

The New Partnership for Africa's Development (Nepad)

The New Partnership for Africa's Development (Nepad) is an attempt by African leaders to address on a collective basis Africa's lack of development. Representatives of five African countries drafted it, but President Mbeki has been its most active promoter.

Nepad was previously known as the New Africa Initiative (NAI), which was itself a merger of two earlier initiatives, the Millennium Africa Recovery Plan (MAP) and the Omega Plan. The MAP originated from the invitation to attend the G8 meeting in Okinawa Japan in July 2000 to presidents Mbeki, Obasanjo (Nigeria) and Bouteflika (Algeria). These three were invited to meet with G8 leaders to discuss development issues because, at the time, they were chairpersons of the NAM, the G77 and the OAU respectively. The Prime Minister of Thailand was invited along with the African leaders. This encounter led to a request from the OAU to the three African leaders to draft a plan for African development. This process began in earnest following the UN's Millennium Summit in September 2000. A steering committee of representatives of all three countries was established to formulate the plan, by then known as the MAP, and already somewhat in the public eye. The January 2001 meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos included a session on Africa in which President Mbeki, President Obasanjo and other African presidents participated, and the

International leaders have come out in support of Nepad.

However, many on the African continent remain ignorant of its contents. The Labour Bulletin talks to Stephen Gelb, who was a member of the South African government's team in the initial drafting of Nepad.

broad intent and outline of the approach were presented. Many South African businesspeople were in the audience - this was their (and the South Africa's public's) first exposure to the process.

In the meantime, Senegal's president, Abdoulaye Wade, had presented his own draft plan for Africa's development - the Omega Plan - to the Francophone Summit held in Cameroon in January 2001. Subsequent to this, Senegal was invited to join the MAP steering committee, as was Egypt, another of Africa's major economies. The governments of both countries did in fact participate in all subsequent meetings of the MAP process, though Senegal continued to elaborate its OMEGA plan as well. Ongoing discussions about the merger of the two processes continued until July, when a single document, temporarily entitled A New

Africa Initiative, was presented to the OAU Summit in Lusaka. The name of the plan was subsequently changed to Nepad in October 2001, when the 15 member Heads of State Implementing Committee met for the first time.

Who produced Nepad?

The document itself was drafted by a team with representatives of all five countries on the Steering Committee. It was a government process, in that the members of the Steering Committee were all government officials, but much of the actual work was done by a 'technical committee', which included several individuals from three of the countries who were academics and researchers, not government officials. In drafting the July 2001 document, as well as the several dozen background papers and supportive documents produced by that point and since, the Steering and Technical Committees consulted very widely both inside and outside Africa. However, the focus of these consultations was staff of other governments and of 'official' multilateral organisations. The latter include the UN Economic Commission for Africa, the African Development Bank, the OAU, the UNDP, UNCTAD, FAO, WHO, the WHO's African Regional office, the African Connection, as well as the World Bank, IMF, OECD and so on. All of these organisations, and others, continue to be involved.

The consultation process did not extend to civil society organisations within African countries, even the five countries of the Steering Committee. This can be partly explained by the pressures of time, and the difficulties of identifying and involving

representative organisations. However, this explanation is not entirely adequate – there could and should have been more public discussion. But there are two important points to stress at this stage.

Firstly, the Nepad *process* remains quite embryonic – the 60-page base document itself is very broad, laying out a general approach to Africa's development. There remains a vast amount of 'detail' still to be elaborated – programmes, projects and institutional processes – and there is a growing amount of 'space' for input into, and influence in, the process, from all quarters – trade unions, community-based and human rights organisations, business and farmer associations, women and students.

Secondly, as I argue elsewhere, it is essential for the success of Nepad in its own terms that civil society organisations be involved in the process of implementation. Their involvement is important in the area of monitoring and assessment, which is at the core of Nepad. Participating governments should be required to demonstrate that they have consulted widely within their own countries while in addition, to direct contact

The structure of the Nepad strategy

A. Preconditions for development

1. Peace, security, democracy and political governance
2. Economic and corporate governance, with a focus on public finance management
3. Regional cooperation and integration

B. Priority sectors

1. Infrastructure
2. Information and communications technology
3. Human development, with a focus on health and education and skills development
4. Agriculture
5. Promoting diversification of production and exports, with a focus on market access for African exports to industrialised countries

C. Mobilising resources

1. Increasing savings and capital inflows via further debt relief, increased ODA flows and private capital, as well as better management of public revenue and expenditure.

Source: A New African Initiative (July 2001, para 48)

between Nepad agencies and relevant organisations in participating countries.

What is Nepad about?

Nepad is an attempt to embody, in a coherent framework, the need for collective action by African states.

Underlying their argument is the view that without collective action, weak states will be unable to address the development challenges. Nepad is based on a three-pronged strategy (see box on p 89).

The improvement of governance included under 'Preconditions for Development' will lead to the strengthening of the weak states in Africa, while regional cooperation and integration will create the opportunity for increased trade and investment as well as improve international competitiveness through the pooling of African resources.

The 'Priority sectors' will prevent the further marginalisation of Africa and lay the basis for sustainable development in the long term, while action in these first two areas will not be possible without 'Mobilising resources' from the rest of the world. In the first instance, there is a need for further debt relief and increased aid flows, but in the longer term, private investment should increase as perceptions of risk are lowered.

South Africa insisted, during the process, that the primary focus of Nepad should be on addressing the governance issues despite attempts to reduce the prominence of the latter in the overall plan. Progress in meeting the 'priority sectors', in particular health; education and infrastructure will depend on improvements in governance and on regional collaboration. The selection of priority sectors was clearly a contested terrain as these reflect the differing priorities of the countries.

Governance improvements will lead to an increase in resource flows. This is at the

heart of the plan - to obtain resources from the industrialised world - Africa will have to improve its performance on governance. These issues should be at the centre of any progressive agenda for the continent - reducing corruption, increasing transparency and accountability in the collection and use of public resources in the arena of economic governance; and resolving violent conflict and enhancing democracy and human rights in the political governance arena.

Greater access to industrialised countries' markets for African exports will also provide additional resources for investment in domestic programmes. As success is achieved in improving governance and in the priority sectors (most particularly, infrastructure, including IT, and human development, especially health), risk premia and the costs of doing business in Africa should fall, so that domestic private savings and capital inflows are expected to rise over the longer term.

The implicit idea behind Nepad is the formation of a 'club' of African heads of state who can collectively undertake to improve governance amongst themselves by engaging in both joint and individual actions. Even though the North contributed 'political momentum' towards its elaboration, Nepad rests on the leadership of African heads of state. Within this context, South Africa's leadership is essential. Despite capacity constraints, South Africa appears to be the one country in the Nepad leadership whose primary concern has been the Nepad process itself and ensuring it succeeds.

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