

NEPAD and African Development Policy

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It has been argued that NEPAD “constitutes the most important advance in African development policy during the last four decades” (Hope, 2002). Do you agree?

In 2001 the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) was launched in Abuja. The goals of this nascent organisation were far-reaching and extensive. They included: the eradication of poverty, the production of sustainable growth, the reversing of African marginalisation and the empowerment of women and minorities. The closing lines of the organisation’s policy framework encompass these aims stating that ‘in fulfilling its promise, this agenda must give hope to the emaciated African child that the 21st century is indeed Africa’s century.’[1] NEPAD enshrined the principles of continued integration of African states, partnership within Africa and with those outside of the continent and the fulfilling of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In 2010 it became a technical arm of the new African Union (AU)[2] and has launched the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), which is an inspection of good governance and democracy in volunteer states by other African nations. At present it has 29 members (over 70% of all African states) including Nigeria, Rwanda, Algeria, Congo and Egypt.[3]

NEPAD and its associated programs have been widely accepted among African states, regional and international organisations and academics. Indeed, K. R. Hope argues that NEPAD ‘constitutes the most important advance in African development policy during the last four decades. Undoubtedly it is an ambitious programme and represents perhaps one last hope for Africa to reverse its slide into irrelevance.’[4] However, critiques of NEPAD, its programs and philosophy have been levelled from many different sides. Critics argue that NEPAD is nothing radically new and is in fact, as Henning Melber argues, simply ‘old wine in new bottles,’[5] a new face on old policies and ideas. It is seen as overly westernised and pursuing a western agenda and that it often fails to understand the realities of the political systems it encounters. Others argue that NEPAD was set up by political elites whose pasts do not mirror the aims of democracy and good governance that they espouse (e.g. Hosni Mubarak and Thabo Mbeki), and that it was created with little consultation and partnership. Political economists argue that the growth required for the development targets set by NEPAD is over-ambitious in the current climate.

This essay will discuss the issues facing NEPAD and ascertain whether the New Partnership for Africa’s Development is indeed ‘the most important advance in African development policy during the last four decades.’[6] Attention shall be drawn throughout to the positive effects of NEPAD and the importance of its creation and continued involvement in African development policy. However, this will be contrasted with some of the negative objections raised, including those outlined above, to provide a fair and balanced assessment of the Partnership’s importance to the continent.

Perhaps one of the most important aspects of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development is that it is an African organisation, founded and run by African leaders. Therefore, it demonstrates a newfound need and ability for Africans to help themselves rather than rely on outside nations and organisations such as the UN. Indeed, the framework document of NEPAD states ‘This *New Partnership for Africa’s Development* is a pledge by African leaders, based on a common vision and a firm and shared conviction ... the Programme is anchored on the determination of Africans to extricate themselves and the continent from the malaise of underdevelopment and exclusion in a globalising world.’[7] Even its critics among civil society groups agree that the ideas of ‘self reliance’ and a ‘focus on “African ownership and management”’ are huge positives brought by NEPAD.[8] Indeed, Gottschalk

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and Schmidt go even further arguing that 'both NEPAD and the AU can be regarded as unprecedented developments in Africa, whether Sub-Saharan or North. They are continent-wide, indigenous initiatives providing the continent with a vision for Africa in the twenty-first century.'^[9] These ideas push the flourishing idea of an 'African Renaissance' in which (as in 15th Century Europe) Africa will experience a cultural rebirth, with a spread of democracy and emancipation led by a renewed focus on African values, culture and glorious past and with a focus on greater economic and scientific success. From this point of view, NEPAD represents one of the first real steps in the African journey from irrelevance, conflict, neo-patrimonialism, aid dependency and poverty to a new, African-led future of integration, democracy and economic control.

Perhaps the best practical example of NEPAD's implementation of these ideals can be seen in the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). The APRM demonstrates the direct ability of African states and individuals to police and inspect other African nations. In theory the APRM allows for the development of good governance and democracy within African states without the involvement of foreign countries, donor states and international organisations, which had often previously been necessary. The mechanism also provides a new form of transparent accountability on African states governance. Through the use of fully published reports by individuals with high moral accountability (such as church leaders and ex-heads of state) and impartiality it forces the states which volunteer for the process to be completely open about the states political system and record of good governance. APRM is often described as one of NEPAD's most radical proposals^[10] and it has been met with both cynicism and criticism.

The APRM has been, in the words of Makamunana and Kuye, 'lampooned by critics for lacking teeth ... the APRM is a non-punitive, non-adversarial process that assumes ... that participating countries will act in good faith.'^[11] The Mechanism itself has no ability to enforce its findings or recommendations and, in fact, leaves it up to governments themselves to do so. If the political will to do so is not forthcoming then the APRM calls on other governments and donor states to push, with all reasonable diplomatic means, for the objectives to be met in the state concerned.^[12] There is little detail and it is left to the enforcers (with all their political motivations) to decide the particular enforcements. This could result in international contention and discord, undermining all co-operative undertakings in Africa.^[13]

Another of the major arguments against the APRM is that the self-assessment format is inherently flawed. By allowing states to assess their own political problems the process opens up the dilemma that states will fail to answer correctly or in full, either because they do not wish to divulge some political tensions or failures or because they themselves cannot see them. Eduard Jordaan provides an excellent example in his critique of the Rwandan self-assessment. He argues that in a far advanced stage of Rwanda's self-assessment report the Rwandan government had made little or no mention of some of the severest problems afflicting the state. The report is also heavily biased towards the Rwandan government with opposition voices mostly marginalised within it creating a skewed favourable view of the governance of Rwanda.^[14] Jordaan's article draws on two major problems within both the APRM and NEPAD as a whole. The first is a relatively obvious one: 'Accession to the APRM requires a commitment from *governments* to identify their own failures with brutal honesty, a rare occurrence indeed. Perhaps it should therefore come as little surprise that Rwanda has succumbed to a self-protective impulse in the self-assessment phase of the peer review process.'^[15] The second problem identified is much more complicated. Jordaan identifies that the majority of African states run on a neopatrimonialist system. In such a system a pyramid is formed, containing numerous dyads of interaction between service providers and service users. For example, a businessman may have 'his customs man' with whom he exchanges not only money for a better service or to waive certain legalities but also gifts and friendship.^[16] This system is entirely at odds with NEPAD's aspirations to democracy, public responsibility and good governance. 'It therefore appears as though the proper implementation of NEPAD's goals would pose an acute threat to the privileged tenure of Africa's leaders, despite their vociferous support of NEPAD and the APRM.'^[17] Arguably, therefore, while the APRM (as a representative of NEPAD as a whole) is excellent in theory, it is beset by certain problems which leads to the conclusion that NEPAD may not be as effective as a force in African development as some of its supporters such as Hope would believe.

The criticism does not stop at the APRM, however, and extends to NEPAD itself. Firstly, NEPAD is seen as another in a long line of failed attempts to deal with the continent's problems. Indeed, the ideas of pan-Africanism (which NEPAD and the AU embody) stretch back a long way; famously in 1963 Ghanaian President Kwame Nkrumah called

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for a United States of Africa, five years after the Treaty of Rome created the European Economic Community.[18] No other state leader backed the idea, which included huge government and military integration.[19] Critics also point to the later failure of the Organisation of African Unity as proof that 'institutional frameworks of African integration attempted over the last four decades or so were chronically under-resourced and politically marginalized.'[20] Gottschalk and Schmidt go on to argue that 'we need to ask whether the foundation of NEPAD and the AU improves the chances of a new era dawning for the continent, or whether the well-known gap in Africa between great expectations and high-flown rhetoric on the one hand, and low capabilities and inertia on the other, can be narrowed.' The failure of previous attempts at pan-African co-operation has damaged the public perception within Africa of what such organizations can achieve. Overshadowing this is the historic mistrust of giving up power and the post-colonialist edifying of ideas of sovereignty and the nation-state. It is hard to see how NEPAD 'constitutes the most important advance in African development policy during the last four decades' when many Africans wait for it to fail as its predecessors did, and mistrust its intentions as part of the AU.

A second issue is also prevalent when discussing the African view of NEPAD: that of its westernised image. Despite its pan-African beginnings, NEPAD has been seen as a Western wolf in African sheep's clothing; an organisation inspired by, and promoting, Western values, philosophies and economics. It also has major support and engagement from western international organisations such as the EU, IMF and the UN. In return for the promotion of the westernised values of good governance, free trade and integration, these 'development partners' would support NEPAD financially and politically.[21] However, the idea of a New Partnership between the developed world and Africa was essentially flawed, the differences in power and control between the donor states and organisations of the West and the poor African states is just too immense. Indeed, as Ian Taylor points out, 'the use of the supposedly equalising and leveling word "partnership" to portray and describe "development relationships" was actually an endeavour to disavow and obscure European paternalism, with its roots firmly embedded in the colonial experience.'[22] Developing on Taylor's line of argument, Kunle Amuwo argues that, rather than development, the Western historic paradigm in Africa is one of acquisition. Over the past three centuries the slave trade, colonialism and neo-colonialist globalisation have removed the ability of Africa to decide its own fate and has subjugated it, so that its only role is the production of primary goods and raw materials for the global market.[23] The article goes on to argue that NEPAD fails to account for the forces of (neo) colonialism as an instrument of Africa's current underdevelopment and its promotion of liberal Western economic values is simply a continuation of Western capitalist control of Africa's development potential.[24] Indeed, 'the discourse [of 'partnerships'] is a rhetorical device to camouflage material processes of exploitation and unequal exchange.'[25] The continuing lack of equality in economic trade between Africa and the developed world, and the neo-colonialist aspect in the globalisation by the West and China mean that the promise of free trade and 'partnership' bringing African development and economic success is laughably hollow.

NEPAD's political objectives receive similar criticism. The western understanding of democracy, as promoted by NEPAD, is one of multi-party elections and full suffrage on a national scale. Not only does this perception ignore all African cultural and socio-political history (as with the economic issues) but it also fails to determine the place that neo-patrimonialist representation and political capital has within many African national systems of government. In many cases, elections are fought between various factions of elites that have been politically powerful for decades and in quite a few countries the government has stayed in through patrimonialism, authoritarian control, shrewd politics and even violence. Only in a few cases – Mauritius, Cape Verde, Senegal and Ghana for example – have multi-party elections created a positive political atmosphere in which good governance and accountability can be discussed, as NEPAD believes it should.[26] On the other hand, others have not been as successful; the experiences of countries such as Zimbabwe, Zambia, Congo, Cote d'Ivoire and Kenya 'do not augur well for the hypothesis that multi-party elections are a sound basis for political and economic improvements that are required if the condition of ordinary Africans is to improve.'[27] Indeed as Patrick Chabal goes on to argue,

'the notion of *democratization* (whatever it may, in practice, mean) would lead *ipso facto* to economic growth flies in the face of all available historical evidence. Democracy as we know it in the West is the outcome of, not the pre-condition for, economic development ... To assume therefore that multi-party election competition will, in and of itself, make development more likely is to be guilty of wishful thinking.'[28]

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Further criticism of NEPAD comes from civil society campaigners. As well as supporting the argument against the economic disadvantages of NEPAD's policies, they believe that the way NEPAD was created is also inherently wrong. A report by the Southern and Eastern African Trade Information and Negotiations Institute (SEATINI) puts forward the case that NEPAD neglected the people of Africa during the consultation phase of its creation; instead the five heads of state who created NEPAD (those of South Africa, Nigeria, Senegal, Algeria and Egypt) went to the international arena and to the heads of 'private capital'.^[29] The report argues that 'although NEPAD talks about "ownership" of the process by the African people, and indeed exhorts the people to mobilise themselves behind NEPAD, they have not been consulted in the process.'^[30] SEATINI argues that a better strategy for African development would be one based on the needs of the people rather than on the basis of international competition and economics – 'the practical effect of NEPAD would be to surrender the human rights of the people of Africa (their rights to food, water, energy, etc.) to the whims of a volatile and untrustworthy global capital.'^[31]

It is also true that the economic goals which NEPAD deems necessary for the successful prosecution of its aims are seen by many as over-ambitious. The Partnership argues that national growth rates of 6-7% are not only feasible but also necessary for the requirements in education, health, governance etc. to be met. In the three years prior to the global economic recession of 2009 this was perfectly possible, with average growth rates of over 6% with some countries even reaching 8-9% GDP growth. However, after the collapse of global markets Africa's growth collapsed by up to 8% to negative 1% (in southern Africa), with ten out of fifty countries reporting negative growth.^[32] While some states continued to accrue reasonably high growth rates and things have improved since 2009, NEPAD's requirement of 6-7% seems distant. International aid is also a major necessity for NEPAD's operations. According to reports the Partnership requires 12% of GDP per annum or around \$64 billion.^[33] Much of this will, in the short and medium term, come from international aid and debt relief coupled with greater freedom in economic trade. Once again this is perhaps an unrealistic aim when many countries are cutting international aid and development budgets to cope with the economic downturn. The UK is a major donor in Africa and provides the highest proportion (14% from 2011-13) of the African Development Fund.^[34] While the UK Overseas Development Budget has actually increased in recent years (to £7,356 million for 2009/10) with a total of £3,392 million used in Africa,^[35] it is not all good news for the continent. The UK is cutting the number of countries it provides aid to from 43 to 27 with the removal of help to Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, Gambia, Lesotho and Niger.^[36] At the same time, 30% of UK aid is being transferred to help unstable regions and lessen or remove security threats to Britain.^[37] While, to some extent, this supports NEPAD's goals through developing peace and security, it also entails a shift of aid to countries such as Afghanistan and a loss of direct aid for governance and the promotion of equality and freedom. Therefore, once again it is difficult to see how the requirements of NEPAD are going to be met in an increasingly cash-strapped and security-focused world.

In conclusion, therefore, the New Partnership for Africa's Development has a set of ambitious forward-thinking goals and ideals and is an excellent example of what Africans can do when they come together to help the continent out of the mire of its history and dependence. It is recognised by most as a hugely important advance in the struggle for pan-African co-operation and inspires all that is best about the new African Renaissance. Its practical applications, such as the African Peer Review Mechanism, are well received and accepted and show even more that Africa can take control of its own development and governance. However, NEPAD and the APRM have also attracted a lot of scepticism and criticism. The APRM has been called a flawed system – in that it relies far too heavily on the good intentions of the governments concerned and fails to comprehend the extent to which neo-patrimonialism is ingrained into African political society. It is also seen as a failure for lacking the "teeth" to enforce its findings and is forced to fall back on donor states and neighbours to apply pressure. NEPAD, too, comes under huge criticism; firstly as it is seen as another in a long line of failed good intentions and carries with it a certain amount of public mistrust. Secondly, NEPAD is seen as overly westernised and, from a post-colonialist point of view, can even be seen as an agent of western neo-colonialism due to the continuing inequalities and injustices in the free trade model the Partnership espouses. Thirdly, its political aspiration that pluralist electoral competition will inspire development and accountability flies in the face of a large amount of evidence within Africa and in the history of democracy more broadly. Civil society campaigners provide further issues with NEPAD, as they argue that it is driven by political elites with little co-operation or consultation with ordinary African people. Lastly, the economic growth and international aid NEPAD requires are over-ambitious and entirely at odds with the current economic climate. Therefore, while NEPAD's aspirations and ideals are entirely laudable and the control it gives Africa over its own future is a huge step

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in the right direction, its failures and the issues raised lead to the conclusion that to call the Partnership 'the most important advance in African development policy during the last four decades' is an amplification of the true power and future influence that NEPAD will hold in Africa.

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