

Nepad's next moves

The project's challenge now is to get more African countries to align their development programmes with its priorities

Analysis

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There was little in the way of visible fanfare to mark the fifth anniversary of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (Nepad) in July. Depending on where you stand, it could be five years of slow, laborious, but promising progress; or five years of predictable diminishing of another continental project started with much hope and celebration.

Nepad began as an arm to give practical reality to the vision of the Africa Union, itself a new initiative to reposition Africa on the world stage. After its inception in 2001 it had its critics, such as the Zimbabwean government, which asked if the West was not trying to use Nepad to impose conditions on African governments in return for financial assistance.

Nepad's primary objectives are to eradicate poverty, halt the marginalisation of Africa in the globalisation process and speed up sustainable economic growth.

Nepad deputy CEO Dr Heshpina Rukato — who is one of two deputies at the Nepad secretariat and is

responsible for policy, resource mobilisation, administration and finance — said the challenges it faced could not be underestimated.

"It takes more than 10 years to put a good project in place and change the way of doing things. Imagine if you have to consult 53 countries before you get something done. The process is bound to be complex," she said.

The secretariat is responsible for coordinating the work of Nepad, including servicing the steering committee, which reports to the Nepad heads of state and the government implementation committee.

The secretariat employs about 60 people and is based in Midrand. Last year there was talk that it may be moved to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, as part of the AU's proposals to integrate its work with that of Nepad.

But the proposal evoked fears that the AU, already battling with its heavy structures, would not pay the requisite attention to Nepad and that its profile would diminish, subsumed under other AU priorities.

Some civil society groups said such a move would cause concern among developmental partners such as the International Monetary Fund and the European Union, which were impressed with the work of Nepad.

Rukato said the secretariat could not take a position on the matter, but had suggested that whatever was



Thinking big: Nepad deputy CEO Heshpina Rukato. Photo: Oupa Nkosi

done during the process of integration should not destroy the momentum created by Nepad and the international goodwill toward Nepad.

"Wherever it is based, the current political leadership of Nepad must remain in place, and integration should not come in the way of flexibility and efficiency," she said.

The AU Summit in Banjul, Gambia, last month formed an ad hoc committee made up of heads of state to decide on the modalities of the integration.

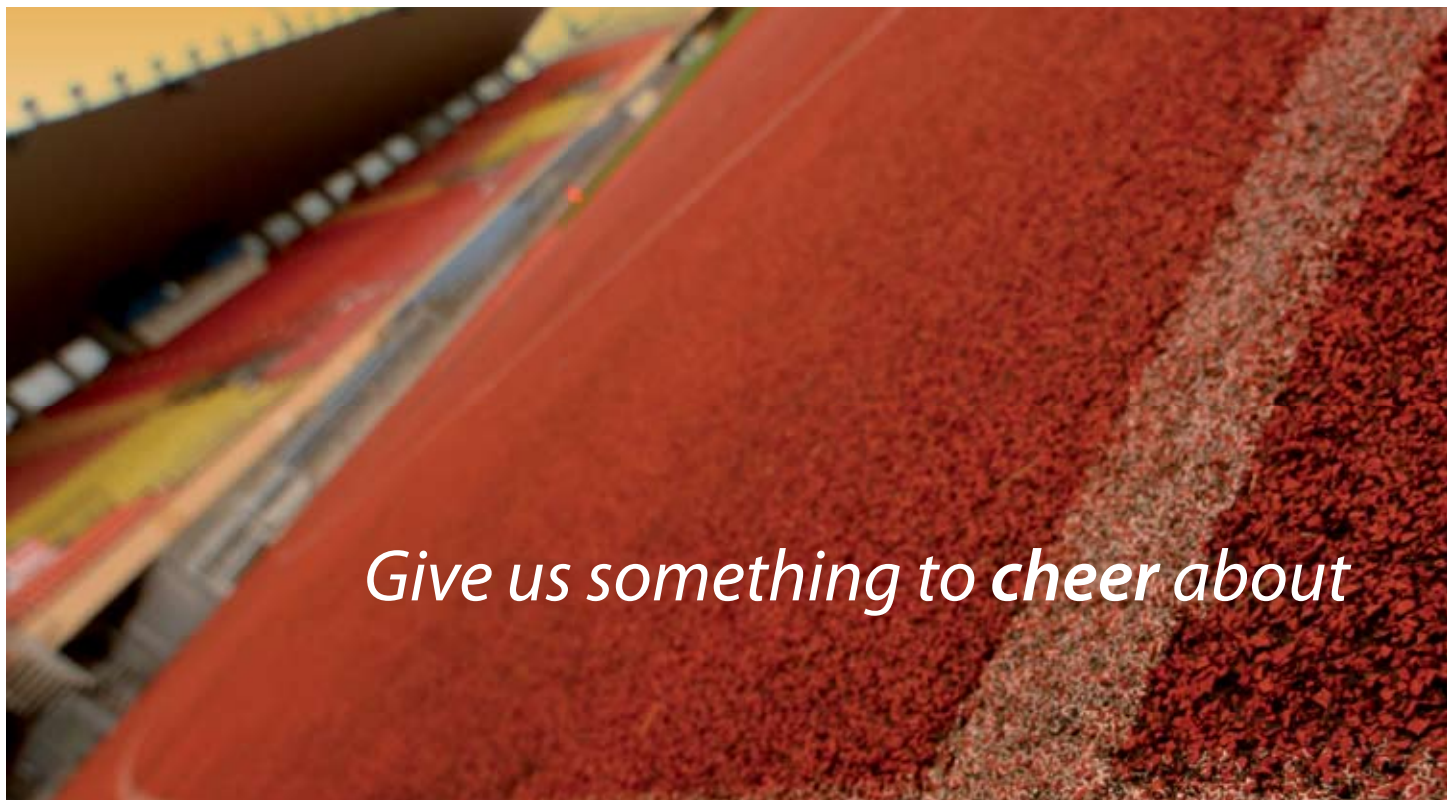
Nepad has hailed the reversal in the decline of developmental assistance flow to Africa in the past few years as significant.

interest and applause across the continent. "What is important now is to demonstrate that recommendations emanating from the process to individual countries are implemented. It shows that our heads of state take good governance very seriously, and that they accept it as a prerequisite for sustainable development. We also need the private sector to engage more with this process," she said.

Rukato, a Zimbabwean citizen with a doctorate in environmental management, said one of the biggest challenges facing Nepad at the moment is to find human resource capacity at regional and national level to implement its programmes.

"This means having people and institutions with the ability to coordinate identified Nepad programmes in a manner that avoids duplication. It includes getting experts who will help us translate concept into programmatic details and research to support sound decision-making by our leaders. We also need to mobilise resources, both domestic and external, to finance priority programmes."

The other challenge is to get more governments to integrate their development programmes to be aligned with Nepad priorities. "Progress remains slow. Integration of Nepad into national development plans is not at a satisfactory level, but the initial steps have been taken," said Rukato.



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