

## AN ASSESSMENT OF NEPAD'S POTENTIAL FOR BRINGING ABOUT GENDER EQUITY IN AFRICA

MK Ingle<sup>1</sup>

### 1. INTRODUCTION

A search for 'gender' or 'women' on the official New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD 2001a) website yields little more than the following:

*"Women who constitute a critical mass in the continent must have a central, critical and decisive role in the implementation and success of NEPAD. We must all play an advocacy role for this important component of the African society in the process of the evolution of NEPAD, as this is not a static programme."* - Statement by Dr Dlamini Zuma, South African Minister of Foreign Affairs, to the Regional Women's Association on NEPAD, 4 July 2002

Amidst the plethora of official documents, press releases, speeches and policy statements available on the site, all one finds is one woman addressing a gathering of her own sex, and so presumably 'preaching to the converted', in 2002. Given that the NEPAD document itself (NEPAD 2001b) is not mute as regards gender, this paucity of 'gendered material' on the official website is somewhat perplexing. This article will assess how NEPAD could play a role in bringing about gender equity in Africa. Before doing so however, NEPAD will be 'unpacked' as to its origins; a brief summary of the nature of its content; the general criticisms levelled against it thus far; and those criticisms that focus more specifically on its gender content.

It is instructive that Dr. Zuma, as quoted above, implies a clear distinction between the static, formal NEPAD document, and the fluid *evolution* which, it is intended, should characterise NEPAD's implementation programme. This distinction is of the essence in what follows, where 'NEPAD' should be understood in its fullest sense, that is as a set of processes, except where specifically indicated otherwise.

It will be claimed that the 'patriarchal blindness' Longwe (2002) discerns in the NEPAD document, lies at the heart of women's subordinate status in many of

---

<sup>1</sup> Centre for Development Support, University of the Free State. E-mail: karoo@intekom.co.za.

Africa's less developed countries. Some ideas from Martha Nussbaum's 'capabilities' approach will be used as sounding boards insofar as they might point to a way forward, in what is a very trying environment for many women. It is concluded that the NEPAD implementation process offers an invaluable forum for Africa's women to pursue the cause of gender equity although they should be wary of politicians appropriating the issue to lend a veneer of respectability to self-serving agendas that do not, in fact, produce tangible benefits for women. Passivity will not win the day and African women must be the active agents of their deliverance from the stultifying hand of patriarchy.

## **2. NEPAD BACKGROUND**

In many cases the newly-independent African states of the 1960s inherited sound institutions, political and otherwise, along with their concomitant infrastructure (Chabal 2002:451-453; Ferguson 1994:25-29; Ferguson 1999). By the mid-1970s, what developmental momentum the colonial legacy had bestowed, had largely been dissipated however. NEPAD represents the latest in a long line of initiatives to recover that momentum.

While NEPAD's pedigree extends further back than is outlined here (Department of Foreign Affairs 2002), NEPAD is a rationalisation of three parallel, African instigated, initiatives that were launched in the period 2000 to 2001. Although President Thabo Mbeki's Millennium Partnership for Africa's Recovery Programme (MAP), which focussed on innovative ways of doing business, and the Senegalese Abdoulaye Wade's OMEGA Plan, with its infrastructural focus, are generally cited as being the more prominent of the three initiatives (Wanyeki 2002), NEPAD's pivotal notion of 'enhanced partnership' was in fact derived from the UN Economic Commission for Africa's 'Compact for African Recovery' (de Waal 2002:466-467).

The South African Department of Foreign Affairs (2002) details the subsequent genesis of NEPAD as follows: "During the 5<sup>th</sup> Extraordinary Summit of the OAU [Organisation of African Unity] held in...March 2001...the work being done [on MAP and OMEGA] ...was endorsed and it was decided that every effort should be made to integrate all the initiatives being pursued [as] ...the Summit recognised the synergy and complementarity that existed between the various initiatives. An integration process...followed and on 11 July 2001, NEPAD... was presented to the OAU Summit...[It] was enthusiastically received and unanimously adopted".

As Chabal (2002:447) expresses it, "The Partnership is a commitment by African leaders to get rid of poverty and to place the African continent on a path of lasting growth and development. It is founded on African states practising good

governance, democracy and human rights, while working to prevent and resolve situations of instability on the continent."

NEPAD is an African owned initiative designed to extricate African nations "from the malaise of underdevelopment and exclusion in a globalising world" (NEPAD 2001b para. 1). The initiative is presented as being a quintessentially African project - both African inspired and African driven, and it is quite forthcoming about the culpability which may be laid at the door of Africa's leaders for the continent's non-performance post-1960 (NEPAD 2001b para. 22 and 42). Thus there is also a vital acknowledgement that Africans are responsible for their own destiny. "At the core of the NEPAD process is its African ownership" (Department of Foreign Affairs 2002). "Africans must not be wards of benevolent guardians; rather they must be the architects of their own sustained upliftment" (NEPAD 2001b para. 27). These are ambitious sentiments and if 'African women' is substituted for 'Africans' in the foregoing statement, then one approaches the nub of the present discussion.

### **3. HOW DO WOMEN FEATURE IN THE NEPAD DOCUMENT?**

Paragraph 45 of NEPAD acknowledges the role that "associations of women" are playing in the spread of democracy and in Africa's "new resolve to deal with conflicts and censure deviation from the norm". Quite why deviations from the norm need necessarily be censured is not clear but this desire for conformity may be revealing. Paragraph 49 is fairly comprehensive. It advocates, "[p]romoting the role of women in social and economic development by reinforcing their capacity in the domains of education and training; by the development of revenue-generating activities through facilitating access to credit; and by assuring their participation in the political and economic life of African countries". Paragraph 67 has the "long-term objective" of promoting "the role of women in all activities". This high level of generality could be turned to good account by astute lobbyists. The more general an objective is, the more latitude one has for smuggling in all manner of innovation by way of meeting that objective. Under 'Goals', paragraph 68, it is proposed to "make progress towards gender equality and empowering women by eliminating gender disparities in the enrolment in primary and secondary education by 2005". One might want to quibble with the limited course of action proposed here but the important thing is what the action is aimed at achieving - and this is not a statement of intent to be taken lightly. Paragraph 118's avowal to "give special attention to the reduction of poverty among women" is all to the good, while the next paragraph's proposal to "[e]stablish a gender task team to ensure that the specific issues faced by poor women are addressed in [NEPAD's] poverty reduction strategies" is the kind of opportunity women presumably lost no time in embracing. This task team should have moved to amplify its brief beyond the conveniently general one

mandated here. Paragraph 157 proposes the improvement of the agricultural productivity of women farmers, partly via (para. 158) improved access to credit. This more commercial focus is extended in paragraph 167 to "strengthening micro-financing schemes, with particular attention to women entrepreneurs" (NEPAD 2001b).

All in all this is not quite the poor showing for women that some critics have made it out to be, especially considering the depth of need in Africa and the array of special interest groups standing in line to be placated. Of course gender issues could have come more to the fore, but then they could have been ignored altogether. There is enough of a platform for action provided here to make a real difference in women's lives but, as suggested in the introduction to this paper, the potentialities implied by the NEPAD document have been slow to bear fruit in NEPAD's actual downstream processes.

#### **4. THE GENDER-RELATED DEVELOPMENT INDEX**

Notwithstanding the advances contemplated by the NEPAD document, Africa still scores particularly badly when it comes to gender equality. Some years ago the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) supplemented its Human Development Index (HDI) with a Gender-related Development Index (GDI) which is now published in the annual Human Development Report (HDR). The GDI is "a composite index measuring average achievement in the three basic dimensions captured in the human development index - a long and healthy life, knowledge and a decent standard of living - adjusted to account for inequalities between men and women" (UNDP 2004:270-271). It must be stressed that "while the HDI measures average achievement, the GDI adjusts the average achievement to reflect the *inequalities* between men and women" in the countries being assessed (UNDP 2004:261).

In the 2004 HDR the data used to calculate the GDI refers to the year 2002 and 144 countries are ranked. Tunisia is Africa's best performer at position 77. South Africa occupies place 96 - third on the continent. What is particularly significant though is that of the bottom 50 placings (ie. positions 95 to 144) African countries occupy 37 slots. Clearly something is awry in Africa in terms of gender equality (see also Wanyeki 2002) even though it must be remembered that 'women in Africa' do not constitute an undifferentiated, monolithic category. As Tamale (2002:7) puts it: "I [use] the term 'African women'... not because I am unaware of African women's heterogeneity and the significance such differences hold. I know that because of the rich and diverse socio-cultural, as well as some political differences across African societies, the statuses of women differ based on class, race, ethnicity, religion, age,

sexual orientation and so forth. However, my reference to African women as a collective in relation to resource accessibility and control stem from... the glaring statistics that show that the overwhelming number of resourceless people on the continent are women... [and that] all are affected by and are vulnerable to the conceptual and functional space that they occupy in the domestic sphere.... Thus, the term is used *politically* to call attention to the common oppression that African women endure by virtue of their simple membership to the social group called 'women'."

It is within this context that, as will be elaborated upon later, Nussbaum (2000) calls into question moves to institutionalise equality for women, most especially where these are not accompanied by an across the board improvement of basic living standards.

## 5. GENERAL CRITIQUE OF NEPAD

The backsliding and dissembling associated with the proposed functioning of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), most especially apropos of Zimbabwe, have unfortunately had the effect of seriously compromising NEPAD's integrity, to the point where cynicism abounds as to what motivated NEPAD in the first place. For example, Chabal (2002:462) suggests that NEPAD's real agenda might lie not so much in the promotion of development, broadly speaking, as in the securing of a steady flow of foreign aid to maintain established patterns of corruption.

Chabal in effect claims that Africa's need has been transformed into its ruling élites' main asset, and that it actually pays these élites to ensure that Africa *does not* develop. If Chabal is right, and in some contexts at least it seems he could be, this is bad news for women's cause. NEPAD, in this view, is a ploy to 'make the right noises' so that the West will continue to bankroll the élites such that they, in turn, can continue dispensing the necessary patronage to keep themselves in power. President Obasanjo of Nigeria is on record as saying, "One of things I abhor is the threat to withhold aid" (Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition 2002) and the recent performances of Ivory Coast, Kenya, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Somalia, Sudan et al. are hardly such as to inspire much confidence in their élites' sincerity about mending their ways. Could it be that NEPAD has very little to do with development (and by extension a sincere commitment to gender issues), and more to do with maintaining the status quo for as long as possible?

Taylor (2002) is even harsher than Chabal concerning NEPAD's credibility: "Even now... bad governance, corruption, violence and vote-rigging will, at the final analysis, be defended to the hilt by many African presidents... Tragically, that the

NEPAD only lasted less than six months before its credibility was fatally undermined demonstrates the fickle nature of African élite politics. The much vaunted desire to alter the 'rules of the game'...without any real reciprocal change in the behaviour of African élites... now seems to be a one-way street of demands but no duties on the part of Africa's presidents... Fatigue with Africa's incessant problems is already high and... the refusal of African leaders to at least try and get their own houses in order further exacerbates such negative attitudes."

Bond (2004:112) is no kinder. He quotes NEPAD's own secretariat - "Wherever we go, Zimbabwe is thrown at us as the reason why NEPAD's a joke". "Like other far-reaching African initiatives made over the years, this one promptly rolled off the track and into the ditch" (**Institutional Investor** quoted in Bond 2004:118). Bond goes so far as to suggest that NEPAD is more a tragedy than a joke. Would anyone actually *want* to associate themselves with such an initiative, seems to be the underlying sentiment.

## 6. CRITIQUE OF NEPAD FROM A GENDERED PERSPECTIVE

Chief amongst NEPAD's critics on the gender front has been Sara Longwe (2002). Given that there is some justice in her assertion that "NEPAD is deeply and comprehensively gender blind", and that it exhibits a "near complete lack of interest in gender", it is rather surprising how *little* comment NEPAD has attracted in this regard. As far as can be ascertained it is only Longwe (2002), Randriamaro (2002), Tadesse (2002), Tamale (2002) and Wanyeki (2002) who have criticised NEPAD on gender grounds in any detail and this was all, curiously enough, within a few weeks of each other in April and May 2002.

Although Longwe does cite criticisms levelled by the African Leadership Forum (ALF) (2002) and the MATCH International Centre (2002) as points of departure, neither can be said to have amounted to much more than merely flagging the gender shortcomings of NEPAD. Longwe is well aware of this in the careful preliminaries to her argument where she seems to downplay them as amounting to little more than misguided special pleading. Longwe is correct to point out that NEPAD is a "high-level document" that could not have pointedly accommodated every "area of concern" without becoming impossibly unwieldy.

Longwe then rather negates the effect of her insightful comments through semantic quibbling about 'gender concerns' as opposed to 'a gender issue', as well as a string of complaints that, had every pressure group been at liberty to make these kind of inputs, would have seen NEPAD still in the draft stages at the time of her address. Wanyeki (2002) also allows her argument to get bogged down in fussy detail and

particularities that can have no place in a document that has to address the 'big picture'.

Longwe's definitions of her terms are also not always helpful. "*Gender Concerns* are those needs which arise because of the gender division of labour" is a case in point. Is one to take it that, in situations where no 'gender division of labour' exists, 'gender concerns' cannot (by definition) be said to arise? Why are 'concerns' equated only with 'needs'? Longwe is entitled stipulatively to define her terms, but the strength of an argument will be affected by the soundness of these stipulations. Longwe's attempts are so circumscribed as to run the danger of only being useful in a private universe of meaning.

Longwe is desirous of impressing the 'Five Levels of Empowerment' intrinsic to "Sara Longwe's Women's Empowerment Framework" upon her readership and is aggrieved that the framework is not "central to NEPAD development strategy". While the Empowerment Framework is well thought through, and makes a good deal of sense, it is difficult to say the same of her "Elements of a strategic development plan". Longwe writes that, "In terms of formal planning logic, no situation can be said to present a problem unless there are policy principles which dictate that aspects of the situation are unacceptable, and therefore present a problem on which action must be taken to eliminate or alleviate the problem". But 'formal planning logic' cannot indicate what Longwe says it must, if only because many 'situations' are 'problematic' precisely due to *policy voids* and never mind what 'policy principles' (if they exist) might dictate. It is hard to know what to make of this 'planning logic' when, as is sometimes the case in South Africa, it is perhaps the 'policy principles' themselves that constitute the 'problem'.

These reservations aside, Longwe is good when she dispenses with awkward formal constructs, and speaks straight from the heart. She is surely accurate in her assessment of NEPAD as exhibiting "paradigmatic [*sic*] patriarchal blindness". As will become evident further on in this discussion, traditional 'patriarchy' is arguably at the root of the problems surrounding the gender issue.

Tamale's (2002:1) withering put-down of NEPAD, although it is only mentioned in passing in a broader context, seems to capture the consensus among women as well as anyone: "The spirit of an 'African Renaissance' has brought forth several home-grown continental initiatives to shape the new beginning of a transformed Africa. Perhaps the most promising would have been the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). I say, 'would have' because sadly and unfortunately the architects of the NEPAD blueprints have repeated the mistakes of old, providing us with a formula that reads something like: 'NEPAD by the men, of the men and for

the men.' This type of NEPAD is doomed to end in stillbirth. As the Africa Women's Forum observed in their conference held in Nigeria... there is a conceptual gender gap in NEPAD. It is quite obvious that gender issues in NEPAD are reflected as an afterthought and are generally relegated to only footnote status."

All in all though, given the voluminous commentary NEPAD has occasioned, gender has not featured very prominently amongst analysts' concerns, and it is perhaps significant that not a single male appears to have taken up the cudgels on behalf of the gender lobby. Bond (2004:103-24), in an ironically titled piece (in the present context) entitled "NEPAD Neutered", castigates NEPAD for its lack of interaction with civil society on several fronts, without even a mention in passing of its shortcomings vis-à-vis gender.

## **7. NEPAD'S PROMISE AND POTENTIALITIES**

Despite the criticisms detailed above, all is not gloom - NEPAD may have borne the kind of fruit President Thabo Mbeki was holding out for in British Prime Minister Tony Blair's Commission for Africa (2005) initiative, which was announced with considerable fanfare on 12 March 2005. This commission reads like NEPAD's dream come true. Although the commission's programme may dismay the anti-'neo-liberal' lobby, and confirm their darkest suspicions, its businesslike approach can hardly be faulted. Significantly NEPAD is mentioned again and again (153 times to be exact) in the 450-page commission report. The report could incidentally also be held up as a fair example of a 'gendered document' (cf. MATCH International 2002 concerning their 're-write' of NEPAD) notwithstanding the fact that only three of the 17 commissioners were women. Although it is too early to pass judgement, one suspects that this 'last-gasp' rescue attempt might just achieve something positive. For a start it is proposed to recover the many billions of US dollars misappropriated by African leaders, and secreted away in Swiss and Asian banks over the years - sufficient in fact to pay off over half of Africa's huge accumulated debt (Commission for Africa 2005:144).

Women's lobbyists (such as those at MATCH International Centre in Canada whose re-write of NEPAD aimed to render it 'gender sensitive'), need not waste their energies tinkering with the wording of NEPAD. It is not going to achieve anything concrete to pepper the document with 'his' or 'her' or to keep pointing out that 'people' includes 'women'. Men who do not consider 'women' as being implicit in 'people' are in any event probably a lost cause. Women's pressure groups should conserve their energies for more promising and enlightened human material wherever it can be found. For a start they should, without further ado, seize on what is already there, imperfect as it may be, in the NEPAD document (and especially

the NEPAD *brand*) and insist that the signatories start transforming pious rhetoric into action. Wanyeki (2002) frets that NEPAD does not spell out specific actions to address certain development goals. But this, as has been mentioned already, is not the high-level NEPAD *document's* concern. It is the *process's* concern and can be addressed by the gender task team, and by women on a locality by locality basis. Those who, like Wanyeki, want to wait for 'clear mechanisms' to be articulated, may wait for some time.

Martha Nussbaum (2000:12), in writing of her collaboration with Amartya Sen on the 'capabilities' approach to development, says: "Instead of asking about peoples' satisfactions, or how much in the way of resources they are able to command, we ask, instead, about what they are actually able to do or to be. Sen has also insisted that it is in the space of capabilities that questions about social equality and inequality are best raised."

This is not simply a matter of changing policies, of inserting appropriate clauses into international declarations or of passing laws. As Nussbaum (2000:17) writes (in an Indian context that would apply equally well to much of Africa): "The first day of the typical Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) education program... is occupied by getting each woman to look straight at the group leader and say her name. The process is videotaped, and women grow accustomed to looking at themselves. Eventually, though with considerable difficulty, they are all able to overcome norms of modesty and deference and to state their names publicly."

It is these 'norms of modesty and deference' that so often prove to be the sticking point in the African context. The point is that these are *norms* and they are invariably subscribed to by the very people who must overcome them, if they are to achieve equality of capabilities - a goal which is in itself very far from being a norm in many African societies. This is to suggest that women will tend to be complicit in their own subjugation and it is partially why Nussbaum subscribes to the notion of universally applicable (as opposed to culturally relative) minimum thresholds of capability rather than some notional concept of equality with men which might, in effect, still consign women to backwardness in very deprived contexts. The achievement of equality per se can provide an escape hatch for governments which might plausibly claim credit for what is in reality still an undesirable state of affairs. This is why Nussbaum, for the time being, is less interested in equality as such, than in minimum standards which should apply across the board to women and men alike.

There is a school of thought which is suspicious of one-size-fits-all universalistic solutions to women's struggle for recognition and this reservation is salutary in NEPAD's case as it is a programme that casts its net continent-wide. Nussbaum's (2000:51) rejoinder to this is particularly telling: "[I]t is not clear that there is interesting diversity exemplified in the practices of male dominance that feminists have most contested. Getting beaten up and being malnourished have depressing similarities everywhere; denials of land rights, political voice, and employment opportunities do also. Insofar as there is diversity worth preserving in the various cultures, it is perhaps not in traditions of sex hierarchy, any more than in traditions of slavery, that we should search for it."

To make Nussbaum's minimum standards apply equally in tradition-bound societies is extremely challenging. Nussbaum (2000:24-30) points out at length just how 'women-friendly' India's Constitution, and indeed the Indian state itself, are. All kinds of cultural excesses ranging from child marriage through to 'untouchability' are expressly forbidden. In many respects India is more enlightened about women's issues than is America (Nussbaum 2000:39). Three Indian provinces introduced alcohol prohibition laws as a direct consequence of representations from women's groups about domestic violence. And yet, notwithstanding this armoury of legislation, and a sympathetic state, women in India are exceedingly downtrodden - the reality simply does not live up to the theory.

Given the Indian precedent, what could NEPAD realistically achieve in a continent which is no less tradition bound? No policy document is going to reverse centuries of ingrained custom - this is not a matter of the magic wand, but NEPAD *does* provide a platform from which a strong signal of intent could be sent out. For all that the 1948 Indian Constitution has not exactly delivered equality for women, it is nevertheless there to be used as a launching pad in support of various initiatives and in some respects it is thanks to constitutional support that progress *has* been made in India, that most culturally diverse of nations (Nussbaum 2000:47).

To return to the point about women being complicit in their own subjugation - sometimes the greatest opponents of emancipation are the unemancipated themselves and, as crusaders for women's rights will know, women's movements are not immune to this form of resistance. Even self-proclaimed feminists may be guilty of perpetuating the oppression of other women. As Nussbaum (2000:38) points out: "Surely opponents [ie. certain feminists] who claim that women were all happy in India before Western ideas came along to disrupt them hardly deserve the time of day." What is true for India is no less true for Africa.

Following Chabal (2002: 452), it is the individual's place in 'the realm of the informal' in Africa that is critical. This will need to be changed before women are taken more seriously into consideration in statements of intent such as NEPAD: "Western political systems (from which the formal African political order is drawn) rest on the assumption that citizens are discrete, autonomous and self-referential individuals who cast their votes according to overt political criteria. The reality in Africa is different: the individual cannot be conceived outside the community...The individual is someone whose behaviour accords with the multiple (and sometimes contradictory) registers... which guide his [*sic*] place [in] ...the realm of the informal."

In other words, until modernity starts to make those inroads that are associated with women's progress in the developed nations, women's status as an appendage to a male dominated social order is unlikely to improve. It is with the 'contradictory registers' that the problems arise and it is, after all, *'his'* place in the community that Chabal speaks of. Above all else NEPAD, to succeed, needed political 'buy in' and the fact is that gender is still - or at any rate was in 2001 - too nascent (threatening?) a concept in Africa for it to 'add value' to NEPAD to attract that buy in. Quite the opposite in fact if the aforementioned GDI rankings are anything to go by. But it is *precisely* in the fact of this that the opportunity for gender lobbyists to enter by the backdoor arises. Dr Zuma pointed out that "NEPAD is not a static programme". It is not cast in stone, it is open to revision. Far easier to insert gender (into the process if not the document itself) now that political buy-in has been, by and large, achieved than it would have been to sell the NEPAD package from scratch with a pronounced gender slant to it. And this seems to be exactly what is happening (Global Policy Forum 7 April 2003; Mbete 2003; Pambazuka News October 2004).

NEPAD should also not be considered in isolation from the African Union (AU), which was formed in 2001, and the Pan-African Parliament (PAP), by means of which considerable progress has been made with 'mainstreaming' gender issues. Women have greatly increased their role in formal political processes. The President of the PAP and the chairperson of the AU Peace and Security Council are women, and Foreign Affairs Minister Dlamini Zuma (2003), in an address to the African Peer Review Panel in October 2003, pointed out that "(t)he AU is off to a good start with the important recognition that women must play a central role in shaping the future of our Continent with its Commission consisting of 50% of women". Three strategic consultations led by women's organisations were instrumental in these developments, namely the Durban Consultation (June 2002); the

Dakar Strategy Meeting (April 2003); and the Maputo Women's Pre-summit Meeting (June 2003).<sup>2</sup>

The next challenge, now that the 'right noises' are being made in the right quarters, will be to change the collective traditional mind-set *organically*. This subsumes, but goes well beyond, Wanyeki's (2002) "need to fundamentally re-orient the economic development approach and strategies currently adopted by most African states". What is required is for African men to change their entire worldview. This may take decades but, as the Indian example attests to, the important thing is that there *are* opportunities for self-starters in India. The secular state does *not* condemn women to subordination by dint of their being female and even a cautious thinker such as Nussbaum is optimistic about the prospects for progress in the most hidebound of societies. The fact is that, even in the West, women's emancipation was very far from being an overnight affair, and one has to start *somewhere*. NEPAD is an excellent process for the women's movement to align itself with, to get the ball rolling. Women must not hesitate to be Machiavellian about this. If, for example, moral blackmail will do the trick then so be it. If ruling élites must be shamed into action - then shame them.

The real menace is one pointed out by Chabal (2002:453) - that is of Africa's rulers regressing to their rural comfort zones by "re-traditionalising" under the smoke-screen of 'window-dressing' democracy. This is arguably what President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe has resorted to, to keep himself in power. It is a dubious path to follow. It is not obvious what role an 'African Renaissance' might play in this regard but any regressive tendencies of this nature will fatally injure any push for a gender equality that transcends mere tokenism.

Longwe's (2002) notion of "taking power" is surely misguided and could only come to grief. Far rather that women take the *initiative*. Subtlety is needed in traditional contexts and protocols must be observed wherever possible. Firstly it is critical that women who *wish* to live traditionally have this option open to them. There is no need to go around turning social orders upside down or creating needless resistance. A crucial point, from the capabilities perspective, is that it "does not preclude any woman's choice to lead a traditional life, so long as she does so with certain economic and political opportunities firmly in place" (Nussbaum 2000:41). This does not entail a revolution but consists rather of a series of small incremental 'door-openings'. As Wanyeki (2002) observes, what is needed is for "African states to remove the systemic barriers" faced by African women. These barriers are the often unspoken 'glass ceilings' that inhibit individual women's ascent to becoming

---

<sup>2</sup> I am indebted to an anonymous referee for the observations contained within this paragraph.

that which they have it within them to be. NEPAD could make it more explicit that such non-threatening reforms, no matter how tentative, constitute part of the peer-review mechanism and will be rewarded (or penalised as the case may be) accordingly. Protected, guaranteed avenues of opportunity must be the name of the game.

The question is whether NEPAD leaves the door ajar for 'gender reform'. It would seem that it most certainly does. NEPAD, and this is crucial, makes much of a "New Political Will" (NEPAD 2001b section III) - seized on by Longwe as well - on the part of African leaders to give effect to "democracy and state legitimacy" which have been "*redefined* to include accountable government, a culture of *human rights* and *popular participation*" [own emphasis] (NEPAD 2001b para. 43). "Many fine initiatives have been developed in the past...but have failed due to...a lack of genuine political will" (Department of Foreign Affairs 2002).

The foregoing avowals provide a 'thin edge of the wedge' by means of which sustained lobbying for gender parity could succeed. NEPAD, *qua* vision, is replete with references to human rights, democratic desiderata, the rule of law and the combating of corruption. This is well and good, the more so that these sentiments have been formally tabled, published and endorsed. These principles, presented as the concomitants of development, are, it is stressed, the pre-conditions for *sustainable* development (Longwe 2002; NEPAD 2001b para. 71; Wanyeki 2002). That is to say development in its most inclusive sense. That this *must* entail a sensitivity towards, and commitment to, gender equality should go without saying.

Women's organisations should not allow themselves to be browbeaten into marginalising NEPAD. The fact is that good governance, accountability, transparency and all the other political virtues held out by NEPAD are absolutely vital for the advancement of women on the African continent and women should demand, in no uncertain terms, that these fine intentions be given concrete expression in their countries. There can be no harm in periodically re-igniting 'political will' and NEPAD provides all the leverage one could ask for legitimately to hound one's leadership cohort into securing tangible results.

## 8. CONCLUSION

Given the demands placed upon it, NEPAD needs to be many things to many people. It was in the very nature of such an ambitious endeavour as NEPAD that its founding manifesto could not possibly have catered for everybody's desires. Such a document would have been doomed to be a perpetual work in progress. The depth

of consultation NEPAD's critics called for was not realistic. These critics should rather allow NEPAD to foment a certain *zeitgeist*, and then take the liberty to refashion that *zeitgeist* to suit their own particular ends.

After an initial fixation on the minutiae of the NEPAD document itself, it does seem as though the women's lobby has moved on to transcend the critique phase, and to start influencing the processes that are supposed to be flowing from NEPAD instead.

If the distinction between blueprint and process is noted, then NEPAD can most certainly address gender equity in Africa *insofar as people use it* and hold signatories to their commitments. There has been too little evidence of this level of resolve thus far. In and of itself NEPAD is neutral. It is pure form which can achieve nothing, a brand in need of promotion. It is the people of Africa who must give content to that form through their determination to give expression to the various disciplines NEPAD calls for. The 'how' of this is limited only by the would-be protagonists' imaginations and abilities. Let all who can bring whatever ideas they have to the table, and argue for them. But in the words of the pop song, only slightly paraphrased, when it comes to issues of gender, 'sisters must do it for themselves'. With donor interest in Africa at unprecedented levels, as evidenced by the proposals put forward by the Commission for Africa (2005), now is the time for women to seize centre stage and make their demands known. *Carpe diem* should be their watchword.

## REFERENCES

African Leadership Forum (ALF) 2002. Preliminary Report of the Regional Conference on African Women and NEPAD, 3-5 February 2002. <<http://unesco.org/women/nepad/report htm>>. 4/9/2005

Bond P 2004. **Talk left walk right**. Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.

Chabal P 2002. The quest for good government and development in Africa: is NEPAD the answer? **Journal for International Affairs** 78(3):447-462.

Commission for Africa 2005. Our common interest - Report of the Commission for Africa. <<http://www.commissionforafrica.org/english/home/newsstories html>> . 4/9/2005

Crisis in Zimbabwe coalition 2002. NEPAD Conference Outline. <[http://www.sarpn.org.za/CountryPovertyPapers/Zimbabwe/august2002/Nepad\\_outline.pdf](http://www.sarpn.org.za/CountryPovertyPapers/Zimbabwe/august2002/Nepad_outline.pdf)> 4/9/2005

Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) 2002. NEPAD Historical Overview. <[http://www.dfa.gov.za/au\\_nepad/historical\\_overview.htm](http://www.dfa.gov.za/au_nepad/historical_overview.htm)> 4/9/2005

De Waal A 2002. What's new in the 'New Partnership for Africa's Development'? **Journal for International Affairs** 78(3):463-475.

Ferguson J 1994. **The anti-politics machine - "development", depoliticization, and bureaucratic power in Lesotho**. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Ferguson J 1999. **Expectations of modernity - myths and meanings of urban life on the Zambian Copperbelt**. Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Global Policy Forum 2003. Women demand major say in Africa's development. <<http://www.globalpolicy.org/soecon/develop/africa/2003/0407nepadwom.htm>> 4/9/2005

Longwe SH 2002. Assessment of the gender orientation of NEPAD. Paper presented at African Forum for Envisioning Africa. Nairobi, Kenya, 26-29 April 2002. <<http://www.aidc.org.za/?q=book/view/177>> 4/9/2005

MATCH International Centre 2002. Review of the NEPAD document. <<http://www.web.ca/~matchint>> <<http://www.westafricareview.com/vol3.1/match.pdf>> 4/9/2005

Mbete B 2003. The Pan-African Parliament: An opportunity for African women. Paper presented at Regional Strategy Meeting on Women's Political Participation and Gender Mainstreaming in AU and NEPAD. Nairobi, 27-31 October 2003. <<http://www.sarpn.org.za>> 4/9/2005

**The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD)** 2001a. Official website. <<http://www.nepad.org.za>> 4/9/2005.

**The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD)** 2001b. Addis Ababa: OAU. <[http://www.dfa.gov.za/au\\_nepad/nepad.pdf](http://www.dfa.gov.za/au_nepad/nepad.pdf)> 4/9/2005

Nussbaum MC 2000. **Women and human development: the capabilities approach**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Pambazuka News 2004. African women welcome the NEPAD engendering process. <<http://www.pambazuka.org/index.php?id=25398>> 4/9/2005

Randriamaro Z 2002. The NEPAD, gender and the poverty trap. Paper presented at the Conference on Africa and the Development Challenges of the New Millennium. Accra, Ghana, 23-26 April 2002. <<http://www.aidc.org.za/?q=book/view/195>> 4/9/2005

Tadesse Z 2002. In search of gender justice: can NEPAD deliver? Paper presented at Public Seminar Centre for Studies, University of Cape Town, 28 May 2002. <<http://www.gwsafrica.org/knowledge/tadesse.html>> 4/9/2005

Tamale S 2002. Gender trauma in Africa: enhancing women's links to resources. Paper presented at the Gender Symposium, "African gender research in the new millennium: Perspectives, directions and challenges", CODESRIA and the Arab Research Centre (ARC), 8-10 April, 2002 Cairo, Egypt.

Taylor I 2002. Zimbabwe and the death of NEPAD. <<http://www.aidc.org.za/?q=book/view/183>> 4/9/2005

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 2004. **Human Development Report 2004**. New York: OUP.

Wanyeki LM 2002. **The New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD): a brief gender critique**. <<http://www.sarpn.org.za/NEPAD/may2002/femnet/index.php>> 4/9/2005

Zuma D 2003. Address at the gala dinner on the occasion of the 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the Africa Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) Panel of Eminent Persons (APR Panel), Sandton, 3 October 2003. Available at <<http://www.nepad.org.za>>