

# **African Human Security Initiative and its role In NEPAD: Carving A Niche for the Media**

By Mpho Mashaba (ISS)

## **Introduction**

The poor state of human security and the slow pace of socio-economic development (or rather a lack of it) have called for reviews into the factors leading to this state of affairs. The results, to which African leaders have conceded, have elicited failure to adhere to principles of democracy, respect for human rights and good political, economic and corporate governance as the main cause of this unwanted situation, especially in Africa.<sup>1</sup> Thus, declarations have been signed and legal instruments introduced with a view to creating commitments for African countries that would ultimately lead to the creation of peace, security, stability and an enabling environment for development on the continent.

Hence, over the decades we have witnessed the development of strategic plans for the development of our continent, including among others the Omega plan, the Lagos Plan of Action, the Cairo Agenda for Action and the latest, the New Africa Initiative, which was endorsed by African leaders and hence adopted in Abuja, Nigeria in October 2001 as the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). These plans have however been characterised by inadequate implementation, largely attributable to a lack of popular participation, although provision for such has been made in official documents.<sup>2</sup> In other cases a lack of involvement by the broader masses has often translated into the absence of pressure on African governments to implement the decisions taken at the highest decision-making structures of the continent, such as the Assembly of Heads of State of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and the African Union (AU).

---

<sup>1</sup> See: Yaoundé Declaration of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government, July 1996.

<sup>2</sup> See: Article 4 of the Constitutive Act of the African Union.

This situation has therefore called for a departure from previous approaches and for systems that will hold governments accountable for the commitments they have made that would pave the way for the creation of viable environments for lasting peace, security, stability, as well as growth and development. It is widely accepted these goals can be achieved through NEPAD and below we will explain the reasons for this.

NEPAD differs from previous development plans in a sense that it provides for a mechanism that will subject member countries to scrutiny over commitments made at the highest decision making level, that is, at meetings of the heads of state and government, sanctioned by a continental body, that is, the AU. NEPAD has broken new ground by introducing the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), which in essence is designed to facilitate peer learning, so that member countries can learn from one another about ways to create an enabling environment for political and economic stability, as well as growth and development. In view of the need to ensure the success of these programmes, the NEPAD Heads of State and Government Implementation Committee (HSIC) have officially called upon civil society to play a role, which is however yet to be fully defined. One section of civil society has promptly responded to this call to participate in continental activities by establishing the African Human Security Initiative (AHSI).

The AHSI seeks to contribute to the NEPAD aspirations for peace, security, stability and development on the continent, but it however operates on the margins of this AU owned programme. It aims to add value to the NEPAD peer review mechanism.<sup>3</sup> The AHSI aims to do this by making available important information resource material on the various human security issues that are linked to human rights and good governance. At the core of its business is reviewing the commitments of eight African countries<sup>4</sup> to the principles of human rights, democracy and good governance. Therefore, the African Human Security Initiative has a significant contribution to make towards NEPAD and this paper

---

<sup>3</sup> Anne Hammerstad, *African Commitments to Democracy in Theory and Practice: A Review of eight NEPAD Countries*, Monograph for the African Human Security Initiative, www.africanreview.org, 2004. p. 1

<sup>4</sup> The eight countries are namely: Algeria, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa and Uganda. These countries were chosen because they have acceded to the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) of the New Partnership For Africa's Development (NEPAD).

is geared towards expanding on this. One other crucial role player, which can assist in explaining to a much broader audience the importance of AHSI in the NEPAD programme, is the news media. This paper will therefore discuss the importance of the African Human Security Initiative to NEPAD and the role of the media in creating awareness on this aspect.

## **Background**

The AHSI is a core network of seven research institutions from various African countries whose governments have acceded to the APRM. Each partner institution is tasked with the responsibility of focusing on one of the seven agreed clusters on human security issues. The clusters comprise: Democracy; Human Rights; Corruption; Arms Management; Security and Conflict Management; Civil Society Engagement; as well as the Terrorism and Organised Crime cluster. The clusters are addressed respectively by the following partner institutions: the South African Institute for International Affairs (SAIIA) from South Africa; the Institute for Human Rights and Development in Africa (IHRDA) from The Gambia; the Human Rights Trust of Southern Africa (SAHRIT) based in Zimbabwe; the Africa Peace Forum (APF) based in Kenya; African Security Dialogue and Research (ASDR) from Ghana; West Africa Network for Peace-building (WANEP); and the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) based in South Africa.

The choice of countries reviewed by the AHSI was based on the fact that they all have acceded to the NEPAD African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). The choice of countries was not only based on that, but also on the fact that all eight countries are active participants in the NEPAD programme. The countries were reviewed based on commitments that have been made at meetings of the heads of states, mainly comprising of declarations, protocols and conventions sanctioned by the OAU, whose duties, roles and responsibilities have been taken over by the AU, albeit with an extended mandate since July 2002.

The AHSI was born out of formal recognition from African leaders that civil society will have to be engaged in the processes of policy formulation and implementation of AU and NEPAD programmes. Such a provision is made in the official documents of the AU and NEPAD. For instance, at the 6th meeting of the NEPAD Heads of State Implementation Committee in Abuja, it was acknowledged in the document on APRM Organisation and Processes, that to supplement the weak AU institutions: “It is anticipated that the APRM will have to work with a wider range of Partner Institutions including... African research and policy institutions engaged in policy advisory services.”<sup>5</sup> But, formal arrangements have yet to be realised for African civil society organisations to engage with NEPAD and other AU structures for any policy making process. But, this did not stop the AHSI partners from wanting to contribute the NEPAD African Peer Review Mechanism, albeit informally and in a supportive capacity.

After realising that the APRM would only focus on two focus areas out of four, the AHSI partners therefore took the initiative to launch reviews in one of the focus areas that fell out of the scope of the APRM, that is, the technical aspects of human rights, democracy and political governance review.<sup>6</sup> In essence, the peer reviews have to focus on four areas, which are: human rights, democracy and political governance; socio-economic development; economic governance and management; as well as corporate governance. These are all encapsulated in the NEPAD Declaration on Democracy and Political, Economic and Political Governance. Although the APRM is intended to focus on the two latter areas, stage one of the APR process will however involve a study of all the focus areas.<sup>7</sup>

As the APRM has to focus on only two focus areas, the responsibility for reviews in the remaining areas lies with AU institutions. But, the eventuality of the reviews taking place

---

<sup>5</sup> Communiqué of the NEPAD Heads of State and Government Implementation Committee, African Peer Review Mechanism: Organisation and Processes, (Guidelines), March 09, 2003. See also: Communiqué of the sixth Heads of State and Government Implementation Committee of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (HSIC6), Project information on the African Human Security Initiative, <http://www.africanreview.org/project.htm>

<sup>6</sup> See HSIC 5 (Fifth Communiqué of the NEPAD Heads of States Implementation Committee)

<sup>7</sup> NEPAD HGSIC 3 - African Peer Review Mechanism: Organisation and Processes, (Guidelines), March 09, 2003. p. 11

relies much on how long it will take the AU to build capacity in the relevant continental institutions. What is interesting to note however is that the reviewing of national commitments to human rights, democracy and good political governance will not only be limited to countries that have acceded to the APRM, but the process will apply to all AU member countries. This is probably the reason for the consideration of broad based review processes that involve a variety of AU organs that include in their respective mandates the obligation to promote adherence to commitments surrounding the focus areas concerned.

The technical aspects of human rights, democracy and political governance review have been specifically reserved for AU organs such as the African Commission on Human and People's Rights – based in The Gambia - (to be supported in this role by the AU Commission that is based in Addis Ababa and whose portfolio committee on political affairs will assume the country review responsibilities), the Pan-African Parliament (PAP), as well as the Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC).

But, these organs are yet to be in a position to conduct reviews on the member countries' commitments to human rights, democracy and good political governance. Also, the mandates of some of these organs do not as yet accommodate country review or monitoring functions. These require discussion, elaboration and formal approval from African leaders at one or more of the meetings heads of state and government. Also, it will take almost five years before the PAP acquires legislative powers, as for now the parliament is mandated to serve only in an advisory capacity. The modalities of the PAP participating in a review process are yet to be elaborated. At the time of writing this paper the statutes of ECOSOCC were yet to be approved at the July 2004 AU summit. Pending formal approval of the statutes of ECOSOCC, what would follow would be the council's formal launch and the consideration of civil society movements, organisations and professionals to participate in the council.

Other AU organs that have been envisaged to undertake country reviews in respect of aspects related to human rights, democracy and political governance include the African

Committee of Experts on the Rights of the Child, the Peace and Security Council (PSC), the Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation in Africa (CSSDCA), as well as the African Court of justice. These organs are also yet to acquire the capacity to function fully, not to mention that of taking on monitoring responsibilities. Some of these organs will also need to have their mandates amended in their respective charters to accommodate this monitoring function, in addition to working out the modalities of participating in country review processes. Therefore, considering the many processes that have to take place before these organs take on their country review responsibilities, one cannot, as Cilliers has clearly pointed out, expect peer reviews from these organs at any time in the near future.<sup>8</sup>

It is this realisation that gave birth to the AHSI. Having no reason to wait for the eventuality of the AU being fully capacitated to undertake its intended responsibilities, particularly in the area of country reviews, the AHSI partners took the initiative to launch a shadow political commitment review process, focusing on areas related to human security. The AHSI partners used as an entry point, background material derived from their previous experiences in research that has sought to link the focus areas with NEPAD issues. For instance, several of the analytical works have been on the organisation and processes of the AU, NEPAD and the APRM.<sup>9</sup> Some background material has also been produced on commitments made by African leaders at the highest policy-making structures.<sup>10</sup> This thus made it easier for AHSI partners to select indicators for their reviews.

Some notes can be made on the similarities and differences between the AHSI review process and that of the APRM. The latter uses set of objectives, standards, criteria and indicators that can be found in the APRM base document. The basic principle of the

---

<sup>8</sup> Jakkie Cilliers, *Peace and Security Through Good Governance: A guide to the NEPAD Peer Review Mechanism*, Institute for Security Studies Paper no. 70, April 2003.

<sup>9</sup> See: Cilliers, J. op cit. April 2003. See also: Hennie Kotzé and Carly Steyn, *African Elite Perspectives: AU and NEPAD, A comparative study across seven African countries*, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) Occasional Papers, KAS: Johannesburg, December 2003.

<sup>10</sup> See: Jakkie Cilliers and Kathy Sturman, *Commitments by African Heads of State to Peace, Democracy, Human Rights and Associate Issues*, ISS paper no. 58, July 2002.

APRM is that any country that accedes to this mechanism will be committing itself to the benchmarks and standards set forth in a memorandum of understanding. The memorandum of understanding will be negotiated between the APR Secretariat and the country to be reviewed. The main focus of the APRM is the assessment of the participating countries' Programmes of Action, with respect to two focus areas, that is, economic governance and management as well as corporate governance. The Programmes of Action referred to here will have to be drafted by the countries concerned. Thereafter these will be discussed with the country review teams of the APRM, who will also prepare country review reports, used against background material provided in the first stages of the reviews. The draft review reports will be discussed with the countries concerned before modifications are effected to the respective Programmes of Action. After the finalisation of the reports, they will go through various stages, from the APR Secretariat, to the APR Panel, to the APR Forum and finally through to regional institutions, not to mention the highest decision making body on the continent, that is, the Assembly of Heads of State.

In this scheme of things it would seem like the AHSI will not be able to make any meaningful contribution to the largely internalised APRM process. But, the AHSI can contribute. Below we discuss ways in which this initiative can contribute to the APRM process and by implication to the broader NEPAD programme.

### **The Importance of AHSI to NEPAD and the APRM**

The main contribution of the initiative to NEPAD is providing in-depth analysis into the factors that jeopardise human security in Africa. The initiative contributes also by generating resource material to be used for policy-making purposes. The other use of the initiative is making available a pool of experts on human security issues, who will be available at any given time to provide their services. One crucial component of improving individual and communal life is the implementation of policies. The AHSI again serves

as an important resource for analysis into the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges countries face in implementing national programmes.

Therefore in sum, the importance of the African Human Security Initiative to NEPAD relates to the African Peer Review Mechanism. The AHSI reviews can be used as benchmarks for information that will result from the APRM. The latter can use the material provided by AHSI as important information resources for policy and decision-making purposes.

Complaints abound of NEPAD being a politically driven development programme with little room for engagement from the public. Ofeibea Quist-Arcton of AllAfrica – a leading web-based news agency – has noted that “Africans are debating whether [NEPAD] can move beyond a top-down prescription for development to a plan that can engage the energies and imagination of a broad range of people and institutions.”<sup>11</sup> These are the sorts of notions that have to be either vindicated or dispelled if initiatives such as NEPAD are to attain some measure of legitimacy at all from the public, as opposed to the legitimacy it already enjoys from being the formal development programme of the AU. One way for the programme to gain broad participation and in the meanwhile earn its legitimacy from the public is through information dissemination and the AHSI can play a crucial role in this regard.

The AHSI can play an important role of bridging the information gap between the elite and ordinary people. Often some of the issues addressed by African leaders may seem boring and incomprehensible for ordinary people who are not informed. For instance, the AHSI addresses the focus area on human rights, democracy, good governance and the rule of law. Out of these four concepts, the AHSI came up with seven clusters as mentioned above. Within the clusters one could note several issues that reveal exactly the kind of human security threats that people are faced with. For example, one cluster addresses anti-corruptions efforts, which are directly related to good governance issues, which do not only relate to politics, but economics, as well as the corporate environment.

---

<sup>11</sup> See: <http://allafrica.com/nepad/>

It is clear that this is a crucial area that affects human development. Then there are other clusters that address human security threats such as conflict (that is, intrastate conflict) and the proliferation of small arms, which have been acknowledged as the number one instruments used to kill people throughout the world. Other clusters address human rights issues, which is a broad concept that encapsulates the aspirations of many throughout the world for social progress, freedom and better standards of living as it is enshrined with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Then one cluster that is closely related to the latter is the one that addresses terrorism and organised crime. This cluster addresses issues that concern the enforcement of the rule of law, which in essence is supposed to protect people's fundamental rights and freedoms. Terrorism and organised crime are broad concepts on their own as they cover a range of activities and methods used to carry such activities, only having a few things in common, including the fact that both are at odds with the law and they threaten the well being of human beings.

It is here where one realises the importance of the AHSI, that is, packaging these human security issues into a conceptual framework and going further by explaining how non-adherence to the commitments made by African leaders to implementing measures to address these issues is adversely affecting the lives of many Africans. Therefore the AHSI will serve as an information resource pool for gaining understanding of human security issues. The AHSI can therefore also be used as gateway to understanding continental processes that are driven mainly by Africa's elite, which are basically meant to improve African lives. But, AHSI does not have direct access to ordinary people and its aspirations of creating awareness on human security issues may be not realised. This is where the media can play an important role. The media is indispensable to initiatives such as the AHSI in a sense that the former forms part and parcel of the most people's daily lives. The media has direct access to the public. It speaks the language of the public. But, most importantly, journalists ask relevant questions that dawn on many people's minds. The media is therefore an important channel for information dissemination.

The following section is therefore dedicated to explaining how the news media can assist the African Human Security Initiative in its efforts to inform the general public about human security issues and the continental processes that affect these issues.

## **The Role of the Media**

Kotzé and Steyn conducted a study on the perceptions of AU and NEPAD among elites of seven African countries, six of which are those covered by the AHSI. Their study revealed that in all countries the elite regard daily newspapers as their foremost sources of information.<sup>12</sup> It is obvious therefore that to reach a large cross-section of the public, the media is an excellent channel.

The APRM process has begun in earnest, but the majority of the African populace are not aware of this process. It is such a detailed process that country support missions have to be sent to participating countries, so as to prepare them for the reviews. As the AHSI is meant to be a benchmarking process for peer review on human security issues, the information it has produced can be used as a benchmark for the formal peer review process of the APRM. Thus the role of the media in this will be to make the public aware of the information produced by the AHSI, which in turn will create expectations in terms of quality of information that the APRM process has to produce.

The APRM envisages but a minor role for the media... that of consulting with the country review teams of the APRM.<sup>13</sup> The consultations will be based on briefing the media on the “processes, spirit and guiding principles” of the APRM. The briefing sessions do not promise to make time for scrutiny, and little of that will be availed in any case, and thus the briefings are not expected to generate any significant impact upon the APR process. Nevertheless, this will be the opportunity for ordinary citizens to find out

---

<sup>12</sup> Kotzé, H. and Steyn, C. op cit. December 2003.

<sup>13</sup> NEPAD HGSIC 3 - African Peer Review Mechanism: Organisation and Processes, (Guidelines), March 09, 2003. p. 13

about the high level political processes that purport to create the environment for the improvement of their lives in one or more meaningful ways.

Discussions of government commitments are rare in the public domain and thus governments tend to move at a very sluggish pace or not at all on these matters as a result of the absence of pressure. The media will therefore play an important role in generating this pressure that will induce governments to act on their promises. As Cilliers has pointed out, "...public scrutiny is an important component of this pressure."<sup>14</sup> But, how can the media assist the public to scrutinise the actions of their leaders?

As the discussions mentioned above are only limited to politicians, academics, professionals and concerned civil society organisations, the role of the media therefore is creating space for ordinary people to enter the discussions. For this the media have to rely on a pool of experts and the AHSI provides just that. The AHSI role here is to assist by unpacking the issues addressed by the NEPAD programme in a way that non-experts can comprehend. Journalists are crucial in this regard. Journalists are there to ask questions on behalf of the general public and package the information attained in a format that is most acceptable to the recipients. Journalists often ask the kind of questions that dawn on the minds of ordinary people. They speak the language of the people. When the public air their views through media channels, the sentiments can reverberate to an extent of a generating what in theoretical terms can be referred to as the Butterfly Effect.

"The Butterfly Effect is the propensity of a system to be sensitive to initial conditions. Such systems over time become unpredictable, this idea gave rise to the notion of a butterfly flapping it's wings in one area of the world, causing a tornado or some such weather event to occur in another remote area of the world."<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Cilliers, J. *Human Security In Africa: A Conceptual Framework for Review*, Monograph for the African Human Security Review, June 2004. p. 13

<sup>15</sup> See: <http://www.fortunecity.com/emachines/e11/86/beffect.html>

This is how pressure on the political elite can be generated. By creating space for the public to air their views, in order to let the political elite know their actions are being scrutinised and hence force them to be accountable. Therefore, the media is important in creating channels for the public to air their views and their association with initiatives such as the AHSI is crucial in assisting the public in understanding many of the issues that would otherwise seem distant, remote and of no consequence to them, whereas in actual fact these impacted directly on public life. The role of journalists will not only be to capture and report the news, but also to seek the advice of experts to explain the issues that are raised. But, these have to be linked to national, regional and continental processes, so that as the issues arise (for instance, corruption related issues) these can be linked to the commitments leaders have made to address them and thus hold leaders accountable. Therefore, the media is an important instrument for holding the elite accountable for their actions.

## **Current Status and Future Prospects for AHSI**

The review process has been completed and what is expected now from the process are seven reports packaged in monograph format. Each monograph covers a cluster from the seven agreed clusters on human security issues.

The release of the reports will be launched initially in South Africa. Then will follow launches in other countries covered by AHSI. The launches will serve as a platform to brief stakeholders including country representatives, national NEPAD focal points, the NEPAD Secretariat, backers (the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID)), the AU Commission, and other members of civil society, as well as the media. The reports will be distributed at these launches.

The project is likely to be extended further to cover four other countries not covered in the first set of reviews. These are: Mauritius, Rwanda, Mali and Mozambique. A third phase is even envisaged where countries such as Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Congo, Gabon, Egypt, Benin and Angola would be covered. However, the logistics and other

basics of this taking place have yet to be worked out. Among issues that need revisiting are the research methods, standards and indicators to be used in the upcoming projects. Apparently the current project exhibits signs of disharmony amongst the partners in the approach used to conduct the reviews. For instance, while certain partners relied heavily on internal expertise, others had to outsource the expertise in order to add depth into the research. This has posed the danger of incongruity in terms of the content and structure of the reports. Nevertheless, efforts are being made to address these issues.

The experience with the project has shown that there is a paucity of information on some of the themes. The AHSI partners are in agreement that this situation necessitates efforts to create awareness on the need for Africa scholars and research institutions to produce more reading material on the various issues that affect Africans, instead of having to rely relentlessly on international organisations from outside the continent to produce such material. This is indeed what the spirit of NEPAD is about, that is, Africans taking ownership of their own destiny, but also working with international partners to reach the intended objectives. The HASI is already addressing this information gap and it intends to make information available, which would be posted on the network's website.

Therefore, the main drive behind the AHSI is that the successful completion of the project will, based upon the results it elicits, allow the initiative to be considered as part of the NEPAD initiative. This will automatically imply the continuation of the project. One or more of the AHSI partners also stand in line to be invited to formally participate in the APRM process as partner institutions in order to offer their expertise. The material produced by AHSI may also form part of the background material to be used by the APRM Secretariat and other national, regional, sub-regional and international institutions that will participate in the review process.

## **Conclusion**

The African Human Security Initiative has a role to play in furthering the goals and objectives of NEPAD. The AHSI can play a supportive role, even if it is just from a

distance. The expertise of the AHSI partners in various areas of human security is an important resource from which the NEPAD programme can draw. In turn the AHSI has to rely on the media as an important channel in order to reach the broader public and inform them of continental processes that affect their future lives. This process will ensure some measure of popular participation, which is what the African leaders have espoused for the effective implementation of developmental programmes. NEPAD promises to deliver where other development plan have failed. The innovation brought about with the introduction of the African Peer Review Mechanism has renewed hopes for the attainment of NEPAD objectives. The African Human Security Initiative has intervened in time to create benchmarks for the official country review process. Despite the relatively minor contribution the AHSI will make to the NEPAD programme, many will acknowledge that this is a significant one. The media will play an important role in this regard. The partnership between the AHSI and the media can go a long way to ensure popular participation in continental processes, a crucial aspect that can ensure that Africans develop together in the spirit of the New Partnership for Africa's Development.

## References

Cilliers, J. and Sturman, K. *Commitments by African Heads of State to Peace, Democracy, Human Rights and Associate Issues*, ISS paper no. 58, July 2002.

Cilliers, J. *Peace and Security Through Good Governance: A guide to the NEPAD Peer Review Mechanism*, Institute for Security Studies Paper no. 70, April 2003.

Cilliers, J. *Human Security In Africa: A Conceptual Framework for Review*, Monograph for the African Human Security Review, June 2004.

Constitutive Act of the African Union, as adopted by the thirty-sixth ordinary session of the Assembly of Heads of State and the Governments of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), AT Lome, Togo, July 11, 2000.

Hammerstad, A. *African Commitments to Democracy in Theory and Practice: A Review of eight NEPAD Countries*, Monograph for the African Human Security Initiative, 2004. [www.africanreview.org](http://www.africanreview.org)

<http://allafrica.com/nepad/>

<http://www.fortunecity.com/emachines/e11/86/beffect.html>

Kotzé H. and Steyn, C. *African Elite Perspectives: AU and NEPAD, A comparative study across seven African countries*, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) Occasional Papers, KAS: Johannesburg, December 2003.

NEPAD HGSIC 3 - African Peer Review Mechanism: Organisation and Processes, (Guidelines), March 09, 2003.

Project information on the African Human Security Initiative,  
<http://www.africanreview.org/project.htm>

Yaoundé Declaration of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government, July 1996.