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PROSPECTS FOR AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT IN LIGHT OF THE NEW PARTNERSHIP FOR AFRICA'S DEVELOPMENT (NEPAD)

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The African continent is considered to be the least developed continent in the world. When assessing Africa using almost any social or economic indicator, Africa compares badly with the rest of the world. While Africans make up only 10% of the world's population, they also account for more than 30% of the world's poor, with almost half of all Africans living on less than US \$1 per day. When using the United Nation's classification of development, it is found that 80% of the 'least developed countries' are found in Africa.

The quality of the lives of Africans compares poorly with the rest of the world. Life expectancy at birth is only an average of 54 years; the infant mortality rate is 140 deaths per 1 000 births; a third of African children are malnourished; almost half of all Africans do not have access to safe water; illiteracy rates are high and school enrolment rates, especially for girls, are low. The AIDS epidemic is ravaging the African continent, especially sub-Saharan Africa. Recent estimates show that around 70% of all HIV-infected persons live in Africa and that 80% of the world's AIDS-infected children live in sub-Saharan Africa alone.

The poor quality of the lives of Africans can be attributed to the weakness of the economies of African countries, and the economic decline which Africa has been experiencing since the 1970s. Most African economies are small and fragile. Sub-Saharan Africa accounts for less than 2% of world trade and global GDP, and African economies have not been successfully integrated into the global economy. Many African countries are heavily indebted, with three quarters of the severely indebted low-income countries being situated in sub-Saharan Africa. Official Development Assistance (ODA) flows to Africa have been declining, and Africa receives a disproportionately low percentage of total foreign direct investment.

When looking at these statistics it is clear that Africa needs economic renewal and transformation. Fortunately, Africa is not only a continent of poverty and underdevelopment, but is also blessed with people who are determined to put an end to the situation described

above, and to seize the 21st century as the African century. African leaders have united in the common purpose of transforming Africa and speeding up Africa's development. The most recent programme being promoted as the path out of poverty and underdevelopment is the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

This programme is by no means the first programme aimed at bringing economic upliftment and development to Africa. It has been preceded by several programmes, some originating within Africa and some imposed from outside. Some examples are the Lagos Plan of Action (LPA), the Final Act of Lagos (FLA), the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) introduced in many African countries, Africa's Priority Programme for African Economic Recovery (APPER) and various programmes introduced by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. While these programmes have had some success, no programme has yet been able to uplift Africa and place it firmly on the path to development and prosperity. NEPAD hopes to be different. The architects of this project believe that the time is now ripe for African renewal, and that NEPAD can be the catalyst which would launch the African century.

After South Africa's first democratic elections, there was much optimism about the possible role that South Africa could play in uplifting the whole of the African continent. Several members of the South African political élite, most notably then Deputy President Thabo Mbeki, began speaking about an 'African Renaissance'. The end of Africa's situation of underdevelopment and marginalisation was proclaimed, and an auspicious future for the African continent was envisaged. By the beginning of the new millennium, it was decided that in order for the vision of a prosperous and propitious future for the African continent to be realised, a practical programme for the realisation of the African Renaissance needed to be formulated. In 1999, the OAU gave a mandate to Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika and South African President Thabo Mbeki to lead a project to end Africa's economic disempowerment. At the G77 summit in 2000, Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo was added to the group. Resulting from the mandate given to these top African leaders, the Millennium African Renaissance Programme (MAP) was launched early in 2001. But the MAP was not the only programme for African renewal to be formulated. President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal also launched a plan for African renewal, which he called the Omega Plan. It was decided that there should be one programme for the entire continent and so the New African Initiative (NAI) was developed. It was presented as a merger between MAP and the Omega Plan. The NAI was accepted by the OAU in July 2001. In October 2001, it was decided to rename the programme the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), but this was no more than a name change - the content of the programme remained largely the same. The MAP, NAI and NEPAD have been presented at several prominent international gatherings such as the meeting of the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos at the beginning of 2001 and the G-8 summit held in Genoa in July 2001. The European Union (EU), G-8, World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the United Nations (UN) have given their approval of NEPAD and several prominent political leaders, such as British Prime Minister Tony Blair, have expressed support for this programme. It is hoped that this programme can get African and international backing and can be the blueprint for African economic renewal.

NEPAD describes itself as

- a pledge by African leaders, based on a common vision and a firm and shared conviction, that they have a pressing duty to eradicate poverty and to place their countries, both individually and collectively, on a path of sustainable growth and development, and at the same time to participate actively in the world economy and body politic.

NEPAD sets out to establish a comprehensive strategy that can bring about the economic upliftment of the African continent. NEPAD begins with a description of Africa's position in the world today. NEPAD emphasises that Africa is a vital resource base for the world and plays an integral role in the world as a whole. NEPAD draws attention to the way in which Africa has been impoverished through colonialism, the legacy of colonialism, poor

leadership and the Cold War. The world is described as currently experiencing an economic revolution, which NEPAD believes could provide the context and means for Africa's rebirth. NEPAD recognises the problems associated with globalisation, but nevertheless believes that the present global economic situation is one that allows for African economies to be renewed.

The bulk of the official NEPAD document gives a 'Programme of Action' regarding how sustainable development in Africa is to be achieved. The programme of action is broken down into three sections: conditions for sustainable development, sectoral priorities for sustainable development, and mobilising resources. Each of these sections is broken down into a number of subsections, which provide specific objectives and actions which must be undertaken in order to achieve these objectives. Subsequent to this, NEPAD discusses the 'partnership' part of NEPAD, highlighting the importance of getting the support of industrialised countries and multilateral organisations. A brief discussion on the implementation of NEPAD follows, including a discussion of the composition of an 'Implementation Committee'. NEPAD concludes with the promise that it will "give hope to the emaciated African child that the 21st century is indeed Africa's century".

NEPAD has a number of ardent supporters. These supporters believe that NEPAD has all the necessary ingredients for a successful programme for African economic upliftment. NEPAD attempts to move the idea of an African Renaissance from rhetoric to reality, by creating a framework of practical objectives and strategies to achieve these objectives. It can be commended for appearing to set strict criteria for membership of NEPAD, although it is not yet clear how the criteria will be applied and how African countries will be encouraged to follow NEPAD's guidelines on good political and economic governance. NEPAD has also been praised for dispensing with the 'begging bowl' mentality by asking for 'partnership' rather than assistance. NEPAD can be commended for presenting rational arguments for Western partnership in an African-led project, rather than trying to make appeals to the conscience of the Western world in order to urge the Western world to provide material assistance for Africa. Supporters of NEPAD commend the programme for aiming to give African countries greater control over economic reform on the continent. NEPAD is marketed as a programme which was developed in Africa by Africans, and which will be an African-owned and African-driven project; although it depends upon the support of the industrialised world. The support that NEPAD has already managed to gather is another point for which it has been praised. NEPAD has been presented at various top international meetings, and has been well-received there.

While NEPAD has been praised by many, it also has its detractors. NEPAD has been criticised for being a top-down programme that was formulated with little civil society consultation. There has not been much debate regarding NEPAD outside of an African and global leadership élite, and some might say the NEPAD corresponds more closely to the objectives and ideals of élites rather than to the needs and goals of ordinary Africans. Questions have also been asked regarding whether or not NEPAD has continent-wide support. The architects of NEPAD and the steering committee established to head NEPAD represent only a few African countries. It seems that since its inception the promoters of NEPAD have been more keen to get international support for NEPAD than to ensure that it had the whole of Africa's backing. A third criticism that has been given of NEPAD is that it relies too much on the actions of the developed world. NEPAD cannot succeed without international backing and appears to assume that backing NEPAD will be advantageous to the industrialised nations of the world. Some critics have commented that this is naïve, and that while the leaders of several industrialised nations have expressed their support for NEPAD, this support will not necessarily be translated into the extensive financial and political backing that NEPAD needs to succeed. NEPAD has also been criticised for being over-ambitious and it is feared that NEPAD may bring disappointment rather than development. Some commentators feel that it may have been better to launch a smaller, less extensive project, so that no unrealistic expectations are generated. A further criticism of NEPAD is that it provides a weak strategic response to globalisation. NEPAD states that globalisation is predominantly a force for good, and does not pay enough attention to the possible negative implications that globalisation has for Africa. A final, more fundamental

criticism relates to the 'African-ness' of NEPAD. While NEPAD claims to be an African-driven and African-owned project, it meshes comfortably with the neo-liberal economic framework being promoted by Western countries. Rather than challenging any of the currently dominant understandings and ideologies, NEPAD appears to concede to these and to encourage Africa to liberalise, modernise, industrialise and become integrated into the global economy. Some feel that this indicates an accession to the Western way of doing things, rather than the presentation of an alternative route for Africa.

It is too early to assess whether NEPAD will follow other similar endeavours into the dustbin of history. For the sake of the millions of impoverished Africans living in squalour it is our fervent hope that NEPAD succeeds

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