

Global change and uncertainty strike Africa – NAI Annual Report 2009

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Africa's economic and political position in the world is changing drastically. One and a half years ago, economic growth on the continent was significantly stronger. Since then, the financial crisis has changed the conditions. Simultaneously, there is a global shift in economic power from West to East in which new superpowers are entering. The Nordic Africa Institute's Annual Report 2009 reflects on some of the new challenges Africa is currently facing.

Brazil, Russia, India and China, together called the BRIC states, are currently the world's most important emerging powers. Their economic growth will lead to a lot of opportunities for African countries, but also some challenges: "The BRIC states are unlikely to act in Africa's best interest, unless African governments put the pressure on them to do so," says Fantu Cheru, professor and research director of the Nordic Africa Institute. "Therefore, it's crucial for Africa to formulate national, regional and continental policies and strategies in order to engage the BRICs in the most profitable way in the coming years."

One of the challenges is the outsourcing of African land for the large-scale production of food and energy for foreign populations. And as Kjell Havnevik, professor and senior researcher at NAI, points out, the outsourcing is happening where rural Africans still suffer from poverty and food insecurity after decades of declining support by governments, international financial institutions and donors.

Democracy remains a major challenge; it has been 50 years since many of the African countries gained independence. And 2010 will be demanding for electoral democracy in several countries, writes Cyril Obi, a senior researcher at the NAI in the report. At the same time, "informal workers" in Africa – who often lack sufficient income, basic rights, and experience hostility from their governments – are scaling up their resistance by creating organizations that voice their interests, according to Ilda Lindell, an associate professor and researcher at NAI.

The Annual Report also covers:

- NAI encourages an increased policy debate among researchers, policy makers and the public by setting up an online forum on Nordic Policies for African Development.
- NAI sets up its Associates initiative. Associates are a wider group of "friends" of the institute.
- Free downloading of published research, Open Access, a cornerstone of efforts to create a fair and balanced flow of information.

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