Getting real about democracy in Africa: Nepad and the challenge of good governance

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Synopsis

An economic benefit-cost analysis would probably indicate that South Africa should put as much distance between itself and the image of Africa as possible. That option, however, has been firmly closed by President Thabo Mbeki's leading role in the establishment of both The New Partnership for Africa's Development (Nepad) and the new African Union (AU). Now it is South Africa's fate to have to try to improve the African "neighbourhood", develop Africa's economic capacity and markets and reduce the damage that failures of governance or turmoil do to economic confidence in all the individual economies, including our own. Nepad is President Mbeki's vehicle to achieve this goal. Nepad is predicated on good governance as a condition for stability, investor confidence and support from the major developed nations in the form of debt reduction, investment and trade.

Against the background of current crises in Africa and the abysmal record of the AU's predecessor, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), both the African Union and Nepad have been greeted with a mixture of cautious high level interest, fairly meaningless hype, more serious doubts and uncertainties and some derision. No alternative strategies for rescuing most of Africa from its political and developmental malaise seem to be available, however, leaving Nepad as the only game in town. Furthermore, the fact that the Nepad initiative has secured tacit acknowledgement by very many of Africa's leaders that the quality of their governance is the major factor in their economic malaise is a significant early achievement, begging that Nepad be taken seriously.

But as a vehicle for political and economic renewal in Africa, Nepad seems shaky and unreliable. Already Mbeki has chosen, or has been forced by the reluctance of key leaders to have their governance "reviewed", to remove political monitoring from Nepad itself and to agree to it being lodged in the far less coherent and advanced institutions of the new African Union. International pressure may force a reversal of this decision but it has shown how unconvincing the commitments to good governance and the democratic reforms within Nepad really are. Perhaps in anticipation of the ambiguity, G8 leaders have been diplomatically supportive but have risked no significant exposure to the plan.

While the caution among developed nations is understandable, as the potential "partners" in Nepad, they now have an

opportunity and potentially more leverage to insist on fundamental political reforms to back the economic reforms that, while never fully implemented, have long been accepted as necessary. Such reform, however, requires far more than moral exhortation and what will probably turn out to be face-saving, state-orchestrated peer reviews of the performance of self-seeking oligarchies. These governments have all the means to dissemble and manipulate the peer reviews of Nepad or the AU.

Firstly, the developed donor nations would be wise to validate Nepad peer reviews with their own monitoring. Such monitoring will have to go beyond the obvious democratic and constitutional formalities that are all too easy for dictatorial governments to fake. In particular, independent monitoring will have to cover the informal but muscular intimidation and public discrediting of both opposition parties and critical voices in civil society that not only rob them of confidence, but undermine their support and financial viability.

Secondly, independent monitoring, while necessary, is an insufficient basis for efforts to strengthen prospects for the consolidation of democracy in Africa. Effective intervention has to address the full range of reasons why democracy has so persistently failed in Africa. The potential partners in Nepad must attempt to have an impact on pervasive processes in Africa's societies that allow corrupt and self-seeking leaders relatively free rein to mismanage their countries in pursuit of their own importance, power and personal wealth.

Political dynamics in many parts of Africa are distorted by the weakness of independent economic classes, the prominence and socio-economic power of a political class of beneficiaries of state patronage, huge social distance between the urban power elite and poorly organised mass constituencies, state bureaucracies and militaries that are too ineffectual to command respect for state institutions but not too weak to act against dissent and threats to their hegemony and corruption that is so entrenched that it has become intertwined with pre-modern tributary economies.

The greatest challenge is to strengthen checks, balances and demands for accountability in the political systems of Africa. To this end what is needed most at this stage are developments that will make an impact in seven broad areas:

•Combating central state hegemony and protecting individuals, communities and civil society from muscular interference by authoritarian governments.

•Strengthening the organisation of civil society.

•Facilitating the emergence of independent business.

•Optimising the conditions for the development of viable democratic opposition parties.

•Strengthening the administrative capacity and effectiveness of the state without at the same time strengthening its centralisation and ability to restrict civil liberty.

•Combating corruption.

•Helping to build the institutions that facilitate growth and economic confidence.

None of these goals can be short-term objectives. If, however, developed country partners act in concert to use the leverage that Nepad might provide, if they strengthen independent civil society (without supporting NGOs with international ideological agendas), promote checks and balances in governance and improve Africa's development capacity without strengthening the coercive power of central governments, they could begin to empower Africa's people and counterbalance authoritarian tendencies. And if they back positive early results with significant material and strategic support, Nepad could yet be a factor in the salvation of a continent. ❏

1. Nepad:
warts and all, the only game in town

President Mbeki has pinned his reputation, and that of South Africa, to a massive risk venture. The challenge is that of transforming the quality of governance on the continent as a basis for what is largely his brainchild, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (Nepad). (See excellent summary of the agreements that launched the African Union and the provisions of Nepad, Cilliers, 2002). If eloquence could engineer development then the plan would be a winner. Speaking to a special session of the UN General Assembly Mbeki announced that "*Africa's time has come … we, the Africans, are the architects of the Nepad renewal plan. As Africans we own Africa's development agenda … (we) are not merely sounding brass and tinkling cymbals.*" (*The Star*, September 17, 2002). Words aside, what gives this initiative a potentially unique cutting edge is the provision for "peer reviews" of the adherence of African governments to democratic principles and good

governance as a *quid pro quo* for development support from the major economies of the world.

As one might have expected, Nepad has met with a mixed reception. More informed observers remember that there have been large but largely futile plans for Africa to rescue itself before — the Lagos Action Plan of 1980, a little later an initiative called African Alternatives to Structural Adjustment, and others. *The Economist* has been "*mildly optimistic*" about Nepad but is not swept away by the rhetoric, warning that "*Words are cheap … many grand plans for the recovery of Africa quickly failed because lip service did not translate into real action*" (*The Economist*, June 22, 2002).

Nepad's greatest weakness may be its vaunting ambition. Former *Business Day* editor, Ken Owen, has warned that Mbeki has set himself up to be the "fall-guy" for Africa (*Business Day*, July 8, 2002). His judgement and image have already been compromised by the manifest failure of his

quiet diplomacy on Zimbabwe, and the undertaking to promote continent-wide good governance could be his bridge too far. Nepad would be a forbidding challenge on its own, let alone as one element of the mega plan to establish the institutions, structures and procedures of the African Union (AU), a union of over 50 states, quite a few of which challenge the basic notions of what a democratic state is supposed to be.

The new AU is planned to have a super parliament, as well as all the institutions that the European Union has today. RW Johnson articulates widely held but diplomatically covert misgivings about the viability of the whole initiative: "*The almost childlike assumption appears to be that if you ape the EU's institutions you can ignore how differently Europe evolved*" (*Business Day*, July 17, 2002). It is difficult to disagree with Johnson that starting small by building on the already functioning Southern African Customs Union would have been infinitely more sensible.

The massive scope of the venture has not been the only grounds for criticism. The sincerity and motivation behind the initiative are also at issue. Again Ken Owen has described the initiative as a "*hole in a far corner of the universe where President Mbeki hides from the intractable problems of governing*" (*Business Day*, July 8, 2002). Prof Sipho Seepe, provides a subtext "*Cutting through the crap … We African leaders, having failed to consolidate democracy … (etc.) come before you chaps in the G8 to enlist your support. If you give us money we promise to honour the commitments we made to our people. We need to be rewarded for what we should have been doing in the first place*" (*Mail and Guardian*, July 12-18, 2002). In the same publication, Nieman Fellow Shyaka Kanuma, asks "*how can rulers who are themselves clearly the problem be part of the solution … It beggars belief that a gathering of men (in the new African Union) … who benefit from disorder … will pave the way for good government in their countries*"(*Mail and Guardian*, July 12-18, 2002).

The most aggressive criticism, however, has come from the left. Professor Peter Vale (quoted by Sampson, *Sunday Argus*, March 17, 2002) sees it as a "*big idea*" but with sinister overtones far removed from the needs of ordinary people — a formula for survival as vassals of powerful Western countries. Along similar lines a grouping of some 40 progressive civil society organisations, meeting at Port Shepstone in South Africa just before the launch of the AU and Nepad, itemised no fewer than 27 substantive points of criticism and concluded that the plan had to be rejected, both in "*process and content … Africa is not for sale!!*"(*EDP Entwicklungspolitik*, Vol 17, 2002). Eddy Maloka (2002) summarises the range of criticisms: Nepad is seen to be a top-down, leader-initiated process, a "neo-liberal" Washington consensus-based plan, a prescription for deepening dependency and Africa's exploitation as supplier of raw materials, subject to the whims of the hostile developed world. Almost without excep-

tion, Nepad has been rejected by left-leaning civil society organisations and NGOs, both in South Africa and abroad.

All this cynicism and disbelief can no doubt be amply justified. Numbers of local opinion polls in South Africa would suggest that most of Mbeki's own supporters would agree with Ken Owen that the President's time would be better spent improving the administration of his own country.

But the die has been cast and Nepad and the AU have taken centre stage in the continent's international affairs. The media have set the gigantic train in motion — *The Star* of Johannesburg, for example, with massive generosity, announced it as: "*African Union marks new dawn for Africa … aimed at powering the economic rebirth of the continent with Nepad as its engine*" (*The Star*, July 9, 2002). The international community has been indulgent if not cautiously receptive. Nepad has been presented to the G8 meeting, to the United Nations, the World Summit on Sustainable Development and a number of other significant international gatherings, quite aside from being packaged as the economic centrepiece of the new African Union. Most top international leaders and diplomats seem to be tentatively sincere, or sincerely tentative, in welcoming it. The German Deputy Minister for Africa, Uschi Eid, for example, in an interview makes it very clear that, doubts notwithstanding, the international community is taking the Nepad leadership at its word, and that it could develop into a benchmark for Germany's policy on Africa

(Uschi Eid, 2002). Pascal Lamy, the chief trade official of the European Union has committed the EU to providing " *… all possible support to Nepad as the development arm of the African Union*" (*Die Burger*, October 15, 2002).

In any event, support for Nepad will most probably strengthen if for no other reason than that there is simply nothing else that offers any hope for the continent. Hence although there is wide scepticism and even derision over the plan, the sheer enormity of the problems of political mismanagement on the continent creates an obligation among nations to respond to the initiative. The risk in all the legitimate criticism, therefore, is that a discredited Nepad will limp on as an expensive diversion, supported only in polite diplomatic rhetoric.

Furthermore, Nepad is a positive development in one important sense. More so than before, African leaders accepting the plan are by implication admitting, in concert, that political delinquency and abject failures of administration and governance are an important part of Africa's economic failures. Manipulating events to extract this formal collective admission has been Mbeki's signal achievement. For this reason alone Nepad has to be taken seriously.

This might also be the right time for it. In 2001 Africa showed slightly higher average GDP growth (four per cent) than other developing regions. Unfortunately it was temporary — the UN Economic Commission for Africa, in its 2002 report, ascribed the

performance partly to Africa's economic weakness — its very marginal integration into the world economy has cushioned it against the effects of the current global slowdown (UN Economic Commission for Africa 2002). It is also very easy to show positive results in the short term from a very low base and in some cases from economic collapse. Much of Africa has nowhere to go but up. The Economic Commission concluded, however, that even current trends would not enable Africa to achieve the targets of its Millennium Plan for combating poverty and disease. Nevertheless, even a temporary economic upturn is a good basis for a new start.

For all these reasons it is unwise to be scathing about Nepad, however tempting that might be. It has to be engaged, both as a focus for development and as a lever in the pursuit of democracy on the continent where democracy has fared worst of all. If one accepts this, two major questions arise:

•How effective is Nepad likely to be in its present form?

•How should the potential "partner countries" respond to ensure, or at least assist, its effectiveness? ❏

2. The prospects for Nepad
as currently envisaged

Nepad's main selling point from the point of view of the developed partner countries is the "Peer Review" mechanism to be applied within the African Union. How much reliance can the developed potential donor partners place on this *quid pro quo* for aid and trade?

First, the international community has generally been impressed by the criteria assembled and formulated as a basis for Nepad. The provisions of the agreements underlying Nepad are also backed by parallel provisions relating to the structures of the AU itself, most importantly the Protocol of the Peace and Security Council and the Declaration on Election Observation and Monitoring. Both of these agreements provide for monitoring, surveillance and various measures and sanctions that can be applied in the case of default or threats to security.

The dispassionate and highly experienced Africa analyst, Richard Cornwell, however, observes that "*To succeed, even moderately, Nepad is going to demand the commitment of political leaders here and elsewhere to policies that may cause them considerable discomfort in the short to medium term. It is in a way a self-denying ordinance*" (Cornwell, 2002). Cornwell's caution is underscored by some disturbing, or at least confusing aspects of the whole Nepad process. One is the fact that Nepad duplicated the monitoring unit of the *Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Co-operation* (CSSDCA), established by the OAU in 2000. A memorandum of understanding backing the CSSDCA was approved in the assembly that launched the AU and Nepad. The CSSDCA has 24 core values, 46 commitments and involves monitoring on 50 key performance indicators. It has mechanisms not only for technical monitoring but also for institutional evaluation and peer reviews. Draft reports on 15 countries have been prepared or are in preparation. In an important sense, therefore, Nepad duplicates an exist-

ing initiative. The most disturbing aspect of this is that the CSSDCA initiative has ruffled no feathers and its work has been almost unnoticed in the public debate. The posture of President Obasanjo of Nigeria is that Nepad and the CSSDCA have to be harmonised and it now seems possible that the political aspects of Nepad reviews will be rolled into the CSSDCA process (see ahead). It also seems that at least Nigeria is unhappy that a non-African Organisation, the UN Economic Commission for Africa, is the technical agency assembling the evidence.

Will the Nepad package have more impact? On the one hand the fact that Nepad requires voluntary acceptance might imply that it will be taken more seriously. On the other hand the duplication of initiatives and the fact that earlier versions of Nepad were proposed as if the CSSDCA did not exist, suggests a huge lack of consequentiality, casting doubt on the quality of the commitments made.

Another problem is the fact that the adoption of the linked election monitoring proposals, which are categorical in requiring action against member governments coming to power by unconstitutional means, appeared to be waived without comment in the case of current leaders who have retained power by unconstitutional means. This and the lack of any noticeable pressure on Zimbabwe during the launching summit of the AU call into question both the sincerity and the political will underpinning Nepad.

Then there is the critical issue of the financial resources required. As Cilliers (2002) notes, the OAU, with a much more limited purview of activity and responsibility than the AU, ran up large debts beyond its budget of $32 million, and the OAU Peace Fund had to be bailed out by non-African agencies and countries. The AU is much more elaborate, even allowing for a phased implementation, and with the addition of Nepad, will require a substantially higher order of financial commitment from member countries. If the developed world is going to be asked to bail out the process it will in effect deny Mbeki's claim that Africa now "owns" its development. To say that the viability of the ambitious venture is in question is to put it mildly.

But the most critical question is whether or not the "peer reviews" are likely to work. General Obasanjo of Nigeria was honest enough to warn that Nepad implies that there will have to be some loss of sovereignty. President Mbeki no doubt shares this assumption, but the almost equally influential and otherwise supportive President Wade of Senegal questioned the right of any external agencies to interfere in or criticise the internal affairs of African governments. Libyan leader Gaddafi, who appears to have bought his great popularity among African countries with hard cash, spoke in and out of turn with great acclaim at the launch of the AU in Durban, insisting that the West should give aid without any conditions whatsoever, and that African democracy had the right to be "different".

Even if one assumes the sincerity of the core drivers of the project, Mbeki, Obasanjo, Wade and Bouteflika and their immediate supporters, it is already clear that some of the other leaders on the now enlarged twenty-man implementation committee for the union will have much to hide from any review process. However, a glance at what the peer review system is planned to be confirms suspicions that the pressure that it is supposed to place on governments to improve their democratic record and governance will be far from categorical. It is likely to be gentle at best and at worst it may even be reassuring.

First, as already indicated, acceptance of the peer review mechanism will be voluntary. There was no signing ceremony to commit member states to meeting the requirements, but merely collective verbal endorsement. Individual countries will sign up later if and when they choose to do so. Second, the evidence for the reviews will be provided by the countries themselves — self-monitoring — according to a set of common standards, then analysed by the UN Economic Commission for Africa, overseen by a panel of "eminent persons". This panel is likely to wield the final judgement. Unfortunately this panel could be anything but independent. Planned to comprise ex-judges, academics and retired politicians, its membership will be nominated and approved by the heads of state of participating countries. Earlier it seemed that the increasingly critical and effective UN Economic Commission for Africa would be responsible for the reviews, since it undertakes the CSSDCA monitoring, but now it seems that it will merely assist in their technical compilation and that final conclusions will be dictated by the nominated panel. There is thus no firm guarantee of transparency and depth in the review process. In other words, the mechanism as endorsed by the AU could be carefully crafted to avoid embarrassing any important country. The pressures to conform to the stated intentions of the review process may have to be self-imposed.

Furthermore, one has to assume that the participating states will learn the tricks of formally satisfying the review criteria while continuing business as usual. African governments are not alone in having learnt to dissimulate with "democratic" brinkmanship (see ahead).

Then, in the case of a failed review, the pressure that will be brought to bear has not been specified. This is doubtless in response to the clear discomfort among the assembled delegates at the launch of the AU. *The Economist* (June 22, 2002) reports that some of the heads of state that endorsed the mechanism reassured each other that it is " *… too early to talk of pressure or the isolation of offending countries*". The agreement was merely to take "*appropriate action*" in the case of a failed review, with no further specification.

But to crown all these doubts, very late in the day, South Africa Deputy Foreign Minister Aziz Pahad and shortly afterwards Mbeki himself, shocked observers by

stating categorically that the Nepad peer review process will not cover political issues at all; his understanding is that it covers only economic and corporate governance. While Wiseman Nkuhlu, head of the Nepad Secretariat, expressed surprise at this announcement, he confessed that there might have been a political decision at high level: "*We will have to wait and see …*" (*Business Day*, October 31, 2002, see also *The Star*, October 29, 2002, and Katzenellenbogen 2002). What seems to have happened is that Mbeki, without much of a struggle, has succumbed to the persuasion of his colleague heads of state in Africa to water down the political surveillance of their governance, and without warning his own appointee, the head of the Nepad secretariat. The intention seems to be that whatever political reviews take place will be rolled into the over-ambitious and elaborate responsibilities of yet to be established AU institutions under the intended Peace and Security Council. In that setting they will be aligned with the existing CSSDCA process which is already under critical scrutiny because its technical work is performed by the "foreign" UN Economic Commission. Hence what was initially presented as a tightly co-ordinated and comprehensive review process under Nepad itself, may now be dispersed across the far less urgent and probably less cohesive future structures of the massive AU machine, and one may expect continuing disputes about the role of the UN Commission to boot. While the economic reviews may start within 18 months, the political review process may not only be delayed but could also become an issue of controversy.

It is possible that the political content of Nepad reviews will be re-instated under pressure of international opinion — there are already signs of backtracking. At the most recent meeting of the Nepad Implementation Committee twelve out of the enlarged twenty-country Committee signed a declaration of intent to be comprehensively monitored, but the criteria and the agencies that will perform the technical work have not been specified. There are still signs of evasiveness on the political content of the peer reviews of Nepad itself. All this suggests that it would be extremely naïve to place much reliance on the political and governance review process and the persuasiveness of its outcomes as instruments of pressure (*Business Day*, November 5, 2002).

All things considered, the democracy reviews seem destined to end up avoiding the critical issues, or being anodyne and ambiguous (perhaps resembling the official South African assessment of the last Zimbabwean elections as "representative"). There is room for stalling, delaying, evading, dissimulation and, in the end, simply toughing out whatever negative reviews may eventually appear.

In any event, however, even if pressure were to be brought to bear on errant states, such pressure is never guaranteed success, particularly not in the short run. Such countries are usually not democracies and therefore the reactions of their neighbours and their citizens can be ignored. These

kinds of governments also tend to make much of national pride, honour, culture and autonomy and many have "anti-imperialist" leanings. Above all, these governments are often in situations in which they have nothing to lose. Moral, diplomatic and economic pressure therefore tends to result in a mobilisation of sentiment among the elites to resist the pressure. In the short run it can be counter-productive. Where sanctions are applied, the relatively small elites can cushion themselves against their effects and leave the powerless poor to take the punishment. Zimbabwe at the moment is a case in point. Bayart (1999) goes further: "*Africa is resistant to every conditionality*".

The effectiveness of pressure aside, there is another way of looking at the reviews, departing from a Pavlovian assumption. If those countries that volunteer for the review process and achieve acceptable ratings are rewarded with aid and trade, and perhaps debt relief, their own positive behaviour may be reinforced and they could then become role models for their neighbours. In this way Nepad could at least engage some African countries in a process of serious interaction with the developed world about political reform. *It is a slim chance* — Sebastian Mallaby (2002) points out that many countries respond to IMF and World Bank rewards but in the end do not implement the policies. He ascribes it to an absence of ownership, but African governments are so bad at implementing even their own policies that this interpretation is generous — it probably boils down to a mixture of lack of capacity and political will.

Nevertheless the dynamic of reward for progress, however tenuous, has to be tried simply because it is the only strand of hope for Africa at large. This suggests that to a degree the ultimate effectiveness of Nepad will depend on how valid the reviews will be and how closely the aid-giving countries will be guided by such reviews if they are credible.

If the reviews are not credible then it will depend on what alternative, consistent and transparent monitoring process is applied by the partner countries. To the extent that the developed countries end up paying lip service to *superficial or cosmetic reviews*, they will simply be helping to entrench an ineffectual political ritual. Therefore the G8 and other developed democracies, particularly the super rich and influential smaller economies - the Nordic states, Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland, Australia and the like, have to try to make sure that the "reviews" do not simply create a smoke-screen behind which corrupt but influential African governments continue with their old habits, confirming the worst fears expressed by the international NGO movement referred to earlier.

The peer review process as planned, therefore, while better than nothing, will not be sufficient. Anticipating the conclusions to this analysis, it would seem necessary for Nepad partners to at least monitor the Nepad reviews and ideally to establish their own benchmarks of adherence to rea-

sonable requirements of good governance, as a check on the official AU reviews.

Good governance and democracy, however, can fail for reasons other than, or additional to, the formal aspects of political performance that are likely, or able, to be reviewed. No matter how sound the review process or the monitoring of government actions by the potential partners may be, pervasive conditions exist that will continue to place the stability of the states and the quality of their democracies in jeopardy. Peer reviews may be useful in extreme cases but they will not in general improve the quality of democracy in Africa. This introduces the major point of this essay. What political conditions or reforms to make African democracy more effective should the potential "partners" in Nepad work towards? What strategies should they adopt to strengthen stability and democracy on the continent in a more basic sense?

The Nepad/AU reviews of formal adherence to good governance will be complex but compared with the challenge of facilitating the underlying conditions for stability, accountability and democracy in Africa, they are elementary. No country in Africa is in the clear, as it were. Fifteen years ago Zimbabwe was seen to be well on the way to democratic consolidation. Even current "log leaders" in Africa, South Africa and Botswana, for example, give reason to question the quality and resilience of their own democracies. One can only guess at what might happen if their governing parties lose their comfortable electoral majorities (see for example Southall (2001)).

Facilitating the conditions for resilient democracy has to proceed from a broad understanding of the political and administrative dynamics of Africa, as free as possible of partisan controversies. This task is complex not only because the dynamics themselves are complex but also because a frank discussion of them is sometimes inhibited by political correctness and the sensitivity of many African intellectuals. Eddy Maloka, the Executive Director of the Africa Institute of South Africa, for example, labels some of the more penetrating recent analyses of Africa's malaise "Afro-pessimist" and "racist" (Maloka, 2002). This kind of defensiveness is exactly what Africa does not need if it is to respond to its political and economic challenges. Fortunately, there are more and more Africans making "radical" analyses that balance criticism of the West with an acknowledgement that Africa itself has squandered its own resources — see for example Dani Nabudere (2002). Hence at the risk of being called an "Afro-pessimist" or worse, one has to proceed. ❑

3. States and goverance in Africa: the patterns of underperformance

The authors Chabal and Daloz in their notable analysis, *Africa works* (1999), observe that "*There is today a greater belief in the irrationality of Africa than there was on the eve of its independence*". The bottom 24 countries in the ratings of the *Human Development Report* of the United Nations Human Development Programme, 2000, were all in Africa. In 2001 there were 13 elections held in ten African countries, and four elections were postponed. As in previous years most of the elections that were held — at least eight — were marred by irregularities, violence and disputes over results (Africa Institute of SA, 2002). Aside from South Africa and Botswana there are countries that look promising at the moment, such as Mali, Ghana and possibly Mozambique, but even in these cases the democracies are fragile and clearly need a period of consolidation.

Africa was part of what Samuel Huntington described as the "*third wave*" of democratisation facilitated by the collapse of authoritarian socialism, but most countries have suffered degrees of backsliding. As Carl Gershman of the National Endowment for Democracy notes, these new democracies were buffeted by forces of global competition and the new freedom allowed all manner of ethnic and communal tensions to surface. What emerged, in the words of Gershman, have been "illiberal democracies" in which electoral formalities "*simply masked and legitimised regimes that were hardly less repressive and corrupt than their authoritarian predecessors ... elections are not free and fair because they are constrained and controlled by the ruling party or otherwise distorted by fraud and manipulation ... they tend to have an overwhelmingly dominant*

executive … authoritarian political culture and practices…a very high level of corruption and inequality … the rule of law is extremely weak as are the institutions of the state that are supposed to provide security and look after the social and economic needs of the people". Gershman refers to the "*unfinished democratic revolution … the large majority of cases* (in many parts of the world but including Africa) *came up against ingrained legacies of authoritarian culture and practice …* (producing) *a cynical form of "virtual democracy*" (Gershman, 2002).

This kind of assessment is so manifestly true and discouraging that one has to ask oneself whether or not there is any point in a mission to democratise Africa. From one perspective this kind of defeatism is unnecessary, however. Only five decades ago Seymour Martin Lipset (1959) produced a table in which he listed 13 western countries as stable democracies but no fewer than 15 European countries as "unstable democracies and dictatorships". At that time there was as much "pessimism" about Southern and Eastern Europe as there is about Africa today. Gershman himself refers to evidence of current counter trends in African democracy, including "*increasingly competitive multi-party elections, cru*sading journalists, increasingly assertive judicial bodies, livelier parliaments and more vibrant civil societies". He also refers to evidence of the tremendous diversity of circumstances affecting democracy on the continent (Gershman 2002). Africa is not a lost cause.

But one dare not oversimplify the challenge. The odds are stacked against any general transformation of Africa's politics in the short to medium term. Here one is mindful of Max Weber's observation, quoted by SM Lipset (1959), on the state of democracy in Russia in the early 20th century, that "*European liberty had been born in unique, perhaps unrepeatable circumstances at a time when intellectual and material conditions for it were exceptionally propitious*". Charles Tilly (quoted by Anderson 2001) says much the same thing, namely that a "*protected place in time and space*" facilitated state-building and later democratisation in early modern Europe.

These judgements reinforce the view expressed above that the democratisation process that Africa needs is at a more basic level than the types of formal practices on which Nepad or alternative reviews can be focused. The problems of democracy in Africa are in a sense the nature of the very societies themselves. ❏

4. What is wrong
with democracy in Africa?

First a general picture. Because of the seriousness of its problems, governance in Africa tends to be debated in moral categories even more than is the case elsewhere. One finds that either the character of Africa's leaders is called into question, or among apologists, the greed and destructiveness of colonialism, global capitalism and the wealthy West. But however satisfying it may be, moralising about Africa or about colonialism or globalisation has not been helpful. It also misses a simple but important point. The politicians in the developed democracies are not necessarily morally superior; they are less self-seeking and corrupt mainly because they are more effectively constrained by the systems and institutions in which they operate.

African politicians are often operating in a different kind of system. As David Apter puts it, "*pre-democratic forms of government are not simply imperfect forms of democracy, they imply a different form of integration*" (Apter, 1987). Chabal and Daloz (1999) quoted above argue that Africa cannot be understood from a conven-

tional Western perspective: "*There prevails in Africa a system of politics inimical to development as it is currently understood in the West*". These are vital reminders of the limits of what is possible and what has to happen to improve governance in Africa.

Another tendency is to indulge in tautological reasoning — ascribing the failure of democracy to anti-democratic behaviour. We constantly hear the intonation that the reasons for the failure of democracy are that opposition is suppressed, human rights are denied, elections are not free and fair or that politicians are not accountable. These factors, however, are not reasons but consequences, symptoms or indices. Understanding the limits of and prospects for action means digging deeper.

Dictatorial systems are relatively easy to understand. The countries that simulate democracies — Gershman's "virtual democracies" — are more complex and more problematic. The most persistent impediments to democracy are the almost tolerable situations of one-party dominant regimes, entrenched "big men" leadership heading toy parliaments and the all pervading state

interference in the private sphere that rob Africa's people of confidence, sometimes of their cultures and of a sense of their own capacity to improve their lives. These situations are often subtle and beyond the purview of the kind of peer reviews that Nepad envisages. They are also the countries in which backsliding can occur when existing power is threatened.

Although there is considerable internal variety, a number of authors have pointed to particular clusters of factors that tend to form recognisable patterns in these unstable emerging democracies. One important example is David Apter (1987). Using somewhat euphemistic terminology, he distinguished between different pre-democratic situations: "*mobilisation systems*", "*bureaucratic systems*" and "*reconciliation systems*" (his other category, "theocratic systems", is not crucial in this context). The first form would describe most of the states in Africa. They are unambiguously authoritarian notwithstanding their human rights claims and electoral procedures. In them power is being assembled, consolidated or protected, and the form of the state is being defined. They are characterised by what he refers to as "consumatory values" and idealistic, heroic and redemptive goals, as opposed to the more functional and instrumental values of established democracies. The state is the sole custodian of modern values and the major formal source of authority — in fact it crowds out alternative sources of authority except the residues of traditional values. Apter notes that in these societies the state is the "*independent variable and society the dependent variable*"; the latter often being reduced to little more than an appendage to the state. Governments in these pre-democratic countries sometimes go so far as to assume that, like medieval aristocracies, they "own" the society. Following this assumption of "ownership" of the society, executive governments believe that they can actually alter the shape of their societies. Typically there will be large redemptive national "projects" (Ujamaa, the Reconstruction and Development Plan (RDP), etc.) always claimed to be the salvation of society from its current condition and historical burdens.

Broadly following David Apter, the escape from this kind of "mobilisation" system takes the following possible paths. If and when a private market economy develops, not co-ordinated by the state, the stranglehold of a centrally located mission and control of the society weakens. The increasingly complex administration required in the society results in an elaboration of the roles of bureaucrats and they begin to assert their occupational and "functional" commitments against those of their political masters. A "bureaucratic system" is not democratic, however, and it is only when the growing market economy produces a middle class independent of the state, and with it the prospects for viable locally-rooted civil society, that the system shifts towards democratic accountability. As the economically based class system matures it diversifies and produces a multi-

plicity of interests and lifestyles that under-
pins checks and balances in social and
political life. The demonstration effect of a
successful market economy produces
awareness of values alternative to those of
the power-elite and hence new sources of
social authority. These processes usher in
what Apter called "reconciliation systems".
These variants are the precursors of plural-
ist democracy because they have to begin to
accommodate interests beyond the stran-
glehold of the political elites or bureaucrats.

Many if not most leaders of pre-demo-
cratic countries in Africa would dispute
this analysis. Some would claim that their
systems are accountable and responsive,
but undermined or destabilised by ene-
mies of the state. Others might blame colo-
nialism, neo-colonialism or exploitation by
external powers. A few would argue that
Africa has a right to be different, as the
President of Libya did at the AU Summit.
What none of these apologists can explain,
however, is why their political arrange-
ments are so vulnerable to external desta-
bilisation. Leadership that has genuine
commitment to its people and support
from them can even be strengthened by
external threats.

These basic models of pre-democratic
society contain within them many permuta-
tions which have to be unpacked further to
illuminate the problems of Africa.
Particular features of pre-democratic sys-
tems in Africa, with exceptions and in dif-
ferent combinations, can be broadly
described along the following lines:

- Weakly developed and poorly organised
  economic classes, including market farm-
  ers, trade unions, business organisations
  and professional associations

Private enterprise and independent mar-
kets are weak relative to those controlled
by the state and limited in scope relative to
the geography. The government either
owns or, even after privatisation, controls
and mediates in the activities of larger cor-
porate enterprises.

Following on the general statement
made earlier that pluralist democracy is a
regime of constraint and counter-balance,
Africa emerges as hugely deficient in that it
does not have much of the classical requi-
site that Weber had in mind: a burgher
class independent of the state, sufficiently
confident and sure of its right to pursue its
interests, and with the material capacity to
mobilise support in its cause (see Higgott
1983). In Africa everything hinges on the
state, and the state, to the extent that it
has capacity, hinges on large "big men"
leaders or bureaucrats. It is similar to,
although not quite as marked, as the condi-
tion of the political economies of Arab
States, in which both the fact of large infor-
mal sectors in the economy and the domina-
tion of oil-based economies by political fac-
tors and international "realpolitik" have
undermined the emergence of an independ-
ent middle class (Lisa Anderson, 2001).

The societies are also weak in respect of
the emergence of another class necessary in
the pluralist mix, namely an organised

working class. This recalls the well-known observation of Geoffrey Kay (1975) that notwithstanding the popular perception among African leaders, capitalism did not exploit the underdeveloped world *enough* to create the conditions for the emergence of resilient organised labour interests. There are exceptions: currently Zimbabwe's only slender hope for a return to democracy lies with an embattled opposition spawned by a trade union federation. The new South African government is finding it tougher to co-opt and pacify its trade union-based alliance partners than the nervous white business class.

With the exception of large estates that are often owned by members of the political elite, farmers in Africa are generally very small and poorly organised. In some countries the majority live under forms of tribal tenure and are subject to the authority of traditional leaders, many of who are in effect state bureaucrats who, in formal matters, have to defer to central government authority.

Authors of either right or left persuasion differ on which of the two independent classes is most important for democracy, the bourgeoisie or an independent organised working class. One should accept, however, that they complement each other in creating the conditions for democracy. Without independent and mobilised class interests, elites operating in markets dominated by state expenditure or by state control of overseas aid, will act rationally and curry favour with the major client — the government. In African capitals the general picture is of leaders of the large corporate sector existing in a symbiosis with top politicians, doing deals with one another and providing vivid illustrations of what the textbooks refer to as patron-client relationships.

Even in South Africa, which entered its period of new democracy with a reasonably independent corporate sector, the ruling party has quite openly deployed prominent political colleagues to positions in state corporations and formulated targets, guidelines or charters for the appointment of blacks or for black ownership in the private sector. The beneficiaries will out of gratitude, if nothing else, support the government. Pressure on the large corporate sector to support black empowerment in both its appointments and in its social responsibility spending, has had the effect of weakening independent and critical voluntary organisations that enjoyed substantial corporate support during the apartheid years. If these things are happening in South Africa, the effects elsewhere in Africa are even more marked. Independent civil society in Africa and increasingly in South Africa exists by courtesy of foreign donations, sometimes heavily discouraged by the governments.

• The dominance of a "political class"

A consequence of the weakness of independent class formation and the co-optation of the corporate sector is the rise to dominance of what David Apter (1987) and others have termed the "political class". These

are the top bureaucrats, the insider elites, the capitalists who in a state dominated system are wholly or partly incorporated into the state networks of influence and decision-making, the co-opted traditional aristocracy and possibly even a blue-collar elite in state-approved labour movements. Shivji (1976) noted that the preponderance of bureaucrats and army personnel in the public sector-dominated systems develop class interests of their own. They become a "bureaucratic bourgeoisie" with an interest in expanding state functions and drawing a rent to boot. These political classes, with great coherence and capacity to communicate, create a web of opinion and influence that makes it very difficult for independent interests to establish legitimacy and support. It is only when governments are so inefficient or corrupt that they damage the interests of even the bureaucrats and insider cliques, that more critical opinions can begin to surface.

• Governments as "landlords"

The relative absence of a dominant economic class external to government leaves the state considerable autonomy. Within this degree of omnipotence there are variations in the interaction between bureaucrats and political leaders. Earlier writers like Eisenstadt (1973) referred to the relative weakness of third world officials relative to politicians but bureaucracies have expanded their roles with the increase in technical and administrative complexity of govern-ment systems. Hence bureaucracy can enjoy not only elevated status but also abundant leverage of the kind that creates a constant probability of top-heavy govern-ment and over-regulation. Where this ten-dency combines with "big man" political leadership the state can become a veritable octopus. This muscular corporatism or what Higgott, following Stephan, calls "organic statism" makes the state the sole agent for the entire society (Higgott, 1983, ch 4). Where one has coalitions of "big men" leaders and more or less efficient tech-nocrats it is almost immaterial whether the authoritarianism is of the left or the right.

This trend is certainly not limited to Africa or the developing world. Ironically, muscular states have often been encour-aged by the international community in order to secure socio-political stability. Samuel Huntington (1968) and other ana-lysts were influential in arguing that widening political participation and eco-nomic growth in the absence of established social institutions to channel popular griev-ances and aspirations, held threats to sta-bility in emerging societies. Higgott refers to the "normative reversal" involved when international aid agencies and wealthy democracies welcome strong central gov-ernment agencies to implement develop-ment aid and the public policy intervention that they try to encourage, inadvertently abetting the centralisation and entrench-ment of state authority (Higgott 1983). State autonomy and imperialism obviously negate accountability, hence undoing what-

ever good public policy intervention was intended to achieve (for the basic arguments see Eric Nordlinger, 1981). Higgott observes that there is a resulting tendency to over-control at the political level (power concerns remain the most intense commitment) and at the public policy level, but to under-control state-linked entrepreneurial groups.

• Decay within the authoritarian state

Authoritarian states and centralised states are not necessarily effective states, and their very authoritarianism can be a sign of their incapacity. Dani Nabudere (2002) asks whether "*some African states are indeed viable sites for economic development … These very 'shell states' are responsible for the continent's ceaseless conflicts and wastage of resources*". Following the African writer Achille Mbembe, Richard Werbner deals with some fascinating consequences of what he describes as the "*banality of state power*" in postcolonial Africa. He concludes that many African states, because of corruption and lack of formal delivery, are unable to command respect or enjoy legitimacy among their populations. This, however, does not necessarily lead to open dissent – Werner speaks of "*the myriad ways in which ordinary people bridle, trick and actually toy with power instead of confronting it directly, but that ends in 'connivance'* " — connivance usually in corruption (Werbner 1996, Intro).

Given the cultural pluralism of most African countries, governments are never sure of their legitimacy and hence resist meaningful devolution to local or regional government or the extension of cultural rights. This high degree of centralisation of power provides a false security, however, because it simply increases the distance between the rulers in some far distant capital city town, often speaking English, French, Portuguese or the largest regional vernacular, and the people in far-flung local areas.

Werbner calls the typical African state a state in name only. Goren Hyden speaks of the "*uncaptured peasantry*" protected by pre-modern cultural agencies and an "*economy of affection*". The states are not able to extend their domain beyond the elite circles, allowing the mass population to opt out. Hyden observes that this does not mean that the masses have freedom of open dissent or that they enjoy "*peasant power in a positive or initiating sense*". The states more often than not are able to impose authority in the case of smaller crude challenges (although not the capacity to resist coups and larger challenges to their authority from within the army), but their "*… coercive capabilities are clearly much greater than their capabilities in social and economic development and reform*" (Hyden 1980).

• Enclave societies and the alienation of mass society

The centralisation, the material inequality, the powerful networks of the political classes and the empires built by the increasingly

technocratic bureaucrats all combine to create a demarcated inner circle or "enclave" within which virtually all of the formal or serious non-agricultural activity takes place (the wealthier agricultural estates and plantations are part of the inner circle). The image is almost akin to that of a walled city surrounded by a mass of poverty, subsistence and struggling peasantry.

The most relevant issue becomes the lack of effective communication and information flow from the margins into the enclave. It results in a situation of super-alienation of the government from the masses and a tendency to overreact to any manifestation of dissent.

- Undifferentiated masses as subjects of centralised authority

The crisis of democracy in Africa cannot be separated from its mass poverty. It is important to reflect on why poverty weakens democracy. The populations may or may not vote in large numbers and often turn up at large political rallies (frequently out of boredom), but the masses are in effect an appendage of the "modern sector". The larger mass of the population is either unemployed, under-employed or informally employed, lives in remote rural areas or sprawling urban slums, is more or less unorganised and has no engagement with or purchase on state policy. Where they interact with state institutions they do so in a passive role, as recipients of service delivery, purchasers of state lottery tickets or members of government housing queues. With the exception of a few countries, even traditional leaders either have been co-opted, had their roles and powers reduced, or are easily bought or pressured.

Mass populations that are largely undifferentiated in socio-economic terms cannot produce nodes of interest around which movements or voluntary organisations can form. Hence there is little basis on which opposition parties can mobilise. The poverty is so great that if opposition mobilises around poverty it poses a severe threat to existing governments with highly constrained fiscal capacity. In any event opposition attempts to outbid the governments tends to distort policy, producing high levels of promissory rhetoric that in turn raises expectations and increases the likelihood of eventually instability.

The alternative is for opposition parties to mobilise around regional, ethnic or traditional loyalties. But this renders them vulnerable to accusations of trying to divide the nation. In countries in which nationalist governments place a heavy emphasis on patriotism and nation-building, the cultivation of ethnic interests is easily presented as treachery.

Opposition therefore becomes highly threatening to the centralised system, and the more common result is for governments in power to make every attempt to discredit and destabilise opposition movements or to undermine them through the co-optation of their leaders. Africa's oppositions are embattled as a consequence. Without the

option of political choice the mass populations comprise subjects rather than citizens. They have to be kept in check, or if not are fed on hope and patriotic rhetoric. They exercise little restraint or check on dominant party rule.

• Territories not nations

Africa, like Europe, is a continent of nationalism, but unlike most European nationalism, it is based on relatively recent conquest or demarcations of territory. Liberation struggles against colonialism were waged by multi-ethnic coalitions, united only against the occupying powers. So intense was the love-hate relationship with colonial rulers that Africans forgot their own identities and assumed the inverted identity of the powers that they opposed. At the level of leadership, the languages of Africa are English, French and Portuguese, and the territories that these leaders liberated were not coherent cultural regions but simply those that colonialism had demarcated. Most African countries are multi-ethnic and their identities are not heritages but the categories that colonial rulers left in their wake.

Breytenbach (1987) points out that Woodrow Wilson's plan for the liberation of the former German colonies after World War I set the precedent for the later liberation of territories rather than nations. This stark and artificial subdivision of Africa has been termed by AD Smith (1983) the "*fateful legacy*". Much has been said about the problems of national unity in the African colonial territories, but the more subtle and pervasive problem was that the new rulers who took over from the colonial powers were not necessarily bonded with their people.

The consequences of this were, among other things, that nation-building after independence was easily corrupted into what Smith calls "state-building", in which the emancipation of people became intertwined with establishing the machinery to take over the running of the territory. The leaders of liberation were more accountable to the territorial structures of the colonial powers than to the indigenous identities of pre-colonial Africa. The community coherence of the component precolonial national groups had to either be co-opted, sidelined, ignored or destroyed in the process of taking over the departing colonists' responsibilities.

In other words key aspects of colonialism (and apartheid in South Africa) were reproduced in Africa's liberation. Most importantly, having occupied and given new personnel to the former colonial authority, the new state found it all to easy too slip into the traditions of colonial rule. Just as the people were subjects under colonialism, they continue to be subjects today.

But they had to be provided with an identity as members of the new states. The resultant nation building has been a smokescreen not only for state building but for consolidating coercive power and sources of wealth.

Flowing from this condition, Werbner refers to the "quasi nationalism" of Africa. Its very tenuousness leads to the violent use of state power against people who "*stand in the way of the nation being united and pure as one body … (and) of the moral renewal of the nation as a whole*" (Werbner, 1996). He also raises the widely discussed phenomenon of political "hybridity". The new national identity cannot eclipse original identities and the latter assert themselves in the re-emergence of traditionalism. This leads to an uneasy co-existence of identities and the reciprocal assimilation of two forms of authority, the modern and the traditional. Quoting the example of Zaire/Democratic Republic of the Congo, he argues that it is this syncretism that allows the pre-colonial "big man" leadership to be transferred to modern political leadership, resulting in what he calls "invisible kingship". Obviously this has massive implications for the accountability of political leaders.

• "People's governments" and liberation democracy

Kofi Annan (2002), the Secretary General of the United Nations made a telling point in his address at the launch of the African Union, but one that seemed to pass without comment at the meeting: "*Democracy is misused in situations where … those who have won 51 per cent of the votes claim the right to ride roughshod over the other 49 per cent. In African democracy, the rulers (should) listen to the ruled and the majority to the minority*".

Today many governments in Africa pursue their agendas equipped with the claimed legitimacy of an election victory, whether rigged, manipulated, representative or free and fair. This device of a demonstrable "popular majority" hides a multitude of sins thereafter. As David Apter (1987) observed, the ideal of people's democracy turns into "consultative" democracy at best. Even consultation, however, requires the management of information flows, and the lack of state capacity soon leads to information overloads and breakdown. Consultative democracy then degrades into large rallies, flag-waving and media events slavishly reported in the state media. The "people" become a "mandate"; a rationale, but become rapidly dispensable as human beings.

Majority support for a government can mean a variety of things, and it is not necessarily proof of democratic accountability. In the kinds of societies that we are talking about it is, however, perceived as the unassailable height of legitimacy. A former African president whose democratic credentials are unquestioned provides a disturbing example of this perception. None other than Nelson Mandela, in a media interview during the launch of the African Union, argued that if a large majority of voters support a leader who wishes to extend his term of office beyond the constitutional limitation, then such an extension is perfectly legitimate. In other words, the so-called

"democratic" principle of majority support overrides constitutional safeguards.

Perhaps the worst result of this claim to popular legitimacy is the moral arrogance that it imparts. The governments so affected acquire an overweening sense of occupying the moral high ground and a surfeit of confidence in acting against dissent. It is this pattern that moved Kofi Annan to plead for consensus-based decision-making.

These distortions acquire an even more insidious quality if the sentiments mobilised in the struggle against colonialism (or apartheid) are kept alive. The struggles that gave post-liberation governments their claims to exalted status and legitimacy can over time become the biggest handicap to accountability. Because decolonisation so dominated the content of the early politics, voters' minds are taken off their more specific interests.

In other words the mass of voters enter the new deal with an uncritical collective mind-set, thereafter constantly fed by ritual celebrations of the liberation.

The uncritical mass adulation then facilitates the permanent capture of state power in the name of freedom, referred to by Heribert Adam *et al* (1997) as "liberation democracy". By the time that the mass adulation wears off it is usually too late — the successive governments having had time to consolidate their grasp on central power and hone their methods of alienating opposition.

• Regimes of corruption?

Perhaps the most visible failure of governance in Africa (and elsewhere in the emerging world) is corruption. Jean-Francois Bayart (1989) in his book subtitled "*The politics of the gut*" describes corruption as the "*… abiding reality of the African state*". Robert Klitgaard (1991), referring not only to Africa but also to large parts of Latin America, sees "*The state as a rent-seeking opportunistic monopoly that serves its own interests*". Although Klitgaard makes useful proposals about addressing the problems in Latin America, the scope of corruption in Africa may well be so large as to crowd out useful policy suggestions. Has corruption become so established that it is a self-perpetuating system, immune to corrective policy?

Richard Werbner (1996), quoted earlier, has little doubt about this. He refers to a "*…ritualised tributary political economy*" involving the "*reciprocal assimilation of elites*" that becomes steadily "*more encompassing in the face of (the resulting) state decay*". Chabal and Daloz see the system as so thoroughly entrenched that: "*Disorder has become a resource … there is no incentive to work for a more institutionalised ordering of society*". It is a "*well-managed moral economy of corruption aimed at achieving a position of legitimate respectability*" (1999). Goren Hyden explains the nature of corrupt aspirations as "*the desire to become established as big men … in an economy of affection*" (Hyden 1980).

The impact on development is considerable. Chabal and Daloz note that development assumes that the resources made available by excess wealth among elites will be channelled into productive investment and job creation. This compensation for inequality does not occur, however, because resources will not be saved or invested because "*ostentation remains and is likely to remain one of the chief political virtues in Africa*".

- ## Africa's "culture" is not the issue

One often hears loose comment to the effect that Africa has still to catch up with the West (or the East) in some general sort of way. The implication behind this is that Africa is "culturally" backward, or that its culture is anti-democratic. Aside from the fact that culture is not something that can be rated on some scale of comparison, comments like these reflect shallow thinking at best and prejudice at worst.

In the assessment above I have tried to avoid such broad generalisations by pointing to specific features and characteristics in Africa's social and political dynamics. Their combinations and concentration may be unique to large parts of Africa but no single feature identified cannot be found somewhere else in the world. Many people refer to India as a form of organised "chaos", the widespread problems of corruption in Latin America are well-documented, Arab democracy, as already pointed out, is in even worse shape than that of Africa and deep in the heart of the Western economic and political systems one encounters instances of fraud and political manipulation that challenge any in Africa for size and impact. Nothing in Africa has affected world markets to the extent of the recent Enron scandal, for example.

Modernisation theory, to the extent that it implied that there is some kind of actual or desirable evolutionary progression from primitive to modern political structure dependant on a value consensus in the relevant populations , and hence intertwined with "culture", has been very thoroughly rejected. The critiques came not only from radical theorists but from others, like Huntington (1968), who challenged the notion that there is a unilinear path from the "primitive" to "modern" institutions. The recognition by the later modernisation theorists of the relevance of economic theories of rational choice was an admission that what might seem like culture is often the logical response of populations to the opportunities and the constraints in their situations — see Higgott (1983; chapter 2).

I have conducted political or social survey research in five African countries and I am constantly struck by how similar to typical Western responses answers of Africans are to questions on political expectations, reasons for voting, the value of opposition and the like (confidential commissioned research by L Schlemmer as part of development project work). If the context of their political behaviour were to alter, African voters would behave much like typical European or American voters.

The review above has adduced a small avalanche of socio-political processes accounting for Africa's political problems. It is not intended to induce pessimism or despair, but simply to emphasise the vital point that Nepad's peer reviews and monitoring are condemned to be superficial at best. If they are not superficial they will inevitably either have to be selective, or risk involving the Nepad process in tortuous interaction with deeply offended member states that will threaten the support for the whole initiative. Neither Nepad nor any other single initiative can rescue democracy and good governance in Africa. ❏

5. Responding to Africa's situation:
the role of Nepad's developed country partners

Earlier it was suggested that Nepad's partners should carefully monitor the peer review process. This is necessary but clearly will not be sufficient to countervail the range of distortions in the political process reviewed above. If the developed world wishes to be effective in facilitating democratic consolidation in Africa it will have to deepen its involvement beyond that of monitoring. Modes of intervention that engage the very nature of African politics and society are called for.

In order to have the credibility to deepen their involvement, however, the developed countries will have to be seen to be changing some of their own practices that damage the prospects for development in Africa (and other parts of the developing world). Belgian Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt has recently spelt out what is necessary: duty and quota-free access to developed markets for agricultural products currently excluded from trade concessions, the phas-

ing out of European and US subsidies for their own farmers, a more effectively coordinated debt relief programme for the highly indebted poor countries subject to appropriate economic reforms and an increase in development aid in general. Verhofstadt points out that the West donated $32 to each African in 1990 but that the figure had dropped to nearly half by 2001(Verhofstadt 2002).

At the same time, however, the widespread tendency among categories of intellectuals and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) to blame the North for all the problems in Africa is clearly absurd. Africa has done little to mobilise its own local production to service regional markets, and its vulnerability to foreign terms of trade is a problem that also requires local economic adaptations.

The major part of the reason for the decline in foreign aid, however, has been the widespread evidence of corruption. Most recently, for example, the IMF has

found that the Angolan government has been unable to account for as much as $4,3 billion over the past five years, a figure that eclipses foreign donor aid (not necessarily assuming that all the money had been stolen) (*Sunday Times*, October 20, 2002). The reconstruction of the Democratic Republic of the Congo is currently being sabotaged by the pillaging of its resources by predatory neighbouring governments and highly placed entrepreneurs under the protection of governments. Professor Dani Nabudere (2002) points out the annual theft of public revenues and foreign aid amounts to more than double the $64 billion a year that is budgeted for Nepad. It would be naïve to suggest that the developed world should increase its government-to-government aid on a general basis. But an increase in targeted aid in support of specific types of programmes to strengthen the conditions for the consolidation of democracy would be more than warranted.

Large numbers of sound democracy programmes are being sponsored by developed countries, and it is not the intention to be critical of current efforts. In the context of Africa's problems, however, even more and better programmes are called for. Foreign countries have had to be cautious in their programmes of assistance up to now for fear of alienating the very sensitive political leadership in Africa, but Nepad could offer the protection and the leverage for them to become more meaningfully involved. If these countries are willing to make a commitment to Nepad, they could insist on the right not only to monitor the Nepad peer reviews but also to launch more far-reaching and co-ordinated democracy and good governance programmes in the beneficiary countries.

Liberal democracy may be a remote goal for the continent, but at this stage Africa needs specific reforms and checks on government power that will at least allow some of its politics to *emulate* the freedom of action found in liberal democracy. If nothing else this will create the space in which pluralist democracy can grow. In general, what is needed most at this stage are developments that will make an impact in seven broad areas:

a Combating central state hegemony and protecting individuals, communities and civil society from muscular interference by authoritarian governments

b Strengthening the organisation of civil society

c Facilitating the emergence of independent business

d Optimising the conditions for the development of viable democratic opposition parties

e Strengthening the administrative capacity and effectiveness of the state without at the same time strengthening its centralisation and ability to restrict civil liberty

f Combating corruption

g Helping build the institutions that facilitate growth and economic confidence.

Some brief comment on each objective is necessary. The suggestions made may

appear to be very controversial, if not radical, but here readers should bear in mind that it has been the relative ineffectiveness of donor country programmes that has contributed to the current groundswell of anti-globalisation and anti-establishment sentiment among international NGOs.

a. Combating central state hegemony

The obvious need in this respect is for donor countries to agree on codes of conduct for the governments of beneficiary countries. Such codes will have to be more encompassing than the formalities of democratic practice likely to be monitored by the AU. The main need is for a common approach by all or most developed donor countries because this will not only provide individual countries with a rationale for standards that might be unpopular among beneficiary governments but the weight of numbers will in itself be persuasive.

Codes should cover freedom of the media, the right to organise, the right to due process and legal assistance, the selection of judges and judicial officers, transparency in appointments to government positions, similar transparency in contracts awarded on state tenders, educational curricula and teacher training, the behaviour of law enforcement officers and the like.

However, state hegemony is underpinned by more than formal power monopolies, and therefore the codes should also cover instances where the central government or its agencies attempt to discredit, impose controls over, co-opt or otherwise undermine legal initiatives and organised activity that emanates from the private sector, the religious sector or communities.

Evaluations in terms of the codes should be conducted by panels including respected citizens of the country recognised for their impartiality. The difference between such panels and AU or Nepad panels of eminent persons is that the governments, while they would have the right to nominate, should not be able to influence final selections. Indeed even the donor governments should be seen to apply a process of selection at arms length.

(See also the need to encourage devolution to lower tiers of government ahead).

b. Strengthening civil society

In Africa civil society organisations are often of three types. There are organisations that are dependent on state patronage or financial support, there are organisations that are sponsored from abroad, often with highly ideological, anti-globalisations agendas, and then there are home-grown independent church or community-based

structures. It is the latter organisations that deserve most support.

It is important that donor country initiatives be aimed at strengthening the organisation of all local interests and incipient classes — small business, farmers, workers, local communities, ethnic minorities and the like. It is important that this process is not skewed by an over-emphasis on particular interests groups, resulting in a distorted impact on the local polity.

The support should mainly take the form of providing resources and training in organisation and in advocacy.

c. Strengthening **local business**

An effective civil society is usually not possible unless there is an effective institutional counterbalance to the state. In other words there is a sphere of production, commerce and services beyond those that are facilitated by state contracts or patronage. Without this an independent middle class is not possible. This objective can be pursued in concert with donor programmes aimed at stimulating local economic growth and investment. Chambers of business should be strengthened to the point that they develop the capacity not only to train members but also to undertake the research necessary for effective advocacy programmes. It is also important that they develop the capacity to interact and co-operate across borders.

d. Strengthening **opposition**

Opposition in Africa faces two kinds of problems. First there is frequently the blatant intimidation of opposition leaders and followers, through direct action or through threats of penalising communities if they support opposition candidates, or limiting the access to the state media by opposition parties. This type of delinquency may be or should be covered by AU review processes. If it is not then the codes suggested under combating state hegemony should help to address this problem.

A more pervasive problem, however, is that of undermining the legitimacy and importance of opposition. This issue is more complex, and is virtually continent-wide. Even South Africa has this problem in substantial measure. Because it need not involve any direct intimidation it is more difficult to act against. Oppositions are frequently depicted as irrelevant, unpatriotic, disloyal and a favourite strategy of governments is to cast aspersions on opposition parties for not being more "constructive". To the extent that governing parties create the impression that opposition is redundant or troublesome, opposition loses attractiveness.

Furthermore, this stance, by implication, is supported by a widely promoted vision of the democratic process in the developed west itself. The ingredients of successful democracy are poorly understood all over the world and competitive pluralist democracy, within which opposition is a key feature, is not uncontested among influential academics and intellectuals. For example Professor Kenneth Good, writing from Botswana, ascribes the elitism of Africa to what he describes as the "liberal model" as opposed to his favoured model, that of "participatory democracy" (Good, 2002). Africa is hardly the "liberal model" (liberalism and neo-liberalism have become superficially fashionable as ways of discrediting almost anything that can be scapegoated in association with the global capitalist economy), but obviously he has a major point in appealing for greater effective participation by populations at large.

What the proponents of participatory democracy seldom discuss, however, is the sheer impracticality of mass participation. How do tens of millions of poor people "participate"? Their "participation" must inevitably be "co-ordinated" or mobilised by governments, bureaucrats or activists and the success of their inputs depends utterly on the goodwill of the co-ordinating agency bureaucrats. Participation systems, unless driven by independent class and other interests (civil society in liberal systems) end up augmenting the power of the "co-ordinators". "People's democracies" do not empower people but only those who "represent" the people.

The reason why the practicalities of participation are seldom discussed is that one is faced with a deep ideological divide. This boils down to a tension between proponents of so-called representative democracy or "people's democracy" on the one hand and doctrines of the minimalist state and pluralist democracy on the other. The proponents of representative democracy argue that ideal of democracy is *equality*. Liberals on the other hand espouse the principle of individual rights and freedoms before equality (for an analysis of the different basic viewpoints see Mouffe, 1998). The often passionate arguments of the egalitarians have lent credibility to the notion that a state, with unthinking mass endorsement from the population at large, is entitled to augment its role in society and curb individual freedom in the interests of achieving equality. As Hannah Arendt has observed, peoples' democracies have never been able to reconcile equality and authority (Hannah Arendt, 1984).

Experience suggests that without sources of mobilisation, organised interests and moral authority independent of the state, people's democracies are co-ordinated and "guided" by the central authority, and fail the tests of pluralism and accountability. In the end the rationale of equality justified an inequality of power and co-ordination even greater than the inequality resulting from the liberal model. Edward Shils (1962) had a euphemistic name for these co-ordinated systems — "tutelary democracies", and they can be more overbearing and patronising

than dictatorships because they are able to shield themselves with claims to being representative and accountable in the basis of "mass" endorsement.

Such is the allure of "representation" and "participation" that it is difficult for opposition parties in Africa to oppose ruling party claims. The answer lies not in trying to drive distinctions between liberal and participatory systems but to work out ways in which powerless and atomised masses can begin to articulate and press their interests. Inevitably the answers will point to the independent organisation and articulation of interests, and from there it is a short step to a model more compatible with pluralism.

This more diffuse but vital issue points to the importance of donor countries sponsoring debate and political education.

e. Checks, balances and government effectiveness without coercive hegemony

All the suggestions above are aimed at strengthening checks on hegemony and balances of interests. They are generally hoped to have the effect of shifting the centre of gravity in a country away from government and the state towards people and communities. But the donor countries have a dilemma. African states are so weak and lacking in policy-making and policy-implementation capacity that the situation begs for intervention. For some time now the dominant form of wealthy country intervention has been through "public policy" programmes. Yet these very programmes can end up providing resources to would be hegemonic central governments. In South Africa, for example, the lion's share (pun intended) of European Union assistance is channelled through the central government agencies, and the same goes for most of the aid provided by other wealthy donor countries. Richard Higgott observes that

"*Ruling groups … inevitably find the incrementalist nature of policy analysis of considerable comfort* (Higgott, 1983).

Although intervention in the field of macro-economic policy can only be channelled through central governments, the donor countries must avoid enhancing the grandeur and status of the central state in other fields. Virtually the only way is through the promotion of delegated and decentralised governance and ideally devolution of central government powers. This involves constitutional change and can only be a long term goal. It above all would require the authority of consensus among donor countries. Of all the modes of intervention, this might well be the most vital both for checks and balances and for effective governance in the long run.

A fairly recent book by Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja and Margaret C Lee, sponsored by the African Association of

Political Science (1998) contains some valuable arguments in this regard. In the lead essay the senior editor notes the underdevelopment of democratic forces, the deteriorating condition of the small independent middle class, the controls over the mass media and pervasive central state domination and repression, and hence sees little hope for a deepening of democracy along current lines. One of the contributors notes that even where the "guiding state" is enlightened, if it is unchecked, democratic processes are emasculated. Another observes that uniform "nation building" is still a smokescreen for building up the coercive powers of the state. In the end the contributors, mainly from left-leaning perspectives, gravitate towards what seems to be democracy's only secure basis — to base popular leverage on *local* interests, *cultural* commitments and *group rights* within the overarching state.

These hopes echo those of Hannah Arendt (1984), who referring to examples of spontaneous local organisation in both America and Eastern Europe before the heavy hand of state socialism obliterated all freedom, argues that the only institutions capable of sustaining freedom and cultivating citizenship are local or ward councils, which then elect representatives to higher tiers of government, so that power is filtered upwards. Hence Arendt and the African authors quoted prescribe measures to empower the local and the particular within overarching states. Arendt calls for what she terms "elementary republics".

Africa's leaders must begin to show tangible willingness to share power with their people, not on the phoney basis of impractical so-called mass participation but in devolving and decentralising power and responsibility to lower tiers of government, right down to the local community. Perhaps Hannah Arendt's "elementary republics" are too ambitious in the real world of Africa, but at least something in that direction must be achieved.

The common reaction among conservatives is to claim that lower tiers do not have the capacity to administer and manage the devolution. As Robert Klitgaard (1991) argues, however, they may not have the capacity if they are expected to administer the over-elaborated, "integrated" systems so beloved of technocrats and bureaucrats, but with the correct information and simple functional and vertical organisation with the right incentives, capacity problems can be overcome.

The developed donor nations should formulate common positions on and blanket pressure for the following ways of devolving, delegating and decentralising governance:

- devolved power to local governments and within them even to wards,
- independent commissions to control armies and police forces,
- rights of cultural groups to certain powers over their own cultural affairs, for example through institutions like the cultural councils in the old Austro-Hungarian empire,

- second chambers, elected on a different basis from that of the primary legislatures,
- requirements for peer-elected specialist and impartial expert committees in policy fields crucial for development,
- at least a level of multi-party consent for annual budgets,
- electoral reform to spread power, such as multi-member constituencies, and
- independent monitoring of steps towards reforms like these to make sure that they too are not manipulated

and packed with the beneficiaries of central state patronage.

These steps would be seen as excessive in a mature liberal democracy, but such democracies have a large number of both formal and informal checks and balances. The central state structures of Africa, in general, have demonstrated that they have neither the capacity nor the responsiveness to govern well in standard unitary political and electoral systems. Breaking up their power is the only alternative, and a concerted strategy to encourage this is long overdue.

f. Combating corruption

This may prove to be the most difficult challenge of all. Robert Klitgaard (1991), who quotes valuable case studies of corruption control elsewhere in the world, concedes forbidding situations in which entire bureaucracies and much of top leadership are avaricious, rent-seeking monopolies. Nevertheless the donor nations, in concert, have to toughen their already stringent codes of conduct, monitoring and auditing

procedures as conditions for aid. It is particularly important that the "downstream" corruption normally beyond the auditing of donor countries be inspected. It is equally important that they insist that public action be taken against people that profit from aid. They should also strengthen the information base of governments in respect of corruption and assist the governments in providing incentives for clean administration.

g. Promoting the development of social institutions

Very little improvement will be possible in Africa unless there is sustained economic growth, which requires private investor confidence. It has long been known that certain "institutions" are vital for investment,

in particular security of property rights and trustworthy legal and financial systems. *The Economist* (October 5, 2002) reports on research findings by William Easterly and Ross Levine that reinforce the conclusion

that stable and resilient institutions, including educational systems and basic values in society, are more important than any other factor underpinning sustained economic performance. This is because established institutions have the moral authority in society to move even opportunist bureaucrats and politicians to caution and restraint. The authors of the study, which compared 72 developed and developing economies, conclude that "*Spelling out how to get from bad to good institutions is ... the real challenge for development economics ...*". This surely must also be the real challenge for the wealthier established democracies that have committed themselves to Nepad and poverty alleviation in Africa.

Obviously this is much easier said than done. Finding points of departure requires an entire analysis in itself. Once again, however, a code of basic rules for Nepad governments, monitored on a joint basis by donor countries, as a quid pro quo for continuing aid, will at least give the committed personnel and stakeholders in the vital institutions more security than they currently have in many African countries. Institutional "twinning" in which personnel in Africa's vital institutions are given full exposure to successful institutions in the developed world would also be useful. ❑

6. Concluding comments

As already said, the suggestions that have been made are far-reaching, and most African political leaders will find them condescending, intrusive and probably even insulting. These proposals, however, are no more radical than the damage that many countries in Africa are doing to their people at present. Nepad could be a significant opportunity for developed democracies to take Africa's leaders beyond the modest limits of their current intentions to improve their governance.

Such proposals may be opposed not only by the existing leadership in Africa. There is an established view among some political scientists in the West that, whatever its faults, the hegemonic central state is the only hope for stability on the continent. Long ago, for example, the respected Mancur Olson (1963) joined the even more famous Samuel Huntington (1968) in expressing the fear that economic growth and wider participation in politics in the context of Africa's social and institutional patterns would invite even greater mass instability than was already occurring. Olsen made the point that ironically, unions and class-based pressure groups, at the same time as protesting and organising

pressures on employers and the state, also provide channels for verbal dissent and negotiation, and hence provide an alternative basis for stability.

Experience over intervening decades suggests that the greatest threat to stability is passive populations under the sway of corrupt leaders. Where voluntary organisation is weak and NGOs are beholden to the state, society at large is limp. The masses are déclassé, and when not limp and helpless, will provide the foot soldiers for turmoil. Passive populations become the playthings of ambitious army leaders seeking support for opportunistic power grabs. More generally the powerlessness of the people to confront and challenge governments through organised protest and party competition means that in much of Africa frustrations fester and accumulate until peaceful reform is impossible. Coups and turmoil are the only recourse. Liberal democracy is no immediate panacea for poverty and inequality, but because it allows early and robust protest it avoids the major instability that has crippled development in Africa.

In the face of the manifest failure of strategies based on the hope of reforming

authoritarian central governments and their elite networks in Africa, the time has come for the donor nations of the world to more incisively address the powerlessness of Africa's people. In facing this challenge there are many pitfalls, among them the intrusiveness of the power and hegemony not only in African politics but also among many well-funded NGOs with anti-pluralist international agendas. The importance of very clear and shared guidelines prepared in consultation with all relevant local and regional expertise cannot be over-emphasised. By using the leverage that Nepad might provide in this way, they could significantly assist in the political renewal of a continent. ❑

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