

has had a poor performance. This has to be attributed, at least partly, to some internal constraints of the prevalent structures and patterns of development within the countries of the region. If present trends and conditions, both international, regional and national, persist, the future outlook for Africa does not leave room for much optimism. The need for a change has been perceived for some time now. Within a rapidly changing global environment, with new and dynamic challenges and opportunities, the need for a reappraisal of development objectives and strategies has been recognized by most agents, within and outside the region, as an urgent need. African countries feel time is ripe to define their own long term objectives and analyze possible paths of evolution which could open new alternatives. Realistic approaches which take into account possible assets and restrictions, both internal and external, to define reasonable bounds of future developments are felt as a much needed tool to face their future under favorable conditions. Since the late seventies there have been efforts to promote the analysis of Africa's futures. The Monrovia Conference held in 1979 and the Lagos Plan of Action signed in 1980 were two important early attempts in that direction. Calls to that effect were later made by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and also by the Long-Term Perspective Studies prepared by the World Bank in 1989, which urged the African countries to prepare national long-term perspective studies to guide their development activities. Further, given the limited results obtained with recent short term programs, based in a limited perspective, centered mainly around economic considerations (financial discipline, revitalization of the private sector, reorganization of the public sector) and which did not fully take into account social, political, cultural and other forces and constraints, the need to develop a new planning capability, with a new approach, a better sense of long-term directives and certain socially shared (or at last openly discussed) objectives gained ground.

A strong consensus began to emerge recognizing that while macroeconomic balances are needed for a sound management of the economy, transformations of sociodemographic, economic, cultural and political structures and behaviors are also essential to provide a solid basis for equitable and sustainable human development. Moreover, global structural changes underway add, among other things, to greater uncertainties about the future, increase the number of decision-making centers, and augment the importance of external variables. Thus, the ability to respond quickly and to adapt development policies becomes essential for dealing with internal and external shocks. The mechanical projections and rigid and limiting frameworks of past planning procedures become less useful, if not damaging. It was for reasons such as these that in a conference held in Maastricht in 1990, African countries and some of their development partners agreed on the need for African countries to take a longer term perspective in their development management, asking the UNDP to assist African countries in preparing long-term perspective studies, which is the overall development objective of the NLTPS or African Futures project (see 3.1, section A, above), launched in 1991 (although it began the operations of its regional office in

Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, only in February 1992). Its long-term objective (see 3.2, section A, above) also finds justification in the above remarks.

At the outset of the NLTPS project, several facts were recognized by the African countries and the sponsoring agencies:

- (a) The national long-term perspective studies should be based on reality and analyze the existing limitations and the consequences if appropriate measures to influence and control strategic variables of change are not taken into account.
- (b) The possible future paths of evolution of a country will depend on the past, the current socioeconomic situation in all its complexity, and the emergence of new situations and occurrence of new events. Collective visions, desires and aspirations in each country will be among the driving forces of the future. The interplay of the different old and emergent actors will also influence the future evolution.
- (c) Long-term perspectives could serve as a fundamental framework to articulate short and medium term plans and programmes, and should be accompanied by preparation of programming instruments that will allow a transition between the current situations and the long-term goals adopted by a country (or its government).
- (d) Long-term perspectives should not be developed in a vacuum nor remain only as an intellectual exercise. They should be supported by facts, as well as the perceptions and aspirations of the various groups making up the society of a nation.
- (e) The NLTPS would necessarily be an iterative and evolving process of a participatory nature, allowing the national community to arrive gradually at a realistic idea of its own limits, potentials and goals, and the role that external factors (subregional, regional and international) could play in future developments.
- (f) NLTPS should be planned and carried out as a function of the individual situation and needs of each country, thus requiring a framework and general guidelines which are flexible and adaptable.
- (g) NLTPS should cover a time horizon of one generation, or about 25 years, to achieve a clear vision of the country's structural transformations and use of human resources.
- (h) NLTPS could and should take advantage of other on-going projects and programs, both aimed at coordinating and stimulating the development of long-term sectoral strategies, and enhancing African research capabilities and

strengthening national capacity in preparation and analysis of developing policy. Previous experiences and efforts on long-term perspectives reflections should also be taken into account.

It was also recognized that the regional project should attempt to assist in providing **the beginnings** of solutions to the following problems common to African countries:

- (i) The difficulty in mobilizing human resources for long-term studies;
- (ii) The lack of data and the need for conceptual and methodological framework for NLTPS;
- (iii) The difficulties in the introduction of perspective and strategic planning techniques, recognizing that efforts to suppress these difficulties cannot be limited to an exercise such as this one, no matter how important it may be, and that institutional changes of regional organizations, governments and companies will also be required for the needed consideration of the futures to become a "reflex" in African countries;
- (iv) The difficult road to a democratic society and participatory development, which can hinder the essential wide discussion process involved in NLTPS, recognizing that these studies can sometimes be disturbing, and that obstacles can arise and the management of the NLTPS and their coordination process can be sensitive.

It was further recognized that the process followed to produce the NLTPS was as important for internalizing the new ideas as the result itself.

At the outset it was determined that the contributions of the regional project would consist of: support to national processes; design and dissemination of a conceptual and methodological framework; maintain a data bank; organize training seminars, discussions and exchange of national experiences; organize a network of African futurists and centers of excellence in prospective studies; and coordinate the various national endeavors, identifying their assistance needs. It should also attempt to facilitate the management of the process launched by the national working groups which would be formed in each country and would operate according to a flexible model.

The Project Document establishes the formation of a Sponsoring Agencies Committee to advise on the general policy orientations of the project and ensure coordination between NLTPS and development policies supported by international organizations and their member countries; in particular, this committee will examine needs for assistance in the preparation of the NLTPS. The Project Document also envisages the formation of a Technical Advisory Board to give advice on: priority research/study themes; preparation of the conceptual and methodological framework; establishment of the regional data bank; and training programs.

## E.2.b. Assessment.

### 1. Objectives and expected outputs.

The evaluation mission finds the **arguments justifying the undertaking of the project more than adequate**. First, because it is precisely in times of greater incertitude and change when long-term perspective studies can be more valuable and when there are more possibilities to influence the possible future outcomes. Second, because imagining one's futures, desires and long-term objectives is the first needed step to achieve them. Third, because the project offers the possibility of recognizing limits on what can be achieved and possible rhythms of advancement. A proactive attitude has higher probabilities of success than merely reacting to events, allowing time to be better prepared to grab the opportunities and face the challenges of the present and the future. Fourth, because an exercise such as that proposed, which provides for a dynamic integrated analysis of past and futures, offers a great opportunity to better understand the present. And fifth, because a project such as NLTPS gives the opportunity to discover, discuss and measure silent trends which would otherwise remain hidden in spite of having major consequences.

We also consider that **the facts recognized at the outset of the project** (see paragraphs (a) to (h) of Background above) **are very appropriate and useful** as guidelines for the project. In particular, we believe that the conception of the project as a **process**, both iterative and evolving, of a **participatory nature** to be an excellent choice. We have found that, in spite of the difficulties that the implementation of such an approach has (see problem (iv) of Background above), participation is unanimously recognized as one of its salient and most beneficial characteristics by all actors involved in the project and all those who know of its existence. Having said this, we have found that the costs and possible delays naturally associated with such a participatory approach, particularly under the prevalent sociopolitical conditions in African countries, seem to have been underestimated. This may still be the case even today for some persons and institutions associated with the project. Many of the obstacles that the project has faced and is still facing may find their roots in this. It should also be noted that establishing a participatory tradition to openly discuss the problems and choices to be made by a country cannot rest in any one project or exercise, no matter how important this may be. Therefore, all parties should recognize that country's circumstances and conditions will determine the degree of participation achievable on any specific NLTPS. Nevertheless, it should also be said that experience has shown that the degree of tolerance among participants tends to be higher when discussing global long-term issues and images, than when attention is centered on immediate issues and problems; advantage should be taken from this.

The mission would like to emphasize the **initial recognition** that in the NLTPS project **the process and the products** or end result **would be equally valuable**. It is our opinion that **this statement has still great merit** and should not be forgotten during this or the final evaluation of the project.