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Issues for National and Regional Long Term Perspectives Studies for the North Africa Sub-Region

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1. The Context

1. In the present era of competitiveness and strategic alliances, the capacity for foresight based on available data and trends is an imperative for developing countries. The presence of information technology with its immense potential to monitor world events gives such countries an invaluable tool to take their destiny into their own hands, within limits posed by unforeseen calamities. Exchange of information between concerned groups can enable the right decisions to be made.

2. The seven countries of North Africa cover a surface area equivalent to 31 percent of the African region, and have 22.5 percent of the total population. Geographically they occupy a strategic position vis-a-vis Europe, Asia and America, and are at the confluence of the world's major civilisations and cultures. They all have a common faith and quite similar culture. Their proximity to the European Union gives them a position of advantage as a major market. Bordering the Mediterranean Sea, the Indian Ocean, and the Atlantic Ocean, they command vast sea resources , and are also endowed with other rich natural resources.

3. Of late they have all been affected by global social and economic upheavals, and have tried to adjust their policies and strategies as best as they could. Both internal and external factors have contributed to their present situation. Propelled by commonality of culture and faith, the subregions, including the Maghreb countries, have at various moments tried to strengthen their co-operation in various forms of socio-economic activities. However, internal and external factors have often come in the way and thwarted the moves. The **absence of long term perspective studies** with various scenarios for development has constrained successful strategic planning and implementation. Weak public sector management, recurrent natural droughts leading to shortages in supply of basic food, falling commodity prices, and the vagaries of the world market have contributed to unstable situations in many of these countries.

4. Most of them have mineral resources of some type or another, and they are trying to control and exploit these resources for their benefit. Agriculture still remains their major activity, but scarcity of water resources has constrained adequate development in this area, and many of them are net importers of food. Population pressures with significant movement from rural to urban areas have exacerbated the situation. With the assistance of the World Bank and IMF they have undertaken structural adjustment programmes with limited success. Overall there has been a stagnation of economies with increased dependence on external aid.

5. Increasing globalisation based on market forces and interdependence of economic and financial markets, explosion of communication technologies, rapid urbanisation and deterioration of the physical and social environment, the development of new technologies, and a change in geo-political structures have all some bearing in their future development. The capacity to forecast the future with reasonable accuracy is still a major weakness in North African medium and long-term development perspectives.

2. Africa and Long Term Perspectives Studies : Historical developments

6. At a high-level meeting on Africa held at Maastricht, the Netherlands in July 1990, under the auspices of the Dutch Government, there was a consensus that African countries should move from crisis management and define long-term objectives that could guide them in daily policy implementation in order to link those policies with the demands of a future marked by growing uncertainty and rapid change. There is therefore need for long-term perspective studies both at national and sub-regional levels.

7. A sub-regional project will enable countries to look at national and sub-regional problems in areas like human resource development and mobilisation, averting brain-drain, lack of data and the need for a conceptual and methodological framework, introduction of perspective and strategic planning techniques, participatory development under democratic principles and practice, sharing of experiences in sub-regional fora, and other issues of common interest. The development of sub-regional long-term perspective vision will enable the member states of north Africa to better appreciate common problems and issues, and forge joint programmes and activities in the spirit of co-operation and sub-regional integration.

8. Sub-Saharan Africa has already started on a similar exercise with UNDP support, while the North African subregion is lagging behind. A few countries in the subregion, like Egypt and Morocco have already embarked on independent long-term perspective studies, while others are waiting for assistance to start on this exercise.

9. The African Futures Project which is funded by the United Nations Development Programme and co-sponsored by the Economic Commission for Africa, the African Development Bank, and the World Bank, after completing its first phase of getting selected member States of Sub-Saharan Africa to complete National Long Term Perspectives Studies, has decided to undertake regional and sub-regional long term perspectives studies. A meeting of high-level experts and policy-makers was convened by UNDP in order to clarify the overall objectives, strategies, operational modalities and partners, and explore alternative approaches as well as provide recommendations on the undertaking and implementation of these sub-regional and regional studies. The meeting was held in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire, from 15 to 17 December 1997.

10. The first phase of the African Futures Project focused on the undertaking of national long-term perspectives studies, since the national level is the place of decision making and implementation involving the various stakeholders. In this phase seven member states, namely Cap Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, Gabon, Guinea Bissau, Malawi, Mauritius and Zimbabwe have completed the study part of the National Long-Term Perspectives Studies, and eight others, namely Madagascar, Mali, Sao Tome, Seychelles, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia, are at an advanced stage of their studies. The operationalisation of these studies is now in process.

11. However there is need to have an adequate perspective of sub-regional and regional issues in order to better understand, fine-tune and implement the national studies. It is in this context that the need for formulation of long development strategies from national to sub-regional and regional levels was felt. This need has been accentuated with globalisation and the setting up of sub-regional and regional economic blocks. African countries must be in a

position to make optimal use of complementarities among themselves, and thus anticipate, control and manage the structural changes occurring in this world. Hence the need for both national and sub-regional studies in North Africa.

3. The macro-economic view

12. National Long Term Perspectives Studies can only be meaningful when viewed in the context of sub-regional and regional integration efforts. The small size of populations and markets forced member-States to work towards the sub-regional integration of economies. Unfortunately, because of internal and external pressures, this integration has not been as expected. Efforts are still on to revitalize some such intergovernmental organisations as the Maghreb Arab Union.

13. The Economic Commission for Africa¹ has been responsible for many such initiatives on integration with long term growth and development in mind. The first efforts towards an indigenous vision of development started in 1975 with **ECA's Revised Framework of Principles for the Implementation of the New International Economic Order for Africa**. This led to the **Lagos Plan and Monrovia Strategy of 1980**, stressing on self-reliance, self-sustainment, democracy and popular participation, equity and poverty eradication, and regional collective self-reliance, with a sectoral approach to futures as methodology. In the 1980's various institutions were set up for promoting social and economic integration and facilitating the attainment of the objectives of self-reliance and self-sustainment. Strengthening existing regional economic communities and establishing new ones where they did not exist, sectoral integration in food and agriculture, transport and communications, industry and energy were among the priorities.

14. During the second phase started in the 1990's, steps are being taken to harmonise strategies and policies, and development plans, promote joint projects and work towards the establishment of **the African Economic Community, as per the Abuja Treaty signed in 1991**. In 1983 the really first perspective study was carried out by ECA, with different scenarios, and is entitled: **ECA and Africa's Development, 1983-2008**. Later on it produced **ECA and Africa's Development**, in line with the Third United Nations Development Decade, where short-term economic balances were targeted to alleviate Africa's debt burden. In 1989 ECA produced **the African Alternative Framework to Structural Adjustment Programme for Socio-economic Recovery and Transformation, (AAF-SAP), in response to the World Bank's Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP)**.

15. The future still rests on the extent to which the overhanging debt burden can first be relieved. Heavily indebted countries are completely unable to forecast any reliable future with independent capacity for policy making and economic management, and no less than 25 African countries, the so-called Severely Indebted Low-Income Countries (SILIC's) are facing such problems. And many of them are having serious internal problems as well.

¹ Adebayo Adedeji : Facing the Future of Africa : A review of African Initiatives in Regional Long-term Perspectives Studies. RLTPS Studies Meeting, Abidjan, 15-17 Dec.97

16. In spite of such constraints an NLTPS and an RLTPS are still desirable with a multi-scenario approach, taking into consideration the phenomenon of globalisation, debt-reduction and elimination, the role of sub-regional and regional organisations and independent research institutions.

17. In the light of the above, development paradigms based on stress on economic growth should be reviewed to include overall development, taking into serious consideration cultural and social dimensions, the wisdom of the elders, an endogenous approach to such development issues, and a rational use of resources from commodity booms, whenever available. Undue stress on what has succeeded in other countries is not often desirable because the social and economic conditions there may be different.

18. There is problem with the elite in Africa, where they adopt life-styles beyond their earning capacity. This leads to corruption, and donors get to intervene by taking decision making away from government. **Development needs to be endogenous and not indigenous.** External factors have to be internalised. The formal sector has to be informalsed, while the informal sector has to be formalised.

19. With the development of partnership between the state and the market, external dependence has increased. Simple minded market mechanism is not a viable solution for Africa. It is necessary to first build up the necessary endogenous capacity to master and to extract full capital out of the market. This is where Africa should concentrate.

4. Globalization and African strategies based on commodities.

20. African commodities have dominated the economic panorama of the continent. Of late the situation has changed significantly because of world developments. Globalization which involves² trade, foreign direct investment, money-markets, and technology transfer, has come as a critical player. This has been aggravated with the liberalisation of trade. Transnational Corporations are the main beneficiaries of this globalization, for they are the ones that are fully involved in transfer of capital and technologies with enhanced use of information technologies. Capitalism is the motor of this globalization that in fact started in the seventies with the recycling of petrodollar.

21. In developing countries this has led to the process of capital flights, massive debt burdens, foreign direct investment in limited areas, and joint ventures where possible. In Africa , because of restricted markets, poor infrastructures, unstable political climates, outdated investment codes, the situation is all the more serious. The replacement of public sector monopolies by private sector monopolies has negatively affected consumers. External trade in Africa has decreased from 3 percent in the seventies to less than 1 percent in 1997. If Africa were simply blotted out of the world map, nobody would even notice it in the market place!

² Makhtar Diouf : Globalization and Africa's Long-Term Development Strategy : Lessons for RLTPS . UNDP African Futures, Abidjan, Dec. !997

22. Because of inability to forecast commodity prices in the long run, African long-term perspectives studies should not depend too much on commodities. There needs to be a change in elite cultural practices so that they consume what is produced locally and serve as examples to the local community. One should guard against being manipulated by the external media which encourages consumerism and import dependency that affects the balance of payments.

23. The following points need to be borne in mind when making long term projections:

- a. There needs to be a review of world political and economic structures in order to tackle the problems of African marginalisation;
- b. By 2025 African population will be 15 percent of world population, and its share in world output has to increase;
- c. Imperial powers of yore have been replaced by Transnational Corporations and International financial intermediaries;
- d. The power game is on, and if you can't fight them, join them;
- e. The rate of scientific and technological developments will accentuate and determine the future. Hence Africa has to give special attention to this discipline;
- f. Once you have a home page on the Internet, you are a global player, able to influence outsiders;
- g. The Internet is able to defeat hierarchical powers. For example a home page for the traditional African doctor could have access to 1 percent of ten billion internet users. This could change concepts and influence practices;
- h. One should refuse to be simply a follower, but should try to influence others to follow. Africa still can play its part in this process, as it has a wealth of indigenous resources;
- i. There are many roads to Rome. So Africa should enlarge its sphere of democracy and market, and not be bound by one option or one development path alone, but must evolve its own path.

5. Values, Culture and Long-term Strategies³

24. In order to promote local values and culture and apply them to development paradigms, **modern technology** can be utilised. The creation of a home page on the Internet in different languages can contribute to this process once information technology becomes accessible. One should promote country values and savings habit amongst the rural and urban masses.

25. In the past tribal chiefs had no army, and yet they were able to rule through their council of elders, and by adopting the method of achieving consensus on different issues. Continuity and legitimacy were the recognised values. Trust in community values was predominant, whereas now individualism is becoming more and more a threat to community life. To preserve these traditional values stress should be on basic education that includes a component of civic studies. Blind adoption of a pattern of western education based on western style curricula will lead nowhere. Therefore long-term strategies for development have to incorporate these value aspects.

26. If this is not done Africa will be led by WTO and others, and states will not be able to have properly trained people who can develop their inherent potential. States have to protect key sectors of their economy. There is a dire need to change the mentality of the people and the rulers, since there is an attitudinal crisis and no commitment by the authorities. They sign protocols and pass resolutions which they themselves do not observe. Those in power are not always ready to relinquish authority. Resources that are meant to develop the country are often squandered on presidential aircrafts!

27. On the issue of integration, stress should first be on collaboration before actual integration. Progressive move towards integration should be encouraged for leaders are scared of formalisation of certain procedures. That is why there is often a reluctance to sign regional projects, and even after signature they do not succeed. There is a need to strengthen existing structures of production and not undermine them, as is the case these days, under the garb of regionalism. An informal integration through the private sector can be more successful. This is exemplified by the activities of traders who cross borders and bring goods and services to the community. When things are formalised external occult forces are able to frustrate the move because of vested interests. The story of integration in West Africa is a glaring example.

6. Methodologies and Approaches for NLTPS/RLTTPS Studies.

28. The methodologies for National Long-Term Perspectives studies advocated by the sub-Saharan UNDP project, have the following steps:-

1. Search for national aspirations, through national seminars, meetings, interviews, studies, etc.
2. Retrospective studies and strategic diagnosis.
3. Scenarios construction.
4. Elaboration of a vision and formulation of strategies for long term development.

³ Soodursun Jugessur, 'Mission Report, Meeting on Regional Long-Term Perspectives Studies (RLTTPS) , UNDP African Futures, Cote d'Ivoire, Abidjan, 15-17 Dec.1997, NA-SRDC, Tangier.Jan.97

29. One may also choose to adopt a sectoral approach, by setting up working groups and calling seminars and meetings at national level, including all stakeholders, on specific sectoral issues like agriculture, economy, population, education, employment, environment, industry, science and technology, society and culture, etc. depending on local needs and priorities. This approach was adopted by Mauritius in its NLTP studies.

30. Concerning sub-regional Long Term Perspectives Studies, once the national studies are completed, a meeting of experts and policy-makers can develop such vision based on the findings of the national studies. This is best achieved through consultant studies, and sub-regional seminars and workshops. Sub-regional projects should also ensure that once national studies are completed, member States are encouraged to implement these studies with the help of national implementation committees. Such committees can also ensure the regular updating of national studies through continuous monitoring and collection of relevant data that can improve the studies.

7. Conclusion

31. While external assistance is necessary for the development of National and Sub-regional Long Term Perspectives Studies, one should ensure that such assistance can only complement national efforts. Ideally a home-grown endogenous strategy has proved to be the best. As essential parameters for North Africa, human resource development and mobilisation to avoid brain-drain, participatory approach with democratic principles and practices, sharing of experiences and aspirations, not forgetting the fact that national wealth has to be equitably shared, are guiding principles. The proximity of the sub-region to Europe offers special privileges that need to be exploited through common shared vision and strategies that can enable the sub-region to present a united front when facing the competition of the developed world. Hence the real need for a sub-regional long-term perspectives studies on top of national long-term perspectives studies.

32. Thus long-term perspectives studies for Africa have to take into consideration all these factors, and adopt different scenarios, without putting all the eggs in the same basket, as was done when the Lagos Plan of Action and the Monrovia Strategy were adopted. African should learn to take their destiny into their own hands, and respond to the call of the times dominated by globalisation and ruthless competition. Long-term perspectives studies will generate this confidence and inspire Africans to work for a better future wherein the generations to come will be proud of their predecessors.