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The NLTPS in Africa
Achievements and Lessons of Experience

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- Document prepared by Mr. Hassaan Yousif, Population and Environment Specialist, UNDP/African Futures;
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INTRODUCTION

The paper is divided into two parts. The first part provides succinct background on the recent history of long-term perspective to development management in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). The main objective is to highlight the factors underlying the need for rethinking and revisiting the ways African countries are conducting development management. In this part, the paper presents the African Futures program and the methodology, scope and components of the National Long term Perspective Studies (NLTPS). It also discusses the institutional framework for undertaking a NLTPS.

The second part of the paper discusses the main achievements and lessons of experience. What did the African Futures program achieve since its establishment in 1992? What lessons of experience did we learn from application of the NLTPS methodology in Sub-Saharan Africa? These are the two fundamental questions the paper attempts to answer in this part. The part also covers the differences between countries in undertaking long term perspective studies. It includes brief presentation of the activities that are currently in place to help SSA countries to operationalize their visions and future plans.

SUCCINCT BACKGROUND

Since independence, governments in Africa have been preoccupied with nation building and management of recurring crises such as food shortages, tribal conflicts, civil wars, droughts, and famines. In fact, from the mid-eighties almost all the African countries began to experience serious development problems, as their economies are based on natural resources and limited human capital. Development activities carried out by the national governments during the sixties and seventies of this century failed to increase the standards of living and welfare of the rapidly growing African populations, whose aspirations and hopes for prosperity were high at independence.

Consequently, discontent with the dismal performance of development activities surmounted throughout the continent. People became dissatisfied with the past decades of policy formulation, development planning and management. It also became obvious that partnership between the government, the private sector, and civil society organizations is crucial for sustainable development. In fact, sustained economic growth and development in Africa require proactive futuristic and visionary planning to provide for the welfare of the populations and ecosystems.

These arguments and the need for a long-term perspective to development management were discussed in various occasions by African governments and leaders (See Box 1). They were the focus of attention in Maastricht in 1990, when the African Leaders and the Dutch Government organized "The Africa Conference". Participants in this meeting shared a common view that "the development of Africa is a long-term process which requires sustained efforts over many years. It must be an endogenous process, responsive to national needs and aspirations, carried out under national leadership and following the priorities set out in long-term development programs which should be prepared by each country." (Global Coalition for Africa 1992).

The Maastricht conference emphasized that development is possible when economic measures are accompanied by socio-economic, behavioral, cultural and political changes organized in line

with a futuristic vision, which is shared by all forces and stakeholders of the society. It was with these spirits that the call for adopting a long-term perspective approach to development management in Africa has emerged. The conference provided strong support to the establishment of the Global Coalition for Africa and the African Capacity Building Initiative, and called upon the UNDP to support "the development of long strategic programmes by individual African countries" (Global Coalition for Africa 1992).

Box 1 Initiatives for Long Term Perspective Development in Africa

- ☞ The ECA's "Africa Strategy for Development in the 1970s", ECA 1971.
- ☞ The OAU "African Declaration on Cooperation, Development and Economic Independence" adopted in May 1973.
- ☞ The Monrovia symposium (1979) on "What Kind of Africa by Year 2000. Future Development Prospects of Africa Towards the Year 2000", held by the Organization of African Unity (OAU). This symposium called for the creation of an African Common Market and a Pan-African Futures Studies Association.
- ☞ The "Lagos Plan of Action" in 1980.
- ☞ The "ECA and African Development, 1983-2008" updated in 1988.
- ☞ The "Africa's Priority Program for Economic Recovery and Development" adopted by the OAU.

THE AFRICAN FUTURES PROGRAMME

Following the recommendations of the Maastricht conference, the UNDP established in 1992 the African Futures program to channel international support to those countries in Africa wishing to create a long-term vision for development management. The objectives of the African Futures program are threefold:

1. To promote the institutionalization of the long-term perspective approach to development management by facilitating the completion of the National Long Term Perspective Studies, and provide the necessary support for operationalisation of the resulting visions through policy reforms.
2. To build and strengthen national capacity in Africa for long term strategic management of the development process in such areas as futures studies, strategic management and planning, policy analysis and forecasting.
3. To develop regional and sub-regional long-term studies for Africa, covering a wide range of strategic issues, including governance, population, regional integration, economic development, food and water security, health, technological capacity, communication and information, peace, security and changes in the global environment.

In order to achieve these objectives, the African Futures program reviewed the world's experience in development management over the past three decades. The main lessons drawn from this review were that any relevant approach to long-term perspective development must provide

satisfactory responses to the set of questions shown in box 2. Any relevant development strategy must recognise the importance of a shared national vision, long-term thinking and a stable policy environment for development. A truly shared vision, developed through national dialogue, is a key element of the development policy. The vision must provide a sense of direction and discovery, and it must serve as the guiding framework for national development actions.

Box 2 Fundamental Questions of Long Term Perspective Development

- ☞ How to anticipate the future and formulate a vision?
- ☞ How to cope with uncertainty, complexity and change?
- ☞ How to create strategic information system?
- ☞ How to integrate the different horizons of planning?
- ☞ How to promote participation, construct capacity and build a shared vision?
- ☞ How to improve a nation's capacity to learn?
- ☞ How to design a development management methodology?

THE NLTPS METHODOLOGY

The review of experience on development management mentioned above furnished the base for a methodology for conducting National Long Term Perspective Studies (NLTPS). The NLTPS methodology is an interactive and participatory process designed to provide answers to a sequence of questions (See Box 3) through national dialogue and in five related phases (See Box 4).

Box 3 The NLTPS Fundamental Questions

- ☞ What are the Issues/factors in the society which could affect the ability and the country to create a desired future?
- ☞ What are the long-term aspirations/goals of the society?
- ☞ What are the alternative future scenarios?
- ☞ Given the scenarios, aspirations and the key issues facing the country, what should be the vision of the society?
- ☞ What are the strategic issues/challenges that must be addressed if the society is to achieve its visions?
- ☞ What are the strategic options available to address these strategic issues?
- ☞ What are the appropriate development strategies for the nation, and how should they put in place?

Phase 1 of the study should deal with identification of the aspirations and desires of the people and the themes, sectors and issues relevant to the aspirations. Subsequently, basic strategic studies (phase 2) should be carried out on the bases of the themes, issues and sectors that were identified

in Phase 1. These studies and the information collected should be used for construction of multiple scenarios (phase 3) on the future of the country and for formulation of development strategies (phase 4). Also, during this phase strategic information on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) must be collected. The scenarios should map out alternative policy options and visions for the future. On the other hand, a National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS) should be designed to realize the visions and policy options. The NSDS should involve identification of the core strategic issues facing the nation and the available strategic options and actions. Finally, the implementation of action plans and programs over successive periods of time towards realization of the national vision should come as the last phase.

Box 4 The NLTPS Phases

- ☞ issues identification
- ☞ basic studies
- ☞ scenario and visioning
- ☞ strategy formulation
- ☞ development planning

SCOPE AND COMPONENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE NLTPS

For an NLTPS to be effective it must be based on careful analyses of the country's experience on development management. It must also be based on the country's knowledge, information and experience, its natural and human resources and its cultural, regional and international contexts. This analysis should lead to the formulation of plausible long-term (25 years) scenarios for sustainable economic and social development. The term "long-term" neither implies delay of development actions and programs nor neglect of the immediate developmental needs. On the contrary, the development scenarios should establish alternative policy options for action and programs to be undertaken at different points in time and within the framework of the NLTPS. Therefore, the long-term approach should be informative for planning and decision making.

Keeping in mind the long-term sustainability of development, the NLTPS should: -

- 1- Incorporate active management of natural resources and spatial organization of the environment into any development strategy. This should include the effects of urbanization, changes in agricultural practices and industrialization on the environment. There should also be an assessment of the trade-off between the use natural resources and the implications for future development.
- 2- Relate population trends to the economy, the environment, agriculture and industry as well as to the future demand for services (education, health, etc.), the welfare situation (income distribution, labor market, employment, etc.) and political organization of the society. Population growth accompanied by changes in urban rural population distribution will undoubtedly have multidimensional impacts on the environment, the economy as well as the social and physical infrastructure.
- 3- Consider the socio-economic sphere. Given that the size of the population will increase rapidly in the future, how will people live, what will their employment prospects be? What are the employment prospects by sector? Etc. Answering these questions would allow the country to investigate alternative paths and raise

the issue of the need for resource mobilization. Simple accounting models should be used to set out the magnitude and composition of the macroeconomic aggregates.

- 4- Consider the human development, science and technology, which are now widely recognized as the most important factors in development. Policies on health, education, food security and social welfare are essential for the development of human resources. Vulnerable groups and gender issues should be given specific attention not only to ensure equity but also to empower people. On the other hand empowering the nation with the information and communication technology is essential for any form of sound development. Special attention should be paid to the technological innovations emerging in the world and how to use them to foster economic and social development and protect the environment.
- 5- Articulate a comprehensive infrastructure development strategy and credible private sector development policies. Sustainable development depends on the ability of the country to create an enabling environment; particularly an efficient infrastructure, an incentive system and good governance.
- 6- Support capacity building. Many countries in Africa have weak capacities to implement sustainable development projects. No NLTPS will be complete if neglects institutional capacity building for sustainable development management. Institutional capacity building is not simply training and technical assistance, but also formulation of a comprehensive set of long-term measures to build sustainable capacity. This should include efficient public service administration, measures to ensure accountability and transparency, and fight corruption, and adherence to the rules and regulations.
- 7- Carefully evaluate and incorporate by theme, sector, etc., the forces of the outside world and globalization.

An NLTPS should be intended as a framework for a shared and evolving vision, which should progressively internalize the results of the exercise. It should, therefore, take into account the findings of the Human Development Reports sector development initiatives (National Environmental Action Plans (NEAPs), Water and Energy Master Plans, etc.) and sector policies (Population Policy, Agriculture Policy, Science and Technology Policy, Industrial Policy, etc.). Linkages should be made to sub-regional and regional initiatives, as well as to global programs of actions (Earth Summit, ICPD-94, Social Development Summit 95, etc.) and agreements (agreements on human rights, world trade, etc.).

THE NLTPS INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

The initiative to conduct an NLTPS exercise must come from within a country. The importance of this stems from "participation" and "ownership" which the NLTPS exercise should nurture all along. It is imperative that at an early stage a small high-level leadership group is established to provide advocacy and high level political support to the process. This is vital for brining-in the political will

from all stakeholders and to ensure the broad participation of social groups in the development process. Small high level leadership is also important to facilitate mobilization of resources (financial and technical) in support of the study. A small core team or secretariat should be established to coordinate the studies as well as the day to day activities of the NLTPS. In addition, a national coordinator to organize the work programs and supervise the NLTPS staff should head the core team/secretariat. Multidisciplinary working groups should be established from the nation's expertise. These groups should be organized around several small task forces to be devoted to specific themes and sectors. The terms of reference and responsibilities of these groups should also be clearly identified. The process of conducting an NLTPS is more important than the end product (i.e. publication of the study or reports) as the study is expected to enhance consensus building and stimulate national dialogue on strategic issues.

MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS AND LESSONS OF EXPERIENCE

What did the African Futures Program achieve since its establishment in 1992? What are the main lessons of experience to be learned from its achievements? This part of the paper will give brief answers to these questions.

The NLTPS methodology is perhaps the most important achievement of the African Futures program. The NLTPS is a flexible process, not a development theory, and as such it recognizes that each country in Africa has its specific situation and requirements. Therefore, the NLTPS exercise differs from country to country. The methodology, which is flexible and easy to follow, has been published in several methodological guides and occasional papers. It became popular as a strong advocacy tool for national dialogue among all development partners for consensus building and to share views, ideas and visions on the future of the country. It also became a vehicle for mobilization of financial and technical resources to promote internal capacities for long-term perspective to development management in SSA countries.

Box 5 The NLTPS Countries

1. Cape Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, Gabon, Guinea-Bissau, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Sao Tome and Principe, Swaziland, Zimbabwe and Uganda have completed their NLTPS.
2. Zambia, Mali, Seychelles, Tanzania, Benin and Senegal have on-going studies.
3. Burkina Faso, Namibia and Mozambique are preparing to launch their NLTPS.
4. Cameroon, Niger, Burundi, Guinea, Equatorial Guinea, Republic of Congo, Lesotho and Sierra Leone have expressed interest in the NLTPS.

In less than ten years of its life span, the African Futures program managed to coordinate financial and technical assistance in support of 19 countries who have completed, launched and preparing to launch National Long Term Perspective Studies (see Box 5). This has been achieved through financial support from the UNDP-IPF (57%), the African governments (25%), the Government of the Netherlands (6%), the African development Bank (2.5%) and other sources (9.5%). The African Futures program is also planning to provide technical assistance to another group of 8 countries expressed interest in the LTPS.

The NLTPS countries differ from each other in terms of application of the method, time schedule adopted, past experience and institutional capacity for development management. The time frame for conducting the NLTPS is not uniform. The NLTPS pioneer countries took between 18 to 24 months to complete their studies. Those are the countries, which followed the NLTPS step by step. Other countries decided to use a loop approach with a time frame of 9 to 12 months. This approach places emphasis on utilization of the existing studies.

The countries have used a wide range of data/information collection and research methods to conduct their NLTPS. These included retrospective studies, sample surveys of aspirations,

meetings and debates at the national level with target groups, annotated bibliography and surveys of existing research, expert group meetings, open workshops and seminars on the future of the country, consultation with community leaders, etc. Also, various futures studies methods and the national teams used strategic planning tools.

It is pertinent to mention here that differences between countries in conducting the NLTPS exercise and the richness of the lessons of experience are both testimonies to the flexibility of the methodology¹, which is very important for its adaptation to different policy environments. No matter which research tool is being used, all the studies contributed to restoring faith among the national stakeholders in the possibility of a better future for their countries (See box 6 for selected vision statements). The NLTPS exercises contributed to confidence building, participation, sharing, ownership, realization of common strengths and weaknesses,

and the responsibility of acting together to shape a common future. Visions 2020s are now popular in many countries in the continent. Some countries, like Botswana, Ghana Gambia and Nigeria,

Box 6 Vision Statements

Mauritius 2020

"a good and stable government, an efficient economy, a carefully nurtured environment, a well educated and multi-skilled population, a warm, caring, compassionate and family oriented society, a deep sense of having national identity and a modern outward-looking nation."

Zimbabwe 2020

Zimbabwe should emerge a united, strong, democratic, prosperous and egalitarian nation with a high quality of life for all by the year 2020. This proud and happy nation will strive for a highly competitive, sustainable, and industrialized economy benefiting fully from its national endowments including its natural resources. Zimbabwe shall continue to be guided by democratic principles, respect for human rights, with a vibrant and tolerant culture while ensuring aesthetic, and physical and spiritual welfare for all its citizens.

Uganda 2025

Prosperous people, harmonious nation beautiful country

¹ This is in contrast to rigid development models and theories. This is not to ignore the usefulness of models, theories and paradigms in studying the process of development and providing alternative pathways and policy options for a country or groups of countries.

conducted long-term perspective studies and visions on their own; adding value to the mandate of the African Futures program

AFRICAN FUTURES NETWORK OF CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE

In order to consolidate the achievements and lessons of experience, African Futures has recently focussed on institutionalization the NLTPS. A network of Centers of Excellence has been established so as to create strategic alliances and networks with which the African Futures program can work and to entrench and institutionalize national long-term perspective in development management in Africa. The Network aims to mobilize Africa's intellectual, analytic and decision-making resources towards promoting sustained capacities to development management. It also aims to undertake strategic policy studies, build capacities in the allied field of perspective studies and provide policy advice to African countries. By so doing, it is hoped that the Network will assist in building a constituency for long-term strategic thinking in the continent and serve as an instrument in shifting the development paradigm to a human-centered one. The Network structure is based on four principal activities organized under four nodes:

Node 1 Studies. To undertake strategic and regional perspective studies,

Node 2 ARSDIS. To contribute to the design and creation of the African Regional Strategic Decision-making Information System (ARSDIS), including analysis of information, data for planning and policy applications, and eventual management of the system.

Node 3 Advisory Services. To advise African countries and institutions on long-term perspectives and operationalization

Node 4 Training. To provide training and capacity building in relation to LTP needs.

OPERATIONALIZATION OF THE NLTPS

Undertaking an NLTPS is not the same as operationalizing it. While the former is a well-defined entity and entails use of resources for a limited period of time, the latter is an endless and complicated process and requires time and resources. Moreover, because the two processes are different in nature, they also differ in terms of mobilization of local/internal resources and donor support. This is not to say that formulation and operationalization are separate processes isolated from each other. On the contrary, the two go hand in hand. In fact, efficient operationalization must be anchored on a well-formulated and designed NLTPS.

The NLTPS countries expressed concern on operationalization of their visions, as this requires change and gradual fine-tuning of the policy and planning environment. It also requires absorption of the complex dimensions of long-term perspective development. In fact, the African Futures and several partners would like to see the NLTPS countries operationalize their studies through undertaking practical steps for implementing the results. In order to ensure that the NLTPS process leads to concrete development strategies, the African Futures program recently undertook a study on the operationalisation of the NLTPS in four countries: Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea Bissau, Uganda and Zimbabwe. The findings of this study were discussed at a workshop held in

Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, in July 1998. A working paper on operationalization has also been produced to help countries develop frameworks for the implementation of their NLTPS.

FUTURE PLANS

Plans are underway for undertaking regional and sub-regional long-term perspective studies², as some of the NLTPS have pinpointed these dimensions. Also, some of the strategic issues such as population, gender and environmental security, have regional and sub-regional dimensions too. In addition, the emergence of global policies has added new dimensions at the regional and sub-regional levels, while the impacts and domains of the inward-focussed national development policies have been limited considerably. It is hoped for these studies to help the regional and sub-regions to reassess their weaknesses, limitations and emerging challenges and vulnerabilities, recognize the opportunities available for them now and in the future and specify their aspirations to chart their future visions. By so doing, it is hoped for Africa and its sub-regions to reposition themselves in the face of the current profound national, regional and global geopolitical transformations.

A regional study titled "Africa 2025 Africa's Long Term Perspective Study (ALTPS)" will be launched soon, in close collaboration with the African Development Bank, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, the Organisation of African Unity, sub-regional intergovernmental organisations (CEMAC, COMESA, ECOWAS, SADC), non-governmental organisations (NGO's), and the African Futures Network of Centres of Excellence. Moreover, four sub-regional (South, East, Central and West) long-term perspective studies and a number of strategic issues (governance, globalisation, environmental security, trade and competitiveness, regional integration, science and technology, etc.) will be conducted by Node1 institutions. These studies have been consolidated in one strategic plan, and are needed for devising strategies for sub-regional and regional development and integration - a *sine qua non* for a meaningful sustainable development for Africa.

Plans are underway for applying the NLTPS methodology in conflict environments in the continent.³ This initiative is in response to the 1998 report of the Secretary General to the United Nations Security Council on "The causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa". Four countries are being selected for this exercise.

It is hoped for these studies to highlight African specificity and encourage the articulation of homegrown information strategies to provide an additional venue for initiating regional networks and alliances for sustainable development.

² The need for regional and sub-regional long-term perspective studies was specifically addressed by the African Heads of States meeting at the OAU summit held in Yaounde, Cameroon, in July 1996.

³ A workshop on this topic was held in Geneva, 29-30 July 1999, organized by the UNDP