

NEPAD'S OPEN DOOR TO AFRICA

by John H.E. Maré

The concentration on future technological development on the continent means opportunities for the private sector.

In recent years there have been many new international efforts to achieve development in Africa. The New Partnership for Africa's Development (Nepad), which emerged in 2001, has become generally accepted as the definitive framework for a variety of international partnerships to reposition Africa in the world and open doors to a new era.

The Nepad initiative attempts to set priorities for African development in the context of a bigger picture, with a vast network of overlapping programmes and partnerships. Co-ordinated intra-African activities are a key feature of the Nepad process, but these are envisaged as interacting with a broader international network of supportive partnerships to achieve desired goals.

Nepad activities have been taking place on many levels. The Secretariat, based at Midrand near Johannesburg, attempts to fulfil a co-ordinating and facilitating role. However, the implementation of projects is envisaged as being the responsibility of national entities and regional organisations in Africa. In the current Nepad process there has been particular emphasis on three key issues:

- First, that the process should be African-owned and driven, although international partners are obviously welcome to take initiatives in terms of the parameters sketched out by the Africans themselves;
- Second, the private sector must be strengthened in Africa to become a major driving force for development;
- Third, agriculture is a priority sector together with related rural development.

In addition to these, there is a need to strengthen Africa's infrastructure, both physical and social, as a primary foundation to take development further on all fronts.

In all of this it is recognised that technologies must be created and applied to propel Africa's development in a sustainable manner. This reality, together with the aforementioned key issues, underlines the opportunities now opening up for African-based technologies and engineering solutions. The relevance of the involvement of a wide variety of academic and research institutions on projects that further the stake and activities of the private sector, within the Nepad parameters, becomes obvious.

The level of support offered by the international community for Nepad, and for Africa's new initiative in development, underpinned by good governance on all fronts, is unprecedented and is needed for African expertise to develop and for international partnerships to sustain it. It includes new possibilities of international finance, such as those emanating from the Blair Commission of the UK; and international political support on all issues. New partnerships that can strengthen the role of the private sector in African development, and the activities of supportive research and technology, include the Nepad programme of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and that of the Africa Partnership Forum.

Imaginative new ways to develop and apply technology are especially related to communications technology, where African ICT utilities are collaborating with leading ICT companies such as the e-Africa Commission. Programmes aimed at improving the capacity of African farmers regarding everything from climate changes to crop diseases and market prices must be expanded. Telematic (combined phone and computer systems) health communications are of primary importance in attaining the Nepad health goals. Telematic monitoring of the challenges of Africa's environment, including those of the built environments in urban areas, are to be further developed in the near future. In all cases the position of programmes in the broader context must be taken into account. Links to both public governance systems and private sector activities for sustainability, also must be taken into account.

The engineering challenges facing Nepad are significant, especially considering the need for ingenuity to overcome an absence of capacity and resources. Among the most challenging are those related to energy and communication in all formats. The delivery of the Grand Inga Hydropower Project on the Congo River is increasingly seen as a litmus test for Nepad, together with related challenges ranging from ways to accommodate the environmental impact to using the energy obtained. ☺

Doctor John Maré is a consultant on international public affairs, specialising in the EU and Nepad. In the course of his formal diplomatic career he served for many years in Tokyo, New York and Brussels, where he was second in charge of the South African Mission to the EU until 1997. Since 2003 he has been working on projects for the Nepad Secretariat and the UN Office of the Special Advisor on Africa. He has recently completed a report on "The Role of the Private Sector in Nepad Implementation" which was issued as a UN document in mid-2005.

What are the NEPAD primary objectives?

- To eradicate poverty
- To place African countries, both individually and collectively, on a path of sustainable growth and development
- To halt the marginalisation of Africa in the globalisation process and enhance its full and beneficial integration into the global economy
- To accelerate the empowerment of women