

Oct. 20th, 2005

NEPAD Town Hall Meeting, Oct. 12, 2005

Event Summary

“Africa is rich in natural resources, but poor in human resources,” started Professor Mucavele, the chief executive of the New Economic Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD), at the Sullivan Foundation’s recent town hall meeting. The professor, who joined us from South Africa, passionately argued that the way to solve Africa’s human development deficit is to allow Africans the space to come up with the solutions. In an attempt to do just that, Africa’s leaders have been brought into a partnership with each other under NEPAD, and must continue to promote democracy, good governance and macroeconomic reforms, invest in education and health and advance gender parity in their nations. The other dimension of the “self-help” approach to Africa’s development that Mucavele stressed was the engagement of both Africans living abroad and members of the broader Diaspora in NEPAD’s development plans.

While he praised NEPAD as a homegrown, purely African initiative, Mr. Byam, the acting Vice President for Africa at the World Bank, was surprised that it is largely unknown throughout Africa. Mr. Byam referred to what is commonly known as the lack of NEPAD’s “democratic credentials.” George Obiozor, the Ambassador of Nigeria to the United States, answered this criticism by arguing that NEPAD will directly manifest itself to the citizens of Africa through the development projects that it sponsors.

Douglas Menarchik, the Assistant Administrator for Policy and Program Coordination at the US Agency for International Development, stressed that for the first time in America’s history international development is a pillar of national security. It is in the interest of the American government to support initiatives, such as NEPAD, which actively promote the establishment, development and maintenance of strong states that are peaceful, prosperous and responsive to their citizens. Although major American aid initiatives for Africa, such as the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA), operate on a system of grants as rewards for governing well, investing in people and promoting economic freedom, the administration is not ignoring the security threats posed by states that are engaged or recovering from intra-national conflict. In line with this policy shift, the administration has committed 20- 25% of its international development allocation to failed and fragile states, and has resolved to support NEPAD in its efforts to secure peace across the continent.

Answering a question on Nigeria’s role in NEPAD’s success, Ambassador Obiozor shifted focus to the initiative’s African origins, which defined an economic and political partnership between Africa and the rest of the world defined much more by Africa’s needs than ever before. Born out of an “African experience,” NEPAD requires the pooling of Africa’s resources, regional integration, and the rooting of Africa’s international policy in the principle of pan-Africanism. This political integration of national interests reflects the desire of the leadership of Africa’s nations to change the

political and economic image of Africa and to say to the world that its leadership is serious about political reform and that “Africa is open for business.”

The theme that emerged as most prominent in the discussion and question and answer period of the town hall meeting was the importance of involving the Diaspora in Africa’s development. Although NEPAD is largely a partnership between Africa and its donors, all speakers stressed the critical role that people of African descent living outside of the continent should play in helping Africa meet its development goals. Since the need for the Diaspora’s investment of their financial and technical resources into Africa is urgent, Professor Mucavele and Abassadors Obiozor and Young argued that individuals must take the initiative in engaging Africa in business and other endeavors.