

The Quest to Achieve African Renaissance: Reflections on NEPAD

by

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Abstract

For long, Africa has been regarded as a hopeless continent characterized by disease, poverty, illiteracy and other malaises. The paradox of it is that Africa is four times the geographical size of the United States, and its population is more than thrice that of the US. More than any other continent, Africa is endowed with immense untapped wealth of natural resources. Blessed with these riches, Africa should be a model of development: a land of milk and honey. Unfortunately the reverse is true. Scores of years of colonialism, slavery, apartheid and post-colonial political misrule exemplified by personalised political regimes and ruthless dictatorships left most African nations politically demobilised and economically torn asunder with an immiserised population. Today Africa harbours the highest stock of the world's poorest people. Is it not startling (if not downright absurd) that a continent with such resource endowment and potential is inexorably mired in squalor, deprivation and incessant chaos? Some observers have characterized Africa's growth performance after decolonisation as 'the worst economic tragedy of the 20th century', with most African countries south of the Sahara in a state of greater poverty now than before they became independent. As a response to these problems, African leaders created NEPAD as a vehicle to extricate Africa from this political and socio-economic abyss. This article gives reflections on the progress of NEPAD, ten years after its formation. It argues that this initiative is hamstrung by several structural, socio-economic and political constraints and that these problems account for its failure in engineering Africa's rebirth. However the article also makes the point that NEPAD has not been a complete failure because it has succeeded in placing issues of human rights, good governance and democracy on the continent's development agenda.

Africa's Problems that NEPAD Must Help Address

We must face the matter squarely that where there is something wrong in how we govern ourselves, it must be said that the fault is not in our stars but in ourselves. We know that we have it in ourselves, as Africans, to change all this. We must assert our will to do so – we must say that there is no obstacle big enough to stop us from bringing about an African renaissance – Nelson Mandela.¹

Africa's woes - social disequilibrium, civil wars, ethnic unrest, poverty, corruption, disease, bad governance, violations of human rights, decrepit institutions, are all public knowledge, and are hardly new to academic discourse. They have been the subject of several studies and analyses by scholars, politicians and policy makers.²

Kofi Annan, former United Nations Secretary General, highlighted the gloomy picture of the Africa by remarking that for many people in other parts of the world, the mention of Africa evokes images of mounting political and socio-economic problems.³ Wole Soyinka, the Nigerian Nobel Prize Laureate, starkly quipped, 'we can no longer speak of wars [in Africa] but only of arenas of competitive atrocities'. He continued, 'I do not hear the annunciation of a renaissance, nor read the flickers of its regenerating fires on our ever-receding horizons'.⁴ He concluded that it is time Africa to begin 'to stare into the cold eyes of statistics' and tackle its problems with increased vigor and determination.⁵

The *raison d'être* of a state is to provide good governance. Good governance is described by Rotberg as 'the delivery of high quality political goods to citizens'.⁶ Political goods, he explained, include but are not limited to 'security and safety, rule of law, participation and human rights, sustainable economic opportunity and human development'.⁷ Africa is experiencing an acute deficit of these 'political goods.' On the prominent expert on governance, Rotberg, provides a disappointing yet accurate account of leadership in Africa. He observes that:

Leadership in Africa is typified more by disfiguring examples — Idi Amins and Robert Mugabes – than by positive role models such as Nelson Mandela and Seretse Khama. Other clusters of developing nations, such as South East Asia or Latin America, exhibit wide variations in leadership quality, but none is so extreme in its range. During the past three decades, roughly 90 percent of Sub-Saharan Africa's leaders have behaved despotically, governed poorly, eliminated their people's human and civil rights, initiated or exacerbated existing civil conflicts, decelerated per capita economic growth and proved corrupt.⁸

The 1960s and 1970s may be said to represent the lowest age in the evolution of human rights and economic development in Africa. It was during this era that Africa experienced unprecedented human rights violations of damaging proportions and economic backwardness. The human rights violations included plunder of property, extra-judicial killings, massacres, forced disappearances, torture, official persecutions, corruption, arbitrary detentions and political repression.⁹ It is during this era that Ugandan dictator, Field Marshall El-Haji Dr. Idi Amin (who was toppled from power in a *coup d'état* in 1979) perpetrated human rights violations which are arguably unequalled in the continent's history.¹⁰ After seizing power in 1971, this 'certified psychopath,'¹¹ oversaw the extermination of over ten thousand Ugandans during the first year of his nine-year tenure in office.¹² Today, human rights violations and the sickness of bad governance still operate unabated in Africa, albeit on lesser intensity and scale.

Hence, African problems have been associated mainly with institutional inadequacy or failure.¹³ For instance when monstrosities of power trampled rights of citizens underfoot as in Uganda, the then Organisation of African Unity (OAU) now the African Union (AU), stood by and did nothing. Former President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, one of the founding fathers of the OAU has derided it as 'a trade union of [African leaders] with solidarity reflected in silence, if not open support for each other.'¹⁴ The OAU stance was informed by its inflexible adherence to the doctrine of *reserved domain*¹⁵ which allowed African leaders to violate rights of their people with impunity.¹⁶ This situation was exacerbated by the fact that the OAU charter made little explicit mention of human rights or good governance.¹⁷ Instead, the charter reflected profound concerns of Africa as at the time, namely to ensure the independence of those African people who were still under colonial subjugation, the condemnation of apartheid regimes in Southern Africa, and protection of newly acquired states.¹⁸ African statesmen were loath to discuss human rights, describing them as 'one of the main elements in the ideological armory of imperialism'.¹⁹ Thus, central to the OAU charter, were provisions on issues such as the non-interference in internal affairs,²⁰ sovereign equality of states, eradication of neo-colonialism,²¹ and self-determination (in the context of states),²² among other things. Therefore, in early Africa, the OAU's focus was the protection of a state not the individual, and any concept of human rights was merely notional.²³ There can hardly be any divergence of views, and thus this has had a negative impact on democracy, human rights governance and economic growth in Africa. Discontented by this socio-economic and political morass, former President Mbeki of South Africa turned to other African leaders to seek partnership in devising strategies to stem the socio-economic political quagmire that had come to define the face of the African continent.²⁴ Together with other African leaders President Mbeki formed New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) to engineer the process of African renaissance. Furthermore, this study argues that NEPAD has not been successful in reaching that goal, and thus identifies the pitfalls that have arrested NEPAD's progress, and proffers recommendations as this initiative moves into the future. Yet, before we look into NEPAD, it is important to have a brief insight into the concept of African Renaissance.

Overview of the Concept of African Renaissance

The concept of 'African Renaissance' has captured the imagination of many African leaders despite that its vibrancy is now under threat following the ouster of President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa, the death of Muammar Kaddafi of Libya, the electoral replacement of Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal and the stepping down of Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria, following the expiration of his presidential term. These leaders were the torch-bearers on the road to African renaissance. Much ink has poured in attempting to dissect and analyse the concept of African renaissance since South Africa's former President Thabo Mbeki resurrected the term in the early 1990s.²⁵ Instructionally, according to the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, African renaissance refers to 'a period of time when Africa will experience great development in its economy and culture. Some people believe that this started at the end of the 20th century.'²⁶ Hence, in its rudimentary form, this concept underscores the point that the destiny of African people and nations is in their hands. In other words, the African people can and must overcome their socio-economic and political challenges that have come to be synonymous with Africa. In South Africa, the phrase was first used in 1994, following the election of President Nelson Mandela at the historic democratic election after the end of Apartheid, and was given intellectual amplification by the then-Deputy President Thabo Mbeki in his famous, speech - *I am an African* which he delivered in May 1996 on the occasion of the adoption of a new constitution for South Africa.²⁷ In that speech, Mbeki observed triumphantly:

I am born of a people who are heroes and heroines [...] Patient because history is on their side, these masses do not despair because today the weather is bad. Nor do they turn triumphalist when, tomorrow, the sun shines. [...] Whatever the circumstances they have lived through and because of that experience, they are determined to define for themselves who they are and who they should be.²⁸

He continued:

I owe my being to the hills and the valleys, the mountains and the glades, the rivers, the deserts, the trees, the flowers, the seas and the ever-changing seasons that define the face of our native land. ...²⁹

Mbeki had a deep-seated concern with the perpetual basket case and trouble-torn status of Africa within a rapidly globalizing world economy.³⁰ Thus, what is more worrying is the fact that Africa survives in the fringes of the world economy more than any other continent, yet it is endowed with immense wealth of natural resources such as uranium, gold, manganese, copper, cobalt, phosphate, platinum, diamonds, chromium, gas, and other valuable resources such as cocoa, coffee and millions of acres of untilled farmland.³¹

In Mbeki's view, in order for African Renaissance to be achieved, the following key areas must receive abiding and undivided attention from policy makers: social cohesion, democracy, economic rebuilding and growth, and the establishment of Africa as a significant player in geo-political affairs.³² According to the advisor to the former President Mbeki, Vusi Mavimbela, African Renaissance is the 'third moment' in post-colonial Africa, following decolonization and the outbreak of democracy across the continent during the early 1990s.³³

Although the concept of African renaissance was popularized by Thabo Mbeki in recent years, the potential of Africa to step out of a dismalness and shed itself of its myriad problems and assume its place in the world stage was foretold by one of the founders of the African National Congress,³⁴ Pixley ka Izaka Seme, when he spoke at Columbia University in New York in 1906 wherein he poetically said:

The brighter day is rising upon Africa...Yes the regeneration of Africa belongs to this new and powerful period. The African people...possess a common fundamental sentiment which is everywhere manifest, crystallizing itself into one common controlling idea...The regeneration of Africa means that a new and unique civilization is soon to be added to the world.³⁵

The concept of Renaissance itself even predates the era of Pixley Ka Izaka Seme. Some commentators such as Lotter correctly trace it to the fifteen and sixteenth century during the revival of Europe's interest in the Greek culture and the concomitant development in certain aspects of European cultural life.³⁶ Seepe is also of the view that African Renaissance is not a new invention. He points out that past African leaders such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Mangaliso Subukwe and Steve Biko preached the same concept.³⁷ He also argues that these leaders essentially propagated self-reliance, economic recovery, political and economic independence, democratic governance and sustainable development as the cardinal pillars of African Renaissance.³⁸ Although the notion of an African Renaissance is not a new idea, it is the most prominent initiative to resurge out of Africa in recent times. Besides being a proposal to harness Africa's potential, it is also an effort to remove the sources of conflict, restore its self-esteem and turn it into a zone of economic prosperity, peace and tranquility.³⁹

The approval by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in July 2001 of NEPAD and a commitment soon afterwards by the world's richest economies (G8) to launch a comprehensive development plan for Africa can fitly be regarded as a major spur for Africa's rebirth agenda.⁴⁰ Although NEPAD is the result of a merger between President Mbeki's Millennium African Recovery Program (MAP) and President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal's Omega Plan, the golden thread of the African Renaissance is clearly recognizable in the final product. According to Myakayaka-Manzini the following added impetus to the agenda of African revival or renewal:

- the independence of Ghana in 1957;
- the collapse of socialist states in 1989;
- the end of the Cold War and the resurgence of more open political and economic renewal in Africa that surpassed the decolonization process of the 1960's;
- Finally, the need for democracy in the whole of Africa which energized the people far more than the nationalist movements ever did. The pressing need for democracy culminated in the liberation of South Africa in 1994.⁴¹

Pioneers of African Renaissance believe that the beginning of their rebirth as a continent must be their own rediscovery of the African soul, captured, immortalized and made permanently available in the great works of creativity represented by the pyramids and sphinxes of Egypt, the stone buildings of Axum in Ethiopia and the ruins of Carthage in Zimbabwe, the rock paintings of the San in Botswana, the Benin bronzes from Nigeria and the African masks, the carvings of the Makonde and the stone sculptures of the Shona.⁴² As noted by one of Africa's most celebrated writer, Frantz Fanon, each generation must discover its mission, fulfill it or betray it.⁴³

Truncated Background of NEPAD

The NEPAD initiative was launched with much fanfare in Abuja, Nigeria, in 2001, by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to work out a programme to spearhead an African Renaissance.⁴⁴ NEPAD is a vision and strategic framework for Africa's renewal that was developed from a mandate given by the OAU to the five initiating heads of state, namely those of Algeria, Egypt, Nigeria, Senegal and South Africa.⁴⁵ During the July 2001 OAU summit in Lusaka, African leaders adopted this initiative. NEPAD provides a comprehensive, integrated development plan that addresses key social, economic and political principles for Africa, and is designed to address the major challenges facing the continent, and as a result halting the marginalization of African people in the process of globalization, it being appreciated that since the 1970s, Africa has gone through economic and social difficulties that are gradually edging it out of the mainstream of world affairs.⁴⁶ Its primal objective is to eradicate poverty, place African countries both individually and collectively on the path to sustainable growth and development, halt the marginalisation of Africa in the globalization process and enhance its full and beneficial integration into the global economy.⁴⁷

Among NEPAD's key principles is good governance as a basic requirement for peace, security and sustainable political and socio-economic development and African ownership and leadership, as well as broad and deep participation by all sectors of society.⁴⁸ Among the top priorities is establishing the conditions for sustainable development and ensuring peace and security as well as democracy, and good political, economic and corporate governance.⁴⁹

The immediate goal was to ensure that all African countries adopt and implement principles of democracy and good political economic and corporate governance and also entrench the protection of human rights.⁵⁰ And the overall objective was to attract more resources to the continent through foreign direct investment, increased capital flows through further debt reduction or cancellation and increased Official Development Assistance (ODA) flows.⁵¹

NEPAD is thus the outcome of sustained and continued organic self-seeking by African leaders to devise strategies that have the potential to bring about social, political and economic transformation. Its *raison d'être* is African renewal. As indicated above, the five major pioneers of NEPAD were Presidents Thabo Mbeki of South Africa, Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal, Abdelaziz of Algeria, Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria and Hosni Mubarak of Egypt. The NEPAD initiative was adopted at the 37th session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government in July 2001 in Lusaka, Zambia.⁵² It is meant to develop values and monitor their implementation within the framework of the African Union. Hence, as mentioned above, NEPAD is a merger of the Millennium Development Partnership for African Recovery Programme (MAP) and the OMEGA plan, which merger was finalized on 3 July 2001.⁵³ Agbu captures how NEPAD came into being when he writes:

NEPAD is an outcome of the marriage between the Millennium Partnership for African Recovery Programme (MAP) developed by Presidents Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria, Thabo Mbeki of South Africa, Abdelaziz Bouteflika of Algeria and Hosni Mubarak of Egypt with the 'Omega Plan' proposed by President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal, previously called the New African Initiative⁵⁴

From the outset, the EU welcomed NEPAD as an expression of African leaders' commitment to building democracy and strengthening good governance.⁵⁵ Different EU institutions, including the EU Presidency, the EU Commission, and the European Parliament, issued statements that expressed political support for NEPAD in different multilateral forums, including the G8, the Tokyo International Conference on African Development, the Africa Partnership Forum, and the UN.⁵⁶ Despite Europe's attraction to NEPAD, its support has focused too little on sharing the EU's own experiences with regional policy integration.⁵⁷

Furthermore, the constitutive document of NEPAD describes it and its agenda as follows:

This New Partnership for Africa's Development is a pledge by African leaders, based on a common vision and a firm shared conviction, that they have a pressing duty to eradicate poverty and to place their countries, both individually and collectively, on a path of sustainable growth and development and at the same time to participate actively in the world economy and body politic. The programme is anchored on the determination of Africans to extricate themselves and the continent from the malaise of underdevelopment and exclusion in a globalizing world.⁵⁸

It is important to note that the NEPAD programme is not the first of its kind to be conceived on the African soil. In fact, there have been similar initiatives in the past such as the Pan African Movement (1980), and the Lagos Plan of Action for Economic Development of Africa (1980-2000),⁵⁹ Africa's Programme for Economic Recovery (APPER, 1986-1990), The African Alternative Framework to Structural Adjustment Programme for Socio-Economic Recovery and Transformation (AAF-SAP, 1989), a Three Year Priority Programme for Survival, Rehabilitation of African Economies (1986-1989), The African Charter for Popular Participation for Development (1990) and the Compact for Africa's Recovery (2000). The greatest challenge for NEPAD is to succeed where all these programmes have failed if it is to secure any credibility and dispel notions that it is an old wine in a new bottle set to fail like the many programmes before it.⁶⁰ Will it suffer the same fate as these other many mechanisms before it? Only time will tell.

The Role of NEPAD in African Renaissance

NEPAD heralds a new paradigm shift in the agenda of Africa's renewal with its hitherto unprecedented emphasis in African strategies and programmes on democracy, human rights and good governance as substantive prerequisites for socio-economic development.⁶¹ It seeks to secure this objective through addressing the various malaises that have come to define the face of the African continent. It was acknowledged that Africa cannot take a corner while still entangled in a myriad of problems like high illiteracy rates, disease, poverty, bad governance etc. and that these problems required a radical intervention spearheaded by African leaders, to develop a new vision that would eventually lead to Africa's rebirth.⁶² NEPAD is therefore a programme that is intended to uplift the masses of Africa from the poverty, squalor and political quagmire thereby reversing centuries of impoverishment, marginalization and exploitation.⁶³ The NEPAD architecture is undergird by seven key principles:

1. Good governance as a basic requirement for peace, security and sustainable political and socio-economic development;
2. Developing, nurturing and promoting Africa's competitiveness;
3. Promoting, accelerating and consolidating regional and continental integration;
4. Revising and reforming the history of unequal mutual engagement between Africa and the developed world;
5. Africa's ownership and leadership, as well as participation by different sectors of society;
6. Securing Africa's development on the resourcefulness and resilience of its people, as well as its resources and;
7. Placing the desperate urgency of realizing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) at the centre of NEPAD's operations.

There can be no divergence of views that NEPAD espouses cardinal principles and lofty ideals and aspirations. The major hardship is the translation of these into reality. Already NEPAD and its processes have attracted some trenchant criticisms. Critics of NEPAD direct their first arrow of attack against its ideological outlook as espoused by Mr. Mbeki, the chief architect of NEPAD. For instance, in relation to the Mbeki's view that NEPAD is intended to prepare ground for development of more effective global governance, Nabudere charges that:

Mbeki put the responsibility for the improvement in global governance first and foremost on the shoulders of the victims of marginalization instead of the other way round. Those who were in fact responsible for running institutions of global governance were excused and the poor were blamed for not putting their houses in order. Because only when Africa puts its political and economic house in order would 'sound global governance' be complete and improved. It is no wonder that the rich countries, which manipulate the global institutions of governance for their own good and which are reluctant to reform them, have welcomed this 'African Initiative' with a lot of praise of the NEPAD.⁶⁴

Whereas sympathy must go for Nabudere's sentiments that responsibility for the development of effective global governance must lie with the developed world who looted, impoverished and ruined Africa, there is, as of now, no coherent and systematic arrangement that the developed world have put in place to assist Africa extricate itself from its woes. Africa was therefore left to its own devices to come up with strategies of improving global governance, hence the creation of NEPAD. Further, Nabudere's argument is not entirely correct to the extent that he argues that the developed world have been 'excused' from taking responsibility in contributing to global governance. We will do best to remember that part of NEPAD's aspirations is to engage the developed world for African countries' debts to the developed world to be cancelled. Clearly, it will not be fair to speak of the developed world having been excused from contributing in realising NEPAD's aspirations. The other point to be noted is that if the door was to be opened too wide for the involvement of the industrialized world, President Mbeki was still to be criticized that he had allowed the Western world to hijack an African programme for their own good. In this connection, it must be appreciated that NEPAD is a home-grown programme devised by Africans for Africans and that there should be limited outside interference. The mutual engagement between Africa and the industrialized world must be carefully thought out and strategic, lest tomorrow the very same critics argue that NEPAD have been parceled to the industrialized community. This is not to suggest that NEPAD is a flawless mechanism. It is a human invention and thus bound to have its flaws to mark human limitations. Thus, the causes or sources of discontentment within the NEPAD system have been classified into: structural, political, economic and social problems.

Structural and Capacity Challenges

NEPAD is seen by many as sitting outside the AU framework.⁶⁵ The two entities - AU and NEPAD are invariably seen as separate entities with the potential to rival each other in competing for prominence and taking the lead in Africa's economic development and integration.⁶⁶ It is submitted that a systemic harmonization of these two important entities will go a long way in servicing the course for continental integration – an aspiration that has eluded Africa for decades since the end of colonization.

Another structural constraint stems from the configuration of NEPAD itself. This initiative is huge and complex. It has several parts, layers, programmes, projects and participants. It involves the AU General Assembly, The AU Heads of State and Government, the Secretariat, Regional Economic Communities (RECs), member states, development partners, The UN systems, private sector and other stake holders.⁶⁷ Such a complex undertaking requires sound coordination among the various actors and programmes and the success or failure of such a conglomerated initiative depends by and large on the effectiveness of this coordination. NEPAD has not been able to demonstrate effective coordination between and among its various components, partners and projects.⁶⁸ Furthermore, it is important to note that within the AU, there exist too many institutions with conflicting functions. There is also the problem of overlapping of roles and functions between these institutions, particularly the Peace and Security Council (PSC) and the African Peer Review Mechanism (NEPAD's technical aspect) – both of which play an important overseeing role in the implementation of democracy and good governance.⁶⁹ These problems are compounded by the proliferation of regional organisations, with overlapping and potentially conflicting functions with NEPAD. A good example is Southern African Development Community (SADC) and Eastern African Economic Community (EAC) and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA). Tanzania is a member of NEPAD-APRM, SADC, COMESA EAC, and AU. All of these institutions have a myriad of functional overlaps.⁷⁰ Therefore, there is an absolute need to harmonise and rationalise these institutions to avoid duplicity and enhance their effectiveness.

Weak institutional capacity has also been identified as one of the major impediments that limits progress in the implementation of NEPAD at all levels – continental, regional and national.⁷¹ These institutional problems manifest themselves in the form of lack of technical capacity to formulate and implement programmes, inadequate financial capacity and insufficiently developed rules to govern collective action.⁷² Despite that NEPAD is being credited for generating increased Official Development Assistance (ODA) for African countries, there is a great worry that Africa is becoming increasingly aid dependent.⁷³ Already, there are some African countries that have placed huge reliance on ODA for budgetary support, with the ODA constituting as high as 10% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP).⁷⁴

Correspondingly, it is submitted that with the current world recession; it is going to be extremely difficult for these countries to extricate themselves from this economic abyss. It is contended that such enormous amounts of ODA make African countries incapable of making the necessary policy reforms that will place them on a veritable course of sustainable development – one of NEPAD's key pillars.

Political Challenges

According to Bunwaree, one of the major sources of discontentment within NEPAD is that the notion of 'leader' or 'leadership' refers exclusively to heads of state.⁷⁵ This is perhaps the major problem with almost all African institutions. They are conceptualized and implemented at heads of state level, with no meaningful engagement of other sectors of society like Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). Almost invariably no oversight is supplied to heads of states' work in these institutions. The very same leaders, some of whom are architects of NEPAD are involved in wanton violations of rights of their people, whereas their peers are on-lookers with astounding silence.⁷⁶ The leader-centric NEPAD has the potential of enslaving Africans all over again, thus making it well-nigh impossible for the continent to extricate itself from its socio-economic and political trap. The NEPAD must be given a human face and be a mass-based programme of action and not yet another trade union of African leaders that provides platform for nothing but exchange of banter between and among African heads of state and government.

According to Gasu, notwithstanding its ideological clarity, NEPAD's course on African renaissance has been deflected by the economic and political relapse in countries such as Ivory Coast, Mauritania, Guinea, Madagascar, Zimbabwe and the persistence of conflict in the Darfur region of the Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo and recently in Mali where a military junta has disposed the democratically elected government of President Amadou Toumani Touré.⁷⁷ These incidents, sporadic as they may appear, are a drawback on the continent's good governance and image building drive. Perhaps by tying itself to democracy building, rather than focusing solely on economic development, NEPAD is limiting its chances of success. According to Chahal democracy in the West has been an outcome of economic development rather than a precondition to it. He further argues that though East Asia is still under authoritarian regimes, it has driven economic growth with single-minded determination, in the process forcing local businessmen to invest in their own countries.⁷⁸ Perhaps therefore instead of concerning itself with Western ideals of democratization and liberal reforms of governance, NEPAD should limit its scope to functioning as an effective development programme. This will ensure that its meager resources are applied to one narrow yet extremely critical area, namely economic development, rather than spreading itself thinly across all spheres of life – from the social through the political to the economic, with negligible or no resultant impact at all.

Economic Challenges

Commentators argue that NEPAD is predicated on a neo-liberal framework of the economy that advocates for privatization, liberalization and de-regulation.⁷⁹ While it is accepted that for Africa to assume her rightful place in the international arena, it must forge strategic alliances and partnerships with the industrialized world and other entities, such as financial institutions, these international and multilateral partnerships must be premised on equality of players and guided by principles of equity. It has been contended that instead of challenging the existing skewed global financial architecture, and demanding redress, NEPAD is inexorably assimilating itself into the inequitable global economic system.⁸⁰ In Bunwaree's view, the 'ahistoric' nature of the NEPAD's approach falls oblivious to the fact that Africa has a history of human enslavement and colonialism – legacies it is still embroiled in.⁸¹ Commenting on the adverse impacts of neo-liberal financial policies on the African continent, George Monbiot trenchantly argues:

[Tony] Blair speaks about Africa as if its problems are the result of some inscrutable force of nature, compounded only by the corruption of its dictators. He laments that it is the only continent in the world over the past few decades that has moved backwards. But he has never acknowledged that – as even the World Bank Studies show – it has moved backwards partly because of the neo-liberal policies it has been forced to follow by the powerful nations: policies that have just been extended by the debt relief package. Anyone with a grasp of development economics and politics who has read and understood the G-8 finance ministers' statements could see that conditions it contains – enforced liberalisation and privatisation - are as onerous as the debts it relieves.⁸²

For many commentators, therefore, NEPAD simply represents old wines in new bottles.⁸³ Its policies and strategies amount to mere rearrangement of desks. It has become a mere sound board for dictates of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). These dictates include but are not limited to persistent demands that African countries: cut budgets; privatise state enterprises; lift price controls, subsidies and any other distortions of market forces; devalue the currency, remove currency controls; impose higher interest rates; deregulate local finance; remove import barriers such as trade tariffs and quotas; lower the social wage and funding for education training programmes; increase user fees for states services, and promote the export of raw materials to world markets.⁸⁴ To drive her point home, Bunwaree cites the example of Mozambique during the 1990s, whose single largest export commodity – cashew nuts, was destroyed by World Bank dictates through debt relief conditionality (privatization, and retractions of 10% export tax as raw cashews).⁸⁵ NEPAD adopts the same policy approaches such as highly indebted poor countries initiatives (HIPC) and Paris Club debt 'work out' Process.⁸⁶ In this connection, it can be argued that NEPAD's economic strategy to attain the Renaissance is not too sound. Its Founding Document proclaims that:

The New Partnership for Africa's Development seeks to build on and celebrate the achievement of the past as well as reflect on the lessons learned through painful experience, so as to establish a partnership that is both credible and capable of implementation. In doing so, the challenge is for the peoples and governments of Africa to understand that development is a process of empowerment and self-reliance. Accordingly Africans must not be wards of benevolent guardians; rather they must be the architects of their own sustained upliftment.⁸⁷

Despite the above colourful words, NEPAD has not shown seriousness in implementing the principle of self-reliance for the upliftment of the mass of Africa, as witnessed by lack of civil society participation in the drafting of its parent document.⁸⁸ To this end, it can be profitably argued that NEPAD lacks social government programme. Its colourful words on human development amount to near-rhetoric.

Social Challenges

As already indicated above, the civil society never took part in the formulation of the NEPAD initiative. African civil society was officially invited to take part in the NEPAD process only in 2002, a year after it was launched.⁸⁹ This means that the civil society has been excluded from NEPAD's creation and, and never afforded the opportunity to suggest improvements or alternatives.⁹⁰ It is argued that the exclusion of civil society participation has deprived it a singular and unique sense of ownership over the initiative. Even today civil society participation within the NEPAD processes is woefully scanty. According to Hope, the failure of NEPAD is inevitable on account of the blatant disregard of civil society participation.⁹¹ Thus NEPAD has been criticized as elitist. Another observer, Olukoshi, contends that due to lack of involvement of the civil society the legitimacy of this initiative has been severely compromised.⁹² In his own words:

No public policy can be considered legitimate only because it is described as being owned by Africa and Africans. It follows that ownership cannot be the exclusive monopoly of the elite; it must necessarily have popular anchorage. In addition, it should have a strong degree of local value added that is linked to local specificities and circumstances and not just seen as a pro forma proclamation that is important in and of itself. The political democracy and government initiative of the NEPAD document does not offer any such local value added or anchorage in domestic political processes/structures.⁹³

Even in the celebrated NEPAD-APRM, there is no meaningful civil society participation. Its processes are shrouded in smog. For instance, the Closed Session of the African Peer Review Forum, where peer pressure is supposed to be applied is conducted outside public scrutiny and NGOs are also not allowed in the meeting room. Only the Heads of State and Government of participating states, heads of the APRM partner institutions and the APRM team are allowed access. In the APRM, NGOs and the media are only involved in the process at its preliminary stages as the country undergoes self-assessment which results in a Country Self Assessment Report (CSAR) and the Program of Action to fix the identified gaps in governance.⁹⁴ Their involvement goes no further than this. Even then, complaints have arisen that governments tend to exclude those NGOs that they perceive as 'hostile' and stack the process with compliant ones.⁹⁵ African civil society's criticism of NEPAD has usually not been received in good spirit by African leaders. For example, South African former President, Thabo Mbeki criticized the civil society for being ill-informed about NEPAD and said that they should 'come forward and ask what they can do rather than criticizing'.⁹⁶ It is argued that this secrecy contributes to the poor quality of mutual political engagement in the APR Forum among African leaders. It is during these closed door sessions that these leaders take turns to praise one another without any meaningful, candid and straight hard-talk on how problems can best be addressed in their respective countries, fully knowing that no one is watching them. African leaders lack the⁹⁷ moral authority to keep one another under check. As one commentator has relevantly remarked, to expect them to criticize one another, 'is like seconding a mafia to raid dope smokers at a high school'.⁹⁸

The masses of Africa also know very little about, if at all. As Fombad & Kebonang put it, the NEPAD architects were, 'so to speak, able to cash in a confidence and trust bonus arising from the declared aims of the blueprint they were selling – interestingly, first abroad before doing so on the 'home front.'⁹⁹ It is trite learning that development can only be effective and meaningful if it is participatory in character, i.e where people are directly involved in the process. NEPAD has not succeeded in drawing the masses of Africa, for whom it is intended, in its processes and this is an abysmal failure. Despite its proclaimed recognition of the people-centric approach in its processes, the African people have not played any part in its conception, design, and formulation. In fact even among elites in universities, NEPAD is hardly talked about and thus little is known about it.¹⁰⁰ It is therefore no wonder that the larger section of our population – alienated and unschooled youth, the peasants, the aged, the drought-stricken, thousand sufferers of HIV do not know anything about NEPAD because even the elites - the well-placed to know - are scantily informed about it. The non-involvement of NGOs does not imply passivity on their part. Some NGOs have out-rightly rejected NEPAD. The African Social Forum of Mali and Third World Network of Ghana have openly rejected NEPAD, as in their view, it perpetrates marginalisation of the people of Africa, particularly women, youth and other disempowered groups.¹⁰¹ In particular, The African Social Forum rejected the neo-liberal orientation of NEPAD and further integration of Africa into an inequitable global economic system as a basis for growth and development.¹⁰²

Of greater concern to these NGOs is the fact that NEPAD is inspired by International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank policies such as structural adjustments (SAPs), trade liberalization etc that continue to subject Africa to an unequal engagement and principles on governance transplanted from the practices of the western world which are not based on the culture, tradition and history of peoples of Africa.¹⁰³

To this end, NEPAD has thus far shown few concrete or tangible results. Africa's development challenges remain the same and remain unaddressed, virtually no concrete programmes or projects have been implemented under NEPAD, few countries have fully implemented the APRM, and none have fully implemented their programme of action. In summing it up, Taylor argues that NEPAD has been traded as a bargain between the donor community and African leaders where democracy has been used as a 'bargaining chip' by African elites and that, as such, this does not portray an authentic fidelity to the ideal of democratic transformation on their part.¹⁰⁴ All of NEPAD's founding fathers - former President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa, former President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria, former President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal, and former President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt have left office, which has led some to question their country's continued support to NEPAD.

NEPAD'S Successes

Despite the numerous challenges that have beset the NEPAD initiative, it has not been a total failure. It has registered its own successes, albeit half-measured. According to Halfdan Lyngø Ottosen, Programme Officer for Africa at International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance firstly, NEPAD should be credited, at least partially, for placing democracy and good governance at the centre of Africa's development agenda and placing Africa's development challenges at the centre of the EU's external relations agenda.¹⁰⁵ At a high-level EU plenary conference in 2002, on how the international community could assist NEPAD, Denmark, which then held the EU Presidency, poignantly pointed out that, 'the EU is a strong supporter of NEPAD and the promise it holds for African development ... The African leaders and people have raised the stakes with the adoption of NEPAD. The international community should be prepared to match this'.¹⁰⁶ Not dissimilar statements were echoed by a number of national parliaments in Europe and by the Africa, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP)-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly.¹⁰⁷

The EU had great commendation for the APRM in particular. As the Scandinavian ambassador remarked, the APRM 'captured our imagination and made NEPAD that much easier to sell.'¹⁰⁸ At the UN General Assembly in 2004, Netherlands, which then held the EU Presidency, stated that 'the APRM is an extremely powerful and positive tool for improving governance in Africa' and expressed commitment 'to support the APRM in the spirit of partnership and with full respect of the African ownership of the process'.¹⁰⁹

Finally, NEPAD should be credited for conceiving the APRM, which, despite criticism and implementation challenges, remains an innovative mechanism for building democracy and good governance and provides an instrument from which the EU itself could learn. This mechanism is an initiative by African leaders which is supposed to be ‘people centered, people owned, people managed, and people driven.’¹¹⁰ Elsewhere, the APRM has been laudatorily described as ‘Africa’s premier home-grown governance and accountability tool,’¹¹¹ while others view it as the ‘jewel in NEPAD’s crown’.¹¹²

Conclusion

Today, even NEPAD’s most devout pioneers admit, albeit painfully, that it has not been quite a successful project. For instance, Former Senegalese President, Abdoulaye Wade, one of the ardent initial believers in NEPAD is quoted as having said the following in relation to it:

I am disappointed. I have great difficulties explaining what we have achieved when people at home and elsewhere ask me. We’re spending a lot of money and, above all, losing time with repetition and conferences that end and you’re not quite sure what they’ve achieved.¹¹³

He is further quoted elsewhere as having denounced NEPAD thus:

Expenses adding up to hundreds of millions of dollars have been spent on trips [and] on hotels. But not a single classroom has been built, not a single health centre completed. NEPAD has not done what it was set up for’.¹¹⁴

In December 2008, Former South African President, Thabo Mbeki, the chief architect of NEPAD was quoted as saying:

I am afraid that we have not made the progress we had hoped for. Indeed, and regrettably, I believe that we have lost some of the momentum which attended the launch ... of the NEPAD...¹¹⁵

Ten years on, to deny that NEPAD has not failed will be foolhardy. Indeed, as shown above, its architects have now openly admitted that NEPAD has been largely a failure. Ottossen argues that in evaluating NEPAD as a stand-alone programme, there is no doubt that has failed dismally.¹¹⁶ However, he argues that if we evaluate NEPAD as part of an ongoing process of regional policy integration in Africa – a process that started with the creation of the OAU in 1963 and has included the adoption of the Lagos Plan of Action in 1980, the signing of the Abuja Treaty in 1991, the launch of NEPAD in 2001 and the transformation of the OAU into the AU in 2002 – it could be argued that NEPAD contributed to African integration in its modest way.

Notwithstanding the quandary that NEPAD is currently placed, President Mbeki has pointed the direction; Africans must now take over from where Mbeki and his peers left and devise a concrete program of action to realize African renaissance. As Mavimbela points out, without an integrated programme of action, the dream of the renaissance will forever be deferred or remain a romantic idealist concept.¹¹⁷ In improving on the foundation that Mbeki has built, the following measures must be adopted in relation to NEPAD: (I) civil society must be given space to participate in NEPAD processes so that civil society participation can give NEPAD a human face and dispel notions that it is elitist; (II) NEPAD must be integrated in the AU architecture for ease of coordination; (III) a code of conduct must be put in place to govern donor programmes and make aid schemes more coherent; (IV) Seeing that NEPAD is an up-down leadership inspired document drawn, ratified and agreed upon without input from the African informed elite, it is important for it to establish a collaboration with the scholarly community to promote research and infuse new ideas into the system.¹¹⁸ In addition, and most importantly, political players must exhibit the necessary political will to make NEPAD succeed – which will is presently lacking. African leaders must step out of their loins and help Africa secure its place in the global village. Finally hope must not be lost that one day Africa will metamorphose from an ugly caterpillar to a beautiful butterfly. Rome was not built in a day. With fidelity to its ideals, NEPAD will deliver.

Endnotes

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⁴ W Soyinka in 'A continent's unequal dialogue' (2009) T Davie Memorial lecture.

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⁶ R Rotberg 'Governance and leadership in Africa: Measures, methods and results' (2009) 62 *Journal of International Affairs* 113.

⁷ As above. See also Oko (n 2 above) 9.

⁸ R Rotberg 'The roots of Africa's leadership deficit' (2003), www.worldpeacefoundation.org [accessed 13 March 2012].

⁹ N Udombana 'Between promise and performance: revisiting states obligations under the African Human Rights Charter' (2004) 40 *Stanford Journal of International Law* 106.

¹⁰ As above.

¹¹ W Soyinka, as quoted by Udombana (n 9 above) 106.

¹² Udombana (n 9 above) 107.

¹³ Oko (n 2 above) 72.

¹⁴ J Nyerere quoted by E Abdulai 'The standoff between ICC and African leaders debate revisited' (2009), <www.africanarguments.org/2010/03/the-standoff-between-Icc-and-african-leaders-debate-revisited> [accessed 17 March 2012].

¹⁵ The doctrine of reserved domain (or domestic jurisdiction) is to the effect that a state is not bound by international law for activities that are essentially within its domain or jurisdiction. See further article III(2) of the OAU charter which proclaims 'non-interference in the internal affairs of states' as one of the cardinal guiding principles of the OAU.

¹⁶ Udombana (n 9 above) 106.

¹⁷ R Murray Human Rights in Africa: from OAU to African Union (2004) 7.

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²⁰ See Articles 3(1) and (2) of the OAU Charter. The Charter is available at: http://www.au.int/en/sites/default/files/OAU_Charter_1963.pdf [accessed 3 April 2012].

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⁴⁴ I Taylor 'NEPAD: Toward Africa's Development or Another False Start?' (2005) 12.

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⁴⁶ DA Omoweh 'The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD): a preliminary Evaluative Analysis' Nigerian Forum: July/ August 2002 (23), The Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA) 7-8.

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⁴⁹ As above.

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⁵⁶ As above.

⁵⁷ As above, 6.

⁵⁸ NEPAD Document, para 1.

⁵⁹ The process that culminated in the launch of NEPAD started with the creation of the OAU in 1963 and the adoption of the Lagos Plan of Action in 1980 (OAU Secretariat 1980). The Lagos Plan of Action emerged in response to rising levels of poverty and inequality in Africa and African leaders' frustration with externally driven development programmes. At the OAU summit in Monrovia, Liberia in 1979, African leaders advanced the idea that Africa's development could not be dependent on development aid and special relations with Europe, and they committed themselves to promoting development aimed at self-reliance, promoting regional economic integration, and establishing institutions to facilitate the achievement of self-reliance (OAU Secretariat 1979: paragraphs 1–3). The aim was to create a dynamic and interdependent African economy and thereby pave the way for the establishment of an economic community (OAU Secretariat 1979: paragraph 5).

⁶⁰ See generally K Ogbinaka NEPAD: continuing disconnections in Africa? (2006) *The Journal of Pan African Studies* pp. 4-27 at 6.

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⁸⁴ As above, 234.

⁸⁵ As above.

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¹⁰⁰ Bonwaree (n 64 above) 236.

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