

# Should African Social Movements support Nepad ?

Thursday 30 March 2006, by [NGWANE Trevor](#) (Date first published: 2 February 2002).

**Notes from a speech to the African Social Forum's African Seminar, World Social Forum, Porto Alegre, Brazil, 2 February 2002.**

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## 1. Introduction

How long must Africans suffer? After many years of plunder, robbery, slavery, colonialism, neo-colonialism and apartheid, we are now facing the ravages of neo-liberalism. We continue to suffer from disease, hunger, poverty and a lack of control over our resources and our destiny. How and when will it all end?

Three African leaders, namely, Thabo Mbeki of South Africa, Abdelaziz Bouteflika of Algeria and Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria, all presidents of their countries, have come up with a solution to Africa's problems called Nepad. Its aim is "to eradicate poverty and to place African countries on a path of sustainable growth and development".

Will this plan work? Should African social movements support this plan? This short paper looks at the underlying assumptions of Nepad and finds them very problematic because of the wrong strategic options they engender. My recommendation to the African Social Forum, in line with the position we took in Bamako, is that we should reject this plan and wage a vigorous campaign of education and denunciation against Nepad.

## 2. Political and economic context

Africa is locked in a debt trap and suffers from unequal terms of trade mainly as a result of structural adjustment programmes imposed upon it by the World Bank, IMF and the World Trade Organisation's policies. In order to attract foreign investment and qualify for loans and aid, our governments have been implementing austerity programmes based on a "one size fits all" economic

model of development which has led to tremendous deprivation and suffering in Africa. While our “leaders” continue to live in luxury and opulence, millions of working class and peasant people live in abject poverty. African heads of state pay little heed to the wishes and plight of the masses, instead they do everything that they are told to do by the international bankers, multi-national corporations and bourgeois politicians. Even where they seem to do “their own thing”, it is self-serving and does not benefit the people. The ruling power elite in Africa has usurped the promise of people and workers’ power that was the hallmark of the national liberation movement. In January 2002, like a bolt out of the blue, the African Social Forum was formed. It is part of the gathering of popular forces and social movements in the world who have had enough and have decided to organise against a system that kills and robs ordinary people everywhere. In line with the World Social Forum we believe that “another world, another Africa, is possible”.

### **3. Problems with Nepad**

#### **3.1 No consultation with the social movement**

No civic society, church, political party, parliament or democratic body was consulted in Africa when Nepad was put together. Instead the first time we heard of it was when Thabo Mbeki presented it in Davos at the World Economic Forum in January 2001 to the likes of George Soros. At the time it was called the Millenium African Recovery Plan (MAP). Through a series of “high-level” discussions, that is discussions above the heads of the people, MAP changed into NAI (New Africa Initiative) and now to Nepad. Any changes to the plan have been in response to the international ruling class’ comments on the plan, for example, during the G8 Summit in Genoa where Mbeki was told to include “good governance” in his plan. The G8 treated him with utter contempt giving him only 5 minutes to make his presentation before sending him off to do his homework.

#### **3.2 Little credibility of Nepad authors**

Mbeki is failing his own people in South Africa while busy trying to solve the continent’s problems. He has failed miserably to respond to the HIV/AIDS crisis choosing instead to publicly entertain maverick views on the subject which question the very existence of the pandemic. But everyone knows that he does not want to spend money treating the disease because of fiscal discipline and similar neo-liberal considerations. Instead Mbeki is spending billions buying arms. Last year 5 million workers went on strike in South Africa against his government’s policy of privatisation. This strike was led by COSATU (Congress of South African Trade Unions), the union federation which is in a political alliance with the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the African National Congress (ANC), Mbeki’s party. For their part Obasanjo and Bouteflika are well-known violaters of human rights in their own countries stoking religious, ethnic and military conflict leading to the death of many people. Recently Obasanjo sent to jail worker leaders for calling a general strike in Nigeria.

#### **3.3 Nepad fails to call a spade a spade**

The document uses euphemisms and camouflage language such as “a globalising world”, “exclusion”, “globalisation” and such like; it avoids the critical language which points to the real cause of Africa’s problems such as “imperialism”, “neo-colonialism” and “capitalism”. Strong sounding words such as “exploitation” are used neutrally and in a “positive” manner rather than critically, for example, the document complains that Africa’s resources have not been “fully” exploited!

#### **3.4 Nepad avoids the problem of power**

The reason Africa continues to suffer is because the advanced capitalist countries have the power to dictate to us what to do. Nowhere does Nepad call for a change in the existing international power relations that compel Africa, for instance, to pay a debt whose legitimacy is highly questionable, or to succumb to an international economic system loaded against Africa.

### **3.5 A partnership between rider and horse**

The relationship between Africa and Western Europe has been one between coloniser and colonised, exploiter and exploited. While the exact terms of this predatory relationship have evolved over time, it seems foolhardy for Mbeki and company to ask for partnership with people who still benefit from Africa's wealth at the expense of the African people. Imperialism is the problem, a partnership with it cannot be a solution.

### **3.6 Nepad calls for closer co-operation**

He who sups with the devil must have a long spoon. Nepad calls for closer relations with the rich countries, it wants Africa to be "integrated" more into the global economic system. But economic development theorists such as Andre Gunder Frank and Samir Amin have long shown how integration leads to growing poverty and underdevelopment because the structure of insertion is designed to benefit the rich; they get richer and the poor get poorer. Third World scholars have recommended less not more integration, namely, "de-linking". Argentina's crisis is due to its integration which made it vulnerable to global financial and market fluctuations. The falling rand (currency) in South Africa is due to the ease with which money can move in and out of the country - an indicator of integration into the global markets.

### **3.7 Nepad wants market-oriented policies**

Nepad wants "market-oriented policies", that is, more capitalism, more profit-driven policies, more competition, more privatisation. Mbeki forgets that it is exactly the doctrine and practice of putting profit before people which led to slavery, colonialism, apartheid and neo-liberalism.

### **3.8 Nepad wants more exploitation**

Like a salesperson displaying his or her wares for sale, Nepad waxes lyrical about how Africa "is an indispensable resource base" which needs further exploitation. After years of being raped somehow Africa is casting itself as a prostitute looking for prospective customers. Nepad claims that "the richness of Africa's culture remains under exploited". This mentality is the same which motivated African leaders to promote the planting of cash crops for sale overseas, in line with World Bank-inspired export-led growth strategies, while the children died back home due to starvation. In South Africa Mbeki's party, the ANC, has been complaining "rich foreigners" buying land cheaply due to the devaluation of the rand. This shows the contradictions of neo-liberal logic.

### **3.9 Nepad wants more loans and aid**

Implicit and explicit in Nepad is a call for money (capital) to be invested in or given to Africa. Where Nepad calls for more loans and aid it forgets the debt trap Africa is already in and the conditionalities which come with such loans. Aid has often been tied to purchasing goods produced by the "donor" country proving right the biblical observation that "it is better to give than to receive". Pakistan has recently received billions of dollars in loans and aid in order to facilitate the USA imperialist project.

#### **4. Nepad and hypocrisy**

Mbeki calls for good governance and an end to corruption in Nepad but in his own backyard his ANC comrades are busy enriching themselves through ill-gotten government contracts and kickbacks. Recently Tony Yengeni, then ANC parliamentary chief whip, received “presents” from Daimler-Chrysler in the arms deal scandal. Social movements are beginning to question the ethics of governments who rule in the name of the people while answering to the multi-national corporations, of government leaders who receive vast amounts in salaries and perks while children die of hunger, of international financial institutions which promote the privatisation of water, health care and education thus pricing these out of reach of the majority of the people. Nepad seems to follow the logic and values of the world’s economic and political elite and as such can never take forward the cause of ordinary Africans.

#### **5. Reject Nepad, campaign against it!**

Based on these few points above it is my strong recommendation that the African Social Forum rejects Nepad and its model of economic development. Let us spend the first year of our forum studying and educating the African masses about the evils of the neo-liberalism contained in Nepad. We must suggest alternatives to this self-defeating strategy and build mass struggles in defence of African economic interests.

Phansi Nepad phansi! Down with Nepad!

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**P.S.**

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