

## Nepad, land and resource rights

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The New Partnership for Africa's Development (Nepad) is an overarching programme for revitalising Africa's fortunes. It has a visionary tone, yet the way that it proposes to overcome Africa's underdevelopment uncritically adopts neo-liberal policy prescriptions that have repeatedly been shown not to work in Africa. Because it has been designed around promoting international foreign investment and attracting Western donors, Nepad may not address the real needs of the African rural poor or deal with the core problems hindering Africa's development. By supporting the interests of multinational corporations, Nepad risks opening the continent up to further exploitation and degradation. Other problems that have been identified include the lack of civil society participation in its formulation. In spite of all of the problems associated with the programme, it is incumbent upon civil society to engage with Nepad and influence its development and ensure that land and resource rights for the poor are enhanced.

### Introduction

Africa has an abundant wealth of natural resources that include minerals, biological diversity, forests, fisheries, water, land and wildlife. The continent has the largest tropical rain forests and the second-largest freshwater lake in the world. Africa's forests constitute more than 17% of the world's forests. However, the continent's forests face increased deforestation and degradation, having lost 66 million ha between 1980 and 1995. Sixty-five percent of this deforestation took place during the 1990s (UNEP 2002).

Characterised as it was by growing poverty, the colonial legacy, HIV/Aids, food insecurity, decaying infrastructure, unfavourable trade regimes, poor governance and negative economic growth returns, Africa was in need of a new vision and a progressive policy to go with it. It was in light of these challenges that the African Renaissance project was conceived and within which framework Africa's crisis was re-conceptualised and a development strategy developed. Supportive institutional arrangements, policy and programmes were required to realise the new vision and path towards a successful transformation for the new millennium. The Organisation of African Unity (OAU) was restructured to become the African Union (AU) and an integrated delivery strategy – the New Partnership for Africa's Development – was developed from three different plans.

Premised on the tenets of good governance, democracy and Africa's ownership of the development process, Nepad represents a bold and ambitious step to design an alternative development model by the African leadership. This is significant, given the 18 previous recovery plans that were all dismal failures. In the long run, Nepad seeks to eradicate poverty in Africa, promote women's role in all activities, and place the continent on a sustainable development path. The short-term objectives of the initiative are to strengthen mechanisms for preventing, resolving and managing conflict; to promote good governance; to restore macroeconomic stability; to revitalise education and health; and to promote the development of infrastructure.

Nepad has since become an official and operative document with several programmes aimed at fulfilling the

identified sectoral priorities and conditions for promoting sustainable development. It has received the political support of most African leaders and was officially adopted by the AU. However, debates on the initiative's theoretical underpinnings and prospects are still raging, notably in the academic and civil society circles. Criticisms of Nepad have been on intellectual, process and procedural issues. Sub-Saharan African non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society organisations (CSOs) have taken issue with governments for inadequate consultation with them.

Whilst most governments have endorsed the principle of Nepad, civil society remains critical of the initiative and the criticism varies across the different sub-regions, depending on awareness of the initiative and other factors. The majority of African people have never heard of the provisions of Nepad, and even among those who have heard of the programme, there is little understanding of its implications. Nepad needs to be marketed to achieve a level of popular awareness and understanding which can only be effectively done with the support of civil society. However, many criticisms have emerged from civil society.

Given that more than 70% of Africa's population resides in rural areas and depends on land and natural resources for their livelihoods, to what extent does Nepad address the issue of land and resource rights for the struggling poor?

### Nepad, land and resource rights

Land and natural resources are too central to the African development process to be treated lightly, left to a selected few, or ignored in the Nepad initiative. Africa's huge resource endowments accounted, in part, for its colonisation by the imperial powers, and the struggle to retain access to these resources by domestic and external forces continue after independence (Omoweh 2004).

Nepad acknowledges the central role of Africa's enormous land and natural resources, especially with regard to poverty alleviation. Agriculture is identified in the policy as a critical area of intervention. Programmes are required to improve rural infrastructure, support agricultural research and empower grassroots communities, as well as to increase

material support for community-based natural resource management and agriculture.

The Nepad agriculture, trade and market access initiative seeks to improve agricultural productivity; ensure food security for all people; increase poor people's access to adequate food and nutrition; promote measures against natural resource degradation; and integrate the rural poor into the market economy by providing them with better access to export markets (Tawfic 2004). Box 1 lists the Nepad actions to achieve these goals.

**Box 1: Nepad actions to achieve agriculture, trade and market access objectives**

- ▶ Increase the security of water supply for agriculture by establishing small-scale irrigation facilities, improving local water management, and increasing the exchange of information and technical know-how with the international community.
- ▶ Improve land tenure security under traditional and modern forms of tenure, and promote the necessary land reform.
- ▶ Foster regional, sub-regional, national and household food security through the development and management of increased production, transport, storage and marketing of food crops, livestock and fisheries. Particular attention must also be given to the needs of the poor, as well as the establishment of early warning systems to monitor the effects of drought on crop production.
- ▶ Enhance agricultural credit and financing schemes, and improve access to credit by small-scale and women farmers.
- ▶ Reduce the heavy urban bias of public spending in Africa by transferring resources from urban to rural activities.

*Source: Tawfic 2004*

While Nepad recognises the critical importance of agriculture and makes provision for addressing the structural constraints facing the development of land and agriculture, its Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) reduces these into only four priorities (Box 2). CAADP is a brainchild of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), one of the Nepad partners. According to CAADP, the first three priority areas will make an immediate impact on the African agricultural crisis which will subsequently improve economic fundamentals, while agricultural research and technology is a long-term priority.

Although CAADP is still a proposal yet to be refined to suit the African context, it is cause for concern that its priority areas have departed from those of the Nepad agricultural programme of action. Nepad has been accused of collaborating with neo-liberal interests at the expense of the rural and poor African masses. The mould of CAADP's irrigation schemes, which will be driven by the state, FAO and foreign agri-capital forces to engage in mechanised farming (for export and not food crops) is likely to entrench dispossession of rural farmers' land. The Sudanese Geriza irrigation project, funded by the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and African Development Bank, which turned

**Box 2: Nepad-CAADP priorities**

- ▶ Extending the area under sustainable land management and reliable water control systems.
- ▶ Improving rural infrastructure and trade related capacities for market access.
- ▶ Increasing food supply and reducing hunger.
- ▶ Agricultural research, technology dissemination and adoption.

*Source: Tawfic 2004*

rural farmers into waged plantation labourers, provides a vivid example of an undertaking associated with FAO's neo-liberal approach to agricultural development (Omoweh 2004).

The Nepad environment action plan for the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a coherent and strategic long-term programme which sets out measures that Africa will take to confront its economic growth challenges with full consideration of the impact on the environment, poverty and the social sphere. The environment plan will ensure the integration of environmental imperatives into all Nepad actions and programmes.

The environment plan has been criticised for not acknowledging the causes of environmental degradation that it seeks to address; instead it focuses mainly on conservation, desertification and global warming. This has been viewed as a deliberate move to avoid criticising the West for its contribution to the degradation of Africa's environment during colonialism. The plan ignores the environmental degradation that accompanied the systematic extraction of raw materials, mining and land appropriation under colonialism. An unequivocal Nepad position on genetically modified organisms (GMOs), large dams, nuclear energy and active promotion of renewable sources of energy is necessary as these issues have huge implications for Africa.

Despite the shortcomings highlighted here, Nepad provides a framework for mobilising Africa's land and natural resources for the good of African people. However, the challenge lies in ensuring broader participation of state and non-state actors in developing modalities and specific action programmes to utilise the continent's natural wealth and secure resource rights (access, use and ownership) for the rural and urban poor. This should include developing the productive capacity of the poor as well as fundamentally changing the structural constraints which adversely impact on poor people.

### **Civil society, advocacy and Nepad**

One of the early and enduring criticisms of Nepad is its 'top-down' process that left key constituencies out, namely civil society organisations. Given historically weak state-civil society relations, the state of the continent, the weakness of institutions and other structural constraints across Africa, it was probably to be expected that CSOs would be left out of Nepad. But CSOs have an important role to play, even though they were excluded from the process of formulating the programme.

History shows that state-centred development has not worked for Africa, hence the participation of civil society in Nepad is crucial to ensure democratic implementation processes. The antagonism between governments and civil society structures should be overcome by creating mechanisms

that facilitate engagement between the two. Perceptions of civil society as a threat to government legitimacy and the resultant tendency of CSOs to engage in peripheral governance and policy processes is not good for development or democratic governance. Civil society is increasingly a legitimate actor whose capacity, resources and experience should be harnessed to improve policy outcomes.

Previous efforts by African civil society groups and sub-regional land networks to help redress the diminishing access and rights of the poor to land and other natural resources have not been very successful. This was due to a number of constraints, key among these being the resistance of government to undertake radical land reforms, irreconcilable interests between domestic and foreign forces over land and natural resources, and poor funding of CSOs. The challenge for CSOs remains advocating for the promotion and defence of the rural and urban poor. One way of achieving this would be through a mass driven pro-poor land advocacy initiative.

Nepad's neo-liberal premise – opening up African economies to external investors and securing the property rights of foreign capital – is regressive. CSOs should challenge the assumptions of this thinking and seek to understand what practical steps, enabling policy framework and institutions are necessary for actualising the land and resource rights of the rural and urban poor. The productive capacities of poor people should be enhanced to regenerate local economies as a basis for meaningful and sustainable African development. To this end, a mass-driven land initiative premised on full engagement of all relevant structures of civil society, the state and grassroots movements is necessary (Omoweh 2004).

In engaging Nepad, CSOs should extend their activities to reach AU institutions such as the Pan African Parliament, the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) and the Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOC) where the key political and policy decisions that impact on Nepad and other processes are deliberated. Engaging policy at this level calls for effective networking across sectors and sub-regions.

Nepad will only be successful if it is participative and its reach extends to the grassroots. This requires a coalition of government and CSOs to consistently and constructively interact with each other and people at the grassroots. Co-operation between government and CSOs could legitimate politics and ensure that the process is credible and mutually beneficial. Institutional mechanisms that facilitate such co-operation should be developed to enhance access to information and meaningful advocacy and lobbying.

### **Is Nepad a solution to Africa's problems?**

Without resolving the land question and associated colonial legacies in Africa, there is very little chance that Nepad will succeed, in spite of its well-conceived programmes of action and all-round political support. The role of the state in land ownership and distribution remains undefined in Nepad, and how existing resource-based conflicts will be resolved is not clear.

Nepad has been criticised for not mobilising Africa's abundant natural resource wealth for the continent's development, but opening it to foreign exploitation and plunder instead. The initiative is silent on mobilisation, redistribution and utilisation of Africa's land for development, particularly for women (Moyo 2002).

Given that it has been designed around promoting international foreign investment and attracting Western donors, there are fears that Nepad may not address the real needs of the African rural poor or deal with the core problems hindering Africa's development. The theoretical underpinning of Nepad is perceived as being inspired by the neo-liberal policy prescriptions that have repeatedly been shown not to work in Africa.

The emphasis on integration into the globalisation process, free markets and free movement of capital were rejected by Nigeria and other countries at the World Trade Organization (WTO) meeting at Doha, Qatar. Yet Nepad (with the support of South Africa, Africa's largest economy) accepts the Multilateral Agreement on Investment and the entire International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank programme. For this reason, Nepad is regarded as a compromise document whose success largely depends on its ability to secure the support of imperial interests; thereby undermining its ability to secure local ownership and support (Tawfic 2004; Lehulere 2003).

The Nepad agricultural initiative has been criticised for being weak on the issue of genetically modified organisms, a contentious issue in the WTO trade discussions and for the rest of the world. Given Nepad's premise that success depends on international foreign investment and attracting Western material support, it is feared that the agriculture initiative will support the introduction of GMOs in Africa. The emphasis on transfer of technology would resonate well with the introduction of GMOs and other foreign technologies onto the continent. The impacts of GMOs remain unknown, and promoting them may not be in the interests of Africa in the long term.

Despite the evidence of the negative impacts of large dams on people and the physical environment, Nepad supports hydroelectric power which can only be generated through building large dams. Nuclear energy has failed and was rejected in many parts of the world, yet Nepad avoids taking any position on the matter. The reasons seem obvious – some of the leading African economies are actively promoting the development of nuclear energy with the support of the West. Nepad should rather be actively promoting investment in renewable energy, but given the dirty-energy economies of those expected to support Nepad, this issue is peripheral.

However, in spite of the controversial issues surrounding Nepad, the initiative cannot be dismissed outright as a non-event. Nepad provides a forum for collective engagement between African leadership and the continent's development partners in the search for viable solutions for development. With international foreign investment trends now clearly and increasingly showing a preference for direct funding to collective bodies, rather than individual states, there is currently not much choice in proposing a different model for Africa's economic development.

Nevertheless, Nepad provides the potential for continuous interaction among African governments at three levels: at the international level with Western countries, international institutions and specialised organisations; at the regional level; and at the national level where the private sector, CSOs and the state interact. Nepad looks set to be a fact of life like colonialism and globalisation, so it may therefore be imperative to engage it and determine how the initiative's challenges can be tackled.

## Conclusion

Nepad should be viewed as a visioning document because it is concerned with the stance of African governments and civil society in relation to the world, and it seeks to transform relationships. Nepad is largely an economic programme whose visionary nature is at odds with the political pragmatism driving its implementation in the current global political and economic context.

Despite Nepad's framing and packaging as a programme for the African continent, it favours the interests of multinational corporations. The corporations are taking over every industry and rapidly penetrating various African markets, especially in the sectors of energy, banking and financial services, mining and infrastructure and retail. Nepad is their title deed. These unaccountable and powerful entities are using Nepad to position themselves as official intermediaries or 'brokers of choice' between the West and the rest of Africa.

However, the continuing development of the Nepad policy framework is creating opportunities for previously marginalised entities to participate and play a more effective role in promoting the initiative at lower levels. This is especially important with respect to land redistribution and related issues in an environment of dwindling state support.

Even though CSOs are cynically viewed as disaggregated, disorganised and sometimes dysfunctional, they nevertheless remain a crucial constituency for policy. Their lack of participation in the development of Nepad is cause for discontent among social formations, and this has a negative impact on the programme's ability to meet its minimal tenets of good governance and inclusive participation. It seems an alternative to Nepad can only come from below, and CSOs are strategically placed to push this agenda forward.

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