



## CONCEPT NOTE

# MEDIA / COMMUNICATIONS PRACTITIONERS SENSITISATION ON NEPAD- CAADP IN THE CONTEXT OF AGRICULTURE IN AFRICA<sup>1</sup>

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### **The basis and justification for the workshop**

The past few years have – in Africa and at the global level – been characterised by an immense interest in the nexus between high fuel prices, high food prices and the welfare of the most vulnerable in Africa. There has been a tremendous interest generated about Africa's agricultural sector and its implications for Africa's development – all of which has resulted in renewed support, substantial pledges and commitments by African governments and development partner-governments. The new catchphrase is that 'agriculture is back to the centre' and this clearly puts

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<sup>1</sup> Including public relations and communications-oriented practitioners from the Ministries of Agriculture and/or those practitioners already attached to the existing network of NEPAD journalists.

the AU-NEPAD's Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP) at the centre of national, regional and global attempts that are aimed at prioritising agriculture in Africa.

For those involved in the work of NEPAD-CAADP, the current environment of heightened interest in agriculture provides a unique opportunity for sensitising African publics about the relevance of agriculture to their own personal welfare and the broader development of the continent.

As the most important – and in some cases the only – link between decision-makers and citizens, the role of the media is of great importance in informing the public about issues concerning agriculture and more specifically the NEPAD-CAADP Agenda.

### **Some challenges faced by Agriculture Reporter**

However, because many media in Africa are profit-oriented and urban-based they tend to ignore issues to do with rural development, environmental changes, nutrition, food security that is agriculture-oriented issues, which they believe to be complicated, slow, uninteresting for audiences, and therefore unattractive to cover.

To complicate issues further, those reporters that are assigned to the agriculture beat are faced with a plethora of organisational, institutional and resources-oriented constraints. To start with, reporters that cover agriculture-CAADP related themes (e.g. sustainable land management,

fisheries, food security, climate change etc) struggle, given the time / space constraints, to explain how and why NEPAD-CAADP is relevant to their audience/s. This problem has in some sense been reinforced by the lack of staff most media organisations have to cover issues concerning business and economics, agriculture, African regional affairs and international affairs and the nexus between these and issues of global trade and politics.

In fact, many newsrooms in Africa are starting to cut back on dedicated journalists that cover these beats preferring instead to rely on international news agencies. In addition, few newsrooms with the exception of a handful in Kenya, South Africa, Egypt and Nigeria have any sort of dedicated correspondents / journalists that focus on agriculture, NEPAD-CAADP and/or indeed the AU's efforts towards rural economic development and agriculture.

These constraints are exacerbated by the very nature of agriculture as a broad sector that tends to include a range of sub-sectors that are inextricably linked to the economic growth and actual lived experiences of the majority of people in Africa. Also, note that agriculture in Africa tends to come with a whole range of implications that have real effects on the social, economic, political and even cultural dimensions of people's lived experiences.

Another problem is the lack of linkage between those reporters that cover NEPAD-CAADP and the more specialised reporters of say politics at the

national member state level. For journalists that report on NEPAD in general it is often hard to assess the significance and likely impact of certain decisions made by the Secretariat and the various national NEPAD priorities (e.g. CAADP) and thus they fail to give them the visibility they deserve. The specialists at the national level, on the other hand, often do not understand the various stages of NEPAD/AU decision-making or the roles of the different AU institutions and are thus more prone to misrepresent who has been responsible for what at the national and regional levels. They are also more likely to fall victim to national spin and prejudice, since they do not possess the contacts or means to counter-check national accounts against regional ones and vice versa.

Moreover, in order to inform the African citizenry about CAADP and/or indeed hold NEPAD decision makers accountable for their actions, truly transnational investigations are needed in order to access information from officials and other potential sources at various levels of AU governance. The lack of truly intra-African media products or research cooperation – on media, journalism and NEPAD – means that the puzzle pieces of a story remain unconnected and public scrutiny comes too late or fails to make a lasting impact across the African citizenry.

Bearing in the mind the aforementioned, it is not surprising to note that CAADP has for the most part featured in the African print news media simply as a response to the crisis around the ‘high food prices’ and as a vehicle for financing global funds towards African agriculture. CAADP is also

often reported on within the context of some global event at which leaders and donors are pledging to use it as an avenue for revitalizing agriculture in Africa. There are few in-depth explanations about the roll-out / implementation of CAADP at the regional and national levels. These media representations of CAADP are in some ways linked to the often noted finding that the media tend to take on issues of agriculture when there is a crisis and/or when there is some agricultural project that is being unveiled by the political leadership. Interestingly, if journalists in Africa had covered reports of the early warnings concerning access to food (high food prices) and the rise in the numbers of people that are going hungry, governments and aid agencies might have reacted earlier.

## **Five key things that could be done to reinvigorate the Agriculture Reporter's work on NEPAD-CAADP**

Having said that, even under current circumstances, African media organisations could take some positive steps to improve citizens' information and enhance cross-national (regional) debate about NEPAD-CAADP, as outlined below.

(i) Editors should treat CAADP issues as a news item with domestic relevance. NEPAD news items are generally not focused on unless there is a major event (CAADP meeting, e-school launch, APRM review etc) and they often buried in the inside pages concerning regional economics and political affairs, even though the frequency and spread of coverage across sections has increased. Even regional newspapers and broadcasters should look at cost-efficient ways of having a presence in various key African cities (Nairobi, Addis Ababa, Lagos, Cairo, Johannesburg etc), for instance by sharing offices and staff.

(ii) But even more importantly, the goal should be to improve the communication among journalists working with national and regional NEPAD-CAADP news sources. This could be done through the institution of a NEPAD/CAADP-liaison news editor, who alerts other sections (culture, economics, gender, agriculture etc.) to the relevance of developments at the Secretariat or other national capitals. The cross-fertilisation of news-gathering from different arenas of political action becomes ever more

important for the adequate scrutiny of multi-level governance, and editorial offices should aim at fostering and coordinating such a process. Journalists that report on regional affairs should, for instance, investigate the AU/NEPAD dimension of national or regional concerns more closely, while domestic agricultural journalists should pay more attention to the potential repercussions of CAADP type decisions at the level of the nation. Such an approach would also help to address the accountability gap arising from various leaders (presidents, ministers') credit – and blame - shifting strategies across the different levels of NEPAD governance.

(iii) More collaboration and network-building among different national and regional news organisations and journalists is required. Many of the key issues in African politics today cannot be properly investigated by relying on national sources alone. Yet journalists from one national context face a number of obstacles when researching and covering an issue touching on other member states or foreign news sources. News organisations should aim at fostering the evolution of transnational research networks (for instance through TAEF, SANEF, SABA, HANA, PANA, WAJA etc in tandem with training institutions) to remedy these gaps by relying on the expertise / contacts of other organisations and journalists.

Informal networks between journalists have played a key role in investigating the news stories that led to the fall of various despotic and neo-colonial regimes. Generally, media organisations should seek to improve their research collaboration.

(iv) Journalists need to be equipped with the knowledge and skills to cover NEPAD-CAADP issues. CAADP and its priorities is still an unknown entity for many journalists. They lack basic knowledge about CAADP implementation at the regional and national levels and its links to the AU/NEPAD and they also do not know where or how to find the relevant information quickly. News organisations should aim at creating and training a workforce that is capable of doing research on NEPAD-CAADP issues. They should foster knowledge of major African languages, stimulate the use of the Internet as a major source of information on NEPAD affairs and offer possibilities for journalists to go to the NEPAD Secretariat for in-office training or take courses in NEPAD news reporting. One could also envisage exchange, twinning and internship programmes among media organisations from different countries, which could help to improve the knowledge of other countries and build-up contacts, which are useful for regional news research. Finally, steps need to be taken to improve the linkages between national journalists' associations, which could cooperate for instance on the development of a training programme for journalists.

### **Specifics of the Workshop**

#### **1. Objectives**

The general objective of the workshop on NEPAD-CAADP for media practitioners is to provide knowledge and competence in dealing with and covering the key aspects of CAADP and its multifaceted impacts on the people of Africa. The secondary objective here is to produce a cadre of mass media personnel who are sensitive to the problems confronting

African governments and publics in their attempts to achieve agricultural-led economic growth.

The specific objectives of the programme are as follows:

- i. To provide journalists with knowledge about NEPAD
- ii. To provide journalists with knowledge about CAADP
- iii. To provide journalists with actual and potential impacts of food insecurity, hunger, poor nutrition and environmental degradation on the welfare of the people
- iv. To explore with journalists on what can be done to kick-start in-depth and precision reporting on CAADP/Agriculture
- v. To sensitise journalists, media institutions and other key stakeholders in the communications sector to join forces in the ongoing efforts to curb / mitigate the high food prices
- vi. To kick-start a network of CAADP communicators / reporters

## **2. Identified topics for discussion**

- The role of the mass media in the reporting on NEPAD-CAADP
- Sources of NEPAD-CAADP issues: press conferences, conventions, research reports, policy papers, CAADP focal point persons.
- Tips: Ministers, Ag Ministry PROs, NEPAD Sec, reports and records; sources in NGOs, international organizations.
- The breakdown of complex CAADP issues.
- How to illustrate in real, concrete and practical terms how NEPAD-CAADP can make a difference in people's lives, their communities and countries
- How to show the domestic relevance of CAADP.
- The use of the Internet as a resource for reporting on CAADP.
- Identifying national and regional CAADP sources that are not the usual elite official sources (governments officials, the CAADP Sec, ministers, bureaucrats etc).
- How to give NEPAD-CAADP a 'face' that is not static – in other words a plethora of faces across nations.

- Writing and editing for print and broadcast media about NEPAD-CAADP in languages, editorial styles, formats and genres that can be understood by the majority of the African citizenry - plays, locally produced reports, songs and dance, features etc that can be relied upon to invoke NEPAD/AU sentiments.
- How to report on NEPAD-CAADP in such a way that looks beyond the usual suspects in the urban areas in languages that are understood by the people. Languages and formats that are seen as not being authoritative, condescending, elitist, exclusive and neo-colonial.
- How to target young people (yes! they are the next generation. How about a 'Youth for CAADP' type network? etc).

### **Some conclusive remarks**

In thinking about the aforementioned tips, it is important to bear in mind that the challenge for the African journalist is to tell the NEPAD-CAADP story in such a way that is interesting, appealing and or in a way that 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. The key challenge for all media practitioners in Africa is to start thinking of how we can get the majority of the people to understand NEPAD-CAADP better through languages and journalism formats that can be easily accessed by us all.