to be done to realize the objectives of the AU and the NePAD programme. This has culminated into the advocacy for the 'full throttle' wider and thorough public endorsement initializing, besides the vivid articulation of a sharper focus on fighting poverty in poorer African countries like Malawi by all the requisite parties involved prior to the implementation of the NePAD initiative. This is being deemed as a necessary pre-requisite for the success being sought for in NePAD.

Initial CSO Reservations in Malawi

Following is an excerpt from the CSO communiqué that was submitted to both the Government of Malawi and the NePAD Secretariat for further consideration:

"We have met several times at various levels, to discuss the initiative and have found that NePAD offers little prospects of benefit for the poorest in Africa.... We fully welcome the idea of having an African Regional Initiative, as this would bring a new vision for Africa. Among others, the initiative would allow some expensive projects in the region to be pursued jointly and so be cost effective. It would also promote trade investment and eventually assist in the exchange rate stability.

However on the NePAD specifically, we have some serious and crucial reservations, which we feel, have to be registered, most of which are:

The Content

↘ *NePAD proposes to continue using the old neo-liberal models of development that have failed Africa for long and as such this initiative does not offer any hope to the turning around of poverty in Africa, let alone Malawi.*

↘ *The document is very general and takes all African countries as being at the same level.*

↘ *NePAD is gender neutral and mentions women and children in passing having no deep-rooted and limited plans for women and children.*

↘ *Sectoral specific is the concern that the initiative does not seem to wholly recognize and put clear plans for HIV/AIDS, a scourge that has greatly affected (and continues to affect) Africa.*

↘ *The document seems to have also been drawn without a thorough assessment (if any) of failures and successes of the previous and older regional blocks such as SADC, COMESAS, and ECOWAS among others.*

↘ *The antithesis of the document is that developing economies like Malawi and most other African countries need a different approach than those already chartered by the western world, a fact which is not being recognized by NePAD.*

↘ *Almost all conditions given in the NePAD are governance-related, a feat that needs to be paramount in the recognition for any sustainable initiative, if it is to deliver: Political will; Economic stability; Protected environment and an Enabling international environment*

↘ *There is a lot of duplication in the document. The strategies highlighted there in are already taken up by some other sub-regional organisations such as SADC, COMESA and ECOWAS just to mention a few.*

↘ *Given the crop of corrupt leaders we have in Africa, the document does not espouse on how Africa would ensure that there is complete transparency and accountability fostered in the mobilization as well as the management of public resources.*

↘ *Membership of the implementation committee is not representative of the poor African countries*

The process

Reflecting on the process followed in the formulation of NePAD, we as stakeholders are not convinced that the initiators have done all that could be done to harness real African input in the process. Unlike the participation precedent that was set in the national processes such as Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) formulation, we feel that the NePAD initiative was rushed and not participatory.

Although the International Financing Institutions (IFIs) praise NePAD, most citizens in Africa are yet to be given more information on the initiative that they allegedly own. It feels as if the drivers of the NePAD seem to be only interested in getting the support of the G8 and the IFIs than getting the African ownership of the initiative. We would want to strongly believe that the member governments do not encourage this approach - an initiative of such importance as NePAD ought to be drawn through an extensive transparent, wider and participatory process...."

(End of quote for the excerpt from the Communiqué).

THE 'IDEAL' NePAD PROCESS

In our view as Malawi Economic Justice Network (MEJN) and rightly on behalf of the Malawi Civil Society Networks the ideal NePAD process need to put several issues as priorities hinging on the full involvement and empowerment of the Civil Society, (*a feat that seems to garnering fruits in Malawi*) everywhere as an independent arm to positively help influence the minimization of the glaring inequalities.

Malawi for instance, is a poor country, landlocked, not in possession of any known strategic mineral and not of much strategic importance. It is also a country, which for many years to come will be in need of external support for its developmental efforts in the form of aid, investment and trade. With respect to two of these, image is important and we could be a little, poor, nasty, fascist regime, with a generally high income inequality (currently being rated as third worst) stuck somewhere between Tanzania, Mozambique and Zambia; or we could be a stable, peaceful democracy that is seriously tackling its problems. Should we choose the latter; there is no doubt in my mind that we will win friends who will join us in the old struggle against repression and poverty. We, at MEJN, also hold the view that only a developmental, democratic and socially inclusive social order can empower all the citizens of Malawi.

In other words, rather than our having to start thinking of giving up on NePAD because the process hasn't been as 'ideal' and because thus far it hasn't brought significant economic benefits, with this analysis we're highlighting suggestions on what way forward can or need to be supported by all to make it really work as follows¹;

1. A people centered approach by the NePAD secretariat to regional integration, based on sub-regional schemes, would be the best framework to address the continent's development and it should be regarded as the building blocks towards greater unity and integration within the AU.
2. The economic policy framework should be facilitated by a strong and inclusive developmental state, which engages various levels of society in producing a developmental plan and guides markets to focus on internal investment and resource mobilization.
3. African leadership needs to recommit to and implement the Lusaka Agreement as well as encourage the formation of partnerships with civil society. The inclusion of civil society in government processes is important and should be strengthened and highlighted to society at large. In promoting peace and security, the building of partnerships between civil society and governments should be based on genuine respect for and recognition of local knowledge.
4. CSOs should energetically monitor the commitments made by African Heads of State including the target of 15% of budget to be spent on health, and the annual report on progress in combating HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases.
5. On the role of civil society on governance and democracy as well as in relation to NePAD, the AU/NePAD secretariat need to open up to engage with Civil Society in a variety of ways deemed feasible in this continuous quest for a transparent and flexible participatory and consultative process of shaping up the successful NePAD. CSOs must take every opportunity to engage with NePAD, both through AU institutions and through

¹ *References:*

- South African Churches (2002) Un-blurring the Vision: An Assessment of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) by South African Churches: Johannesburg: South African Council of Churches.
- International Catholic Union of the Press (UCIP), (1993) Journalism for World Peace and Development, Editions Universitaires Fribourg Suisse

NePAD mechanisms such as the Peer Review Mechanism. Civil society should continue demanding representation in NePAD decision-making processes and structures.

6. In parallel, CSOs must set up their own monitoring system to monitor NePAD, based on nerve centres in the five key countries that form the NePAD Steering Committee plus Addis Ababa. These should be for advocacy, communication and dissemination of information. It should be demanded that the AU's institutions for accountability and oversight be set up immediately and democratized as quickly and thoroughly as possible.
7. CSOs on the continent are encouraged to interact with similar organisations throughout the world, in particular with African organisations in the diaspora and CSOs in the global South especially in developing a **monitoring mechanism** to evaluate the performance of NePAD member countries, let alone in beefing up civil society organs to effectively develop their **own codes of conduct and monitoring mechanisms** for their own performance.
8. Africans at all levels need to know more about NePAD, its constituent parts and other regional and sub-regional initiatives and institutions. This is the challenge that can easily be taken up by Civil Society in their programmes specifically tailor-made for their respective wide involvement of the communities, for instance. All this should be beefed up with the NePAD Secretariat undertaking **publicity campaigns**, consulting as widely as possible with all stakeholders, especially the Civil Society.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, true to various assessments by different stakeholders in Malawi and elsewhere, the NePAD's vision and drive are blurred in the generalization and sighting on the hope that greater global integration will save Africa in the absence of popular participation in determining its focus. But arguably and most importantly, NePAD's vision can be restored if Africa's leaders enter into a new partnership with their people.

The vision of a new Africa dawning in the 21st Century is too precious to be lost. Africa's children, men, and women are its greatest treasures who need to be fully involved in owning the whole process from the beginning to the end. The remarkable political will generated by NePAD must be focused into a participatory transformation of Africa through direct, immediate, and decisive action to overcome the causes of Africa's impoverishment.

The Civil Society in Malawi continues to strongly believe that continuing engagement with AU and NePAD must be an ongoing priority. CSOs in all their varying manifestations and

operatives should engage with states and continental initiatives and institutions, taking up the great challenges in the wake of successfully bolstering the necessary intended benefits out of NePAD. Having an African unity and development have long been a vision of African people and the African civil society, therefore, needs to resolve to be vigilant in ensuring that African leaders remain true to their commitments as enunciated in both the Constitutive Act of the AU and the principles of the NePAD process.