

# **Grappling with the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD)**

## ***The Debate in Namibia***

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### **A. Introduction**

This brief report captures the debate about NEPAD in Namibia and also highlights the thrust of the different viewpoints offered by different organisations and individuals. A view of civil society as contained in LaRRI's recent publication, 'A new partnership between rider and horse', the NID education booklet written by Joseph Diescho, NEPRU's policy briefing paper on NEPAD will be given.

The point of departure will be LaRRI's booklet on NEPAD because it cuts across many of the NEPAD themes such as governance, politics, economics, institutional issues, etc. LaRRI's NEPAD publication also received a lot of media attention (even a dedicated broadcast on the National television) because it was launched at a unique forum which for the first time brought the various viewpoints together to discuss NEPAD. These included the Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister, Dr. Kaire Mbuende, Mrs. Otilie Abrahams, a popular NGO activist, as well as the First Secretary for political Affairs in the South African Embassy to Namibia, Mr. Seth Mompei.

This paper also summarises some of the main arguments covered in the other NEPAD booklets. The views expressed by different NGOs such as those involved in human rights, gender, development, private sector will also be presented. Individual views of analysts and commentators are also contained. The government position on NEPAD is presented by focusing on recent public statements made by the President, Prime Minister, and other government officials. A few suggestions are made as to how the NEPAD popularisation and education work could be taken forward.

### **B. Civil Society and Nepad**

The Labour Resource and Research Institute (LaRRI) recently (April 2003) published a booklet titled: '*NEPAD: A new partnership between rider and horse?*' Instead of viewing NEPAD as a map towards a recovery of the continent, LaRRI is rather sceptical of the document in that it may instead subject the already impoverished continent to more exploitation. Slavery, resource plunder, colonialism and now neo-colonialism are some of the direct causes of why Africa is poor today. Structural adjustment programmes soon

eroded the initial post-independence gains of the 1960s and if NEPAD is to propose a repetition of that it will not be able to provide any solutions for the continent. NEPAD just like structural adjustment wants to replace the role of the state with that of the market and this arrangement would see Africans deprived of even the basic essentials to irk a living whilst the multinationals, both on the continent and from elsewhere, would continue to amass huge profits.

NEPAD was crafted and presented at a time in history in which the world has become more preoccupied with safety and security issues after the September 11, 2001 alleged terrorist attack on the twin towers in New York, United States. This according to LaRRI, accounts for why Russia got US\$ 20 billion in assistance to dismantle its weapons of mass destruction whilst Africa simply received nice words and a sheer US\$ 7 billion in debt relief instead of the US\$ 55 billion they were expecting to start to implement NEPAD. Whilst NEPAD appears to emanate from Mbeki's espoused African renaissance ideology, NEPAD is less African in its orientation and content. NEPAD is rather externally oriented (concerned mainly with the interests of donors and investors) more than that it is internally oriented (challenging the impact of aid, debt, foreign investment and globalisation on Africa) argues LaRRI. NEPAD further makes little mention, if any, of the earlier continental development programmes such as the Lagos Plan of Action (1980), AAF-SAP (1989), APPER (1986 – 1990), and many others. An analysis of why these programmes, most of which could be judged as truly African in many respects, is lacking and this creates an impression that NEPAD is a unique attempt at resuscitating the continent from its malaise of poverty and underdevelopment. The analytical question of why most of the donor countries suddenly appear to have such a grate interest in NEPAD unlike in the earlier programmes is totally ignored. NEPAD, because of this ahistorical departure ignores lessons learned about earlier African development attempts.

LaRRI further charges that one of the biggest problems with NEPAD is that its analogy of the causes of the African development crisis is incomplete and inaccurate. NEPAD's fundamental argument that Africa is poor because of lack of integration into the world economy is wrong. It is not about more integration but rather a reorganisation of the terms of trade at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) so that Africa can reap better benefits from the trade process. It is not colonial legacies that is the cause of the African development crises but colonialism itself, slavery and neo-colonialism which are a root cause of Africa's development problems. In its euphemistic language NEPAD prefers to talk about debt relief instead of backing the popular civil society call for the cancellation of the 'illegitimate debt'. Africa received a lot of aid for the past four decades but Africa is still poor. Instead of questioning all these NEPAD instead present a bill of N\$ 64 billion which must be serviced annually (mainly by donors and through the attraction of FDI) if the NEPAD objectives are to be realised. To make matters worse NEPAD ignores the current continental GDP growth which has not even reached 4% as well as the decline in aid (from a high of 3.4% in 1993 to a low of 2.4% in 1998), and instead project an annual GDP growth of 7%. The open door policy on Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) ignores three fundamental truths. Firstly, FDI does not come to the African economies as a result of charity, instead FDI go to where it can maximise profit, exploit cheap labour and national infrastructure. Secondly, it is not true that FDI go to countries where there is good governance and protection of human rights. Nigeria and

Angola which are amongst the African countries which receive most FDI but have questionable governance and human rights records and certainly no history of 'good governance'. Thirdly, FDI does not only have a capital inflow side, it also has the profit outflow side. It is therefore not true that FDI necessarily invest national infrastructural development.

LaRRI also charges that the 'partnership' is treated as given. The question of who is going to partner with whom is ignored. Can the powerful industrialised nations be partnered with? Why should Africa, emerging from decades of subjugation, slavery, loss of human, natural resources and dignity, pretend to be an equal partner with those who benefited out of these colonial evils. LaRRI therefore titled its publication 'a new partnership between rider and horse?'. What has changed that will make Africa a truly valued partner of the industrialised nations? A related question is whether South Africa and Nigeria (the two large economies on the continent) would be the only beneficiaries? What possible economic benefits would small economies such as Lesotho or the Gambia reap out of such a partnership and would such small nations have equal political influence as their more influential partners? LaRRI further charged that NEPAD could be the same old wine put in a new jar. The neo-liberal underpinnings contained in NEPAD are still the same that were underlying the structural adjustment programmes.

LaRRI concluded that a partnership should first be fostered among the African people themselves before it could be extended to others. A partnership with the industrialised countries should therefore be regarded as secondary to a partnership with and between the people of Africa. Instead of such a partnership to be about creating favourable conditions for FDI (profits) a partnership should have the African people's basic needs as its core objective. Greater emphasis should instead be placed on what the Africans can do for the continent instead of what others can contribute towards the continental recovery as proposed in NEPAD. A partnership with industrialised countries should include a fresh debate around the debt question, the WTO rules, and the expected opening up of African markets for the dumping of EU and US surplus products.

Joseph Diescho, a Namibian academic and consultant who now lives in South Africa, published the first Namibian booklet on NEPAD in 2002. This was done in collaboration with the Namibian Institute for Democracy (NID). Starting on a more positive note Diescho highlighted some of the distinctive strengths of NEPAD. He argued that there is a renewed strength and vigour among the African leadership to pull the continent out of stagnation. The launch of the African Union (AU) which coincided with the NEPAD launch gives NEPAD a greater importance. The AU unlike its predecessor, the OAU, is designed to be more than what some sceptics use to refer to as the 'trade union of African leaders'. Diescho argues that the new organisation has its focus on bread and butter issues. Another strength is the fact that African leaders appear to be speaking with one voice, which suggest a degree of enhanced unity. African leaders, in NEPAD declare that they will uphold human rights, the rule of law, respect individual rights and uphold good governance. African leaders are also now challenging the industrialised countries to listen to them as they and their people are the recipients of development aid. The

African leadership, under NEPAD also pledge to address the problem of brain drain on the continent.

Diescho in his analysis of the weaknesses and problems of NEPAD argues that the African leadership is part of the problem and may therefore not be the architectures of a proper solution to the African development crises. Diescho further questions whether the new AU is perhaps not the continuation of the old Organisation for African Unity (OAU). For Diescho, NEPAD appears to be more of a project proposal to seek external funding than that it is a programme designed to undo poverty and all other problems on the continent. NEPAD's ownership is questioned in that the final NEPAD document was first presented to the G8 in Kananaski before it was sold to the broader African populace. Diescho's final critique of NEPAD is its peer review mechanism which he charged could be like brotherly meetings of leaders who know and understand each others problems. African leaders may not have the courage nor the moral high ground to challenge each other on human rights or governance issues which will render the peer review mechanism worthless. The last general elections in Zimbabwe and the post election crack down in law and order was an important test for NEPAD.

Diescho sees the partnership between the African leadership and the African people as a prerequisite to any partnership between Africa and the rest of the world. The word "partnership" could, according to Diescho be replaced with the word "co-operation" as the dichotomy between the rich (industrialised countries) and poor (Africa) still exist. A genuine partnership of equal parties can therefore not be envisaged. For NEPAD to work the document should be marketed to the broader African people including parliamentarians of various governments who are themselves not adequately informed about NEPAD.

Another high profile analyst on Namibian political and economic issues, Henning Melber (2002) argues that NEPAD 'will fail if the Western leaders don't reform the world economic system'. Melber speaking on Wednesday, 10<sup>th</sup> July 2002 in Windhoek, said that the 7% GDP growth rate projected for Africa in the NEPAD document will remain a fallacy unless some fundamental issues are addressed. These amongst other include an end to the vast subsidies to European and US food producers as well as the legal loopholes which allow bribery by transnational corporations. Western powers may need to take drastic action against illicit trade in commodities and weapons.

Melber also sees a bleak future for NEPAD in that whilst the plan, through its peer review mechanism allows interference in internal affairs of individual African countries, the AU's constitution encourage non-interference. Interference is only permitted in cases of war crimes, genocide or crimes against humanity. For Melber, the peer review mechanism will be hampered by its exclusion of human rights groups, lawyers and churches amongst others.

Two researchers at the Namibia Economic and Policy Research unit (NEPRU), Johan Dahl and Rehabeam Shilimela also made valuable comments about NEPAD. After

bemoaning the fact that Africa has been turned into a net exporter of capital the researchers concluded that NEPAD has very little to offer to Namibia (Dahl and Shilimela, 2002). Namibia scores very well on both political governance and sound economic performance and the expected increase in capital inflows to Namibia as a result of improved governance and sound macro-economics is therefore not to be expected. Instead of relying on NEPAD to generate additional FDI for Namibia, the country may need to rely more on official rather than private capital inflow. Namibia is also not likely to benefit from further debt relief because of her low foreign debt status.

In what they term 'closing the resource gap' between Africa and the rich industrialised countries, Dahl and Rehabeam (2002) argue that as a first step the outflow of capital in Africa should be addressed. Secondly, the subsidies given to industrialised countries' agriculture, textile and clothing industries, areas in which Africa has a comparative and competitive advantage, must be stopped. Dahl and Rehabeam recommend that the AU be used as a platform to advocate the removal of subsidies to industrialised countries' agricultural and textile industries and also the opening up of their markets to African countries. The resource gap could also be narrowed and closed by putting higher policy priorities on policies that would encourage the generation of African capital instead of relying on foreign capital. The success of any development plan for Africa lies in its ability to unite rather than divide African countries, they argue. NEPAD and in particular its peer review mechanism has the potential to divide the continent. Civil society should therefore also be brought on board to take part in the debate. In order to provide for the different needs of individual African countries, the NEPAD programme should be implemented in a rather flexible manner instead of the proposed rigid mode.

Many Namibian NGOs have welcome NEPAD and the creation of the AU as steps in the right direction (New Era, 2002). Many reservations were however raised by organisations such as the Namibian NGO Forum, the Namibian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (NCCI), Sister Namibia and the National Society for Human rights (NSHR). The NGO forum stated that the inclusion of civil society in the planning and implementation of NEPAD remains crucial if NEPAD is to succeed. NCCI emphasised the importance of including business in NEPAD, as it is the principle force for the success of NEPAD. Sister Namibia, mainly a gender and human rights lobby NGO advocated the inclusion of women in the NEPAD process as they bear the brunt of poverty on the continent. The NSHR argued that NEPAD created a favourable environment for the protection of human rights on the continent (New Era, 2002). The organisation however raised concern about entrusting the same old African leadership with a continental recovery plan, as some of them are the culprits.

### **C. Namibian government and NEPAD**

President Nujoma, greeted the NEPAD initiative with a lot of enthusiasm (Republikein, 2002). He however emphasised the fact that NEPAD needs to remain an African initiative supported by all Africans. Speaking at the Durban meeting, Nujoma emphasised the need for development of the vast human resources on the continent so as to turn the continents' natural resources endowment into real opportunities for the

Africans. For Nujoma the important role performed by regional and continental organisations such as SADC, COMESA, ECOWAS, African Development Bank and others in developing the African continent should also be taken into account. NEPAD should therefore be developed with due recognition that there are other actors in the pursuit of African development.

Nujoma, like some other African leaders is however sceptical about NEPAD's peer review mechanism. At a SWAPO (ruling party) elders' council held on Monday, 28 July 2002, Nujoma warned people against 'succumbing to foreign ideologies and influences' through structures such as NEPAD (the Namibian, 2002). Rejecting the notion of good governance, democracy and human rights, Nujoma said that these people (former colonisers) cannot teach anyone anything about this virtues as they enslaved and colonised people in the past. In his implicit reference to NEPAD as yet another attempt of the imperialist forces to re-colonise the continent and its people, Nujoma warned that 'Namibia will never be colonised again. Africa will [also] never be colonised again' (the Namibian, 2002). President Gaddafi of Libya also echoed these sentiments during the visit of his counterpart President Thabo Mbeki of South to his country. Gaddafi said that NEPAD was just a project of 'former colonisers and racists' (Sunday Times, 2002). Although Thabo Mbeki was quick to correct that NEPAD was an African initiative it is clear that there are different understandings about NEPAD's agenda and the African leadership is not totally behind the NEPAD project. The Namibian Prime Minister Thoe-Ben Gurirab, then a Minister of Foreign Affairs was more substantive in raising his concerns regarding NEPAD. Gurirab stated that NEPAD because of its peer review mechanism is likely going to derail the unity being fostered through the AU in that there will be a 'good guy, bad guy' dichotomy (New Era, 2002). Gurirab further noted that NEPAD seem not to be the impediment of the wishes of the African people which was somehow contained in some of its predecessor draft documents such as the New Africa Initiative (NAI).

Nevertheless, the Namibian government is part of the African Union and therefore has accepted NEPAD. A NEPAD committee comprising of representatives of the Ministry of Trade and Industry, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Information and Broadcasting, Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Rural Development, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Works, Transport and Communication, the Ministry of Environment and Tourism, the National Planning Commission, the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources and the Ministry of Regional and Local Government and Housing was set up (New Era, 2002).

#### **D. Conclusion and way forward**

The initial ground work in creating general awareness about NEPAD in Namibia has been done, although not completed. Much of the awareness-raising has targeted the middle-class and those who can read the newspapers and have access to television sets. However, LaRRI facilitated a workshop for trade unions on NEPAD and has also included a session on NEPAD in its labour diploma course. NEPAD awareness raising work has not yet been decentralised and continues to be around the capital, Windhoek.

Schools, churches, NGOs and other civil society organisations do not know enough about NEPAD. Even most parliamentarians of both the National Assembly and the Lower House, the National Council, know very little about NEPAD.

The existence of two plain-language booklets on NEPAD, one by LaRRI and the other by NID / Diescho, creates a favourable environment for more awareness raising work on NEPAD. Since NEPAD will have an impact on the poor, they should also be targets for any NEPAD awareness raising campaigns. The use of different language services radio stations and drama groups could be one way of reaching them. It should also not be taken for granted that members of the media know enough about NEPAD, they also may need to be educated in the issue so as to enable them to report accurately about NEPAD.

Although many of the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community based organisations are slowly getting to know NEPAD, a lot of further awareness raising especially in the regionally based NGOs and CBOs is needed. This important task can be accomplished through regional workshops targeted at NGOs, CBOs, trade unions, churches, political parties, local authorities, students and other layers of civil society. The purposeful inclusion of women and women groups in such workshops should be prioritised.

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