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## **African Media Coverage of NEPAD: Implications for Reporting Africa\***

Lilian Ndangam\*\*  
& Andrew Kanyegirire\*\*\*

### **Abstract**

The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) has emerged in recent years as an African-owned development framework for the African continent. Despite its emphasis on sustainable development, democratic governance, regional integration and strategies to implement these, a major challenge for NEPAD remains the continent-wide knowledge and understanding of its agenda and initiatives. This baseline study examines African news media coverage of NEPAD in order to assess the extent and nature of media engagement with NEPAD. Based on a content analysis of coverage in African newspapers and news providers available through the online news portal *Allafrica.com*, the study provides an overview of NEPAD coverage from January to July 2005 in a sample of African countries. Findings show that coverage of NEPAD is event based and elitist with little consistent critical analysis of processes that underpin the NEPAD framework. Analyses of this nature provide insights into how African media are reporting and engaging the public with regard to this continent-wide development initiative. The implications of these findings are discussed with reference to 'African journalism'.

**Key Terms:** NEPAD, Africa, news coverage, journalism, African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM).

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- \* An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 2005 Highway Africa Conference held in Grahamstown, South Africa.
  - \* \* Lilian Ndangam is Andrew Mellon Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the School of Journalism and Media Studies, Rhodes University. Her research interests include online news flow between African countries and African media reporting of Africa. She can be reached at email: L.Ndangam@ru.ac.za
  - \*\*\* Andrew Kanyegirire is a PhD student at the School of Journalism and Media Studies, Rhodes University. His work explores journalists' perceptions of their roles and identity constructions with regard to NEPAD. He can be reached at email: g00k1936@campus.ru.ac.za

## Résumé

Le Nouveau Partenariat pour le Développement de l'Afrique (NEPAD) est apparu ces dernières années comme un cadre de développement élaboré par l'Afrique pour le continent africain. Malgré son insistance sur le développement durable, la gouvernance démocratique, l'intégration régionale et les stratégies de mise en œuvre de ces projets, le défi majeur du NEPAD demeure toutefois la connaissance large des réalités du continent ainsi que la compréhension de son agenda et de ses initiatives. Cette étude préliminaire étudie la couverture du projet du NEPAD par la presse africaine, dans le but d'évaluer l'étendue et la nature de l'engagement des médias envers le Nepad. Sur la base de l'analyse du contenu de la couverture médiatique faite par les journaux africains et les sources d'informations, disponibles sur le portail d'informations en ligne *Allafrica.com*, cette étude fournit un aperçu de la couverture médiatique du NEPAD, de janvier à juillet 2005, dans un échantillon de pays africains choisis. Les résultats montrent que la couverture du NEPAD faite par les médias est établie sur une base événementielle et élitiste, avec une très faible analyse critique des processus sous-tendant le cadre du NEPAD. De telles analyses montrent comment les médias africains informent et sollicitent l'implication du public vis-à-vis de cette initiative de développement établie à l'échelle du continent. Les implications de ces résultats sont commentées à travers des références au « journalisme africain ».

**Mots clés:** NEPAD, Afrique, la presse, les medias et actualité, Mécanisme Africain d'Evaluation des Pairs (MAEP)

## Mass media and the African story

For the past several decades, Western news media reporting of Africa has come under scrutiny from international media scholarship, journalists and politicians. International communication research has pointed to little coverage of African countries in the West and a dominant focus on coups, wars, corruption and disease (Palmer 1987; Schraeder and Endless 1998). Content analyses of international news identify conflicts and crises as dominant topics in reports of less developed countries in the media of Western countries. The reportage also tends to frame corruption, violence and disorder as systemic problems evolving from the natural character of these countries, whereas similar problems in the West are framed as mere deviances or temporary imperfections (see Dahlgren and Chakrapani 1982; Kariithi 2000).

During the 2003 Media in Africa conference at Stellenbosch University, Philip Molefe, head of the South African based satellite channel *SABC Africa*, argued that 'the major challenge facing the media in Africa is the ownership of the African story. It is a known fact that the story of Africa continues to be packaged and edited in London, Paris and Atlanta' (Molefe 2003:1). Molefe was echoing a theme previously highlighted by South

Africa's President Thabo Mbeki during the 2003 South African National Editors Forum (SANEF) conference, where Mbeki underscored the need for African media—in the context of the African Union (AU)—to facilitate knowledge and understanding of the continent by reporting 'Africa to Africans' and reporting 'Africa as Africans' (Mbeki 2003). The Presidential Roundtables hosted by the University of the Witwatersrand in April 2005 again highlighted the underreporting of African countries in the media of Western countries. A ten year content analysis commissioned by Boston University's African Presidential Archives Commission observed an overwhelmingly negative coverage of Africa in American media (APARC 2005).

The quantitative and qualitative imbalance in news flow between Africa and the West remains an issue of concern to scholars, journalism professionals and politicians alike. While Western media coverage continues to be the focus of professional and political discourse, inadequate attention has been paid to African news reporting of Africa. Inherent in the critique of Western media coverage is the uncritical assumption that African media reportage on Africa by Africans would be different from the Western media reportage that has been criticized in the literature. Yet notions of 'telling the African story' and 'reporting Africa as Africans' that are central to these debates have not been sufficiently analysed. Problematising these notions prompts us to ask questions such as: What is the African story? What does it mean to report Africa as Africans? In whose interest is it to report Africa as Africans?

In attempting to unpack the aforementioned debates, we can note that there is an implicit assumption that since journalists in Africa are imbued with some self-sense of being 'African', they will therefore report on Africa in a positive light in contrast to the broader 'negative' coverage on Africa by 'Western' and other media. There are two potential facets to this seemingly plausible argument. On the one hand, journalists in Africa by virtue of their perceptions and specific context can report the continent differently from Western journalists. On the other hand, reporting differently does not necessarily equate to portraying Africa positively. In addition, the tendency to foreground reportage on the basis of some essential purity of being could lead to reportage that reinforces the self-serving interests of governments and business—at the cost of the interests and rights of the wider African publics—all in the name of positive reportage.

There are many stories within Africa. Apart from well-documented stories of HIV/AIDS and bad governance, there are stories of regional cooperation, such as Somalia's government currently based in Kenya, AU

peace-keeping in the Darfur region of Sudan and the Cameroon-Chad pipeline. There are stories of lesser-known issues such as the recent struggle over gorillas between Cameroon and South Africa, and there are also stories of successes such as *Nollywood* and South African soap operas.

The emergence of pan-African initiatives, such as the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) within the reconstituted AU and the Pan-African Parliament (PAP), are some of the significant developments and potentially pertinent stories on the continent in recent years (Kotze and Steyn 2003). To elaborate, in transforming the Organisation for African Unity (OAU) into the AU, one of the aims was to reposition the continent 'in such a way that interaction among its nation states and with the rest of the world is improved and geared towards sustainable development' (Mogekwu 2004:238). NEPAD, which, in its terms, is aimed at poverty eradication and the acceleration of Africa's integration into the global economy, is the 'African-owned' and 'African-led' development vision of the AU (NEPAD 2001:13). Specific goals are to achieve economic growth of 7 percent per year and to meet the international development targets agreed upon by the United Nations in 2001 through investment in certain priority sectors such as ICTs (NEPAD 2001:1, 24–25). Collectively, these initiatives articulate a strengthening of continental cooperation, emphasising a pan-Africanist fortification of democracy, sustainable development, economic growth and good governance. For instance, NEPAD's African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) enables member states to police each other on issues of human rights and democratic governance (NEPAD 2001).

Despite its visionary premise and promise of transforming African development and governance, NEPAD has been criticised for the neo-liberal ideology that underpins its development, evolution and mode of deployment (Adesina 2004; Bond 2002). In addition, having excluded the unions, civil society and religious groups in drawing up its framework, the initiative has been criticised for being elitist and exclusionary, all of which is in opposition to its 'African-owned' credentials (Anyang' Nyong'o et al. 2002). Hence, Adesina (2002), Bond (2002) and Taylor and Nel (2002) question NEPAD and its precursor the African Renaissance on the grounds that they are an extension of neo-liberalism and the failed macro-economic policies of the 'Washington Consensus'—structural adjustment and tied aid.

Regardless of these criticisms, the proponents of the emerging political and economic initiatives collectively seek to enhance regional integration and strengthen unity among African countries (Kotze and Steyn 2003; Mbeki 2003; NEPAD 2004, 2005). As a regional development initiative,

NEPAD can be seen as a pertinent African story—one among many stories of Africa—that is worthy of attention by Africa’s media. Few, if any, studies have explored media reportage of regional initiatives and transnational events in Africa. This paper is a baseline study exploring the coverage of NEPAD by African media. Such an analysis presents an opportunity to establish the visibility of the initiative in the continent’s media. This is particularly relevant when discussing issues in reporting Africa.

### **An exploration of the mass media – NEPAD nexus**

A recent study on elite African perceptions of the AU and NEPAD by Kotze and Steyn (2003) found that the majority of elites in South Africa, Senegal, Uganda, Kenya, Nigeria, Algeria and Zimbabwe ranked daily newspapers as their primary source of information about these institutions. Evidently, journalists and the mass media potentially play a significant role in increasing knowledge and understanding of initiatives such as NEPAD and, by implication, fostering integration, reinforcing co-operation and strengthening unity across Africa. Journalists are viewed as disseminators of information to the public and by implication stakeholders in the NEPAD process. The latter position is most evident in the APRM’s inclusion of journalists as some of the stakeholders to be consulted during the peer review process (Herbert 2003). Having said that, NEPAD and the peer review framework are for the most part silent on freedom of expression and media freedoms as key criteria for good governance (Berger 2002; IFEX 2005).

Kouakou highlights the promotional and indispensable role that can be played by the mass media in branding NEPAD (2003:44). For him, the media are part of the information conduits by which Africans can come to understand and participate in NEPAD and the AU. Moge kwu (2004) also suggests that the mass media ‘should’ promote the ideals of NEPAD by addressing the challenge of xenophobia, which is evidently in opposition to the pan-African elements of NEPAD. Mbeki, a leading proponent of NEPAD, has raised related views for instance during the 2003 SANEF meet where he argued:

Central to the conceptualisation of the African Union and its development programme, NEPAD, is the collective determination to promote African unity and the political and socio-economic integration of our continent. This is informed by the conviction that the peoples of Africa are interdependent and share a common destiny. It makes no sense that they should be separated from one another by ignorance of one another. Indeed that dangerous state of unknowing, which leads to prejudice and

superstition against and about one another, would make it impossible for us to achieve the goal of African unity (Mbeki 2003:1–3).

For Mbeki, continental unity cannot be achieved when Africans are ignorant about one another. It is therefore important for the mass media in Africa to facilitate knowledge and understanding of the continent by reporting ‘Africa to Africans’ and by reporting ‘Africa as Africans’ (Mbeki 2003). The idea here, also argued by Kouakou (2003:44–45), is that journalists and mass media in Africa can encourage dialogue among Africans and can create a shared sense of vision and *ubuntu*—the discourse of which can be used to tackle social problems such as xenophobia. In doing so, the assertion is that the media will also be creating a public forum for discussions on NEPAD all of which could expand the African-ownership of NEPAD (Kouakou 2003; Mogeckwu 2004). This position highlights the important informational and supportive roles that the African media can play in bringing NEPAD to the public’s attention whilst also creating a forum for stakeholder involvement in the initiative.

Overall, proponents of NEPAD and the AU are relying on the frameworks of these initiatives to enhance regional integration and cooperation and to strengthen unity among African countries (Kotze and Steyn 2003; Mbeki 2003; NEPAD 2001, 2004, 2005). As Mogeckwu (2004) rightly asserts, a meaningful interaction with the world through these pan-African schemes depends on a successful integration of people within the African continent so that they can deal with the rest of world as a collective. In this regard, one could argue that as a pan-African initiative NEPAD is one of many important stories to emerge from Africa over the last few years. Its focus and implementation are arguably key topics on the African political, economic and development agenda. The implicit and explicit location of the mass media within the NEPAD discourse speaks to the significant role of the media in the integration of the continent and necessitates a consideration of how the media within Africa are reporting this initiative. This is not to say that the media alone are the key players here. In fact, various stakeholders in society including the media will have to contribute to NEPAD in their own separate ways given that the success or failure of NEPAD has real implications for them all. So how is African media engaging with this initiative?

Based on a content analysis of coverage in African newspapers and news providers available through the online news portal *Allafrica.com*, this study provides an overview of continent-wide visibility of NEPAD in the African media. The analysis is guided by the following questions: 1) What are the dominant themes of coverage? 2) Who gets to speak in the

news on NEPAD? What types of sources are cited by the newspapers? and 3) Which countries are visible in news about NEPAD?

### Research method

To establish the visibility of NEPAD in the African media, a sample of NEPAD related stories on *Allafrica.com*'s English language website were coded, covering the period from January to July 2005. *Allafrica.com* is an online news portal which gathers news from more than 120 websites of media organisations around Africa. The site aggregates and distributes news from a variety of English and French language newspapers, news agencies and organisations mainly drawn from the continent. It operates two websites that respectively cater to English-speaking and French-speaking audiences interested in news about Africa from Africa. Owing to the language capability of the researchers, only coverage on *Allafrica.com*'s English language site was examined.

Mainstream media such as newspapers, television and radio in Africa have increasingly adopted the new media technologies and computer mediated communication avenues as tools for producing and disseminating content across time, space and distance. As a medium that is helping shape global communication in the twenty-first century, the internet offers an additional dimension to news dissemination and international communication (Volkmer 2001). To this end, news websites build international connections and simultaneously represent global communities (Moore 2002). News audiences with access to the internet increasingly turn to the medium as a source of news while many daily newspapers tend to present breaking news on their websites instead of waiting until the next day's print publication (Paterson and Sreberny 2003; Pavlik 2000).

Based on online publishing models identified by He and Zhu (2002), including broucherware/shovel ware, quasi-interactive and virtual community, it can be reasonably argued that many African newspapers are still in the shovel ware model of online publishing. This model entails print versions of newspapers simply being transplanted online with no room for feedback, interactivity or additional information (He and Zhu 2002) and not specifically edited for online audiences (Jensen 2001; Olukemi 2004). In addition, many African media's desire to adopt the new media technologies remains compounded by low-levels of technological investment and ICT skills. Consequently, while we are not able to gain insights with regard to the pagination, illustration and layout of the news content on NEPAD in the actual newspapers, the news texts available online were almost always a replica of the content in the hard copy of newspapers.

The search was limited to stories ‘about’ NEPAD during the sample period. ‘About’ was defined as mentioning NEPAD in two separate paragraphs and/or references to NEPAD-related topics and policies in two separate sentences in a news article. The categories of coded topics were modified from the priority themes and concerns in the 2001 NEPAD document and combined with other mainstream topic categories identified from prior engagement with the data. The following themes were identified for coding: regional cooperation, economic performance, peer review, corruption, trade/aid, investment, ICTs, agriculture, poverty, health, gender issues, civil war /conflict, human rights and others. Articles were also coded for the country of focus, type of sources cited and gender of news sources.

### **Results and discussion**

During the seven month time period, the search came up with 101 stories from 27 newspapers and news agencies (see Table 1).

**Table 1:** List of newspapers

Newspaper	Frequency	Percent
This Day	20	19.8
Business Day	12	11.9
The New Times	8	7.9
The East African Standard	6	5.9
The Nation	6	5.9
Accra Mail	5	5.0
BuaNews	4	4.0
Daily Champion	4	4.0
New Vision	4	4.0
AIM-Maputo	3	3.0
Angola Press Agency	3	3.0
IT Web	3	3.0
The Monitor	3	3.0
New Era	3	3.0
Vanguard	3	3.0
Daily Trust	2	2.0
The Post-Lusaka	2	2.0
allafrica.com	1	1.0
Ghanaian Chronicle	1	1.0
The Herald	1	1.0
Mail & Guardian	1	1.0
Mmegi/The Reporter	1	1.0
Nigeria First	1	1.0
The Post (Buea)	1	1.0
The Standard Times	1	1.0
UN News Service	1	1.0
Zimbabwe Standard	1	1.0
Total	101	100.0



Nigerian newspapers reported most frequently on NEPAD with thirty-one stories thereby accounting for close to 30 percent of the stories in the sample (see Table 2). South African newspapers accounted for nineteen stories while Kenyan newspapers featured eleven stories on NEPAD during the period of analysis. NEPAD was less visible in countries such as Angola and Sierra Leone whose story count fluctuated between one and five stories (1–3 percent of stories).

**Table 2:** Location of newspaper

Location of Newspaper	Frequency	Percent
Nigeria	31	30.7
South Africa	19	18.8
Kenya	11	10.9
Rwanda	9	8.9
Uganda	7	6.9
Ghana	6	5.9
Angola	3	3.0
Mozambique	3	3.0
Namibia	2	2.0
Zambia	2	2.0
Zimbabwe	2	2.0
Botswana	1	1.0
Cameroon	1	1.0
Ethiopia	1	1.0
Sierra Leone	1	1.0
Outside Africa*	2	2.0
Total	101	100.0

\* One story had a UN dateline, and the other came from *allafrica.com* whose head office is based in Washington DC.

That the coverage of NEPAD is significantly higher in Nigeria and South Africa is not surprising given that both countries are leading champions of NEPAD as well as leading political and economic powers on the continent (see ‘NEPAD, Nigeria continues to play prominent role’, *Nigeria First*, April 20, 2005). Some countries with a low frequency of NEPAD coverage such as Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe and Zambia have yet to voluntarily sign up to the APRM. In fact, Botswana, Namibia and Zimbabwe have tended to express less enthusiasm for NEPAD than others with Namibia in particular arguing that it already has in place structures that are in line with the APRM (see ‘Namibia cautious over peer review’, *New Era*, April 14, 2005; ‘Guebuza hails NEPAD but Mugabe “looks East”’, *Zimbabwe Standard*, May 2, 2005).

### Main country of focus

Media coverage of NEPAD predominantly took on an African angle, that is to say, the effects, implications and impacts of NEPAD were projected onto the continent. A third of the stories focused mainly on Africa as a whole and less on a particular country and/or sub-region (see Table 3).

**Table 3:** Main country of focus

Country	Frequency	Percent
Africa- General	30	29.7
Nigeria	17	16.8
Kenya	9	8.9
South Africa	9	8.9
Uganda	8	7.9
Rwanda	7	6.9
Ghana	4	4.0
Angola	3	3.0
Mozambique	3	3.0
Zimbabwe	3	3.0
Namibia	2	2.0
Cameroon	1	1.0
Ivory Coast	1	1.0
Sierra Leone	1	1.0
Zambia	1	1.0
More than one country	2	2.0
Total	101	100.0

### Event-based coverage

Coverage of NEPAD was most intense during those periods when there was an event such as a regional summit, national peer review session, project launch or visit between African leaders. For instance, the most frequent reportage occurred during late March, April and June, months characterised by the peer review forums among other major events related to NEPAD. The presence of NEPAD was relatively limited during those periods that were not characterised by a given event (see listing of events below). While events remain important, processes drive development and democratic initiatives. Events are only the subtotal of processes. NEPAD therefore remained almost invisible during the routine news week.

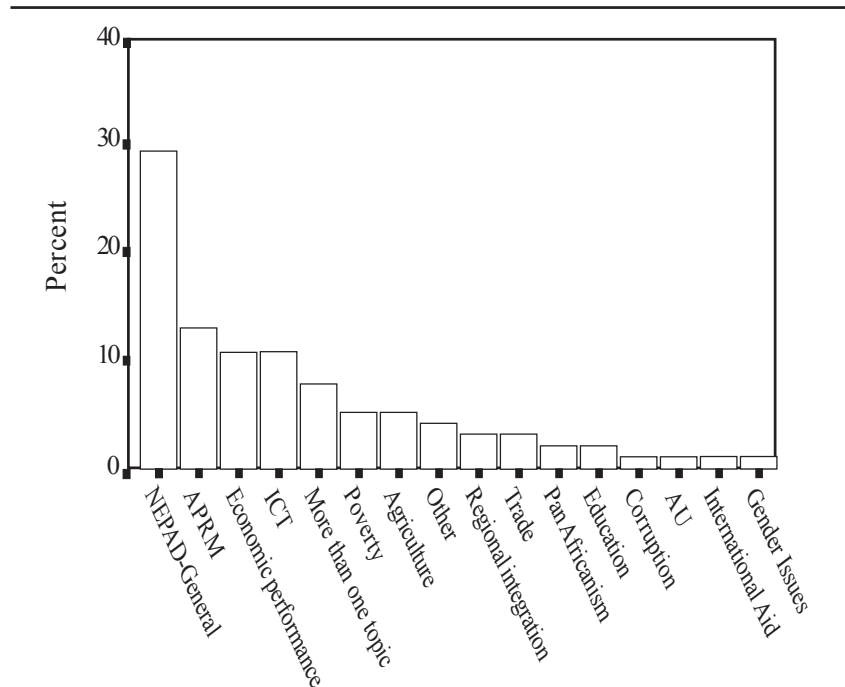
### Topics: African Peer Review Mechanism

The topics that appeared most often in news stories included the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), followed by NEPAD in general, economic development/performance, ICTs (e-schools, ICT firms to invest, the EaSSy project) and finally stories that reported on more than one main

topic in their coverage of NEPAD (see Figure 1). Topics such as poverty (the Millennium Development Goals [MDGs]), agriculture (the CAADP programme) and regional integration (Regional Economic Communities [REC] such as Southern African Development Community [SADC] and East African Community [EAC]) accounted for 2 to 5 percent of all stories. Themes that made a cameo appearance and yet are crucial to the success of NEPAD, include health (HIV/AIDS), gender issues (women account for the bulk of productive work in Africa) and corruption.

Despite the presence of an African angle in the reportage, national interests also shape the reporting of a continent-wide framework such as NEPAD. This could explain the high visibility of NEPAD’s peer review in countries that are signatories to the initiative. It also demonstrates the complications of covering a continent-wide initiative that lacks continent-wide appreciation. The flagship APRM programme remains crucial to establishing member states’ commitment to good governance as an increasingly viable means of acquiring aid and foreign assistance. In return for upholding practices such as the peer review, the donor community in the West is expected to provide increased foreign direct investments (FDI),

**Figure 1: Main topic of story**



aid, debt relief and fairer trade access to enable Africa to meet the MDGs (Kotze and Steyn 2003:109; see also Herbert 2002). Yet whilst the peer review is open to all member states of the AU, signing up to it remains voluntary. By the time of the most recent AU summit in Sirte, Libya in July 2005, twenty-three out of the fifty-three member states had agreed to be assessed (see Table 4).

**Table 4:** Countries that have acceded to the APRM

Algeria	Cameroon	Rwanda	Angola
Burkina Faso	Gabon	Senegal	Lesotho
Kenya	Nigeria	Benin	Sierra Leone
Ghana	Uganda	South Africa	Egypt
Mali	Ethiopia	Mozambique	Congo
Mauritius	Tanzania	Malawi	

Source: Adapted from NEPAD website accessed July 16, 2005.

### **Elites as Sources**

The most frequent sources relied on by reporters in the coverage on NEPAD were officials attached to NEPAD. This includes officials from the regional NEPAD secretariat, the national units/chapters of NEPAD, the regional APRM secretariat, national APRM steering committees and the official spokespersons of these bodies all of whom accounted for 19 percent of sources. Fifteen percent of sources for news coverage of NEPAD topics were ministers. Heads of state, businesspersons (CEOs, private sector organisations, NEPAD business organs) and press releases each accounted for 12 percent of sources. Altogether, press releases, businesspersons and heads of state were more likely to appear as sources than any others (see Table 5).

The analysis of the study results showed civil society organisations and representatives, such as unions, advocacy and grassroots, accounting for 5.9 percent of news sources. The limited sources provide less opportunity for coherent oppositional perspectives in the coverage. Similarly, the use of academic and expert sources, also accounting for 5.9 percent of sources, was infrequent, thereby providing less opportunity for informed, analytical perspectives.

**Table 5:** Main source for story

Source	Frequency	Percent
NEPAD official	19	18.8
Minister	15	14.9
Head of State	12	11.9
Press release	12	11.9
Businessperson	12	11.9
Other	8	7.9
Document/report	6	5.9
Academic/expert	6	5.9
Civil society	6	5.9
None	5	5.0
Total	101	100.0

Among the most frequently referenced sources, heads of state, ministers and NEPAD officials are represented as active parties in news coverage of NEPAD. They do the work of NEPAD, advocating and speaking on behalf of and for NEPAD. As represented in the following headlines, these public figures are actively ‘appealing’ for funds or ‘blasting’ those standing in the way of Africa’s interests:

‘Obasanjo appeals for moderate oil price’ (*This Day* March 8, 2005)

‘Obasanjo blasts foreign nations over looted funds’ (*Daily Champion* June 21, 2005)

‘Museveni to launch first e-school’ (*New Vision* July 15, 2005)

‘Mubarak invites Kagame’ (*The New Times* April 15, 2005)

‘Zuma, Mbeki on official trips’ (*BuaNews* April 18, 2005)

‘Tukur advocates rail link across Africa’ (*This Day* March 30, 2005)

‘MPs analyse NEPAD’s mechanism’ (*Angola Press Agency* January 26, 2005)

In contrast, business sources, including NEPAD business forums in Nigeria and South Africa, potential investors and CEO’s of ICT and banking firms, were for the most part represented as voices of and for prudence, investment and trade in Africa. The following headlines show this pattern:

‘NEPAD’s Business Chief lashes out AU over Zimbabwe’ (*Business Day* April 29, 2005)

‘Business ethics in Africa on the table’ (*Business Day* March 7, 2005)

‘NAICOM banks on NEPAD for improved penetration’ (*Daily Champion* May 10, 2005)

‘Kenya primed to be a digital hub’ (*The East African Standard* March 20, 2005)

‘Kaduna trade fair: NEPAD urged to participate’ (*Vanguard* January 13, 2005)

‘NEPAD: 127 billion pensions available in 14 countries’ (*The New Times* April 29, 2005)

‘Funding NEPAD’ (*Business Day* June 28, 2005)

‘NEPAD to finance projects of Angola’s Peasant’s Union’ (*Angola Press Agency* February 21, 2005)

Further, both civil society and academic sources were cited more frequently in a responding rather than defining role. These sources were used to react to issues and perspectives established by others. They were most likely to be represented as deliberating on NEPAD and on the actions of the decision-makers rather than taking action. For example:

‘Africa’s development plan: An analysis’ (*Vanguard* January 3, 2005)

‘Civil society deliberates on AU + NEPAD’ (*The Standard*, Sierra Leone, May 21, 2005)

‘Civil society forum holds on APRM tomorrow’ (*This Day* February 8, 2005)

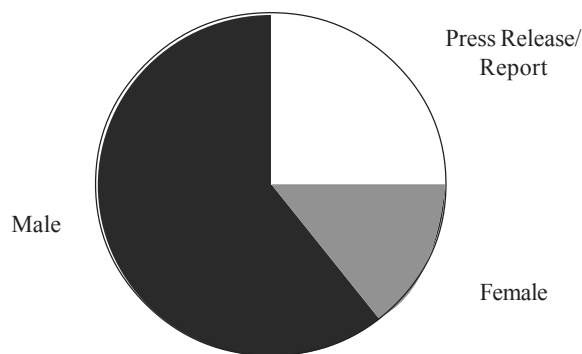
‘Don’t trade NEPAD away’ (*This Day* January 27, 2005)

Arguably, these varied emphases in news sources have to do with news gathering and production routines within journalistic practice which privilege authoritative sources as active sources. However, the implication of this skew in news sources and social actors is for NEPAD to remain perceived and represented as government-driven with little ownership from other stakeholders.

The face of NEPAD is dominantly male (see Figure 2). Men are most visible as news actors and sources in the reporting on NEPAD and represented 61 percent of primary sources in all news stories. Women accounted for 14 percent of main sources cited in NEPAD news stories. This is the result of a set of factors involving how the political and social system is structured in African society, socialization (the way politics continues to be conceived of and conducted as a dominantly masculine

profession) and the professional and internal newsroom dynamics of the media where women remain generally invisible. The absence of women as news actors in the reporting of NEPAD also reflects the invisibility of gender issues within NEPAD's initiatives. In the entire sample only one story specifically focused on gender: 'NEPAD to launch gender task force' (*BuaNews* July 10, 2005).

**Figure 2:** Gender of news sources



### **Conclusions: Some reflections on reporting NEPAD**

From our analysis, the four leading trends in the coverage on NEPAD are event-based coverage, a dominance of elite male news sources, a predominant focus on the peer review, and the recurrence of a regional African angle in the media reportage of NEPAD issues. Event-based coverage leaves little room for critical analyses, features and commentary on processes. Yet democracy and development are about processes of representation and participation. Nevertheless, events are part of NEPAD's mode of deployment, such as launching e-schools, the schools feed programme, seminars and training workshops. But events are only actions within stages of a broader process. Coverage needs to take into account the processes underpinning the events.

Important though the APRM is to the NEPAD project, the focus on the peer review in the reportage is potentially at the expense of other initiatives. In fact, even within the focus on the peer review, news reporting is limited to issues of political governance with little or no reporting on corporate and economic governance which are equally important aspects of the peer review process. This selective coverage reinforces the view

of the APRM as a beauty contest whereby the better-looking contestant is rewarded with more aid, so that by simply signing up and submitting to the review a participating country is more acceptable in the eyes of Western donors. Similarly, the dominant focus on specific personalities and countries as the face of NEPAD, such as Nigeria's President Obasanjo and South Africa's President Mbeki, potentially creates perceptions of the initiative as personality driven and non-inclusive. This perception could potentially damage the long-term visibility of the initiative, because when those personalities are no longer in the public limelight, by implication NEPAD might become less visible. Overall, NEPAD in the news comes across as a plan of, for and by the elite, as an initiative that looks to specialists, the private sector and regional leaders, and thereby limits the opportunity for broader engagement with NEPAD at grass roots levels.

Explanations for the kind of coverage observed can perhaps be found in the understanding of the NEPAD framework and its mode of deployment and not just the individual journalists, newspapers and competing national interests. Part of the difficulty in bringing NEPAD to media attention is a result of the complexity of the initiative. By journalistic standards, NEPAD is a multifaceted story to cover. Its broad framework, aims, goals and institutional/organisational structure cut across already existing RECs and make it a big and at times complex story that challenges journalists. To illustrate, some NEPAD events and meetings organised during the period of analysis include:

- APRM Country Support Mission to Nigeria, 21–24 March,
- APRM meeting of Panel of Eminent Persons, Johannesburg, South Africa; and, NEPAD Steering Committee meeting, Sandton, South Africa, 30–31 March,
- APRM Country Review visit to Ghana, 4–8 April,
- African Partnership Forum, Abuja, Nigeria, 9–10 April,
- NEPAD Science and Technology Diary, Dakar, Senegal, 11–14 April,
- NEPAD Heads of State and Government Implementation Committee Summit and the 3rd African Peer Review Forum, Sharm El Shaik, Egypt, 18–19 April,
- APRM Country Support Mission to Rwanda, 14–25 April.

Taking into account the diversity, frequency and location of these NEPAD-related events combined with the reality of journalistic practice—deadlines,



pressures from business, national interests and internal and external pressures—makes it harder for the media to unpack the NEPAD story.

Another aspect of the complexity of NEPAD reflects both the perceived and noted internal discrepancy in the NEPAD framework. While NEPAD may be ‘African-owned’, the consensus on its viability remains in doubt particularly given its ‘curious dilemma of being hailed as a visionary document by the West’ while being severely criticised by African civil society and academics for its neo-liberal policy orientation (Adesina 2004: 125). It certainly does not help that the name of the initiative is itself the butt of many jokes (*kneepad*). As De Waal asks ‘What’s new about NEPAD?’ (2002:465). Many journalists around the continent probably pose this question. Africa’s economic history is littered with plans that promised and failed to deliver. From the Lagos Plan of Action to the Bretton Woods imposed Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPS), the continent has seen its fair share of experimental and failed plans of development. These plans often exist alongside competing initiatives developed by regional organisations such as SADC and ECOWAS. More recently, with the launching of Tony Blair’s Commission for Africa, it is possible that many in Africa are left questioning the duplication of initiatives and where NEPAD fits within another grand plan to spur development on the continent. Where does NEPAD end and where does the Commission for Africa begin?

The prioritisation of positive coverage of NEPAD, implied by proponents of NEPAD and NEPAD’s communication strategies (see NEPAD 2004), is in itself problematic for the media. Following the recent presentation of the review reports for Ghana and Rwanda at the third summit of the peer review forum in Abuja, Nigeria in June 2005, the APRM secretariat expressed its disappointment at the mostly negative coverage of the event by the press (NEPAD 2005). The APRM secretariat felt that the press had only focused on the ‘shortcomings identified in the review reports’, whilst ignoring the positives and that maybe the press also lacked a proper understanding of the review process (NEPAD 2005:3). For the APRM secretariat:

[T]he press has a critical role in supporting the APR process and disseminating accurate information to the public. The press can and should educate the masses on the positive aspects of the process and highlight the very good and positive developments happening in the African continent (NEPAD 2005:3).

As argued earlier, the danger inherent in such an expectation is that African media portage on NEPAD could easily be reduced to reinforcing the

self-serving interests of business leaders, governments and elites at the cost of the interests and rights of wider African publics, groups and communities whilst also stifling criticism of the initiative.

The challenge is to tell the NEPAD story without simply becoming guard dogs and lapdogs for the interests of the African elite; that is, to avoid self-congratulatory messages about NEPAD, excessive Afro-optimism and/or positive stories purely reported for the purposes of securing the interests of the powerful under the guise of genuine public communication. It is pertinent to note here that being analytical and critical in the reportage on NEPAD does not necessarily detract from appealing emotionally to people as 'Africans' or documenting important NEPAD successes. The challenge is to tell the NEPAD story in such a way that is interesting, appealing and rectifies the distorted image of Africa in the news, whilst also pointing out its shortfalls and successes and their implications for the daily lived experiences of Africans.

To an extent, making sense of NEPAD across local, national and regional interests will rely on well-mapped communication strategies that link continental-level NEPAD issues with national and local interests. Here we are not simply referring to communication campaigns about the positives of NEPAD or regional training workshops on how to cover NEPAD (important as all these are), but rather to start thinking of how we can get the majority of people to understand NEPAD better through languages and journalism formats that can easily be accessed by all.

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