

NePADS' ROLE IN BUILDING CIVIL SOCIETY IN AFRICA

A perspective from the field

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Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) have recently emerged as one among key stakeholders in the development processes and peace-building in Africa. With the vision of NePAD for Africans to cooperate and integrate among themselves to accelerate the transformation of the continent, civil society can play a critical role in this process. Indeed, social capital approaches to development can attest to the value of the local social fabric, the importance of forms of solidarity and co-operation in promoting long term conditions for development, peace and security (Molyneux, 2002: 168). If networks, associations, and local knowledge are increasingly being recognized in development policy thinking and practice as valuable resources in development and peace-building everywhere, then surely the role of civil society in NePAD can only be viewed as positive. However, while it should be expected that Civil Society should play a greater role in promoting peace and security in today's Africa, the NePAD document remains unclear on how this will be done. A case in point is the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) that effectively excludes civil society involvement. An earlier speaker has explained the APRM in detail¹. Suffice to say its efficacy is questionable and opportunities for CSO involvement very limited.

Before embarking upon our discussion, let us specify that we consider that "Civil Society" refers to those groups, networks, and relationships that are not organized or managed by the state (Narayan et al, 2000: 129). Civil Society, for the purposes of this discussion, covers a wide range of formal and informal networks and organizations including Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Community - Based Organizations (CBOs), and networks of neighbours and kin. We are also aware that the concept of peace, itself, is at issue but we do not here concern ourselves with this question.

The presentation has four main sections as follows: The first section recalls in broad terms the debate within civil society on NePAD. The second section calls focus to what role NePAD can play and how it can build civil society towards peace and security in Africa. The third Section filters out some recommendations for possible follow-up. Section four concludes the presentation.

I. CIVIL SOCIETY DEBATE ON NEPAD

As NePAD was placed piecemeal on the public stage internationally, during 2000 and 2001, and then eventually made fully public within Africa in the last months of 2001, it received mixed but generally critical responses from African NGOs and broader social movements, church based and academic researchers, and even media analysts across the continent. On the other hand, some African civil society organisations and analysts welcome NEPAD and support it both in its aims and its content. But of those that are more critical:

¹ The conference programme indicates an earlier session on "Mechanism of NePAD and the Challenge of Peace and Security". We assume here that this session would explain in detail the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM).

- many focus on the process of NePAD's formulation, and the absence of appropriate and wide – ranging prior public consultation on its very conceptualisation, and in the various phases of its subsequent elaboration and global promotion;
- Others focus more on the overriding external orientation, and the basic motivation of the document as a 'fund-raising project designed to reassure and encourage foreign investment and increased Overseas Development Aid to Africa;
- Yet others analyse in some detail the overall paradigmatic framework within which NePAD Is situated, or the theoretical concepts that are employed within its proposals, and the substance and implications of its specific projects;
- And some analyses combine various or all of these dimensions.

However, cutting across these different approaches or emphases, there is a lively debate within African civil society as to how or whether civil society should now 'engage' with the inter-governmental NePAD.

For some Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), 'engagement' means a continuation of their rigorous analysis of NePAD as one part of the long standing independent research and analyses on African political economy that had been underway well before – and not only in response to- NePAD; towards the articulation of viable sectoral programmes and comprehensive alternatives for individual countries, regions and the continent. Thus, the Accra Declaration of April 2002 by African academics, Council for Development and Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) states:

“in support of our broader commitment to contribute to addressing Africa's development challenges... we shall deploy our research, training and advocacy skills and capacities to contribute to the generation and dissemination of knowledge on the issues at stake; engage with and participate in the mobilisation of social groups around their interests and appropriate strategies of development; and engage with governments and policy institutions at local, national and continental levels[and] we shall continue our collaboration with our colleagues in the global movement”²

For other CSOs, being 'engaged' means participating in the public consultation process, and even some official avenues that have belatedly been opened up by the NePAD secretariat in response to the many process criticisms; and working therein to contribute to more detailed content for the existing proposals. For some of these, in recognition of current gaps and inadequacies, the declared aim of such 'engagement' is to improve the document as a whole. Thus, the 'Continental Experts Meeting', organised in Pretoria in June 2002 by the Africa Institute of South Africa recommended that:

“An all Africa Academy of Arts and Sciences or an Academy of Scholars be established to institutionalise the intra-African academic partnership as a civil society component of NePAD [in order to] to optimise the opportunities for African intellectuals to add value and participate in the NePAD process by means of dedicated research and scientifically-based recommendation [and for which] NePAD

² “Conference on Africa and the Development Challenges of the New Millennium”, Accra Ghana 23 - 26/04/2002 under the auspices of CODESRIA and the Third World Network – Africa.

funding should be made available... to support the identification and guidance of such Centres of Excellence”

Underlying and informing such very different civil society responses to NePAD are contrasting positions not only on their response to this document *per se*, but also on the role and relationship of African researchers and analysts and /or to African social movements. Perhaps this is not surprising because the NePAD document would seem not to have a clear framework for discourse with and/ or involvement of CSOs. This leads me to the next section of our presentation.

II. BUILDING CIVIL SOCIETY AND PEACE IN AFRICA: WHAT ROLE FOR NEPAD? HOW?

Firstly, to build Civil Society in the context of peace and security, NEPAD must first provide a framework for a civilized discourse and a clear mechanism for CSOs involvement. As it is said in Arabic, “comprehension precedes understanding”, and it is through dialogue concerning our commonalities and differences - that we may first achieve the mutual comprehension that can precede a global ethos of understanding. It is perhaps in recognition of this fact which can give us one possible starting point with NEPAD in its role to build or enhance capacities within civil society in the context of peace and security. And this can represent a high investment in Africa’s common future.

Second, and perhaps more fundamentally, NEPAD should recognize the role and responsibility of civil society in peace-building and responding to conflicts in Africa and then identify and address specific capacity constraints faced by African CSOs that hinder them from effectively participating in conflict prevention, management and resolution.

Conflicts in Africa and many other parts of the world today occur mostly within rather than between states. These conflicts results from a host of factors, the most fundamental being the nature of the distribution of power and resources within a society. It is evident from the cause of many a conflict in Africa [e.g. Zimbabwe, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola] that government alone cannot effectively address the resulting conflicts within societies, in part because they themselves are often parties to the conflict. The myriad of factors at the heart of such internal conflicts require the involvement of a wide variety of actors to establish a path towards long-lasting settlement.

In this respect, I submit that NEPAD must recognize that ownership and responsibility for addressing the scourge of violent conflict in their communities, nations, sub-regions, and the continent must reside with African civil society itself.

HOW SHOULD NEPAD BUILD CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE CONTEXT OF PEACE AND SECURITY?

1. Facilitating Civil Society - Government Interface

Admittedly, the strength and form of civil society varies between countries, being relatively well-developed in some cases and virtually non-existent in others, particularly

in countries suffering from severe, protracted conflict. This is where NEPAD must play a facilitative role in supporting the development of civil societies structures where they do not exist and ensuring their vibrancy where they do exist.

2. *Positioning Women in Peace Making*

Within this context should be the positioning of women to play more critical roles in peace making in Africa. Their strength as peace makers arises from their traditional function as the custodians of family and community values, and as nurturers, care-givers and mediators within the family. Two most significant constraints on the involvement of women in peace processes are the societal bias against consultation with women in matters pertaining to public life and ineffective organization of women. Therefore, strategies to enhance women's involvement in peace keeping and conflict resolution should focus on the mobilization of women. An important step would be for NEPAD to support sub-regional networking among women's groups around key issues relating to peace. It would also be fruitful to design and provide appropriate training in conflict management.

3. *Harnessing the Academic Wealth of the Scholarly Community*

Scholars are often repositories of knowledge that is critical to understanding the root causes and evolution of conflicts. They can provide valuable advice to governments and inter-governmental institutions on the strategies for managing conflicts. During violent conflicts, academics on both sides of a divide can be made to work together and make their joint efforts known to the wider community as a means of advocating tolerance and peace. As with women organizations, there is need for a more effective networking among academics to enhance the quality of scholarship and the dissemination of knowledge.

4. *Strengthening Civil Society's Capacity in the Provision of Early Warning Regarding Impending Conflicts and Advocating Traditional African Values*

Finally, it is evident that some African societies, undergoing stress associated with simmering conflicts, are suffering from the loss of certain fundamental values that should guide and temper the conduct of societies during peace and war. This loss of value is manifested in the uncontrolled violation of human rights, killing of non-combatants, and massive pillage and destruction of fundamental means of production. I do not wish to make drama out of a crisis but memories are still fresh from the repugnancy of the genocide in Rwanda and Burundi.

With the opportunity of NEPAD, a concerted effort to address the root cause of this phenomenon must be made drawing upon both the deep well of traditional African values, and the modern international instruments that set parameters for the conduct of conflict. These values and standards need to be advocated at both the community and inter-state level. An exploration needs to be undertaken to determine the most concrete and effective means for promoting such standards and principles.

In most cases, conflict prevention has involved last-minute diplomacy to prevent a rapidly deteriorating situation from sliding into all-out war. The case of Liberia is still in the press. However, effective long-term prevention requires that many of the underlying causes of such conflict be addressed. These underlying causes often include: inequitable access to power and resources; discrimination on the basis of race, religion, religion, or other criteria; an absence of moral or ethical constraints against violence; non-democratic governance or a governance system that is too excusive; the failure of

state institutions; and the denial of basic human rights. This brings me to the section on some specific recommendations.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS: A FOLLOW UP AGENDA

1. Networking

There is an urgent need for networking, both within civil society and between civil society and government institutions. Therefore, NEPAD must explore networking possibilities within civil society and survey the state of existing networks at the various sectoral and sub-regional levels in Africa and develop proposals for strengthening them. Such networking will require basic communication infrastructure and technological support.

2. Linking Civil Society to the NEPAD Peace and Security Initiative

A platform must be created through which civil society can interact with the NEPAD peace and Security Initiative

3. Involving CSOs in the APRM

There should be a clear role for CSO involvement in the redesign, formulation and implementation of the NEPAD's African Peer Review Mechanism.

4. Capacity-Building and Training for Conflict Management

5. The capacity to engage in conflict management activities varies among the many civil society entities that have the potential role to play. Accordingly, there is significant need for appropriate capacity building and training for many civil society actors. These needs can be addressed at two levels. Those civil society actors that are involved in peace efforts at the national and international levels may require training and capacity enhancement in the process of international peace making and peacekeeping. For those operating on more local level, training and capacity building and enhancement may be geared toward developing expertise in community-based facilitation and mediation.

6. Developing Institutions for Conflict Management

At the heart of any long-term strategy for preventing violence is the development of institutions for managing disputes and conflict. These can take various forms but civil society can play an important role in providing early warning regarding impending conflicts by concretely derailing the sources and the parameters of disparities, mistrust, suspicion and misperceptions between groups.

7. Promoting Democracy

An important challenge facing African civil society involves the building of a democratic culture. African, both in government and in civil society, must work toward building political systems that promote respect for basic human rights and give citizens a voice in determining who governs them.

8. Developing a Community of Values

NEPAD must ensure that the leaders of government and civil society in Africa work together to establish and strengthen among African communities a set of commonly accepted values that guarantee the rights and liberties of Africans during periods of both war and peace.

The erosion of traditional ethics and the weaknesses of contemporary international norm have led to an absence of restraints on the resort to violence in Africa. This was most sharply demonstrated by the genocide in Rwanda where the world witnessed the abhorrent reality of vast numbers of ordinary citizens participating in genocide. A similar moral vacuum enables leaders to ruthlessly use children in their pursuit of power and person gain. Such weaknesses in values can only addressed through concerted efforts at education and dialogue at all levels. Civil society can play a vital role and must be enabled to undertake programs for civic education, exhorting people against joining discriminatory groups, and developing and promoting norms of wartime conduct.

CONCLUSION

The subject of peace and security in Africa is very broad and admittedly cannot be exhausted in a brief presentation such as this one. The limitation is acknowledged. Suffice to say however, that the state and civil society must seize the opportunity to work together. It was Mao Tse Tung who once said, and I quote:

“So many deeds cry out to be done, ten thousand years are not enough, seize the day seize the moment”

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