

NEPAD and Gender

Introduction:

Women have been a major force in socio-economic development in all communities throughout history, acting as agents for change and providing the framework for the evolution of societies, even where their decision-making power was limited or covert. During the last century women across the globe have made great strides. They have thrown off the shackles of patriarchy that previously dominated many cultures and are increasingly claiming equality (albeit with varying degrees of success) in the political, economic, corporate and social arenas.

Africa's poor developmental record in the post-colonial era has been underscored by the continued marginalization of women in all spheres of life. Rural African women continue to be the poorest of the poor and are often totally excluded from the market economy. Male control of resources and power is still entrenched at home, in government and at work. Despite lip-service to the idea that they are essential contributors to sustainable socio-economic development, African women are seriously underrepresented at the highest levels of politics and business, and are thus excluded from the corridors of decision-making power.

Through the New Partnership for Africa's Economic Development (Nepad), hailed as an Africa-led and African-owned initiative, our leaders have committed themselves to good governance and poverty eradication. The experience of other developing regions

has shown that successful development is predicated on the active involvement of all sectors of civil society, and that women play a particularly crucial role in this regard.

In spite of this, the formal Nepad document makes scant reference to the role of women and the initiative has received criticism from civil society groups for its strong focus on private-sector partnerships, an arena where women are already marginalized.

The Nepad Secretariat's creation of an Office of Gender and Civil Society Organisations in October 2004, is a most welcome development. However, the fact that it comes a full three years after the Nepad initiative was formally launched, does raise questions about the prioritisation of women and their interests by Nepad.

This paper examines Nepad as it has evolved over the past three years, using a gender lens to determine the extent to which it involves women at all levels, with a view to identifying opportunities for women's participation and providing some strategic recommendations for enhancing their involvement in the various Nepad initiatives.

Women and Nepad at Genesis: An Uneasy Labour?

a. Policies, Structure and Management

Nepad may be viewed variously as a programme, a series of projects, a framework for action or a new philosophy for Africa's dealings with the world. There exist numerous analyses and critiques of Nepad's neo-liberal and modernist development approach.¹

It has been called a pseudo-structural adjustment programme, different only in that it

is spearheaded by Africans instead of first-world leaders. Similarly, much has been written on the negative impacts of neo-liberal economic policies on the circumstances of African women.^{2, 3} It is glaringly apparent that Nepad, at its birth, failed to give serious consideration to these analyses.

A brief and superficial search of the Nepad Framework Document reveals that ‘gender’ is mentioned a mere three times and ‘women’ only nine times in this 59-page base document⁴. Yet both this document and the Nepad website (www.nepad.org) list poverty eradication and accelerating the empowerment of women amongst Nepad’s primary objectives.

This dissonance with regard to gender is reflected in various Nepad-branded documents, policy initiatives and within Nepad’s organisational structures. Analysts have argued that this is a direct consequence of the top-down design and management of Nepad, which has largely been at the level of heads of government, all of whom are male.⁵ Furthermore, although they are championing good governance in multilateral discussions, among the architects of Nepad are heads of state who, in their own countries, have questionable records on political and economic governance issues, including issues pertaining to women’s rights. This was highlighted by the worldwide furore over the case of Nigerian single mother Amina Lawal, a woman who, in 2002, was initially sentenced to death by stoning on a charge of adultery. The sentence was later overturned.

The dearth of concrete actions to translate Nepad’s vague gender goals into reality renders them meaningless. The goal “To promote the role of women in all activities”⁶

is mere lip-service unless it is backed by well-defined and time-bound practical measures to achieve and monitor progress. “Nepad has simply designed an objective concerning women but has not actually adopted a transversal gender approach that accounts for the specific needs and strategic interests of men and women confronting gender inequalities,” claims Akouavi⁷. Longwe goes further, categorically stating that “Nepad is deeply and comprehensively gender-blind”⁸, since it fails to acknowledge the prevalence of structural and institutionalised gender discrimination.

In its opening policy statements, the Nepad base document highlights the “promotion of the role of women in social and economic development by reinforcing their capacity in the domains of education and training; by developing revenue-generating activities through facilitating access to credit; and by assuring their participation in the political and economic life of African countries”⁹. However, a lack of follow-through is evident on two counts. Firstly, the document does not compel nations to remove discriminatory legislation and other institutional barriers to equality in accessing education, credit or political participation, among others. Secondly, gender-blindness is apparent with regard to the actions proposed under the sectoral priorities, particularly in key areas like agriculture, education and health.

Another concern raised by critics has been with regard to the macro-economic policy framework within which Nepad has been defined. They argue that when states are re-organised to serve the interests of market forces, the concomitant privatisation of public services such as health and education increases the uncounted and unpaid labour burden on poor women, who are the main caregivers of children, the ill and the elderly. “Most noticeably, privatisation of infrastructure usually prevents the cross-

subsidisation required to serve poor consumers, especially women-headed households.”¹⁰ Patrick Bond cites several examples where the privatisation of water resources in southern Africa have led to unaffordable pricing structures and the consequent disconnection of water supply.¹¹ Where privatisation of basic utilities such as water and power have resulted in disconnection of those who cannot afford to pay, it may be argued that this infringes on the basic human right to clean water. According to Randriamaro, Nepad’s emphasis on the ‘marketisation of government’ actually perpetuates the socio-economic exclusion of women and contradicts Nepad’s “claimed focus on poverty eradication and people-centred development”.¹²

Nepad’s narrow focus on market-driven growth also fails to elucidate how those outside the formal market economy will benefit. Its policy framework does not address the exclusion from the formal economy of the small-scale agro-producers that sustain Africa’s population, the majority of whom are female. Mohau Pheko of the International Gender and Trade Network notes that “Nepad is far behind when it keeps women in areas of the economy that perpetuate exclusion from the macro economy.”¹³

Nepad’s congenital ‘gender-blindness’ is underscored by the gender representation in the continental Nepad structures (see diagram 1). The list of the 20-member Nepad Steering Committee contains only 2 names that might be female¹⁴ and the committee reports directly to the all-male Heads of State Implementation Committee. Since inception, the management levels of both the Nepad Secretariat and the more recently established African Peer Review (APR) Secretariat have been predominantly male, with little decision-making authority in the hands of women. The one exception to

this is in the Panel of Eminent Persons of the APR, where three of the seven members are women, with one of them being the chairperson.

b. Nepad Initiatives and Sectoral Priorities

Nepad's four development initiatives address Peace, Security, Democracy and Political Governance; Economic and Corporate Governance; Capital Flows and Market Access respectively. Additionally, the six sectoral priorities are the Infrastructure Gap; Human Resource Development; Agriculture; the Environment; Culture; and Science and Technology. Not a single one of these initiatives or sectoral priorities goes beyond the micro-level issues of women's access to education, training and credit to specifically address the gender-based constraints that confront women in these sectors.

For example, the sections on Agriculture in the Nepad Framework Document¹⁵ signally fail to address the discriminatory laws and patrilineal norms that subvert women's ownership of the land that they till. Although they produce 80% of its food, women own only 1% of the land in sub-Saharan Africa, since traditional practices dictate that a man's property passes to his adult sons or brothers, with the result that widows and young children are often evicted and left destitute.¹⁶ In countries like Swaziland, women are legal minors who cannot own property. In others, such as Ghana, Uganda, Cote d'Ivoire and Kenya, where the law theoretically gives women some rights, women are frequently dispossessed of their land in practice.^{17, 18} Many countries, including Zimbabwe and Kenya, have provisions that allow traditional norms to supercede the national legislation, providing a loophole that dispossesses

women of access to land.^{19, 20} The Nepad Framework Document does not propose any policies or actions to end discrimination as part of its Agriculture sectoral priority.

A survey of the Peace, Security, Democracy and Political Governance Initiative, possibly the single most important aspect of Nepad, illustrates a tendency to emphasise the importance of this initiative as a means of attracting foreign investment, rather than as a desirable end in itself. Again, beyond a few mentions of access to education, political participation and credit, the initiative makes little attempt to mainstream women's rights within the paradigm that peace, security, democracy and good political governance are essential for Africa's social and economic advancement. The document ignores the role of women in conflict prevention and conflict resolution, despite widespread recognition of the valuable contributions made by African women in reconciliation processes in countries such as Rwanda and South Africa. According to Randriamaro²¹, "Nepad sees gender equality to be achieved by micro women-specific projects as opposed to tackling the fundamental structural causes of women's poverty and inequality". She deplores the Nepad perception of women as a passive one and complains that Nepad fails to recognise women's agency and their (often unpaid) labour.

In the post-9/11 world, the industrialised nations' emphasis on fighting terrorism has seen Africa divided into "for" and "against" camps, reminiscent of the cold-war era. This development has been subtly linked, however, with the notions of good governance and peace and security that are cornerstones of Nepad. African states that are seen as weak or poorly governed are deemed to be potential breeding grounds for terrorism and conflict. Over the past three years, donor support for the Nepad's peace

and security initiatives has been significant and Nepad has demonstrated laudable successes with the establishment of the Peace and Security Council (PSC) and interventions in conflicts ranging from the Great Lakes region to the Sudan.

However, the increased militarisation within African Union (AU) and Nepad structures raises the question of whether this will result in a diversion of attention and financial resources towards defense and away from the pro-poor sectors that are most crucial for women. Also, some states have used the global fear of terrorism as an excuse to undermine and silence legitimate civil society protest on the grounds that it threatens peace and security.²² This poses a serious risk for the struggle to advance women's social and economic development, particularly in regimes where subjugation of women by formal security forces and/or informal militias is not uncommon. Though outside the scope of this paper, there is potential here for further research on patterns of budget allocations at the level of nations, as well as at the regional and continental levels.

From the examination above, it is evident that the architects and managing agencies of Nepad, failed, at the outset, to address the needs and concerns of half the African population - its women. Notwithstanding that the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action produced overwhelming evidence that poverty wears a female face and that sustainable development is predicated on the achievement of gender parity in all spheres of economic and political life, Nepad was birthed in a milieu that ignored the Beijing Platform as well as its predecessors such as the 1979 UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

Unless urgent steps are taken to mainstream women's involvement in all Nepad activities at all levels, an economic development initiative that sidelines half of its intended recipients is doomed to failure. The Nepad 3-year review, undertaken in October 2004, provides an opportunity to gauge what progress (if any) has been made.

Nepad at Three: Walking and talking, but is it working for women?

a. Evolution and Progress at Policy Levels

The renewed initiatives towards regional and continental integration during the last decade have increasingly opened up space for conversation and debate by civil society, including women. These efforts “provide an opportunity to ensure the implementation of regional and international commitments on women's human rights”²³. Over the past three years, the sheer volume of gender-based critiques of Nepad in academic and media circles, in tandem with civil society protests and

sustained lobbying efforts by women's interest groups, have placed considerable pressure on AU and Nepad leaders to give prominence to gender issues as part of their development plans. This has resulted in a subtle shift to encourage greater participation of women in AU structures (including Nepad) and the adoption of policies and positions that empower women, at least in theory.

Women's networks across the continent capitalized on the momentum of the AU's inauguration by organizing broad-based consultative meetings at the AU summits in Durban in June 2002 and in Maputo in June 2003, as well as a forum in Dakar in April 2003. These consultations produced the Durban Declaration, the Dakar Strategy and the Maputo Declaration, which were used to lobby AU leaders and other influential decision makers at the AU meetings.

Among the positive developments are the adoption of the Durban Declaration by the AU's inaugural meeting in July 2002; and the adoption of the Protocol on Women's Rights to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights at the 2003 AU Summit in Maputo. The Durban declaration binds all states to abide by CEDAW, the Beijing Declaration and the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, all three of which contain specific recommendations for ending legal and institutional discrimination and providing for equal access to basic rights and services. The 2002 Durban AU summit resolved that 50 percent of the AU Commissioners would be women; that a Gender Promotion Directorate would be created within the chairperson's office; and that recruitment policies for senior staff would uphold the principle of gender parity.²⁴

The protocol adopted at the Maputo summit represents a significant milestone since it compels national governments to ensure equitable treatment and full participation of women in various spheres. Amongst other provisions, states must adopt measures to ensure equality of access to education, training and employment; equal pay; the punishment of sexual harassment; and the participation of women in governance, conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction. The protocol also calls for an end to discriminatory legislation and harmful practices that adversely affect women (eg. female genital mutilation), and it protects the reproductive rights of women, including access to abortion in certain circumstances.²⁵

Although the AU adopted the Maputo protocol in July 2003, 15 member countries must ratify it in order for it to enter into force. As at end January 2005, only seven countries - Comoros, Lesotho, Libya, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda and South Africa - had ratified the document. The lack of commitment implied by this reluctance on the part of African governments to ensure that gender rights are upheld in their countries, has been criticized as a sign that, despite a new-look AU and the well-marketed Nepad initiative, not much has changed from the era where the old Organisation of African Unity (OAU), acceded to human rights and governance instruments at continental level but made little effort to ensure that nation-states would follow through on their commitments. More than 3000 people have signed a petition to urge African governments to ratify the protocol.²⁶

Nepad, as the socio-economic development arm of the AU, must lead the way by ensuring that the provisions of the Maputo protocol are reflected within Nepad's organizational structures and recruitment policies, and by mainstreaming the

provisions into its initiatives and sectoral priorities. Since the regional economic communities (RECs) are regarded as the building blocks of Nepad, their structures, policies and programmes should also integrate the provisions of the Maputo protocol.

The Nepad Secretariat's establishment of an office for Gender and Civil Society Organisations in October 2004 is a welcome step in the right direction. It is to be hoped that this office will seriously engage with the task of integrating the Maputo protocol into the various Nepad initiatives and implementing the Beijing recommendations in all aspects of Nepad's operations. With regard to the APRM process, it is also encouraging to note that the APR Secretariat has employed female researchers to lead both the corporate governance and socio-economic development aspects of the process.²⁷

Ms Litha Musyimi-Ogana, Nepad's gender and civil society advisor, remarked in November 2004, "If Nepad is compared to the human lifespan, at three years old, it is still an infant which cannot be expected to have achieved full maturity with regard to gender"²⁸. While this comment provoked laughter, it also brought forth the rejoinder that African women could not afford to wait the 60-70 years of a normal human lifespan for Nepad to achieve the requisite degree of gender-consciousness.²⁹

b. Progress Within Nepad Initiatives and Sectoral Priorities

It is disappointing to note that the report of the work of the Nepad Steering Committee and Secretariat at the end of 2003, makes no reference to the gender element of Nepad's activities.

The gap between the sexes is recognized within the Nepad health and education plans and there are policy recommendations aimed specifically at narrowing this gap. The health strategy recommends that female genital mutilation should be prohibited by law and advocates access to family planning³⁰. Goals 1, 2, and 3 of the Education Plan have a strong focus on gender parity, as does the youth strategic framework.

However, there is little attempt in both the health and education spheres to provide statistical data disaggregated by gender. This omission that must be rectified ‘in order to highlight the difference in the situation between men and women so as to bring forth an explanation as well as recommendations for reducing the growing feminization of poverty linked to the precarious health of mothers and children and the difference in the schooling of boys and girls.’³¹

The introduction to Nepad’s Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Plan (CAADP), acknowledges that the plan has been frequently criticized on the lack of explicit reference to gender, and that gender must be “a core consideration in operationalising the CAADP”.³² However, apart from a few paragraphs on the role of African women in rural development in Chapter 5, the CAADP signally fails to consider the role of women in the livestock, forestry and aquaculture sectors. With regard to women’s access to land and water, the plan is vague. The assertion, “gender bias and obstacles to women’s access to land deserves priority attention”³³, is not followed through with any practical recommendations or actions for ensuring women better access. This lack of emphasis on women’s contribution and participation is continued in the June 2004 study commissioned by Nepad to investigate food security systems in Africa, an area in which women play a vital role.³⁴

Nepad's short-term action plan for infrastructure development makes no mention of women or gender at all, while the few references to gender in Nepad's environmental plan are generally vague and lacking in focus, and are related mainly to work done by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). The environment plan does make a specific reference to the right of women producers to inherit land and to be decision-makers and owners in the land utilisation process.³⁵

Overall, the process of mainstreaming gender with Nepad's policies and plans has been slow, despite recognition of gender gaps as a cross-cutting issue in all sectors. But the Nepad office for gender has announced that it will spearhead gender mainstreaming of policies and programmes as a key priority for the first half of 2005.³⁶

Nepad and the Future: Does it pose the risk of deepening women's Poverty?

In November 2003, the African Women's Economic Policy Network claimed that the policy choices being made under the Nepad banner would lead to a deepening of African women's poverty.³⁷ Hellen Wangusa, the network's coordinator, stated that Nepad's policy of putting raw materials into the market and keeping labour costs low impacted most on women. She cited examples where the promotion of labour-intensive high-value crops such as flowers and spices at the expense of staple food crops had undermined food security. Mohau Pheko also warns that "a tragedy is being enacted on African women" and, by continuing with policies dependent on the

World Bank and International Monetary Fund, Nepad “keeps women in areas of the economy that perpetuate exclusion from the macro-economy” and destroys the social policies of many African countries.³⁸

Analysts concerned at the impact of Nepad’s macroeconomic policy framework (see discussion above) have also shown evidence that indiscriminate trade liberalization has seriously stifled domestic industry, resulting in widespread retrenchments and less stable employment environments. In most cases, the worst-affected workers are the least-skilled ones, often women. A study of the micro-level impacts of liberalization in South Africa’s textiles sector concluded that retrenched textile workers experienced difficulty in meeting basic needs and emphasized that governments need to consider the long-term social consequences of economic policies.³⁹

Recommendations

Hlongwe⁴⁰ recommends that Nepad should incorporate a primary focus on ending all forms of legalized gender discrimination within statutory law, customary law and administrative practice in member states. She regards this as an essential condition for sustainable development and a crucial component in the Nepad initiative for improved democracy, good governance and human rights. She also recommends that the Dakar and Beijing documents should be used as the base documents for mainstreaming gender issues within the Nepad sectoral priorities. Since then, the Maputo protocol has been adopted, and, as it is largely based on the Dakar strategy, this author would recommend that the Maputo protocol should be the Nepad Secretariat’s primary

source reference regarding the priority needs of African women, with the Beijing document as the underlying and more comprehensive overall 'wish list' from which the key issues contained in the protocol were extracted.

Hlongwe also advises that a Gender Advisory Committee be formed to assist in rewriting the Nepad document 'to achieve a gender orientation commensurate with the international commitments of the participating countries.'⁴¹ While time and resource constraints may preclude such action, consideration should be giving to appending the Maputo protocol to the Nepad document, together with an undertaking to mainstream the protocol provisions into all Nepad activities.

Each sectoral priority and programme under Nepad, should then identify those articles of the protocol which can be incorporated into their activities. For example, in implementing Article 12 of the Protocol (the right to education and training), Nepad's Education Division should take steps to eliminate gender stereotyping in textbooks, syllabi and other media, which are developed under the aegis of Nepad's education initiatives. The praiseworthy technological advancements within the Science and Technology sphere, such as the African Laser Centre, should pay special attention to building capacity and enhancing women's technical abilities outside of traditionally defined limits. Pheko recommends that "education and infrastructure developments should work in the interests of African women and people, and not be export or investor oriented as (currently) articulated in Nepad."⁴²

Similarly, the CAADP must consider Articles 15, 16 and 21 of the protocol (the rights to food security, adequate housing and widow's rights), with actionable strategies for

protecting women's land rights, as part of Nepad's overall agriculture plan. The economic and corporate governance initiative should implement strategies to integrate aspects of all the articles of the protocol, especially Article 13 (which protects women's economic and social welfare rights), including aspects such as ending exploitation of cheap female labour; providing equal pay for equal work; preventing sexual harassment and guaranteeing paid maternity leave.

Nepad's flagship governance initiative, the voluntary peer review system, already has three prominent and well-respected women on its advisory panel, some of whom are well-known for their work in promoting women's and girls' rights. Dr Graca Machel, for example, has long been a champion for equal access to education for girls and has devoted resources to improving the education opportunities for girl children. Two key steps in the review process are the identification of the major governance challenges (big issues) for each review country and the compilation of an action plan to address these challenges. Gender activists should seize the opportunity at national and regional levels to compile submissions to the APR process and to lobby the APR Panel to give greater prominence to specific gender gaps and problems affecting women in their countries. They can ensure that their concerns are aired during the country review process and that specific time-bound actions to redress gender imbalances are recommended as part of the country's action plan.

Pheko also calls for a re-orientation of the global economic system in favour of poor African women, urging that debate on these issues occur in the World Trade Organisation and amongst the African Caribbean and Pacific countries.⁴³

Ms Litha Musyimi-Ogana, gender and civil society advisor at the Nepad Secretariat, has on two occasions⁴⁴ in the presence of this author, invited the participation of women in the Nepad Secretariat's policy-making and implementation procedures and emphasized the open-door policy that her office intends to promote. She acknowledged the dearth of research capacity in this respect. "Nepad needs the expertise of women operating in all sectors of civil society." she noted, "I am challenging you all to get involved to ensure that the protocol (on the rights of women) which our leaders signed is implemented." Nominations have been opened for a Nepad Gender Task Force, which will have thematic expertise and be operationalised by April 2005. This is a challenge and an opportunity that African women and gender activists cannot afford to ignore, if Nepad is ever to fulfill the development aspirations of the continent's people.

Endnotes

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