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Nepad Becomes the Framework for UN Relations with Africa

SARPAN recently hosted a panel discussion on the decision by the UN General Assembly to make Nepad the framework for its relations with Africa. Dr John Ohiorhenuan, UNDP Resident Representative in South Africa, spoke on the reasons behind the decision and the modalities for providing support to the Nepad programme. Neville Gabriel, a senior official within the Justice and Peace department of the Southern African Catholic Bishop's Conference, spoke on civil society perspectives towards Nepad, after which the discussion was opened to the floor. The discussion, held on 29 November 2002, was attended by 50 persons, representing civil society, donors, diplomatic and government sectors.

The UN View

John Ohiorhenuan began by noting that Nepad, which was adopted by the OAU Heads of State at a summit held in Lusaka in July 2001, was essentially a strategic framework consisting of five main elements:

- an insistence on African ownership, responsibility and leadership and building capacity for this role;
- a focus on developing a new partnership with the industrialised countries and multilateral organisations on the basis of mutual commitments and obligations;
- a commitment to nurturing an enabling socio-political environment by minimising conflict and promoting democracy and human rights;
- a commitment to an enabling economic environment by ensuring macroeconomic stability and maintaining transparency and accountability in institutional support mechanisms for the market; and
- promoting sub regional and continental economic integration.

In adopting Nepad, African leaders pledged themselves to place the continent on a path of sustainable development, anchored in the determination of Africans to extricate themselves from under-development and global marginalisation. None of these elements are particularly controversial: "they build on the lessons of several decades of experience with development programmes in Africa". While it was easy to criticise Nepad, a common criticism being that it is too oriented towards the concerns of the developed countries, it was important to see it as an unfolding agenda, not a final product, and to direct criticism towards shaping its evolution.

The UN Decision

The decision in June 2002 by the UN General Assembly to adopt Nepad as the framework for supporting development in Africa came in the context of an evaluation of the United Nations New Agenda for Development in Africa (UN-NADAF), which guided the UN's programme for Africa through the 1990s. The evaluation identified five main lessons from its implementation.

- Peace and security are vital to development. Although the New Agenda, from the outset, recognised the vital link between peace and development, conflict continued to threaten progress in many parts of the continent throughout the 1990s.
- African ownership of its development programmes is essential and development cooperation with Africa required a new orientation to overcome the limitations of the overriding reliance on liberalisation, privatisation and market.
- Commitments need to be honoured. The lack of success in implementing the New Agenda was to an extent due to the fact that it was only partly implemented by African Governments and hardly at all by the donor community.

- Strengthened advocacy for Africa's development remained essential. An acknowledged contribution of the United Nations in the last decade has been in heightening awareness of Africa's needs, and creating greater appreciation of its achievements and the difficulties it faces.
- Improved coordination and collaboration among United Nations agencies in Africa could help in achieving results that exceeded the sum total of individual contributions.

The overlap between these lessons and the commitments expressed in Nepad, as well as Nepad's commitment to several of the Millennium Development Goals, were taken into account in the General Assembly's decision to adopt Nepad as the successor to NADAF.

Future UN support

The evaluation proposed that the UN's future role in supporting Nepad should take the form of 'enhanced advocacy, undertaking technical cooperation for capacity building, mobilising resources, monitoring and reporting on activities in support of Nepad, and strengthened coordination in the delivery of programmes.' In line with Nepad's emphasis on using existing structures, the UN support programme will work through mechanisms and frameworks that are already in place. At country level it would use existing programming tools, such as the PRSPs, as the main mechanisms for engagement, but with special attention to reducing the burden of coordination on governments and agencies. Where national priorities were not aligned with Nepad priorities this would lead to tensions and would limit the effectiveness of UN support. At the regional level, UN agencies would form five clusters which would allow the UN system to respond better to the Nepad Initial Action Plan. The clusters and their focus areas are:

Infrastructure development, water and sanitation, energy, transport and ICTs would be led by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA). The focus will be on:

- operationalising the African Energy Commission (AFREC) and attracting investment;
- operationalising the integrated water resource management principle from the Africa Water Vision 2025;
- assisting with implementing the Sub-Saharan Africa Transport Policy Programme and the liberalisation of air transport markets in Africa, and
- working with existing frameworks on ICTs such as the African Information Society Initiative (AISI).

Governance, peace and security would be led by the UNDP. The focus will be on:

- developing a framework to promote and implement a rights based approach giving attention to best practice, strengthening oversight and capacity for advocacy, implementation and monitoring, and reviewing legislation and capacity;
- develop integrated programmes for conflict prevention, management and post conflict recovery and reconstruction with particular focus on refugees and internally displaced persons, and
- promoting good governance including supporting the development of indicators for the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) and developing capacity for peer review and self assessment;

The UNDP's Nepad Programme Preparatory Assistance Project is an example of the kind of programme envisaged. It provides for a technical support facility for the Nepad secretariat, a Nepad Advisory Panel, a joint AU/Nepad Communication and Popularisation Strategy, a Strengthening Democracy and Good Political Governance component to support the APRM, a component to support and evaluate external partnerships and one for country level promotion of Nepad-MDG goals.

Agriculture, trade and market access would be led by the FAO. The focus will be on:

- helping to implement the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP), a major component of the Nepad framework, to ensure agricultural stability and economic development. The CAADP calls for an investment of US\$240 billion in African agriculture by 2015 (less than the current annual cost of food imports), focusing on three pillars:
 - 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;
- ensuring better market access for African exports; and
- diversifying commodity dependent economies.

Ohiorhenuan noted that the FAO's assistance to Nepal in the CAADP's formulation was an example of the kind of support that the UN system could offer to Nepal in various other areas.

Environment, population and urbanisation would be led by Habitat. The focus will be on the challenges posed by population growth and movement, rapid and uncontrolled growth of human settlements, environmental depletion, degradation and pollution and the lack of demographic statistics. The group had identified the following joint programmes and activities for 2003-2004:

- natural disaster and risk management including mapping sensitivity and risk, integrated planning, and establishing early warning mechanisms;
- sustainable Nepal cities, including mapping poverty and empowering communities and local government;
- safer cities including victimisation surveys and offender profiling;
- waste Management including the impact of waste on environments and human settlements;
- rural-urban linkages and managing peri-urban growth including assessing pressure on peri-urban lands and the environment;
- global warming and the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol on climate change including the development and implementation of clean development mechanisms;
- marine environment protection, monitoring, control and mitigation of marine pollution;
- data for monitoring and evaluation progress towards achieving Nepal goals;
- policy dialogue, advocacy and awareness; and
- capacity building at regional and sub regional levels for joint implementation of programmes to address environmental pollution and urbanisation issues, and response to emergencies.

Human resource development, employment and HIV/AIDS would be led by UNICEF. The focus will be a 'fast track' approach to produce measurable results in a small number of priority areas in the short to medium term to demonstrate and accelerate commitments. These areas are:

- **Education:** free compulsory primary education for all; accelerate girls' education; ensure special risks children's attendance; expand teacher training; technical education for employment; improving the quality of higher education.
- **Employment:** mainstreaming employment and labour issues into Nepal and national PRSPs through an inventory of best practices. This includes translating the MDGs into specific employment related targets, the formulation of a social policy framework and focusing on child labour issues and their implications for education.
- **HIV/AIDS:** promote national dialogue; information sharing and consultation on the HIV/AIDS campaign; support the mainstreaming of HIV/AIDS into Nepal sectoral programmes; support the establishment of a regional observatory for monitoring, for example, drug pricing; advocacy for generic drug production and disease tracking; supporting countries in meeting commitments made at Abuja and UNGASS.

To encourage cooperation between the above-mentioned five clusters, the Executive Secretary of the ECA would periodically call joint meetings of the cluster convenors with the Nepal secretariat (see also Figure 1 on page six). In addition, a consolidated report, based on the work of the clusters, would be included in the UN Secretary General's annual report on Africa. This reporting process, led by the Secretary General on Nepal, was seen as a way to spur countries towards action that would produce tangible developmental results. The Nepal secretariat had also indicated that it would use the consolidated report in its own policy, programme formulation and advocacy work.

At the global level, the UN would also foster a coordinated and coherent response at an intergovernmental level to the interrelated issues of peace, security and development in Africa; it would put the implementation of Nepal on the agenda of every General Assembly session and would also pursue global advocacy for Nepal through the office of the Special Coordinator for Africa and the Least Developed Countries (OSCAL).

Dr Ohiorhenuan concluded by noting that underlying the UN's commitment was a belief that Nepal was a programme by Africans, for Africa and that Nepal would evolve over the next few years as "we learn by doing".

A Civil Society View

Neville Gabriel began by noting that Nepad could only be seen to achieve its goals if African communities believed that it was delivering effectively at the community level. From this perspective the major concern has been the lack of opportunity for the participation of African communities and civil society in the rapidly developing debate around Nepad's developmental framework.

Achievements

Nepad had initiated positive developments in three important areas:

- the countries driving Nepad have been centrally involved in peace processes in Africa, even if they have not formally represented Nepad;
- Nepad has played a major role in putting Africa back on the global development agenda, securing a place for it on the G8 agenda for the first time, and ensuring that it will remain on the agenda next year;
- there are indications of movement towards stronger government accountability, at least in the Nepad core group.

However, there has been a tendency amongst civil society organisations to focus on NEPAD documents without looking at the political processes that happen around them. For example in the debate on peer review there is no clarity on which institutions will be responsible for drafting the initial political peer review of 13 countries or on the composition of the eminent persons panel which will review the findings. This underlines the fact that political processes around Nepad remain strongly contested.

Concerns

Civil society organisations are also concerned about gaps in the Nepad documents and about towards some of the policy approaches adopted. On the subject of capital flows the Millennium Africa Plan (MAP), one of Nepad's precursors, had a strong proposal on debt cancellation, a subject on which Nepad itself has said little concrete yet. MAP argued that debt sustainability could not be based on foreign trade earnings given the decline in commodity prices. It should rather be capped as a percentage of government revenues (5-10 percent) after calculating the cost of poverty reduction programmes. On this basis most African countries would qualify for total debt cancellation.

Nepad argues for greater integration into the global economic order as part of the solution to Africa's development problems. However, foreign trade already accounts for more than 40 percent of total economic activity on the continent and on this basis it is already over-exposed to global economic forces. Rather than proposing greater integration, Nepad should be looking at ways to stop or limit the outflows of capital from Africa, which are the worst in the world. The experience in Africa with long term, indirect strategies for poverty reduction such as Nepad is that they have led to increased joblessness and poverty. To counter this Nepad needs, at least in part, to look at ways of addressing poverty directly.

There are also concerns about geopolitical realignments in Africa related to Nepad. While Nepad has been adopted as a continent wide strategy by the AU, in its relations with donors Nepad will create "winners and losers", with the main benefits likely to go to the economically stronger countries. This is likely to increase polarisation on the continent around support for Nepad which is already feeding divisions in the SADC region between Zimbabwe, Angola and Namibia (which share a military pact) and South Africa, Botswana and Mozambique, which have growing trade links. These shifting geopolitical alignments on the continent provide a new African geopolitical context for assessing Nepad.

Nepad has no process for direct engagement with civil society. While there is a general recognition of the impossibility of engaging with all civil society organisations, the design of the programme does not include processes or mechanisms for consultation. If one views Nepad as a poverty reduction strategy programme on a continental scale it lacks the participatory element that is regarded as essential to the success of these programmes and an important reason for the failure of earlier poverty reduction initiatives.

On the issue of development aid there are concerns that the meeting with the G8 at Kananaskis skirted the issue of time frames and firm commitments by donor countries. In addition, a predictable shift in official development assistance (ODA) from development support directly targeting communities, to a focus on

support for private sector investment, notably through export credit guarantees, could impact negatively on debt.

The debate on market access within Nepad focuses on tariffs and quotas. While this is important for established exporters and foreign investors, the issue of subsidies is more important from a trade justice perspective. For example every European cow gets around US\$2.3 a day in subsidies while half of Africa's people live on less. Support for small-scale farmers in Africa means reducing or eliminating the subsidies in developed countries that impact on the price of commodities. This would prevent a situation where, for example, sugar produced in the EU sells at less than its production price, making it uneconomic for small-scale farmers in Africa to harvest their sugar crops for market.

Neville Gabriel noted in his concluding comments that there was an "overall sense" that Nepad had gone for what was politically winnable in current terms. While civil society supports the advocacy role that Nepad has played in putting Africa back on the global development agenda, it would like to see a far more direct approach by Nepad to poverty reduction in Africa. If Nepad, in its current form, articulated only what it felt was politically practical in the current context, then civil society organisations would continue to work to broaden the public space for debates around Nepad and Africa's development.

Discussion

In general the discussion ranged between those who felt that Nepad was not making enough of the opportunities that it represented and those who felt that it represented a positive start that provided a foundation on which to build. Other issues included how civil society could be more effective and questions around how the UN would play a role in supporting Nepad, as a programme driven and based outside the UN system.

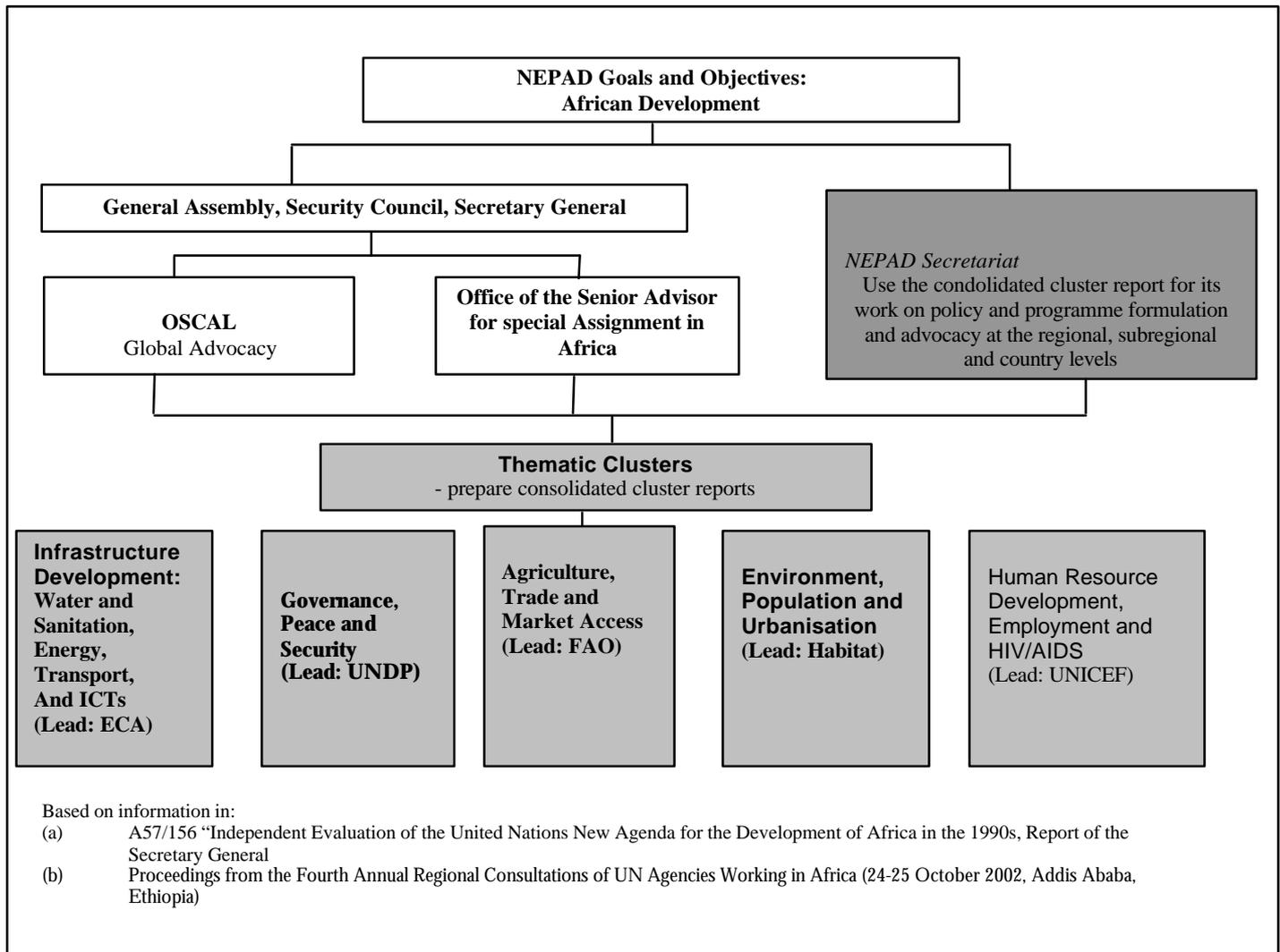
Discussion also noted that getting the Nepad document accepted by the OAU was an achievement in itself. Overcoming barriers between African countries was, in itself, a daunting agenda on a continent where many nations still guarded their borders jealously. Relations between African countries are probably more complex than relations with the developed world.

Here are the main points from the discussion:

- The focus on infrastructure is important as without roads, communications and things like phytosanitary standards, African countries will not be able to benefit from trade opportunities.
- On the issues of trade and subsidies Africa cannot dictate what other countries and blocs should do. It should look at trade between African countries and not only at trade with developed countries.
- Nepad is conservative on the debt issue but it has put it on the agenda. This makes it possible for other groups to push the issue further. It has helped to open the space for what is politically possible.
- Much of the evolution of globalisation is taking place around the WTO. Africa is at a disadvantage because it lacks capacity to engage on this key issue. Nepad provided the opportunity for African countries to pool resources to get the necessary technical capacity.
- Nepad provides the opportunity to maximise the presence of African needs on the world stage. In the longer term this may be the role of the AU, but at present it is not in a position to take this up.
- It creates a vehicle for communication with other countries in the world and between countries in Africa.
- Regional integration is important - it is seen in Nepad as one of the three essentials for development on the ground.
- Good governance is emphasised to enable African countries to access the finance to undertake development projects.
- The one step, two step approach of getting good governance in place and then getting development going is not likely to work.
- Nepad risks creating winners and losers amongst African countries in the development stakes through processes like peer review. This will increase divisions on the continent. Part of the reason for South Africa's approach to Zimbabwe is a concern to keep it in the Nepad camp.
- Bringing the private sector on board Nepad was "essential for success" while a similar process to engage with communities and local people was also needed.
- The research community needed to make a greater contribution to Nepad.

- The lack of consultation with civil society raised questions about the lack of effectiveness of civil society in South African specifically but also elsewhere in Africa. What does civil society need to do to increase its influence and engage more effectively at national level on issues like health and education?

FIGURE 1
NEPAD and the UN System: Lead Agencies, by thematic cluster



Note: For more information on Nepad, including the review of UN-NADAF, visit the Nepad section on the SARNP www at: www.sarpn.org.za

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