

The Social Dimensions of the New Partnership for Africa's Development

An Analysis

Dimpho Motsamai and Siphamandla Zondi

The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) was established in 2001 as the socio-economic programme for Africa to address the challenges of continued marginalisation of Africa in the global political economy. Its primary objectives are the eradication of poverty and the promotion of socio-economic development. To this end, NEPAD Action Plans were drafted, outlining specific focal areas and programmes necessary to meet NEPAD objectives. In summary, the Action Plans are in three parts: the first addresses the political and economic preconditions for the NEPAD programme to work; the second outlines 'sectoral' priority areas that need intervention; and the third focuses on resource mobilisation to support the implementation of NEPAD projects.¹ NEPAD also sought to galvanise African countries to work together in pursuit of democracy and good political governance, as well as economic and corporate governance.²

However, the focus in scholarly writings and policy debates has been on NEPAD as an economic development plan, thus overlooking the social dimensions of the programme. Many even criticize NEPAD for ignoring social crises facing Africa, including social exclusion and disintegration of communities. This paper maintains that NEPAD does provide a framework for social policy interventions in Africa. It argues that these social aspects of NEPAD are generally neglected in discussions about NEPAD as a socio-economic programme for Africa because NEPAD officials, being primarily economists, have been more successful in selling its economic messages than its social initiatives. The social dimensions of NEPAD are not as explicit as the economic and political facets outlined in the Action Plans.

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NEPAD as a Social Policy

The United Nations Department for Social development has reiterated that "comprehensive social policies are an urgent priority to achieving development objectives and to building nations that are socially inclusive, economically robust and politically stable."3 In order to understand the social dimensions of a continental policy framework such as NEPAD, it is important to define social policy both at the national level and at the regional level. This paper utilises the African Social Policy Framework (SPF) definition of social policy.⁴ Firstly, at the national level, social policy refers to collective, state-lead measures (sector investments and programmes), implemented by the central and local governments and other stakeholders, such as organised employers and workers, the broader private sector and civil society, as well as international development partners, which promote the wellbeing of all citizens.⁵ The policies should address structural inequalities in wealth, ensure greater equity and equality for all, correct market shortcomings, reduce poverty and promote social inclusion. The rationale for the implementation of social policy at the national level is that, by addressing a range of social issues and concerns such as unemployment, poverty, social exclusion and redistribution, equity, social justice, social cohesion, and integration, consensus building will be facilitated at the national level and help to prevent and manage conflicts.6 So, social policies are not only humanitarian in their conceptualisation, but also economic and political, as they reinforce human and economic development and political stability.

Regional and sub-regional social policies are an extension of national social policies, and generally should be consistent with national social policy objectives. Regional social policies address issues that require intergovernmental cross-border cooperation on issues of rights, regulation and redistribution in the areas of (a) social sector investments, (b) social issues at a cross-national level, and (c) human rights and empowerment.7 Therefore, the main areas of social policy include: i) intergovernmental cross border cooperation in sector investments and programmes in the fields of employment, education, health, social protection, housing and utilities; ii)intergovernmental cross border co-operation on policies which address social issues and social problems such as poverty and social exclusion, and policies which promote redistribution, social justice and equity, social solidarity and social integration (e.g. funds redistribution through regional social funds or regional disaster mitigation funds, and regulation of inter-regional labour market issues or utilities);

and iii) cooperation to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms.8 It is argued that NEPAD has evolved into a framework for supranational social policy interventions in Africa, even though there has been an attempt in analysis and at the AU to make this link obvious. NEPAD's full implementation nationally has the implication of providing a fresh impetus to national and regional social policy initiatives that have largely been ignored. This is because economic and political programmes do not represent the full meaning and spirit of NEPAD, i.e. socio-economic rejuvenation of Africa. Secondly, the developmental challenges that NEPAD was designed to resolve are social in their nature. The problem is that the drafters and champions of NEPAD have not sufficiently emphasised its social dimensions.

Overview of Social Challenges in Africa and Regional Responses

Despite positive economic growth trends in many African countries, poverty persists in Africa. This means economic recovery in some cases has not produced the desired social outcomes. While these outcomes have been uneven across and within African countries, the escalation of poverty, jobless economic growth, vulnerability to fluctuating commodity prices, inequality, and decline in social development indicators are common problems that most countries share. A variety of historical causes and current factors have caused these problems. These include persistent political instability and conflict, the inability of states to effectively address human deprivation and ensure sustained human-centered development, and structural weaknesses in African economies in general. These adversities lead to vicious cycles of deprivation, unemployment, social exclusion, crime and violence, including gender-based violence. These problems hamper the attainment of internally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).9 Other social challenges confronting African countries include the following:

- The decline in health standards and incidence of disease;
- Poor educational outcomes like high illiteracy and numeracy as well as declining levels of access to the service;
- Lack of adequate social protection for vulnerable members of society, including women, children, the elderly and people with disabilities;
- Poor provision of safe and sound housing and rising homelessness;

- Unemployment, under-employment and lack of entrepreneurial opportunities;
- Poor provision of basic services like water and electricity;
- Gender inequalities; and
- Inadequate protection of human rights, including rights of vulnerable groups.¹⁰

Although the inability to effectively address all these social challenges has a high human cost, social challenges also cause significant economic losses for the region. For example, high poverty and inequality results in small domestic markets, with insufficient demand to foster growth and economic development. In turn, the economic uncertainty and instability discourage private investment.11 Poverty and underdevelopment can also contribute to protracted social conflicts and political instability. In this sense, socio-economic challenges are multi-sectoral in nature and they impact the political and economic spectrums of society alike. Thus, the dichotomy between economic and social interventions in the implementation of NEPAD is incorrect.

In light of this, NEPAD's programme has increasingly become the cornerstone and driver of development on the continent. This is because NEPAD's primary objectives include, among others, the eradication of poverty. NEPAD was endorsed by the United Nations (UN) Security Council in 2002 as the continent's strategic socio-economic development framework. The UN recognises the link between the NEPAD programme and the UN Millennium Declaration, thus NEPAD as an instrument to address social challenges in the region and achieve the MDGs. Other key regional instruments that seek to operationalise NEPAD's framework, particularly in addressing social challenges on the continent include, i) the Ouagadougou Declaration on Poverty and Employment, which emanates from the 2004 AU Third Extraordinary Session on Employment and Poverty Alleviation; ii) the Social Policy Framework for Africa, emanating from the AU's Third Ordinary Session of the Labour and Social Affairs Commission in 2005; iii) the outcomes of the Ministers of Social Development in the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and; iv) the SADC Declaration on Poverty Eradication and Sustainable Development of 2008.¹²

The Pillars of NEPAD and Social Policy Provisions

NEPAD makes a direct link between development, peace, security, governance and economic growth

of the content, and this is to be found in its five pillars.¹³ These pillars are intended to create a balance between economic and social imperatives in pursuit of the overarching goal of poverty eradication. The five pillars are:

- Preconditions: which stipulate governance, democracy peace and stability.
- Sectoral Priorities in the following core areas:
 - Agriculture (productivity and capacity);
 - Culture (Indigenous Knowledge Systems, arts. innovations):
 - Environment (combat global warning, deserts):
 - Human capital (poverty eradication, health, education);
 - Infrastructure (water, energy, ICT and transport);
 - Science and technology (transfer and technology);
- Resource Mobilisation: this puts emphasis on capital flows, market access, intra-African trade and partnership with donors.
- Implementing Modalities. As NEPAD asserts
 that Africans must take ownership of their
 own development, implementation of the
 NEPAD plan resides with the 20 Heads of
 State, a Steering Committee and the NEPAD
 Secretariat.
- African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM): To ensure that NEPAD's plan is effective and that countries adhere to pre-conditions, the APRM is a voluntary peer review mechanism where countries review themselves to identify strengths and weaknesses in their political and economic governance.¹⁴

These sectoral priorities were translated into regional Action Plans. However, NEPAD implementation has given much more emphasis on economic and governance topics than on social development. Action Plans on infrastructure development, ICT, e-governance and agriculture have received much more prominence than those covering issues of education and health. There was also no attempt to innovate around issues of human development to provide clear guidelines on what could be done through NEPAD on a host of related issues of social development, including equity, decent employment and social integration. Thus, it seemed that action planning has neglected social development issues. However, it must be acknowledged that the broader thrust of numerous NEPAD documents clearly demonstrate awareness of the need for social interventions at national, regional and continental levels. Utilising the conceptualisation of social policy set out, the following section presents the specific

NEPAD programme areas found to be relevant for addressing social challenges on the continent.

This is premised on the argument that there are priorities in NEPAD's programme that are clearly and explicitly social in content and impact; and there are others that are not explicitly social but whose outcomes are social in nature. Therefore, in outlining NEPAD's social dimensions, the paper suggests that there are two ways of identifying the social dimensions. The first is the explicit reference to social sectors, and the second refers to social dimensions that are implicit in the NEPAD priorities and plans. The latter requires critical social analysis of otherwise non-social programmes to identify.15 Both the explicit and implicit dimensions should be regarded in whole as social dimensions of NEPAD, as they are mutually reinforcing and will bring about sustainable socio-economic development. Both these dimensions are outlined and discussed in detail.

Explicit Social Dimensions of NEPAD

The more unambiguous social programmes in NEPAD's plan include:

Poverty eradication

Poverty eradication is one of the foremost goals of NEPAD. The very choice of the sectoral priorities is motivated by the idea that economic development in African countries will strengthen countries' capacities to intervene against poverty. In its conceptualisation of poverty, NEPAD concedes that poverty and underdevelopment are associated with the political economy of inequality and marginalisation, and this has a direct impact on social questions of human rights, alienation, diversity, cohesion and integration. So, poverty and the solutions thereof are understood in comprehensive terms to include income poverty; access to food; shelter; clean running water; sanitation; health facilities; education; employment; and economic gains.16 Therefore, poverty is not only about human deprivation, but also about deficiencies in human dignity. Poverty also has other dimensions, such as gender and race, hence anti-poverty measures and development initiatives targeted at meeting the basic needs of citizens have a direct impact on strengthening social and economic capacities and opportunities for individuals in society. All of these patterns of thinking about poverty permeate a large number of NEPAD documents, including Action Plans on various issues. Although there is no Action Plan on poverty eradication per se, NEPAD documents reveal this deep-seated

understanding that poverty eradication is the ultimate deliverable. It seems that NEPAD drivers assume that poverty eradication is a cross-cutting matter that does not require its own Action Plan.

Development goals including the MDGs

The achievement of development goals, particularly those that relate to human development, is stated as one of the guiding principles of NEPAD. NEPAD also utilised the MDGs to track progress towards the eradication of poverty and a better quality life for Africans.¹⁷ In essence, the NEPAD plan embraces the MDGs as a framework of its developmental initiatives.¹⁸ The seven commitments under the MDGs are a significant impetus for social development in that most of the goals are social in nature. For instance, the goals on poverty reduction, education, and minimising hunger and disease are social goals, which also feature in NEPAD's sectoral priorities.

People-centered development

In NEPAD's framework there is an explicit reference to people-centered development and the emphasis on needs-based interventions that advance human livelihoods. Furthermore, NEPAD underlines the need for countries to enhance popular ownership and responsibility for development interventions by ensuring popular participation. So, the drivers of social development policy in government must engage with communities in the various processes of development. The people-centered approach is a major social policy question at the moment the world over.

Gender development

According to NEPAD, promoting the role of women in social and economic development and assuring women's participation in political and economic life is part of broader efforts to eradicate poverty and ensure sustainable development.19 Also reflected in NEPAD's documents is the recognition that the marginalisation of women remains rooted in many African countries, despite NEPAD's objectives on gender development. So, the NEPAD Gender Task Force was set up in 2005 to develop a framework for mainstreaming gender into NEPAD policies, programmes and activities. The Gender Task force spearheads the gender mainstreaming of the institutional mechanism and processes of NEPAD policies to ensure systematic and programmatic gender response to the socio-economic challenges. NEPAD's programme has also established the Office for Gender and Civil Society Organisation, which is mandated to advance and promote women development in all sectoral policies, as well as

identify and address gender-based structural barriers to women's development.²⁰

Human development

Under NEPAD's sectoral priorities, education and health are given systematic focus as priorities in enhancing human development. This indicates that, out of a host of social interventions necessary to overcome underdevelopment, primacy was given to revitalising, extending and improving the provision of adequate education and health services. In order to augment the list of human development provisions, the NEPAD Steering Committee has included food security and addressing problems of malaria, tuberculosis, HIV and AIDS, and other communicable diseases. The following section elaborates on NEPAD'S human development areas, namely health, education and food security.

Health

The NEPAD Health Strategy recognises health as one of the most serious casualties consequent on poverty, social exclusion, marginalisation and lack of sustainable development in Africa. The strategy is based on harnessing multi-sectoral effort in strengthening health systems and services. This includes the improvement of health infrastructure, scaling up communicable and non communicable disease control programmes, strengthening technical capacities of health system programmes, supporting programmes that empower populations to improve their health, and mobilising resources to support health development.21 NEPAD's Declaration on Democracy and Governance also gives priority to addressing the problems of health, particularly HIV/AIDS and other pandemics, as a measure of enhancing good governance and stability. In its fine print, the Declaration pronounces that at least 15% of national budgets of African countries should be allocated to health. NEPAD has also developed a plan to combat AIDS, which details approaches on how governments can improve their capacities in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

Education

NEPAD puts emphasis on enhancing the quality of education and training in African countries by focusing on the following four main objectives: 1. Bridging the education gap; 2. Developing higher education capacities in Africa; 3. Skills development; and 4. Reversing the brain drain. ²² Notably, NEPAD's e-Schools Programme was created in 2005 to address deficiencies in education provision and training systems, through the use of information communications technology (ICT). The NEPAD

e-Schools programme is intended to contribute to the development of education in Africa, in partnership with the NEPAD e-Africa Commission, participating countries and schools.

Food Security

NEPAD gives high priority to food security under its Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP). In addressing food security challenges, CAADP focuses on the following areas: i) preparedness and response capacity to emergencies; ii) direct assistance to the most food insecure; and iii) programmes to enhance food security through production. To do this, CAADP targets the agricultural sector, including livestock, forestry and fisheries, through policies and strategies aimed at small scale and traditional farmers in rural areas.23 CAADP also aims to help governments address capacity constraints in preparing for and responding to the food and agricultural emergency fallout of disasters; and simultaneously embarking on longer-term investment in food security linked to national Poverty Reduction Strategies. CAADP, therefore, aims to provide assistance to governments in strengthening early warning systems and information on food insecurity as a basis for improved targeting, and also enhancing private sector participation in addressing food security challenges, by putting emphasis on human capacity development and the removal of constraints to agricultural production and marketing, including soil fertility, poor water management, inadequate infrastructure, pests and diseases.24 The implementation of the food security strategies includes implementation of CAADP flagship projects, involving Action Plans for agricultural development, at the national, regional and continental levels.

Social partnerships

Whilst NEPAD puts emphasis on the idea of strategic partnerships, particularly with the developed world, it also highlights the importance of partnerships amongst Africans. There is an attempt to encourage social partnerships between civil society, labour organisations and the state, to enhance people-centered development. For this reason, the NEPAD Secretariat has created a special unit to deal with civil society interface.

Implicit Social Dimensions of NEPAD²⁵

In addition to the explicit social elements of NEPAD's framework, there are other initiatives that have a less overt social dimension. These include economic and infrastructural development priorities that are designed to produce social outcomes or impacts. The following section identifies some of these implicit social elements of NEPAD's programme.

Agriculture

NEPAD's agriculture programmes were designed such that agriculture development becomes a means to eradicating poverty. NEPAD's agricultural priority combines economic interventions to boost productive capacity and efficiency of the agricultural sector, with measures that boost self sufficiency. For instance, in addition to food security, CAAP was developed for governments to support agricultural productivity, and the Multi-country Productivity Programme for Africa (MAPP) was developed to promote agri-business and promote regional trade, including market access. The overriding goal is to overcome poverty by enhancing food self-sufficiency, generation of local revenues, and acquisition of technical skills to allow economic, and to a greater extent, social self determination.

Nutrition and feeding schemes

NEPAD has a host of programmes to address the intensifying food insecurity on the continent, which contributes to malnourishment, chronic hunger and poverty. On the issue of malnourishment and food scarcity, NEPAD has a strategic ten year strategy for the reduction of vitamin and mineral deficiencies (VMD), which is an adjunct to the broader framework for African Food and Nutrition Security (FAFS), endorsed by the African leaders and forming a part of the Global Ten Year Strategy to combat VMD. NEPAD also has fortification programmes that target vulnerable groups on the continent, such as the School Feeding Programme, which is part of CAADP.

Water

Among the action plans under the infrastructure priority, the ones on water have a strong bearing on social questions of hunger, poverty health and social progress. The NEPAD Short Term Action Plan for Trans-boundary Water Resource Management aims to improve water management on the continent, as a mechanism to promote human welfare and eradicate poverty. This plan identifies water as the driving force for sustainable development, the eradication of poverty, food security, health welfare, the fight against hunger, and environmental integrity. Emphasis is put on providing access to clean water to rural communities, improvements of hydropower technologies to

support agricultural production, and promotion of cross border cooperation on water management.

Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS)

NEPAD's IKS policy is another important dimension of social policy. It is part of NEPAD's response to what is referred to as 'culture' in its priorities. The importance of IKS has been under-estimated for some time. Generally, IKS policy is intended to provide a framework for stimulating and strengthening the contribution of indigenous knowledge to social and economic development. The idea is to tap into the knowledge that has been preserved by Africa's indigenous populations, which may help in shaping Africa's responses to socio-economic challenges, including ill-health, food crises and social disintegration. NEPAD advocates the use of IKS in poverty eradication by taking note of knowledge that resides in local communities in designing anti-poverty measures. Consequently, IKS policy is inherently social as it is about enhancing popular participation into development processes by integrating indigenous social-cultural systems into developmental interventions.26

Implementation of Social NEPAD

To effectively implement social aspects of NEPAD, African states must maintain and sustain high levels of economic growth and ensure its equitable redistribution. They must ensure the development of human resources and skills. There should be conditions of safety and security and strong popular participation. African countries must also build effective institutions of state to effectively drive social interventions, in keeping with the NEPAD vision. Africa would need a new form of a state, one that facilitates economic growth, social cohesion and security by mediating sectoral interests, articulating a strong developmental vision and mobilising the rest of society towards that vision.27 Thus, the concept of a developmental state that enters into matured and structured partnerships with society, including the private sector to increase government capacity to meet social-welfare expectations of its citizens, is relevant. This state must be a good planner and investor in social interventions by putting emphasis on the 'how' of implementation, including costing and securing the necessary fiscal space in national budgets, and enhancing partnerships with development partners in implementation strategies. This remains a challenge for many African governments, particularly in collaborating with development partners which focus explicitly on social policy.

The welfare of citizens must be the primary concern of state and society in general rather than the mere achievement of particular GDP growth rates or creation of certain designed systems. Human wellbeing should become the end of all policy interventions designed to implement NEPAD. This is particularly important given the social challenges that arise from the economic marginalisation of Africa due to the history of inequality and changes in global economy. As African countries mitigate the effects of unpredictable economic crises on their own economies, particularly the current global financial crisis, there should be a shift in focus to prioritise social policy. It is, therefore, imperative that African countries find the balance between addressing the social needs of the population and exercising fiscal austerity in the face of the global crisis. The social dimensions of NEPAD underpin the point that the pursuit of higher economic growth and the fight against poverty are not mutually exclusive endeavors.

Challenges of Implementing Social NEPAD in Africa

The identification of the social dimensions of NEPAD is not as complex as causing NEPAD actors to implement them. The first challenge facing social NEPAD is the extent to which those behind the implementation of NEPAD are aware of the potentially positive impact that identification of social dimensions would have on the fight against social crises in Africa. So, awareness and political will to act is a major problem going forward.

Secondly, although the NEPAD Implementation Committee of Heads of State and Government asserts that states should align their national development with NEPAD in order to implement it domestically, many African countries have been unable to do so, even in cases where there are clear and simple plans. This problem may be aggravated in the area of social dimensions because some of them are implicit rather than explicit, and some are not sufficiently factored in Action Plans. Some of the challenges that will be confronted have to do with institutions of state and how they behave in general. These problems include the following:

Alignment: Many countries have not effectively mainstreamed regional social policy into their own socio-development strategies. The lack of 'domestication' of NEPAD social policy refers to the fact that NEPAD provides a framework for addressing social development in African countries and, therefore, policies should be contextualised and adapted to meet specific needs of that particular

country. Many countries, therefore, fail to first determine the social, political and economic factors, which may hinder or support the social policy framework.²⁸

Coordination. Due to the lack of institutional capacities, governments face challenges in synchronising the work of implementing agencies, provincial and local governments to guarantee service delivery in the areas of social policy provision. This contributes to weak capacities of government in monitoring and evaluating polices, thereby diminishing the role of the state in being accountable and responsible to its citizenry.

Prioritisation. There is still a tendency to give priority to explicit aspects of social policy over their implicit counterparts, for example, on developing hard infrastructure and neglecting policy interventions in enhancing human welfare, dignity, etc. This suppresses the importance, and hence, the implementation of the explicit social dimensions (as discussed in the paper).

National budgeting and resource allocation. In line with the prioritization of social policy in government's development strategies is the financial resources allocated to the implementation of social policy. When governments do not prioritize the implementation of social policy as fundamental to development and economic growth, social programmes are underfunded. Part of the reason is that African countries are continually struggling to identify effective developmental options, overcome persistent poverty, domestic social inequality and, at the same time, implement feasible growth strategies.

General neglect of social policy as an instrument of public action. The failure to give priority to the effective implementation of social policy, including the identification of weaknesses in individual social policy systems, and the lack of inclusive participation by civil society, hampers any move towards improved implementation of these policies. It is important to note that while the desired renaissance of Africa will require economic progress and political stability, it will also need social development and poverty alleviation.²⁹ Countries that face challenges in engaging civil society in development processes will invariably lack consolidated policies to effect 'real' policy reforms.

Participation and inclusivity. Social outcomes will only come when NEPAD implementation is inclusive of all major stakeholders in society. In this regard, the role of social partners such as civil society, trade unions and traditional authorities and their collaboration with governments is critical to ensuring that social dimensions of NEPAD

are duly applied in the implementation of NEPAD plans. Policy interventions that derive from the express needs and choices of people on the ground, as well as stakeholders, foster unity and lead to a concerted fight against socio-economic ills in society. So, it is critical for governments to integrate civil society in all stages of programme design, impact assessment, implementation, monitoring and advocacy.

Coverage. Most countries often lack the administrative capacity to extend the coverage of programmes, including social policy. People in rural communities remain fairly isolated from the benefit of national social policies, and some remain unaware of the availability of these services. In most cases, even if they were informed about the social policy programmes, they could do little to use the services because the programme offices were located in major cities, out of reach of much of the population.

Conclusion

While NEPAD is known more as an economic rather than as a social programme, its social dimensions have a potential to address a variety of social crises gripping the continent. Both the implicit and explicit facets of NEPAD's social framework have a problem-based approach to solving social and economic challenges, including poverty. The effective adoption and implementation of the social aspects of NEPAD by the AU and African countries will be a step forward in addressing poverty, creating self-sufficiency, equity, and social cohesion for all members of society. However, to apply these social aspects of NEPAD, political will to domesticate and integrate them into national policy frameworks is paramount, as well as the will by the state to intervene in the economy to ensure that economic activities produce desirable social outcomes, and the participation of stakeholders and peoples of Africa in shaping the social results of NEPAD implementation. Social policy is not a static instrument, but one that evolves through smart partnerships and continuous engagement and dialogue.

Recommendations

NEPAD/AU:

 The AU/NEPAD must highlight the fact that NEPAD is not merely an economic programme with political pre-conditions, but that it embodies social interventions as well.

- They must popularise the social dimensions of NEPAD, even in their international engagements, to ensure that social programmes do receive support as well.
- The AU/NEPAD must commission studies that will elaborate the meaning and content of social NEPAD and how it relates to various regional social policies. Studies should also indicate how the idea of social NEPAD will enhance the achievement of long-held social goals in Africa.

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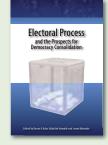


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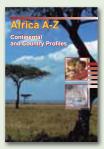
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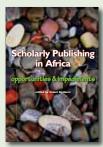
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