

The G8 and Africa: Political Aspects

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According to Prime Minister Tony Blair, the present state of Africa is a scar on the conscience of the world. About half of the continent’s population live on less than two dollars a day. Over 40 million of the children do not go to school. Every minute, a woman dies in pregnancy or child birth and other preventable diseases. There is a steady and persistent decline in food production. In the last two decades, the continent has been the most affected by violent conflicts. At the present rate, Africa will not achieve the millennium development goals by 2015 and if the HIV Aids pandemic which in some countries cut life expectancy by as much as 50% is not tackled, the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) will never be met.

The present situation can be traced to the lingering effects of slavery and colonialism which at independence bequeathed weak states and dysfunctional economies to the first generation of African leaders. The situation was however aggravated by poor leadership, corruption and bad governance thus leading to some African countries now being classified as failed states. One notable effect of the appalling situation in Africa is the migration of young people in their prime to the developed world.

It is now generally accepted that the rot in Africa has to stop, lest poverty is globalised. What happens in the weak and failed states will if not checked, begin to affect those in the successful states. As the Commission for Africa Report pointed out, the future of the richest people in the richest countries are tied irrevocably to the fate of the poorest people in the poorest countries of the world. Failed states constitute good recruiting grounds for terrorism and if the United States is poised to take as much as 25% of its oil from Africa within the next 10 years, there is need to show concern for events on the continent.

The above partly explain why Africa is currently at the heart of several global initiatives and why 2005 is described as Africa’s year. There is the 25% replenishing of resources by the World Bank to developing countries, the progress report by the United Nations on efforts to achieve the MDG, the World Bank Global Monitoring Report, The Live Eight Concert, The Make Poverty History Project, The Commission for Africa and the G8 Summit with Africa on top of the agenda. All these attest to a renewed commitment on the part of the international community to improve living standards on the continent and combat poverty and disease.

Critics of the Commission for Africa Report describe it as nothing more than an elaboration of the obvious, a rehash of previously stated views. The balance of learned opinion in Africa is that the contents and timing of the report testify to Tony Blair’s, genuine and abiding interest in, and sympathy for Africa, for which history and posterity will be kind to him. This writer witnessed at first hand, the contribution of Tony Blair’s government towards halting Sierra Leone’s slide to a failed state between 1996 and 2003. The same clarity of purpose and genuine commitment to improve matters is being demonstrated to the situation in Africa. The British Prime Minister will not be the first EU President, neither will he be the first host of The G8 Summit, but by deciding to make Africa a priority for international action in this period, Mr Tony Blair deserve the support of all those who believe that Africa should have a place in the sun.

It is impossible to disagree with the recommendations of the Commission for Africa. The fact that Africans constitute majority of the membership of the Commission, and that its recommendations tally with the objectives of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) makes Africans have a feeling of commitment to and to some extent ownership of the

report. The challenge is effective implementation. To translate the ideas contained in the report to effective and long lasting action, consideration should be given to the following:

- The creation and sustenance of the political will in the G8 to successfully implement the recommendations of the Commission. Tony Blair's pre G8 diplomatic shuttle and the EU decision to double its aid to Africa by 2015 and wipe off debts to the HIPC countries in Africa are steps in the right direction.
- The establishment of a G8/Africa forum to become a formal and prominent part of the annual G8 Summit. This should involve political leaders from Africa as well as the UN Secretary-General. This Forum should review the implementation of existing commitments and design a checklist of progress on Africa's development.
- In view of Africa's being at the heart of a number of global initiative, the G8 should use its influence on key international agencies such as EU, World Bank and IMF to evolve a coherent policy for the development of Africa.
- In view of the possibility of some G8 countries disagreeing with some aspects of the Report of the Commission particularly on the issue of doubling the Overseas Direct Investment and the issue of the International Financial Facility, other countries should feel free to pursue the policies.

This presentation is meant to discuss the political aspects of G8's relations with Africa. But the present situation is such that there can be no meaningful discussion of the politics without reference to the economy. The economic aspects will be discussed in much greater details by other panellists. For the moment, we shall endorse the view earlier expressed by the British Prime Minister and Chancellor Gordon Brown that Africa needs a new Marshall Plan to erase the scar that it presently represents on the conscience of the world. The plan should include among others: more aid to help in meeting the MDG, effective debt relief, a levelling of the international economic playing field including greater market access. It will also help if adequate controls can be put in place to curb arms proliferation which fuels violent conflicts and constitutes a great hindrance to political stability in the continent.

Democracy

The Foundation for political instability in Africa was laid in the colonial times. The states were artificial creations with weak foundations. At independence, the new leaders inherited and strengthened a system that was authoritarian, despotic, bureaucratically over centralised, and operating a top down form of government. In many African countries, the political system failed to internalise popular participation through failing to put in process a political process that is open with freedom of expression guaranteed, differences of opinion tolerated, and democratically arrived at consensus decisions honoured and accepted.

But it does appear that things are changing. Unlike about 20 years ago when it was fashionable for African governments to be run as dictatorships, the AU, and the Commonwealth have refused to accept in their ranks regimes that are not democratically elected. The OAU policy of non interference in the internal affairs of member states has now been replaced in the AU by one of non indifference to the violations of democratic rights. The NEPAD agenda sees good governance as a prerequisite to development. The African Peer Review mechanism (APRM), which is part of the NEPAD process, has been designed to foster the adoption of policies, standards and practice that lead to political stability, high economic growth, and sustainable development. It is still early days for the NEPAD, but support from the international community especially the G8 will increase its chances of success.

At their 2004 meeting in Coolom Australia, Commonwealth Heads of Government constituted a High Level Expert Group to recommend ways in which democracies might best be supported in combating poverty. The report of the Group emphasized the central role of states, markets, and civil societies as focuses in development policies that in themselves uphold and promote democratic values. It describes the characteristics of a democratic state as:

- A freely and fairly elected parliament that is broadly representative of the people in the country

- An executive (government) that is answerable to parliament
- An independent judiciary
- A police force that responds to the law for its operations and government for its administration
- Armed forces that are answerable to government and parliament

The report emphasised that for democracy to survive and function properly, each of the following institutions must be held to account:

- an independent electoral commission
- an independent human rights commission
- a freedom of information commission
- an ombudsman

The report was adopted by the Commonwealth Heads of Government. The Commonwealth Secretariat has since intensified its efforts in implementing the report. Ever since the end of apartheid in South Africa in 1994, the Commonwealth has embarked on encouraging and assisting military and one party states to adopt multiparty democracy. As of now only Pakistan has a military head of state with a democratically elected parliament. The Commonwealth has developed a capacity for monitoring and observing elections in member countries and had been strengthening through training and other technical assistance, institutions that uphold democracy such as the parliaments, the judiciary and human rights group. In the pursuit of these objectives, the Commonwealth has benefited tremendously from the support of two members of the G8, United Kingdom and Canada who are the two major contributors to the organisation.

But there are only 18 Commonwealth members out of the 54 nations in Africa. Other members belong to the La Francophonie in which France a G8 member exerts considerable influence. It is significant that La Francophonie has adopted the Bamako declaration which is akin to the Commonwealth Harare Declaration and which underlies the fact that military governments would no longer be tolerated within the Organisation. La Francophonie suspended Togo this year following the attempt by the military to impose Faure Gnassingbé following the death of his father. But there is still room for more. It would be helpful if France through La Francophonie establish a mechanism to deal with serious violation of the Bamako declaration in a manner similar to what the Commonwealth does through the Good Offices Role of the Secretary-General and the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG). Countries that do not respond positively to this mechanism risk facing sanctions including the suspension of their membership. This has strengthened the democratic process in Commonwealth Africa. It will help if France exerts on, and support the democratic process in Francophonie Africa as much as Britain and Canada do in the Commonwealth. Other members of the G8, Germany and the United States have varying degrees of influence in some African states. The African political climate will benefit much if the G8 countries stand very firm on the side of democracy in the continent.

The recommendations of the Commonwealth Expert Group seem to be in line with the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) which seeks to pursue a development strategy in African based on good governance, respect for human rights, better conduct of government business and action against corruption. African countries are expected to subject themselves to the scrutiny of their peers through a process involving consultation with governments, Non Governmental Organisations (NGO) and the private sector. They will also be requested to develop a programme of action with clear objectives and time frame. Although untested, the APRM is an important and innovative programme with real potential. The APRM needs the G8 support.

Accession to APRM is the most effective and concrete proof of Africa's preparedness to comply with requirements of good governance. As of now, only 24 of the 54 African countries have signed up to it. G8 countries can encourage, and influence individual countries to which they relate to sign up. Without necessarily making it a conditionality, the G8 could use accession to the APRM as a yardstick for prioritisation in considering competing requests for aid, debt relief and other forms of assistance.

In recent times, there have been some improvements in governance and stronger commitment to democracy in Africa. In 2005, there have been two successful transitions in Mozambique and Namibia. Some mopping up still need to be done in Togo. Nevertheless some disturbing signals do exist. The line between international cooperation to prevent conflict and interference in the

internal affairs of sovereign countries are blurred. Opinions are divided on the morality or otherwise of moves by some African leaders to extend their tenure by amending the constitution in parliament. Given the fragility of the constitution, and the predominance of the personality factor in the politics of the continent, coupled with the seeming reluctance of the AU to comment on some of these issues, the G8 should support orderly transitions and discourage the sit tight tendency of some of the African leaders. The tendency to cling to office and become career heads of state has been a major cause of political instability in Africa. It may be necessary to adopt a policy of zero tolerance to Heads who want to stay beyond the agreed tenure.

Conflicts

Between 1960 and the end of the last century, there have been as many as 80 violent changes of government in Africa. Many countries have been engaged in internal strife, conflict and or war. African had earned the reputation of a continent that is perpetually at war with itself. The opportunity costs of conflicts are enormous. Not only do conflict countries forgo developments, they actually regress. The origin of the conflicts can be traced to the arbitrary and artificial nature of African borders culminating in the emergence of new political entities which did not experience any long process of state formation. Ethnic groups were split across national frontiers. But for the wisdom of the founding fathers of the OAU who declared the sanctity of the inherited frontiers, interstate conflicts could have been a more common occurrence. The fact that the countries were made up of people of diverse origin and the political elite manipulated the people by feeding them with stereotypes about other groups to achieve self centred objectives created a fertile ground for conflict. There was also the fact that at independence African governments inherited, sustained and strengthened colonial authoritarianism, and despotism. Many of them operated autocratic forms of government where freedom of expression was not tolerated and criticisms were frowned. These made conflicts inevitable.

In recent times, a number of organisations have focussed attention on the prevention and resolution of conflicts in Africa. The Commonwealth Secretary General's Good Offices Role is the organisation's institutionalised way of preventing and resolving conflicts in Africa as well as in other regions of the Commonwealth. Through quiet, discreet, behind the scene diplomacy, facilitated by the ability to win and sustain the confidence of conflicting parties, the Commonwealth has contributed to preventing and resolving conflicts in Sierra Leone, The Gambia, Swaziland among others. The AU has shown itself to be more assertive than its predecessor. It has played a role in stabilising Liberia and Burundi. The organisation kept firmly to its policy of not admitting non democratically elected governments to its rank. It refused to recognise and indeed forced the abdication of the militarily established regime in Guinea Bissau and insisted on proper democratic procedure for succession in Togo earlier this year. All these are evidence of its commitment to the Nepad Peace and Security Initiative which is designed to support the proposed Protocol relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution within the African Union. The proposals cover actions and measures to improve early warning capacity especially information gathering and analysis and ensure that early warning leads to early and effective action.

In view of the fact that intra African interventions is preferable to extra African interventions and the generally accepted view that the primary responsibility for the prevention and resolution of conflicts in Africa should be placed on the shoulders of the AU, it will be necessary for the G8 to support the AU and Nepad Mechanism for Conflict Resolution. The report of the Africa Commission suggested that to enable the AU act quickly and effectively to resolve conflicts, donors should agree to fund at least 50% of the AU peace fund from 2005 onwards. It also suggested that the UN and regional organisations should take steps to clarify their respective roles and responsibilities and the criteria for taking action to prevent conflicts. Donors should also be prepared to fund the rapid clearance of arrears for post conflict countries in Africa to enable early access to concessional financing from international financial institutions. These suggestions are worthy of consideration and support of the G8.

One major contributory factor to the prevalence of conflicts in Africa is the relatively easy access to arms and ammunition by the combatants. The availability of arms is not the cause of the conflicts. But it does exacerbate them. Arms proliferation has also the tendency of increasing tension and making disputes violent. Weapons flow into Africa from a variety of sources. In the cold war days, the super powers supplied arms to their proxies. After 1990, Central and Eastern European states become the major source. In recent times, China and Ukraine are the leading suppliers. To reduce the incidence of violent conflicts in Africa, the G8 should lead the way in tightening control over direct arms export to Africa. It is in the G8 that Russia, China and other arms suppliers from Europe can be engaged. The G8 countries should establish an International Arms Trade treaty setting high common standard governing arms transfer to conflict countries in Africa and elsewhere. They could also put diplomatic pressure on some African countries who have been engaged in arms proliferation while intervening in crisis in neighbouring countries eg Uganda and the Congo. There should be specifically targeted actions against well known international arms traffickers such as Victor Bout known to have supplied arms to rebel movements in Angola as well as Charles Taylor.

Corruption

Corruption has been one of the major hindrances to development in Africa. Apart from the negative impact on moral standards, it discourages hard work, initiative and breeds inequality. Corruption by government officials affects the style of governance. Large projects such as the construction of Sports Stadium and purchase of ships, aircraft and military equipment take precedence over the provision of basic health services or improvement in the condition of service of teachers. It also encourages crime in that judicial officials are bribed and court decisions are influenced.

The effect on the national economy is usually very damaging. A corrupt country is not attractive to foreign investors. In the immediate post-independence period, corrupt politicians and officials invested the stolen money in projects in their countries. In recent times, the trend has been to lodge the stolen loot in banks in Europe and America. Overseas based companies particularly those in the extractive industries collude with corrupt government officials to conclude deals. As it happened in many African countries, the national income is eventually depleted, genuine foreign investors are scared and invest their money elsewhere.

Much as African political and business elite can be held responsible for the corrupt practices, there is a feeling that the scale had been exacerbated by the encouragement of, and collusion with foreign-based companies. The availability of safe deposits in banks and financial institutions in Europe and America has encouraged the looting of the African resources. A substantial amount of money stolen by African leaders such as Mobutu and Abacha are lodged overseas. Because of its obvious negative impact of corruption, African countries have in recent times demonstrated some willingness and determination to deal with the malaise. President Thabo Mbeki recently sacked his Deputy Jacob Zuma on grounds of corruption. Frederick Chiluba of Zambia is facing corruption charges. Nigeria has created an Economic and Financial Crimes Commission which has convicted some leading public officials. Signatories to the APRM have pledged to tackle corruption. But there is a lot that the G8 can do to assist in tackling the problem of corruption.

It is fairly well known that companies based in developed countries including G8 members are often involved in corruption by paying large bribes to secure commercial deals. Some of these companies are sometimes supported by cover for Export Credit Agencies (ECA's). The ECA's often underwrite the contracts that include the cost of commissions that a company has paid to win the contract. There have also been instances when companies that have been prosecuted for corruption in their own companies win large contracts in Africa. It is possible for the G8 countries to establish a mechanism in their diplomatic missions whereby the record of companies competing for contracts could be checked to verify their reputation.

Perhaps the most important factor stimulating the transfer of stolen assets from Africa to the developed world, is the ease with which the loot can be deposited and later utilised. During his

five years of brutal rule in Nigeria, Sani Abacha alone deposited between two to five billion dollars in overseas banks located mostly in G8 countries. It is estimated that corrupt African leaders have as much as 28 billion dollars in Swiss and American banks. The Commonwealth Expert Group and on Democracy and development recommended that Commonwealth Governments should aid fellow Commonwealth member countries to repatriate the stolen assets to the countries of origin. Nigeria has been making efforts to recover the assets stolen by the Abachas. It has recorded some successes in Switzerland. Ironically, it has faced the most serious obstacles in the United Kingdom. It may be necessary to enact legislation that will remove whatever legal obstacles that stand in the way of the repatriation of stolen funds.

The lure of the good life in the developed countries is one of the reasons for the looting of funds by African politicians and officials. Recently the British High Commission in Kenya cancelled the entry visa of a corrupt politician and that of his family. A Nigerian minister advocated that EU and American missions should cancel the entry visa of some Nigerians who have beyond a certain amount of money deposited overseas. Immigration restriction on well known corrupt African citizens could discourage corruption.

The OECD convention on combating bribery and corruption of foreign public officials in international business transaction compels its signatories to introduce new laws that make it possible to prosecute companies in their home countries for paying bribes abroad. It came into force in 1999 and was signed by 39 OECD countries. But it has many loopholes. The monitoring process is weak and the convention does not address bribery by private officials. Many G8 countries accord low priority to its complementation. This needs to be corrected.

The United Nations Convention against Corruption has not been ratified by a single G8 country, despite the clear benefits such compliance would add in combating corruption. The activities of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) on money laundering should be broadened to include Africa. African bodies with objectives similar to the FATF such as the South and East Africa Anti Money Laundering Group, deserves to be supported by the EU.

The issues are clear — Africa is facing a crisis of immense proportions: a crisis which if unchecked could wipe out over one-third of the adult population of the entire continent. Added to this are crippling debt repayments which retard essential investments in health, education and infrastructure, prejudicial and obstructive subsidies and regulations which stifle economic access and growth. Promises abound at the moment, the air is thick with optimism and solidarity — we have discussed the issues, challenges, modalities and proposals at length. It is clear that the leaders of the countries gathering here next week hold the political power and the financial to support and enhance the radical changes necessary to allow Africa fulfil her potential and take her seat as an equal partner in world affairs. Africa's recovery must not be allowed to be derailed or diminished by individual or multinational hegemonic interests, nor should efforts cease once the baton of leadership is passed — G8 leaders must see this as a collective responsibility regardless of the leadership and initiative shown by Britain.

Africa's position is clear. The continent will no longer tolerate despotic and undemocratic rulers. Africans understand the importance of education and development for the betterment of their lives and are beginning to hold themselves accountable and responsible for peace, development and stability on the continent. By the same token, Africans demand the respect, consideration and fair treatment long overdue from their partners in the international community. It is my sincere hope that the decisions and commitments made prior to, and during this Summit will be followed by strong political will, timely financial support and equitable trade policies. History will judge whether 2005 truly will be the turning point in world history. It has the potential to be.

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