

REPORT OF THE RENAISSANCE SOUTH AFRICA OUTREACH PROGRAMME

CONTINENTAL EXPERTS' MEETING ON THE NEW PARTNERSHIP FOR AFRICA'S DEVELOPMENT (NEPAD) AND THE AFRICAN UNION (AU)



ORGANISED BY THE AFRICA INSTITUTE OF

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Introduction

From 17 – 19 June 2002, over three hundred scholars from the African continent held a meeting under the auspices of the Renaissance South Africa Outreach Programme in Pretoria. The meeting provided African scholars with a platform to deliberate on and inform the debate on the Constitutive Act of the African Union (AU) and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) in light of the forthcoming Summit of the AU. The objectives of the meeting were:

- To critically engage with the NEPAD process
- To explore the role and responsibility of the African scholarly community in realising the goals of NEPAD.

The meeting was addressed by the South African Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, who welcomed participants, and the Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, Dr Ben Ngubane, who introduced the South African President, Mr Thabo Mbeki. The meeting represented a unique opportunity as it was informed by an interactive dialogue between President Mbeki and experts participating at the conference.

What follows is a summary of the substantive debates that emerged from the two and a half days of deliberation and consultation. This report is divided into three parts: a general overview, a critique of NEPAD, and recommendations.

General Overview

Participants acknowledged that NePAD was a welcome initiative by African leaders to address Africa's recovery from its worsening economic underdevelopment and the promotion of sustainable development in a globalising world. It was borne out of the conviction by African leaders that Africans must either develop themselves or remain under-developed. NEPAD was believed to be an initiative aimed at poverty reduction, reversing the marginalisation of Africa, and promoting sustainable development, democracy and good governance on the continent in the 21st century. It was also aimed

at the collective and integrated industrialisation of Africa. In other words, it was a political strategy intended to tackle the African development crisis. Consequently, participants welcomed the NEPAD initiative as timely, to be embraced by Africans, especially given the precarious situation of Africa at the end of the 20th century.

General Critique

1. Delegates argued that the context of the discussion needed clarification. In the view of many, NEPAD's challenges were largely economic in nature, relating to trade, finance and debt issues. Participants noted that the present global economy was not benefitting Africa. It was therefore suggested that Africa should find creative ways and regenerate notions of collective self-reliance and regional integration as the building blocks for African unity and development.

2. There were also concerns that the NEPAD initiative was located within the Washington consensus and as a result was likely to perpetuate and reinforce the subjugation of Africa in the international global system, the enclivity of African economies and the marginalisation of the majority of Africa's people.

3. The meeting expressed concern about the model of accumulation proposed in the NEPAD process and noted that it may not be appropriate for Africa's development.

4. Questions were raised about the enthusiasm of the G8 leaders over NEPAD. It appeared as if the G8 saw NEPAD as a partnership of global elites and Africa as an investment opportunity, without taking into account Africa's development. Concerns were raised that debt cancellation, to remove the debt burden that has hindered Africa's development efforts, was not on the agenda of the forthcoming G8 summit. Participants, however, cautioned that judgment should be reserved until the nature of projects to be supported by the G8 leaders at this meeting became known.

5. Participants also noted that the G8 was employing double standards by urging African countries to adopt free trade policies whilst in their own countries they were erecting protective barriers against African products, for example through the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union and the recently enacted United States Farm Act.

6. Participants noted that NEPAD was the product of a small group of political elites without the participation of the African people and civil society organisations. Consequently, questions were raised as to whether the African people could claim ownership of NEPAD given the absence of consultation and dialogue between these African leaders with civil society organisations. The meeting emphasised that partnership between African governments, organic intellectuals, and civil society organisations, including trade unions, women's and youth organisations, was of cardinal importance.

7. Following from the above, participants observed that scholars were now being invited to discuss details of implementation instead of reflecting on the project's origins and ideological grounding. Against this background, participants noted that this "expert meeting" was not adequately briefed by the NEPAD Secretariat.

8. Questions were raised whether Africans have learnt the lessons necessary to make NEPAD a success, given the past experiences of Africa's development efforts, including the Monrovia Strategy of 1979, the Lagos Plan of Action of 1980, the IMF-World Bank imposed Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) of the 1980s and 1990s, and the African Alternative to SAPs of 1989. The SAPs, especially, appear not to have reversed Africa's underdevelopment.

9. Participants noted that there was a lack of a common understanding of the concept of democracy and whether African politicians, given their antecedents, were to be trusted with representing the interests of the people – either nationally or continentally via the Pan-African Parliament (PAP).

10. Questions were also raised about the lack of minimum performance criteria for countries to qualify for AU membership.

11. The location of Peace and Security structures at the level of Heads of State and Government, at the expense of involving civil society groups such as human rights NGOs, was noted with concern.

12. Participants noted that some countries did not have properly elected and constituted national legislatures, but were instead ruled via one-party systems, military regimes, and monarchies. In light of this experience, participants expressed concern that the PAP was going to consist of delegates from national parliaments rather than being directly elected by the people. In addition, concern was expressed that it would have little or no legislative power binding on national governments.

13. It was noted that although NEPAD alludes to infrastructural development and access to resources like water, it is vague about the distribution of these resources.

14. Similarly participants noted that the land question was not adequately addressed. The role of the state in land ownership and distribution remains undefined in the NEPAD project; as well as how to resolve existing conflicts around access to land.

15. The meeting raised the question of how NEPAD was going to address the issue of negligible investment of resources in African states. It noted that internal resource mobilisation was critical given the drought of Foreign Direct Investment and Official Development Assistance, and the waste of resources through conflicts and wars in many parts of the continent.

16. Similarly, participants noted that NEPAD seemed to privilege foreign investors at the expense of domestic investors.

17. While lauding the goals of NEPAD, participants expressed concern about the lack of clarity as to how its projects and programmes will be implemented at national, sub-regional and continental levels. Perhaps more important was the time frame set for accomplishing the projects under the International Development Goals (IDG) and how those of NEPAD could work within this context. For example, under IDG, the proportion of people living in extreme poverty has to be reduced by half in 2015, having started in 1990. By implication, NEPAD is already 11 years behind schedule and has just 14 years to achieve the results. Nor has much progress been made by the various African countries such as Nigeria that had embarked upon poverty reduction projects. As for the elimination of gender disparity in primary and secondary education enrollment, the target year is 2005. Again, it means that NEPAD has just three years to implement strategies for sustainable development at national level. One implication of keying into the time frame of the IDG was that NEPAD might not be able to achieve the expected results.

18. It was noted that there still remained a lack of a shared vision about Africa's development needs and an African identity. Participants expressed dismay that the NEPAD process did not give adequate attention to this important question.

19. Participants expressed concern about the relationship between Africa and its Diaspora which has been characterised by complexities and problems in view of changes in historical linkages and geographical context. It was also marked by asymmetrical relations between communities and the Diaspora.

Recommendations

1. That an "All Africa Academy of Arts and Sciences" or an "African Academy of Scholars" be established to institutionalise the intra-African academic partnership as a civil society component of NEPAD. It is believed that such an Academy will optimise the opportunities for Africa's intellectuals to add value to and participate in the NEPAD process by means of relevant, dedicated research and scientifically-based recommendations on topics critical to Africa's development. Because of the evident contributions that an organised partnership of African intellectuals can make to informed debate, NEPAD funding should be made available for the above objective.

2. To ensure the success of NEPAD's objectives, efforts should be made to ensure the coordination of various activities across the continent. Given the level of Afro-pessimism, efforts must be made to ensure that successes be visible. Africa needs Centres of Excellence to inspire its people and to change foreign negative perceptions of Africa, as well as serve as models for the broader continent.

In this regard, intellectuals can play an important role by identifying and guiding such Centres of Excellence.

3. Following from the above, it is suggested that national and regional institutions be identified or established to facilitate networking by African intellectuals and to carry out detailed research on a number of issues including the mode of accumulation suitable for Africa's development, an African definition of democracy, and the question of poverty eradication strategy amongst others. It is crucial that the appropriate model of accumulation needs to be re-examined if NEPAD is to succeed. Accordingly, participants commit themselves to explore the possibility of convening, in the near future, another meeting of experts representative of the continental and national institutions in order to allocate research responsibilities and priorities as agreed at this meeting. This research will also require a detailed analysis and critique of the sectoral approach in NEPAD. Research output will be popularised among the African people, universities, research institutions, civil society, business, the AU and governments.

4. As part of their tasks, identified national and sub-regional centres or networks should initiate holistic debates on developmentalism and the type of development required in Africa.

5. Ownership/partnership: Participants call for further reflection on the relationship between African intellectuals and policy-makers as NEPAD has not yet shown such a relationship or social contract. Consequently, participants call for a summit between the African scholarly community and the African political leadership over the NEPAD agenda and the AU.

6. African leaders are urged to speedily implement the decision of the Lusaka Summit of the OAU in 2001 to popularise the AU and NEPAD and involve civil society in this process.

7. Furthermore, African leaders are called upon to create a conducive environment, and to transform the informal economy to make it more productive, as a means of income generating activities and as a source of sustainable livelihoods. This requires micro economic research by academics that can complement the economic policy-making, poverty alleviation and development efforts of the continent.

8. It is recommended that African leaders create and nurture an environment for democracy and good governance. The feasibility of democracy in Africa will however depend not so much on the declarations of African leaders as its relationship with the existential conditions of Africans. Moreover, it will depend on how far instrumentality of democracy can be used to meet the people's social needs. In essence, the democratisation project by African leaders have to be monitored to enable NEPAD realise its set objectives.

9. To realise the above objective, participants proposed that national, regional and continental civil society networks be created or strengthened as part of the NEPAD process.

10. Furthermore, it is proposed that a mechanism be put in place to bridge the gap between the state and civil society. This should take the form of national, sub-regional and continental fora where both the state and civil society will have dialogue on a regular basis.

11. It was agreed that the NEPAD initiative requires a strong and democratic state that must meet the needs of African people – education, health care and other social needs.

12. Delegates urged African leaders to pursue policies and projects aimed at initiating an African agrarian revolution as one of the primary objectives of NEPAD.

13. Delegates call on AISA and its partners to convene another meeting of this nature to consider other issues related to civil society participation in organs of the AU such as the PAP, the Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC), Court of Justice and the Commission for Human and People's Rights. This is especially needed since at the AU summit, only government officials will be represented and in such a process the voice of civil society will not be heard.

14. It is recommended that African scholars engage on a daily basis with the struggle of the African people to build a new social base for sustainable development. It is further proposed that a review of the curriculum of our schooling systems at all levels be undertaken with a view to inculcating new values in our people in order to achieve the goals of Africa's development as envisioned in the NEPAD initiative.

15. It is proposed that NEPAD adopt a bio-regional planning and management approach on an Africa-wide scale. This approach recognises that sustainable development can be achieved by people working together in a geographical space defined by ecological systems and human settlement patterns. It is within this context that individuals, governments and NGOs can play their rightful role and that the value of monetary, natural and social capital can be optimised. Within this context, it is important that all bio-regions benefit from sustainable development initiatives at all levels. The proposed establishment of Africa-wide Centres of Excellence could be important building blocks for local and regional development.

16. It is proposed, as part of the NEPAD process, to mobilise the "best and brightest" from among the Diaspora and within the continent to harness and mobilise domestic resources to unleash the necessary potential for Africa's development. Towards this end, it is recommended that the AU undertake an audit of the Diaspora so that their skills can be drawn upon for the realisation of its goals.

17. It is recommended that processes be put in place to revive Africa's diverse cultures with the aim of developing a common African identity. In this regard, participants welcome the initiatives to host the

3rd FESTAC in Durban in December 2002. It was however proposed that much more marketing and promotion needs to be done to increase awareness of the FESTAC so as to mobilise African people around it.

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