The Achievements and Challenges of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development

The New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) is a fairly recent African programme aimed at both general renewal and economic recovery through strategic endeavours by African governments with identified development partners. The author argues that NEPAD has already made significant progress in reaching some of its aims, particularly in the area of African ownership and leadership, and debt cancellation. However, NEPAD also faces formidable challenges: forging new partnerships, dismantling trade barriers, political dictatorships, the role of the African Peer Review Mechanism, possible polarisation, human resource investment, development and diversification of industries, and the eradication of a foreign aid mentality.

Nevertheless, the author concludes that NEPAD is firmly based on clear principles, which are mandatory to its success in future.

Introduction

The New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) is a fairly recent African institution for economic recovery. In order to achieve its lofty goals of extricating Africa from the malaise of political insecurity, extreme poverty, and social instability, NEPAD is grounded on a disciplined social and political contract as encapsulated in the principles supporting the institution’s programmes and operations. As the development of NEPAD since inception has been discussed in some detail in the literature, this paper will focus only on its major achievements and the key challenges facing this nascent institution.

Salient Achievements of NEPAD

It is difficult to identify precisely what NEPAD has achieved up to this point since it is still a very young institution which is growing rapidly and attracting much regional and international interest. Many activities are still in a state of flux and have yet to stabilise. Nonetheless, in this paper the author endeavours to indicate what are considered its salient achievements: African ownership and leadership, adequate

Thekiso G Khati

At the time of submission, Dr Thekiso G Khati was Ambassador of Lesotho in the Nordic countries. He is currently a senior lecturer in the Department of Language and Social Education at the National University of Lesotho.
attention to political issues and conflicts in Africa, and debt cancellation, while acknowledging that the process is ongoing. No attempt is made to quantify the successes in any sense. Nonetheless, NEPAD operations and processes show clear indications that indicate the viability and vitality of its programmes and projects.

**African Ownership and Leadership**

Since the establishment of the African Union (AU) and the launching of NEPAD, African political leaders have shown a real determination to ensure that their continent’s social, economic, political and security agendas are defined and led by Africans themselves. Hitherto, they have not wavered – the entire NEPAD programme is fully decided upon and run by Africans. For instance, to ensure that the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) succeeds in ensuring good governance, funding for its activities is essential. This funding is primarily derived from the member-states participating in the review. In this connection, Taylor observes that the APRM gathers its resources “primarily from those states that have volunteered to participate in the review process... [and] to keep foreign financial assistance low, in order to avoid charges that it is not African-owned”. However, he adds the caveat that in this way the APRM might be short of funding and, as a result of finding other ways to meet the shortfall, may become devoid of “real political independence”. Although this funding may not be sufficient to carry out all the activities of the APRM in the long term, it is, nonetheless, a clear indication that Africa is determined to take responsibility for and ownership of the programme. This bears witness to a strong political will observable on the African continent at present.

Furthermore, African leaders have advocated, and are still advocating, NEPAD and its programmes and projects, both abroad and throughout the continent, so that African nations become fully aware of NEPAD and actively participate in its activities. For instance, the information published by the NEPAD Secretariat under the rubrics: “The awareness challenge” and “Telling the NEPAD story to Africa – and beyond” deals with advocacy. Moreover, NEPAD contact points or country offices are being set up throughout the continent in order to liaise with the Secretariat on projects and programmes. In Lesotho, for example, the NEPAD chapter was launched in August 2004 while the NEPAD e-school Initiative Demonstration Project was launched on 25 August 2005. In addition to pursuing the goal of universal education, this project will ensure that Lesotho becomes an information and knowledge-based society in the long run. All of these projects and activities will advance the noble objectives of NEPAD. Therefore, it can be argued that every country in Africa, in one way or another, is making headway in advancing the goals of NEPAD through its own country structures and projects. It can be further contended that making NEPAD programmes and activities known and ensuring their implementation in every African country by African political leaders and their citizens is a notable achievement in its own right. In terms of the achievements made in the area of ownership and leadership so far, the NEPAD Secretariat observes:

... African leaders have not only taken ownership and leadership of the continent’s socio-economic renewal agenda, they have also transformed the content of the agenda and are making progress in changing the international context as well.
Political Issues and Conflicts in Africa

It is the author’s view that ever since the establishment of the AU and NEPAD, there have been improvements in the political arena in Africa. There is no mere ‘business as usual’ in dealing with grave political matters such as election of heads of state and government. In this regard, the Togolese presidential issue is a case in point.

Early in 2005, the African political leaders demonstrated an unwavering solidarity and resolve in opposing the unconstitutional installation as president of the son of the former president of Togo, following his death on 6 February 2005. As a result of this stance, the constitution was upheld and elections were held according to the laws of the land. This can be seen as a political milestone in the history of Africa. The successful opposition to this attempted unconstitutional installation of a head of state is a major achievement on the African continent and lends credence to the NEPAD Secretariat’s claim that encouraging and rapid progress has been made, and that the AU has conducted itself differently from its predecessor, the Organisation for African Unity. The Secretariat further asserts that the AU is executing its mandate and responsibilities appropriately and that several African leaders have assisted in ensuring that the organisation conducts its affairs competently, procedurally and transparently.4

Debt Cancellation

For many decades African states have laboured under a heavy burden of financial debt owed to bilateral partners and multilateral institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. African nations, and developing countries elsewhere, have had to service their debt with great difficulty. Reasons given for irregular payment or non-payment are poorly performing economies, poor governance, and a lack of appropriate financial and economic policies and practices. In many instances, the payment of debt has negatively affected the financing of social and development policies, resulting in poor health conditions, lack of, or mediocre, education, and a less than satisfactory infrastructure. Aware that this situation had reached crisis levels and that some African countries would never manage to extricate themselves from debt problem, thus perpetuating the cycle of extreme poverty indefinitely, African political leaders decided to negotiate debt cancellation. This has been deemed necessary if Africa is ever to achieve the United Nations (UN) Millennium Goals and eradicate poverty.

Following many consultations by African leaders and a number of G8 Summits, an agreement on debt cancellation was reached at the G8 Summit at Gleneagles, Scotland in July 2005. However, not every country in the category of Highly Indebted Poor Countries
benefited from this agreement. Unfortunately, some countries, such as Lesotho, which service their debts honestly and conscientiously, did not benefit from this accord, as they were judged financially able to continue financing their debt. However, it is questionable whether honesty, conscientiousness, and accountability are not confused with economic capacity. It is hoped that in the course of subsequent negotiations this position will be reversed. Indeed, such countries deserve a better deal, which can act as an incentive for responsible action.

Furthermore, it is important to note that debt cancellation by the wealthiest countries of the world cannot be regarded entirely as a favour. It should be viewed as a moral and political responsibility. As noted in the *New African* no 444 of October 2005:

> By canceling Africa’s debts, the G8 countries are supposed to be doing Africa a favour in helping to develop the continent. While this is partly true, the other half of the truth has not been told … and it is that without Africa’s wealth and resources (both human and material), development in Europe and America would not be as we know it today.^

Indeed, as observed in the above excerpt, Africa has “… developed Europe and the Americas”. This reminds one of the old adage: one good turn deserves another. Crudely put, it is Europe and America’s time to pay back the debt. Africa requires much greater assistance, partnerships and networks need to be expanded, and assistance provided in real terms.

### New Partnerships and Possible Assistance

The biggest single challenge facing NEPAD is unavailability of resources, especially financial resources. Currently, the NEPAD Secretariat is sustained by all 53 African states through their annual subscriptions of US$200 000 per annum, which is grossly inadequate. Certainly, without sufficient funds the lofty ideals and objectives of NEPAD will be unachievable. The lack of funds urgently requires Africa to cooperate and network with other countries, continents, and organisations as partners – genuine equal partners – in order to pool resources.

The challenges facing NEPAD and the AU are too great for Africa to meet them without help; the goals of NEPAD are too noble to be abandoned and its programme is too crucial for Africa to fail. Thus, partnerships are imperative. As the Danish Foreign Minister, Per Stig Møller aptly comments:

> The primary responsibility for facing the challenges lies with Africa. But Africa cannot
address them alone. A renewed development partnership between Africa and the international community is needed to support Africa in its efforts.8

The NEPAD Secretariat is very open to assistance from partners. The Secretariat further realises that NEPAD does not exist in a vacuum; several relevant partnership initiatives and processes already exist, such as the UN Millennium Declaration, G8 Okinawa Declaration, Copenhagen Declaration, Cotonou Agreement, European Union/Africa Cairo Plan of Action, African Growth and Opportunity Act, and Tokyo International Conference on African Development. The Secretariat further observes:

NEPAD does not seek to replace or compete with these [initiatives and processes] but rather to consciously establish linkages and synergies between NEPAD and these activities, and to see where each initiative can make the greatest contribution.9

The linkages and networks between NEPAD and the relevant initiatives require and should be buttressed by genuine, strategic, committed, effective, and action-oriented partnerships between Africa and other continents, countries, organisations, and sectors of community (e.g. the private sector) if anything worthwhile is to be achieved. Anything falling short of such partnerships is a waste of time and limited resources. Moreover, it should be ensured that prospective partnerships in economic renewal and recovery in Africa go beyond mere promises and pledges. To be considered a viable initiative, NEPAD should receive concrete assistance, such as debt cancellation, as mentioned previously. Other potential partners should be pursued vigorously and those that have made commitments should be persuaded to honour their pledges. NEPAD requires a very strong resource base both within and outside Africa and this constitutes its greatest challenge.

Dismantling Trade Barriers

Another important challenge to NEPAD, and indeed the whole continent, is the iniquitous international economic system. For Africa to prosper, its leaders should ensure a fundamental change of unfair economic policies and practices that create serious trade barriers which blunt Africa’s competitive edge. For instance, the developed world outclasses and undersells Africa through the high subsidies paid to their commercial farmers. According to Guest, “rich countries subsidize their own farmers so lavishly that African producers cannot compete. The total value of agricultural subsidies in developed countries is almost a billion dollars a day: more than the GDP of Sub-Saharan Africa”.10

Guest further contends that, conversely, if the rich countries eliminated their trade barriers, they “… could do more good, more quickly”.11 He argues that Africa possesses great agricultural potential owing to fertile soil, favourable climates, and cheap labour. The continent has a competitive edge in textiles, which are simple to manufacture but require extensive labour. “By exporting crops and shirts to rich countries, Africa could start on the path of growth. But imported food and textiles are precisely the things that rich countries most rigorously shut out of their markets”.12

High subsidies on agricultural production paid by rich countries push developing countries, including those in Africa, out of the lucrative markets and encourage the escalation of poverty and starvation in Africa. Clearly,
world trade is excessively unfair. If the policies of international trade were altered and competition made more balanced, Africa and other developing parts of the world would be able to compete favourably in the global market.

**Sale of Raw Materials Instead of Manufactured Goods**

Another challenge that requires Africa’s urgent attention is the sale of raw materials instead of manufactured goods. This constitutes a serious setback to Africa’s economy. It is imperative that African leaders confront this problem directly. Partnerships benefit Africa; however, it is better for Africans to live on their own resources.

Guest argues that countries grow rich in the same way as individual people do. Countries prosper by manufacturing goods that other countries want to buy and by providing valuable services that are paid for. He observes that “by and large the route to prosperity is through thrift, hard work, and finding out what other people want in order to sell it to them”.13 Britain, Japan, the US, and other wealthy nations produce several sought-after commodities: cars, furniture, clothing, and electronics. However, “Africa, by contrast, hardly produces anything that the rest of the world wants to buy”.14 Instead, Africa loses great wealth by selling mainly raw materials. “The continent exports minerals, such as oil and copper, and crops such as cocoa, coffee, and tobacco. But few African countries turn their minerals into manufactured goods ...”.15 If NEPAD is to make a recognisable mark on the African economic landscape, the continent’s leaders and nations have to find ways to curb this trend.

Sam Nujoma, President of Namibia, puts the issue succinctly. According to him, African governments should “… adopt priorities [that] ensure that Africa’s natural resources are not stolen or bought cheaply as they have been over the years to benefit non-African peoples”.16 Furthermore, he argues that “… all our resources should be processed [in Africa] into finished products”.17 In this way the manufacturing industry could provide employment for many in Africa. Similarly, President Museveni of Uganda argues in favour of export-oriented trade and contends that exporting products would be of immense economic value to the exporting country. He maintains: “When you export a kilogram of lint cotton without turning it into garments, you only get one tenth of the value...”.18 The export of raw materials in the place of manufactured goods implies the ‘massacre’ of the African economy and should not be allowed to continue.

**Changing the Trends in the Political Leadership of the 20th Century**

Certain political leaders of the ‘old school’ who continue to lead countries that are not deemed democratic in any sense of the word, may still serve in the structures of NEPAD, such as the Heads of State and Government Implementation Committees. Other leaders present in these structures may have acquired power undemocratically or have a long history of bad governance, the violation of civil and human rights, and a lack of financial accountability. Clearly the presence of such political leaders in NEPAD structures is not beneficial. They tarnish the good image of this promising institution and erode its credibility in the eyes of the African people and the international community. It can be asked how the AU and NEPAD should strive to change the political character of these leaders and thus guarantee the credibility of
the institution. It is doubtful if leaders marred by old habits and a poor reputation will turn around and summarily embrace NEPAD’s principles of good governance and economic and financial accountability. In this regard, Ian Taylor remarks:

The irony is that the type of solutions advanced by NEPAD would deprive rulers of the means to maintain their patronage networks. In short, to have an Africa based on the enunciated principles of NEPAD would actually erode the material base upon which the neo-patrimonial state predicated. And yet NEPAD seems to advance the idea that the very African elites who benefit from neo-patrimonial state will now commit a form of class suicide.\(^{19}\)

Leaders with a reputation for bad governance and lack of economic transparency cannot advance the objectives of NEPAD. This thorny issue must be faced objectively and forcefully by NEPAD if its integrity and intentions are to be heeded. A possible solution is the design and application of a more stringent APRM.

**The Role of the APRM**

The role of the APRM, as a NEPAD programme that focuses on good governance, cannot be overemphasised, as the success of NEPAD and the AU hinge on it. The APRM can be described as the watchdog or disciplinary programme of NEPAD. It pledges “… to offer a disciplinary device to secure compliance with agreed values and norms in Africa”.\(^{20}\) It has been designed to improve political and economic governance in Africa in order to achieve greater stability and, therefore, reverse the marginalisation of Africa by the international community. In an interview with the Integrated Regional Information Network, Professor Okay Onyekekwe, an expert at the UN Economic Commission for Africa, describes the APRM as “one of the most attractive components of NEPAD [that] really gave it its credibility”.\(^{21}\) He sees it as a monitoring mechanism through which African leaders can assess each other’s performance and nudge poor performers to improve.\(^{22}\)

However, there is a general criticism that the APRM has retreated from its original form, and has thus become a watered down and voluntary mechanism. For instance, Taylor argues:

The whole question over what peer review implied quickly embroiled NEPAD in a controversy and led to a somewhat ignominious retreat to a vague and voluntary process with no measures to ensure compliance.\(^{23}\)

In its present form, the APRM is viewed in some quarters as impotent to rein in the countries that do not comply with the principles of good governance, economic transparency, democracy, and observance of human rights. The latter principles constitute the pillar for success in any society. However, if participation in the APRM is voluntary, it is very difficult to reverse decades of corrupt and despotic governance in Africa. If the voluntary nature of the APRM is just a feature of the initial phase of the mechanism, designed to lure even the hardcore dictators into the NEPAD fold, it would be an acceptable proposition. However, even in this case, it is essential to stress that more stringent phases of the mechanism are required in future.

**The Need to Avoid Polarisation**

As is the case world-wide, African leaders hold divergent views on political, social, and
economic issues concerning their continent. Some scholars have categorised these points of view according to schools of thought. Schoeman, for instance, distinguishes between revisionists and counter-revisionists. She contends that “... the African Union can be defined as an emerging security community under the leadership of a group of revisionist states ...”.24 The revisionists intend to depart from the orthodox political and economic practices of the past decades. In contrast are the counter-revisionists, who seek to retain the status quo. As a result of these different viewpoints, the revisionists face “a number of internal threats that might inhibit their participation in the community [AU] building process”.25 If this threat materialises, the counter-revisionist group of states “… might thwart the realization of the key objectives of the new organization [AU] in the absence of strong leadership by democratic states on the continent”.26

In simpler terms, some argue that there are African states which are clearly determined to implement change, a revision of the political landscape of Africa. On the other hand, other states are reluctant to abandon the orthodox tendencies of the past for their own reasons. If this is the case, this situation is likely to pose a threat to the new community, to the AU and NEPAD programmes. One might add yet another group to Schoeman’s categories. This group of African leaders appears to have mixed feelings about the potential of NEPAD to succeed, at least in its present form, and may openly criticise certain aspects of NEPAD.

It must be noted, however, that debates and counter-debates, as well as divergent opinions, exist in any nation. Africa is no exception and it is entitled to differences of opinion. If the debates are healthy and intended to construct a better AU and improved programmes, they should be viewed positively and not as a polarisation of the continent. However, if the views are too radical, inflexible, and diametrically opposite, they should be viewed cautiously or even discouraged, as unbridled radicalism may lead to factionalism, which is not in the interests of the AU and its programmes. For the AU and NEPAD to succeed, solidarity of the member-states of the AU is essential and Africa should unite and speak powerfully with one voice in order to tackle the current problems that beset the continent. True African unity will eventually result in an effectively run continent that can achieve political and economic prosperity.

Human Resource Investment

An important area that calls for NEPAD’s attention is its investment in human resources through relevant education and training, which enhance human resource development. Educational provision should be relevant to each African country and the continent as a whole. This implies that education should be aligned to African needs, the local environment, and resources. Africa abounds in fertile soil, natural building materials, clean water, a variety of flora and fauna, inland lakes, a long coastline, and mineral wealth. In short, the continent is richly endowed with natural resources.

Through its educational programmes, it is recommended that NEPAD align the curricula of the education systems of various African countries so that learners receive adequate instruction in the utilisation and care of local natural resources. If NEPAD could initiate curriculum reform in schools, Africa would be able to educate and train an appropriately skilled workforce, which could, in turn, develop and use natural resources optimally. In this regard, educational innovation and the dismantling
of the remnants of outdated and irrelevant colonial education systems are urgently needed. NEPAD should be a catalyst in this kind of curriculum reform.

**Development and Diversification of Manufacturing Industries**

The question of the manufacture of goods is crucial to the survival of the continent. This endeavour is not impossible and Africa can learn from the precedents set by other countries. The establishment of manufacturing industries on African soil will improve trade and eliminate economic underdevelopment.

Improved and diversified manufacturing can stimulate Africa’s economic development. The thrust towards economic development, what President Sam Nujoma terms the struggle for economic independence, can form the hallmark of economic emancipation. Therefore, Africa should make a critical assessment of the continent’s resources. This should be followed by the formulation of policies that ensure that Africans are no longer exploited by foreigners. According to Nujoma, African governments should “… adopt priorities [that] ensure that Africa’s natural resources are not stolen or bought cheaply as they have been over the years to benefit non-African people.”

African resources should be processed into finished products in Africa.

**Eradication of a Foreign Aid Mentality**

As NEPAD’s advocacy continues to spread and its projects and activities continue to take root throughout Africa, NEPAD should encourage the eradication of negative tendencies or attitudes among the populace. For instance, certain communities do not view foreign food aid or other aid as an emergency measure; they regard it as a right or entitlement that their governments are obliged to provide for them.

It is not an uncommon practice for those who can afford to feed or clothe themselves and their families to queue for aid along with the poor and the destitute. An unhealthy dependence on aid discourages the able-bodied from working and maintaining themselves and their families. Thus, the provision of foreign food aid becomes a substitute for work, individual enterprise, and the traditional way of obtaining sustenance from the environment. Positive social attitudes to hard work, responsibility, and respectability are compromised, and a sense of individual independence and self-reliance is eroded by foreign aid.

If Africa is to extricate itself from poverty, its people must be enlightened and liberated from the poverty of the mind and conscience. Aid should be seen only as temporary relief occasioned or dictated by disasters or extreme circumstances, and not a permanent feature of existence. Unfortunately, aid recipients in many poor African countries have, over the years, developed a skewed approach to foreign aid, which is viewed as a permanent solution to difficult circumstances.

This mentality of perpetual dependency should be reversed as a matter of great urgency. This dependency syndrome can be likened to a slave mentality, which is invidious and militates against the kind of development advocated by NEPAD. It is recommended that NEPAD and member-states of the AU hold awareness campaigns, seminars, and meetings to address attitudes towards foreign aid and to inform people about the rationale behind aid, particularly food aid. The route to prosperity is through diligence, planning, sacrifice and hard work. As Guest points out: “Outsiders can help, but only on the margins.” Similarly, President
Yahya Jemmey supports this notion by stating that “Nobody will ever develop your country for you.” Foreign aid can fulfil a sound moral and political purpose; however, it should not encourage donor dependency.

**Conclusion**

NEPAD, as the economic arm of the AU, is supported by clear principles, which reflect the intention of its operation. It is possible that earlier development initiatives in Africa did not succeed because of a lack of comparable principles. It is, therefore, mandatory for NEPAD to adhere strictly to its principles in order for it to repeat its successes and to meet the mammoth challenges as discussed in this paper.

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