

South Africa and NePAD – Quo Vadis?

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At the beginning of the 21st century relevant stakeholders on the African continent initiated a new offensive towards advertising Africa's preparedness to seek closer cooperation with the dominant global actors and integration into the currently existing world market. The initiative's subsequent blue print has adopted the programmatic title The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NePAD). This paper reflects on certain issues particularly linked to the pro-active part played by South Africa and the likely implications the NePAD-initiative might suggest in terms of future perspectives.

Whatever reservations critics may formulate: In the meantime one has to concede that NePAD can currently claim a multi-dimensional relevance within an international relations perspective. In the first place, it has a far-reaching inner-continental impact. It is to some extent a product of different and competing interests for hegemonic control over Africa's policy orientations both in terms of international political relations as well as in terms of socio-economic paradigms. To this extent NePAD can be qualified as a "pact among elites", which seeks to gain the power of definition over Africa's future development discourse. It aims at greater integration into the dominant global forces and hence at a higher degree of participation in international political and economic affairs, which have so far increasingly marginalized if not ignored the continent.

Such an effort requires to reconcile expectations and demands towards such an initiative formulated on two fronts: It seeks international recognition and support beyond the continental level from the powerful state actors of the industrialised world as represented in both the countries of the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and in particular the G 7/8. At the same time it has to secure a maximum degree of acceptance "at home", as a truly collaborative African effort being part and parcel of the transformation of the previous Organisation of African Unity (OAU) into the African Union (AU). To that extent one might argue that the emerging policies trying to firmly place NePAD on the map of both the industrialised countries and the African continent, has to manoeuvre between a rock and a hard place.

NePAD has despite all problems and suspicions managed within a remarkably short period of time "to bring Africa back in", at least with regard to an international debate of what is considered to be an African initiative towards establishing new partnerships and links with the outside industrialised world. NePAD is discussed, questioned and defended both in Africa and abroad and has thereby achieved more acknowledgement and recognition than any other

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initiative of lately coming from the continent. Based on this phenomenon alone, it can rightly claim to be of relevance for Africa.

Origins and background to NePAD

With its successful democratic transition, South Africa emerged during the second half of the 1990s as a new political factor on the continent. In the late 1990s, the South African President Thabo Mbeki coined and popularised the ‘African Renaissance’. While the notion never materialised as a fully fledged, concise new paradigm, it managed to rally policy-makers, bureaucrats and intellectuals alike behind an idea still highly relevant as a concept of African self-respect, dignity and pride. Inspired by earlier notions of self-reliance (in the sense of African ownership over African affairs), the ‘African Renaissance’ provided a philosophical basis for new policy formulation. Parallel to this philosophical dimension efforts aimed to position South Africa in terms of its foreign and economic policy in a leadership role within the African continent. Within this process, Mbeki’s foreign policy approach could be characterised as ‘a complicated and sometimes contradictory mixture of ideology, idealism and pragmatism’ (Olivier 2003: 817). This blend competed with ambitions for a leading role displayed by other countries, in particular the agenda by Libya’s Col. Gaddafi in the transformation of the OAU into the AU (see Morais/Naidu 2002 and Sturman 2003). South Africa’s Finance Minister Trevor Manuel, in a keynote address to the German Foundation for International Development as early as December 1998 characterised the emerging South African strategy in a revealing way by asserting ‘there is a new resilience and a new will to succeed in the African continent. We in South Africa have called it a renaissance, a new vision of political and economic renewal. It takes the global competitive marketplace as point of departure’ (quoted in Taylor 2003: 312).

Since October 2001, the NePAD secretariat is based at the Development Bank of Southern Africa in Midrand (South Africa), with President Mbeki’s economic adviser Wiseman Nkhulu acting as chief operating officer. NePAD has sought increasingly close co-operation with existing institutions such as the African Development Bank (ADB), the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the AU Secretariat to counteract suspicions of running its own show. Its advocates confirmed the aim to ultimately incorporate NePAD offices into the AU headquarters.¹ The composition of NePAD’s Steering Committee confirms the current power-sharing arrangement by uniting Algeria, Egypt, Nigeria, Senegal and South Africa – the five states involved in the initiative since its early stages. Another ten African states have been appointed to an Implementation Committee and selected on a regional representation basis.

More recently, as part of the integration of NePAD into the newly consolidated AU structures and with the aim of reflecting ownership over the initiative by all African states, more countries and their political leadership – in particular from the NePAD critical faction originally dismissing the initiative as an outward oriented sell-out strategy (such as Libya, Namibia and Zimbabwe) – have been either less critical or even co-opted into the NePAD club, which offers

¹ The South African Deputy President Jacob Zuma has in his speech to the African Development Forum III on 8 March 2002 in Addis Ababa emphasised the close interaction between the initiative and the continental body, thereby endorsing the view that NePAD is an OAU document and hence an instrument owned by the organisation (<http://www.dfa.gov.za/docs/adf113a.htm>). During the AU summit in Maputo in July 2003 the NePAD protagonists – despite the emphasis on being an initiative within the AU – managed to reach a temporary arrangement that the NePAD secretariat will continue to operate from South Africa and only be transferred to Addis Ababa in a few years.

voluntary association. Notwithstanding these permissive structures and pragmatic efforts to compromise, NePAD remains controversial among leaders of African states. It has also utterly failed to gain approval from many stakeholders in African societies such as trade unions, grassroots organisations and parts of the academia and churches, who consider the initiative as ideological blunder of a neo-liberal capitulation towards the powerful in this world.

The Policy Issues: Collective Responsibility Versus National Sovereignty?

NePAD emphasises the necessity of collective responsibility if Africa is to meet the developmental challenges. Given the track record of post-colonial policies on the continent, and the primacy of autonomy by national governments to exercise their rule, however, doubts remain concerning the existence of a general political consensus and the will to implement such far-reaching possibilities for intervention into the internal affairs of member states.

In article 4(g), the AU confirms its adherence to the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of member states: on the other hand article 4(h) contains a reservation clause which concedes ‘the right of the Union to intervene in a Member State pursuant to a decision of the Assembly – in respect of grave circumstances, namely: war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity’. In the meantime, a first amendment of this Constitutive Act adds to the same article 4(h) a right to intervention to prevent a ‘serious threat to legitimate order’. The shift of emphasis in the AU, from mainly individual national towards increased collective continental responsibility, does not abandon the concept of state (in the sense of regime) security. It continues to give priority to the notion of national sovereignty over internal affairs and limits the range of interventions to mainly stabilising existing orders (cf. Baimu & Sturman 2003). NePAD, in contrast, originally formulated a marked deviation from those hitherto common grounds of non-intervention by suggesting increased collective responsibility over Africa’s affairs. Legitimacy and credibility are in this regard essential contributing factors in the ongoing efforts to turn NePAD into a success story.²

The lack of visible outside initiative to bring about a democratic solution in Zimbabwe illustrates the dilemma. While some analysts had explored to what extent NePAD is a ‘last chance for Africa’ (Cornwell 2002), some had already predicted ‘the death of the NePAD’ (Taylor 2002a, 2002b). The experience of African leaders tolerating – if not approving – the Zimbabwean government’s abuse of power came as a major blow to expectations that NePAD would represent efforts ‘to penetrate the shield of sovereignty behind which too many corrupt leaders hid for too long’ (Taylor & Nel, 2002:164). In contrast, South African Deputy President Jacob Zuma stated at the Opening Ceremony of the Fourth Session of the Nigeria/South Africa Bi-national Commission in Pretoria on 25 March 2002: ‘we need to vigorously challenge the doctrine of “collective punishment” that is emerging in relationships between Africa and the developed North. This is the doctrine that any significant project initiated by our continent, particularly NEPAD, will not be supported if a particular leader or country behaves in a manner that is unacceptable.’³ But as much as an European Union (EU) has to position itself towards the Jörg Haiders and Silvio Berlusconi in its ranks, an AU (or SADC for that matter) and even more so a

² It goes beyond the limits of this paper to pay adequate recognition of the dimension, character, scope and likely effect of the currently shaped African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), which will play a relevant role in this context. For analyses on this substantial matter see i.a. Cilliers (2003), Cilliers & Sturman (2002).

³ <http://www.dfa.gov.za/docs/nig253b.htm>.

NePAD has to do so vis-à-vis its culprits. Charles Taylor's exit into exile is a laudable and most welcome token pointing into such a direction.

In reflecting upon NePAD's relevance for Southern Africa and SADC in particular, an analysis has pointed out that 'Nepad does not introduce the possibility of excluding countries not satisfying the political criteria for sustainable development (revolving around peace and security, democracy and good governance issues). These criteria and their implications are still to be developed' (Isaksen & Tjønneland 2001: 28). Patrick Chabal (2002: 448) maintains that 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'. For the Executive Secretary of CODESRIA the democracy and governance initiative in NePAD 'seems designed more to pander to a donor audience than responding to or representing the concerns of the domestic socio-political forces' (Olukoshi 2003: 14).

Economic Issues: A Neo-liberal Globalisation Strategy?

Other critical assessments of NePAD have pointed out that it blends nicely into the neo-liberal mainstream of globalisation and is fully in line with the economic strategy of South Africa's present government, seeking closer integration into the dominant structures of the world economy (see i.a Bond 2002a). The inherent danger of such a strategic move might lie in the message that serves to legitimise instead of aiming to restructure the existing global power relations, to which African countries have been a victim, as Taylor and Nel (2002: 166) have warned. They further articulate the suspicion that the driving force behind such a policy might be the 'linkage between globalisation, export-driven trade policies and a nascent transnational elite', and maintain that 'making neoliberalism somehow "work for all", rather than rethinking the overall global trading system, is the key strategy of South Africa particularly and New Africa more generally' (ibid.).⁴ There is indeed evidence that the current expansion of South African capital into the African continent of unprecedented dimensions (see Daniel/Naidoo/Naidu 2003 and Naidu 2003) is also reflected in the particularly active and strategic involvement of the South African ministers for trade and for finance respectively in the current efforts to modify the global economy under the WTO (see Jawara/Kwa 2003).

Reservations of a similar nature were articulated by some 200 organisations from 45 African countries, which met in early January 2002 in Bamako (Mali) to prepare inputs to the World Social Forum within the framework of an African Social Forum. In the Bamako Declaration they expressed concern that NePAD 'was based on accepting the neo-liberal analysis and strategies of

⁴ Remarks by Trevor Manuel, South Africa's Minister of Finance, in his capacity as the Chairman of the Development Committee to the International Conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey on 18 March 2002 might actually be seen as a confirmation of this view. As he stated: 'There is general consensus that globalisation provides an opportunity for countries to improve standards of living, but its not an end in itself ... The key challenge is to attempt to manage globalisation in such a way that it does lead to poverty reduction' (<http://www.dfa.gov.za/docs/ffd253b.htm>). Along similar lines, the South African Foreign Minister Dlamini Zuma in an address on 22 March 2002 to the University of Alberta had the following to offer on the advantages of NePAD: 'To the private sector, the continent of Africa is endowed with the human capital, mineral wealth and unlimited opportunities for trade, investment and partnership as proposed in the NEPAD programme. Other countries are taking advantage of this burgeoning market; it is imperative that you are not left behind. The opportunities abound in Africa' (<http://www.dfa.gov.za/docs/unal253a.htm>). For an critical overview on South Africa's international strategy and role in particular towards and within the WTO see Keet (2002 and 2003).

the rich countries and was therefore not acceptable as a basis for planning Africa's future'.⁵ The Executive Secretary of CODESRIA summarised the general suspicion and reservation towards the blue print on behalf of the critical intellectuals when assuming that 'the NEPAD document reflects many of the assumptions that underpinned the neo-liberal economic, social and political reform agenda for Africa during the 1980s and 1990s' (Olukoshi 2003: 11). He therefore warns that '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' (ibid.: 26).

What Future for NePAD?

Favourable conditions for NePAD seem to include in the post-September 11th times the opportunity to sell the concern over Africa as a security problem to those, who are afraid that their interests might otherwise be even more at stake. As the Implementation Report by the Africa Personal Representatives to Leaders on the G8 Africa Action Plan summarises: 'Substantial support – both funding and technical assistance – has been contributed by G8 partners towards institutional capacity building for peace and security, the development of capacity for peace-keeping operations and of an effective network in Africa of peace training centres for military and civilian personnel involved in peace support operations' (G8 Summit 2003: §12). This confirms the approach that the African continent is currently perceived more as a security threat in terms of the international security issues than anything else. From a NePAD perspective this cannot be the main or exclusive goal and falls short of what might be labelled as an acceptable deal. It remains to be seen, if NePAD beyond this limited (and certainly legitimate) aim will ultimately achieve some more meaningful degree of true improvement in the grossly unequal power relations and resulting structural constraints.

Clearly so, NePAD will not be able to replace demands for a fair share in the world's resources by those, who have been the victims of domination and exploitation for far too long. At best it might be able to slightly increase the far too tiny piece shared from the global cake with stakeholders in Africa. Instead of a meaningful radical alternative, NePAD seems to be much closer to "more of the same" – namely capitalism as a new form of global apartheid (cf. Bond 2003a and 2003b). Along similar lines Taylor (2003: 312) reminds of the active role elites in the South have played in this recent process of capitalist expansion termed (misleadingly) "globalisation" by supporting the new Washington Consensus, resulting in the promotion of the liberalisation of trade and capital movements. It remains to be seen if there is from the point of view of those outside of these elites any substance in the pragmatism, which argues: better this capitalism than no capitalism at all.

The South African economist Stephen Gelb, who had been a member of Thabo Mbeki's team for drafting the predecessor to NePAD, reminded in a recent analysis of the South African president's earlier approach. In a 1997 speech the then-Deputy President referred to the need for South Africa 'to "walk on two legs" in its foreign policy – to cultivate strong relations with the South, as well as strategic relations with the industrialised countries' (Gelb 2002: 42). Gelb concludes, that NePAD 'is grounded in the full realities of South Africa's relations with the

⁵ See for the full text as well as other critical documents the documentation compiled by Bond (2002b); more insights into the critical debate among African scholars and other civil society actors are also presented in Anyang' Nyong'o et.al. (2002).

continent, including those beyond its immediate regional neighbourhood in Southern Africa. At the same time it is also grounded in the realities of globalisation, especially the unevenness of its impact amongst and within nations, and reflects an attempt to shift the continent, including South Africa itself, towards a more effective engagement.' (ibid.) More radical critics, who had opted to remain outside of the new centres of (political) power in democratic South Africa, speak out more directly. They suggest that NePAD offers the opportunity for South African capital to expand further in Africa by creating new market access. NePAD is hence considered as a lubricant for a South African expansion into other parts of the continent, which under an Apartheid regime until the mid-1990s would have not been conceivable. Almost ironically, only a politically correct post-Apartheid government allows to promote and greases a process, which is also to the benefit of those who already profited from the previous undemocratic system at home and can now enter spaces abroad.

But such conclusion, as critical as it might be, answers not yet the question how to respond to such initiative: 'Whether to merely rubbish NEPAD and campaign against it or to combine a range of different responses is about the current balance of forces. In a sense the only time one can ignore NEPAD or simply call for its scrapping is if the balance of forces allows for such.' (Gentle 2003: 21) The same applies for the increasing reservations with regard to the political component of NePAD, which in the eyes of many falls behind the original expectations created by the initiative itself. Landsberg (2003: 26) argues, that the attempt to democratise NePAD 'does not mean falling into an either/or approach of rejecting or embracing NEPAD. The debate has to be critical and analytical and NEPAD's architects and crafters need to take engagement seriously.' Those vehemently dismissing the blueprint as simply another neo-colonial offensive with some political cosmetics would do better to acknowledge such appeals for thoroughly scrutinising the trade offs and thereby becoming critically engaged - without abandoning their scepticism.

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