REGIONAL FORUM ON REINVENTING GOVERNMENT IN AFRICA:
REPOSITIONING THE PUBLIC SECTOR FOR THE CHALLENGES OF NEPAD
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Aide-memoire

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Regional Forum on Reinventing Government in Africa: Repositioning the Public Sector for the Challenges of NEPAD

1: Background

The Global Forum is a major event organized by the United Nations every two years. It derives its mandate from the United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/RES/57/277/ of 2002. Bringing together high-ranking Government officials, eminent public administration scholars, corporate leaders, representatives of international organizations, donor agencies, and non-governmental organizations, the Forum has served as a powerful medium for the exchange of ideas on public policy and management challenges facing the different regions of the world. The opportunity that the Forum provides for cross-cultural comparison of perspectives has proved invaluable in spotlighting the strengths and weaknesses of dominant public administration paradigms, and in suggesting rethinking in contemporary public policy.

The first Global Forum took place in Washington, DC in 1999 and focused on the generic theme “Reinventing Government”. The second was held in Brasilia, Brazil in 2000 on the theme “Democratic States and Governance in the 21st Century”. The third took place in Naples, Italy in 2001 and examined the subject, “Fostering Democracy and Development through e-Government”. The fourth Forum, held in Marrakech, Morocco in 2002, discussed the theme “Citizens, Businesses and Governments – Partnership for Development and Democracy”, while the most recent Forum, held in Mexico City in 2003, focused on “Innovation and Quality in 21st Century Government”. The Sixth Global Forum will be held in Seoul, Korea in May 2005.

2: Sponsorship and Purpose of the Regional Forum

In preparation for the May 2005 Sixth Global Forum in Seoul, the United Nations Department of Economic ad Social Affairs (UNDESA), in collaboration with its partners, has been conducting regional forums on reinventing government. The Regional Forum on Reinventing Government in Africa will be held in Johannesburg, South Africa from 17 to 19 January 2005. It will be organized by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the United Nations Development Programme, and hosted by the Department of Public Service and Administration of the Government of South Africa. The purpose of the Forum is to highlight the visionary leadership attributes as well as the innovative approaches that are required to reinvent government within the region, and thereby enhance the capacity of governance and public administration to attain the objectives of the New Partnership for African Development (hereafter referred to simply as NEPAD).

3: Context

The Regional Forum on Reinventing Government is being organized against the backdrop of the complex and multiple challenges facing Africa as well as the determination of African leaders to surmount the obstacles and place the continent on a path of sustainable
The past two to three decades have been difficult for the region. National economies have either shrunk, or have not grown fast enough to create jobs, generate income, improve access to basic social and infrastructure services, or alleviate poverty. The gloomy conditions prevailing on the continent stand in sharp contrast to the vitality in the other regions of the world – a vitality that is spurred in large measure by good governance practices, advances in technology, and expanding international trade opportunities.

The enormity of the challenge facing the African region is matched by the strong determination of the leaders to find credible and lasting solutions. As early as 1999, the Summit of the then Organization of African Unity met at Sirte, Libya, to draw up a plan aimed at re-engineering the African economy and reversing the growing marginalization of the continent in an era of globalization. In response, South African President Thabo Mbeki, Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, and Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika jointly came out with the Millennium Partnership for African Recovery and Development. At about the same time, the Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade produced a second initiative named the OMEGA Plan. The two initiatives were subsequently merged into one, called the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD).

As adopted on 2 July 2001, NEPAD is both a vision and a programme of action. The broad thrusts of NEPAD are towards poverty eradication and sustainable development, and are thus in line with the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). NEPAD places high emphasis on infrastructure development (including the construction and/or rehabilitation of highways, railways, air and sea transport facilities). The other priorities are good governance, human resources development, agriculture, environment, culture, science and technology. The strategies for achieving the preceding objectives include:

- stimulation of economic growth;
- job creation;
- reduction in poverty and inequality;
- diversification of the production base, enhancement of the international competitiveness of African products, and increased exports;
- increased African integration.

The socio-economic objectives of NEPAD are to be pursued and achieved through the support of qualitative governance and public administration. NEPAD therefore envisages qualitative change in governance and public administration on the continent as one of the prerequisites for the success of the programme. This is the essence of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), which came into being following the adoption of the NEPAD Declaration on Democracy, Political, Economic and Corporate Governance (AHG/235 (XXXVIII) at the inaugural Summit of the African Union (AU) in Durban, South Africa in July 2002. According to the Base Document of the African Peer Review Mechanism (AHG/235 (XXXVIII), the primary purpose of the APRM is:

“To foster the adoption of policies, standards and practices that lead to political stability, high economic growth, sustainable development and accelerated sub-regional and continental economic integration through sharing of experiences and reinforcement of
successful and best practices, including identifying deficiencies and assessing the needs of capacity-building.”

The (APRM) process was launched by the Heads of State and Government Implementation Committee in May 2003. Countries acceding to the Memorandum of Understanding are expected to observe the commitments spelled out in the two major documents referred to earlier, i.e., the NEPAD Declaration on Democracy, Political, Economic and Corporate Governance, and the African Peer Review Mechanism (Base Document).

While the Base Document contains guidelines on the implementation of the peer review process, it is the 2002 NEPAD Declaration that focuses on the substance of what African countries need to do to be seen as making progress in various areas of governance. In specific terms, the Declaration spells out the minimum standards that participating countries are expected to attain and the measures that should be adopted in matters relating to political, economic, and corporate governance. The Declaration is, in effect, an agreement among the participating Heads of State and Government of the African Union “to work together in policy and action” in pursuit of the following objectives:

- Democracy and Good Political Governance
- Economic and Corporate Governance
- Socio-Economic Development
- African Peer Review Mechanism.

African leaders have taken additional measures in pursuance of NEPAD and APRM objectives. Under the auspices of the Pan African Conference of Ministers of Public Service, steps have been taken to promulgate a Charter for the African Public Service (based on the Windhoek Declaration of February 2001), to articulate a Governance and Public Administration Programme for NEPAD (after the Stellenbosch meeting of May 2003), and to direct CAFRAD, UNDESA, and other partner institutions to prepare a programme for the development of government and public service leadership capacity (along the lines outlined at the end of a workshop held in Kampala, Uganda, in January 2004 and the consultations held during the workshop of September / October 2004 in Johannesburg). All the above cited measures correspond with the theme of the Forum, which is reinventing government for Africa’s renewal and development.

4: Objectives of the Forum

The objective of the Forum in Africa is to sustain the on-going momentum towards the revitalization of governance through institutional and human capacity building, policy planning and management processes, and the adoption of innovative approaches in pursuance of broad development, and specific, NEPAD-related objectives. This entails, first of all, an assessment of ongoing reform efforts and practices within the various countries in the region, with a view to show-casing good practices in public service innovation, as well as standards that could be applied in ensuring the effective implementation of NEPAD and the APRM. Among the areas to examine in this context are the leadership attributes essential to the effective implementation of NEPAD and the
APRM, and to meeting the challenges of wealth creation, poverty eradication and sustainable development in Africa. The Forum will also be expected to examine country case studies on public service innovation, with particular emphasis on the reforms undertaken to engage civic bodies (and the private sector) in decentralized governance processes, introduce “customer-care” initiatives and improve citizen access to services, utilize information and communication technologies, combat corruption and strengthen accountability mechanisms at central and local levels, and enhance the capacity of conflict-prevention and peace-building institutions.

The specific objectives of the Forum are to:

- highlight and discuss the role of visionary leadership, good governance and effective public administration in responding to the challenges of NEPAD and sustainable development and poverty reduction in Africa;
- assess the efforts made within and across countries to reform governance and public service practices, spearhead public administration innovation, and reposition the public service for the NEPAD challenges;
- examine critical capacity factors accounting for success or failure of programme to reinvent government within the Africa region;
- suggest modalities for the establishment of knowledge networks (including institutional arrangements which would enable think-tanks, universities, training and research institutions, and representatives of the government to share knowledge and experiences); and
- identify areas of common concern and a framework for regional and national cooperation on the implementation of NEPAD and the APRM.

5: Thematic Focus of the Forum

The forum will consider the following themes within the larger theme of Reinventing Government focused on enhancing government and public sector capacity.

- Repositioning governance and public administration institutions for effective implementation of NEPAD: The role of visionary leadership in championing the cause of innovation, excellence, and quality service
- Governance reform and public administration innovation within and across African countries: a focus on achievements, setbacks and future directions
- Mainstreaming MDGs and NEPAD objectives in national policy planning, budgeting and management processes: Challenges, Options, and Possibilities
- Reinventing government in difficult circumstances: Strategies for surmounting the challenges confronting LDCs, LLCs, and countries emerging from conflict
- Decentralized governance and civic engagement for poverty reduction, peace building, and consolidation of democracy
- Applying R & D solutions and building an e-government infrastructure and knowledge networks for the achievement of NEPAD objectives
- Acquiring and developing E-government infrastructure, knowledge networks for effective implementation of the APRM
5.1: Repositioning governance and public administration institutions for effective implementation of NEPAD: The role of visionary leadership in championing the cause of innovation, excellence, and quality service

In all respects the achievement of NEPAD will pass via success in promoting innovation, excellence, and quality service in the Public and private sectors as well as in the civil society. It is increasingly acknowledged that the internationally agreed goals such as the MDGs and the NEPAD cannot be achieved without commitment and visionary leadership at all levels (regional, national and local). Regional, national and local government policies and strategies need to be readjusted to support the implementation of such internationally agreed goals especially those that are in direct congruence with national regional and local needs. A number of critical questions come to mind when it comes to the role of leadership in the implementation of NEPAD. What kind of leadership at regional, national, and local levels is required? Through what approaches and with what strategic actions can the capacity of such leadership be strengthened. What strategic actions should such a leadership undertake in order to spearhead and champion the effective achievement of the NEPAD? What interface needs to be created and maintained between the leadership and “followership” to effectively reinvent government in Africa for the achievement of NEPAD objectives and MDGs? The NEPAD is part and parcel of the initiatives of Regional integration in Africa and reinventing government on the continent will have to take this strongly into consideration. What kind of leadership on the continent will effectively champion regional integration for the benefit of the people of Africa? What readjustments and innovations must take place in institutions and practices of governance and public administration in Africa (regional, national, and local levels) to sustain effectiveness in the implementation of NEPAD? Are there successful practices or at least indications of efforts towards success in building and exhibiting the kind of leadership that will promote innovation, excellence and quality in the performance of governance and public administration institutions for improvement of public services?

5.2: Governance reform and public administration innovation within and across African countries: a focus on achievements, setbacks and future directions

It is becoming a truism that in order for Africa to succeed in causing qualitative change in the lives of its people via the delivery of public services and poverty reduction, high level public administration innovations will have to be made. It is also true that almost every African country has been undergoing public administration reform for quite sometime now. The issue that needs to be explored is to assess the achievements that have been registered so far across the continent. Of all the public sector reforms that have been on-going, are there some that have succeeded that can be emulated or from which other countries can derive lessons for improvement. Even in cases where success has not been achieved, what were the obstacles and setbacks and what can be devised as the future strategies for avoiding such obstacles and ensuring success?
5.3: Mainstreaming MDGs and NEPAD Objectives in National Policy Planning, Budgeting and Management Processes: Challenges, Options and Possibilities

The United Nations General Assembly met in New York in September 2000 and adopted the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). They have been under implementation in many countries since then. There are indications that many African countries are lagging behind the rest of the world in achieving the MDGs. The MDGs are in congruence with the NEPAD and indeed in the Road map towards the implementation of the MDGs there is special attention paid to the special needs of Africa including supporting the implementation of NEPAD. However, given the poor performance of African countries in both achieving NEPAD and the MDGs there is need to explore the extent to which these goals and objectives have been integrated in national policies, plans and budgets in African countries. What challenges are being faced by African countries in mainstreaming these goals and objectives in their plans, policies and budgets? What options can be devised to facilitate this process? Are there successful cases on the continent where the MDGs and objectives of NEPAD have been mainstreamed in national policies, plans and budgets that can serve as learning examples for other countries?

5.4: Reinventing Government in Difficult Circumstances: Strategies for Surmounting the Challenges Confronting LDCs, LLCs and Countries Emerging from Conflict

Although Africa is one and in many respects the countries on the continent have been facing similar problems and challenges, the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), owing to their more severe levels of poverty and governance capacity, face some problems and challenges that are specific to them. The Brussels Plan of Action of the LDCs (May 2000) had foreseen strategies for strengthening governance and public administration for reducing poverty. What are the challenges confronting these countries in strengthening the capacities of their public services and what strategies would need to be put in place to achieve the MDGs and NEPAD in these countries? What are the particular challenges that face the LDCs that have just emerged out of violent conflict? How can such challenges be addressed to enable such countries achieve the MDGs and NEPAD objectives? Are there some of the LDCs whose performance serves as example for others in terms of planning and implementation of strategies for achieving MDGs and NEPAD?

5.5: Decentralized Governance and Civic Engagement for Poverty Reduction, Peace-Building and Consolidation of Democracy

As part of efforts to structure governments to promote the participation of the people in the decision-making processes as well as the development activities as one of the tenets of ‘good governance,’ the policy of devolution of power and authority to sub-national governments, (i.e. decentralization),’ is increasingly adopted and applied in many African countries. In addition the decentralization trend is being supported by many aid agencies. “Decentralization is a gradual process and is expected to enhance the opportunities for participation by placing more power and resources at a closer, more familiar, and more easily influenced level of government. In environments with poor traditions of citizen participation, therefore, decentralization is perceived to be an important first step in
creating regular, predictable opportunities for citizen-state interaction. Many see decentralization as a vehicle not only to the enhancement of the State’s capacity to accelerate local development but also as a way to enhance the Poor’s voice and power (civic engagement) in the fight against poverty”1.

Given adequate financial and human resources, there is sufficient reason to believe that service delivery by Local authorities and their community level partners can be more flexible and responsive to the local needs and conditions than delivery by central government. However, counting on decentralized governance and civic engagement for poverty reduction, peace building, and consolidation of democracy should not be automatic. A number of issues need to be taken into consideration including the following:

- The socio-politico-economic problems that the countries that have decentralized sought to solve by introducing decentralized governance.
- The main features of the decentralization policy and major strategies for its implementation
- The structural arrangements that are put in place to facilitate the involvement of the grass-roots people in these countries in the process of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the delivery of services at the grass-roots.
- The proactive partnerships developed between stakeholders in the country (public and private sectors, civil society organizations and the international community) and how these interface with the community level to facilitate service delivery.

An analysis of successful or even unsuccessful experiences needs to be made to serve as learning cases for countries that are still grappling with how to decentralize their governance for promoting democratic governance, peace, and poverty reduction.

5.6: Applying R & D Solutions and Building an e-Government Infrastructure and Knowledge Networks for the Achievement of NEPAD Objectives and Implementation of the APRM

Achieving the NEPAD objectives and implementing the APRM will require engaging research and development in many aspects of socio-politico-economic and technological life in Africa. ICT application needs to be taken advantage of and e-government infrastructure built as well as knowledge networks. These are facilitators of innovation and promotion of excellence. Countries need to devise strategies for R&D, building and sustaining e-government infrastructure, and strengthening knowledge networks without which it will be difficult to implement and evaluate the achievements of the NEPAD and APRM.

Papers on the above issues will be presented and discussed during the Forum. As a background document, the publication on “Reinventing Government: State Capacity in a Globalizing Society” (prepared for the Fifth Global Forum on Reinventing Government) will be provided to each of the participant. Conclusions and recommendations of the Regional Forum will be presented to the Sixth Global Forum on Reinventing Government in Seoul in May 2005.

6: Participants

High level government officials, particularly from Ministries and Departments responsible for the public service and public sector modernization in African countries, will be invited to attend the Regional Forum. Resource persons, representatives from international institutions, the academia and regional institutes and civil society organizations, as well as experts from UNDP and UNDESA will also attend the Forum.

7: Outcome

The outcome of the Regional forum will be an increased understanding by Senior African officials of the requirements of repositioning the public service to better respond to the challenges of NEPAD in the context of sustainable development and poverty reduction in Africa. The Forum will also increase the potential for regional and national cooperation on the implementation of NEPAD, and the APRM, as well as for establishing knowledge networks.

8: Venue and dates

The Regional Forum will be held from 17 to 19 January 2005, at the Sandton Convention Centre, Johannesburg, South Africa.

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