

Strategic Ideas for a Prosperous Africa

Richard Joseph
Northwestern University

Numerous meetings were convened in many countries to discuss the issues being considered by the Council on Africa sponsored by the British Government. This essay is an expanded version of my responses to questions sent to invited participants in a meeting convened by the Council of Foreign Relations in New York. They are based on my research and published writings, and those of many colleagues, over the past three decades.¹

1. *Where is Africa presently heading and where should it be heading?*

There are different “Africas” and their trajectories differ significantly. Different typologies can be created based on these variances. There is an Africa of peaceful democratic constitutional states that is making progress on several fronts (Ghana); an autocratic Africa that has permitted limited liberalization and made little progress in re-establishing a constitutional democracy, (Cameroon and Togo); an Africa that has slid under repressive and highly conflictual modes of governance (Zimbabwe); an Africa in which stabilization and national reconstruction are paramount (Congo-Zaire and Liberia); an Africa torn apart by warfare, (Côte d’Ivoire and Sudan), etc. The realistic priorities in the near-term for countries (or sometimes particular regions of large countries) differ. In short, there is no single answer to the question where or should “Africa” be heading? As some scholars began recognizing a decade ago, “Africa” has been heading in different directions simultaneously. That diversity has since accentuated and should be reflected in the design of new strategies.

2. *What are the main obstacles to successful development in Africa?*

The main obstacles are internal and external and they interpenetrate. Internally, the greatest obstacle has been the failure to establish effective, responsible, transparent, and accountable systems of governance. A direct consequence of this primary failure has been the inability to create coherent developmental states. The state is understood here as a complex of institutions responsible for the collective affairs of a people organized territorially. Institutional weaknesses are evident in both state and non-state institutions. An important external obstacle is the inability of the global community to devise ways of working cooperatively to help tackle the problems posed by pervasive governance and state inadequacies in Africa. There have been three to four decades of shifting international policy priorities regarding Africa. The overall impact, given the breadth of resources applied, has been disappointing. The time has come to stop recycling what has

¹ See Richard Joseph, “Smart Partnerships for African Development: A New Strategic Framework”, Special Report, US Institute of Peace, May 15, 2002; and “Africa: States in Crisis,” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (July 2003), pp. 159-170.

been tried before. We should begin thinking of sub-Saharan Africa as a zone in which new models of international cooperation may be needed to build bridges between Africa's current governance and institutional deficiencies and a terrain on which African countries can compete effectively in the global system.

3. *What can the rich countries of the world do to help?*

Rich countries can apply what has been learned over a quarter-century about the developmental failings in Africa and which is abundantly documented in reports by international agencies such as the World Bank and UNDP, and by scores of academic and policy scholars. Such a process would involve using the tools we have at our disposal to disaggregate "Africa" and identify: a) where there have been salutary forms of governance and institution-building; b) what explains the relative successes c) which advances can be expanded and replicated d) how can the failures be contained or stabilized, and what steps can be taken to achieve incremental advances and e) how can the international community move towards more "internationalized" approaches to promote stabilization, renewal, and socio-economic progress in Africa.

4. *If there is action from the rich countries, what do Africans need to do?*

The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) has identified many positive and widely shared goals for Africa. There is no point in repeating an operation of this comprehensive nature. What can be considered is an independent exercise that is not under the influence of any particular African state or government. This exercise would distill from the many NEPAD documents a more focused priority agenda that would be realistic and achievable for the "different Africas". Blending this disaggregated agenda with the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) should make it possible to establish targets, both short and medium term, for African countries based on what is realizable within certain time periods. Such an exercise would also seek to identify trajectories that could be followed. It would be of great interest to Africans, and persons concerned about Africa worldwide, who support the objectives of NEPAD but have not been encouraged to date by its operations.

5. *If we achieve a substantial increase in net resource flows to Africa, where and how should the funds be directed and spent?*

There has been an "unprecedented" transfer of public capital to Africa in the form of development and humanitarian assistance during the past three decades.² In addition, there are multiple current and potential resource flows to Africa: official development assistance, family remittances, earnings from African exports, repatriated capital, debt relief, and foreign direct investments. It is an error to assume that Africa's developmental failures are mainly attributable to the insufficiency of resource inflows. Doubling or tripling these flows without transforming the capacity to use them efficiently and

² See Nicolas van de Walle, "Economic Reform: Patterns and Constraints", in E. Gyimah-Boadi, ed., *Democratic Reform in Africa: The Quality of Progress* (2004); and *African Economies and the Politics of Permanent Crisis, 1979-1999* (Cambridge University Press, 2001).

productively would be a wasteful use of public capital. There must be a close and interactive relationship between capital flows and accountable and transparent executive capacity in Africa - in governmental, non-governmental, and private entrepreneurial sectors.

The *Millennium Challenge Corporation* (MCC)³ of the U.S. government, and similar initiatives of other bilateral donors based on the philosophy of matching assistance to performance, should be expanded into a coherent international program of assistance to Africa during the last decade of the *Millennium Development Goals* (MDG), 2005-2015. Again, putting aside the generalized notion of “Africa”, and thinking of countries according to their actual political, economic and national integration, the range of capital resources available to them, and their degree of local capital retention versus flight, an *International Challenge Account* (ICA) could be created to be disbursed among such countries based on criteria used by the MCC as well as their relative success in mobilizing their own resources. The ICA would be a global resource for entire African societies, not just the persons able to wrest power and their associates, regardless of their ability or willingness to improve the supply of public goods.

In discussing “net resource flows to Africa”, it is also necessary to move away from harmful “welfarist” modes of thinking. Much official aid (ODA) is now applied to budget relief for African states. In short, it helps make up the deficits in the national accounts of these countries and roughly matches the outflows for debt servicing. ODA has become a component of “stalled development” in Africa. Most African governments have failed to make use of the considerable financial resources provided to them over the past four decades to shift their countries onto different development trajectories. As Nicolas van de Walle, the scholar who has most carefully studied these aid flows and the resulting “partial reform syndrome” concludes: the likelihood is that Africa is facing another “decade of economic crisis and state decay.”

A first step in avoiding this scenario is to disengage the “aid business” from failed systems of governance and reconnect it to identifiable salutary and productive systems wherever they emerge in the continent. Such a shift in perspective would encourage African creativity and innovation. Preferential treatment would be accorded governments that protect the rights and liberties that make it possible for the creative and entrepreneurial talents of their people to be freely manifested.

6. *What is the role of religion in African development?*

There has been an upsurge of religiosity and religious mobilization in many African countries. This is, of course, a worldwide phenomenon. The prolonged economic crisis in Africa, the many infrastructural challenges, declining real incomes, and limited employment opportunities have contributed to the heightening of religious fervor. Loss of confidence in formal governmental institutions has contributed to the shift of entrepreneurial skills and energies to religious entities. In view of the size, vibrancy, mobilizing capacity, and values-orientation of such entities, they should be encouraged to

³ During the design phase, it was known as the Millennium Challenge Account or (MCA).

engage more directly in tackling the many development challenges. The Centre for Law and Social Action (CLASA) in Nigeria, supported by the Heinrich Böll Foundation, is pointing the way in this regard. CLASA recently started a Pentecostal-Civil Society Dialogue. Such dialogues, by seeking common ground on issues of concern to religious and secular groups, could help mitigate sectarian conflicts associated with the evangelical upsurge among Christian, Muslim, and other religious groups. It could also stimulate collaborative development efforts across the divisions of government, civil society, and religious organizations.

7. *For a just outcome for Africa and Africans, what can a bold agenda for the G8 deliver?*

- Firm commitments to African peoples and societies, and to governments that serve their societies and are accountable to them.
- A clear demonstration of how African governments have failed to provide basic public goods and strengthen human security for their citizens, and the wide shortfall in achieving the MDG.
- A commitment to develop new modes of international and institutional collaboration that would engage many sectors of society in parallel with the efforts of local governmental agencies.
- An *International Challenge Account* to which all major donors would contribute a certain share of their development assistance to be disbursed according to widely agreed performance criteria. [The ICA would encapsulate the American MCA into a broader global framework—delete].
- Greater progress in providing mechanisms to open overseas markets to African products and to facilitate foreign direct investments as well as the encouragement of domestic investments.
- Comprehensive international action to reduce Africa's crippling deficits in health and education. There could, for example, be a bold plan that every dollar accountably spent on health and education in Africa, and such basic infrastructural resources as clean water, would be deducted from annual debt servicing repayments. Other similarly "fresh" incentives should be encouraged.

8. *What matters to the American public and U.S. policymakers in terms of development in Africa and what role can it play in delivering change?*

The most important link is between security and development. There is an urgent need to foster greater understanding of how American "homeland security" is tied to the security and development of the homelands of other peoples. The challenges are greater in Africa but the rewards are also significant, especially as the importance of Africa for the energy needs of industrialized countries grows. Africa has suffered from the geo-political and geo-economic strategies of the industrializing West, and now East. This is a historic moment when that equation can be reversed. The imperial powers met in 1884-1885 in Berlin and established protocols for dividing up the African continent. Why can't they, 120 years later, reconvene with accountable representatives of African peoples and

societies to prepare a comprehensive 20-year plan designed to help Africa reconstitute itself into developmental entities at all levels and in all sectors?

9. *What are your greatest concerns about contemporary Africa?*

With regard to African countries, it is that Nigeria, the most populous African nation with an enormous unrealized potential, will not get its political house in order prior to the pivotal 2007 elections when President Olusegun Obasanjo completes his second and final elected term of office. Politically induced conflicts in Nigeria will have grave implications for that nation as well as for west and equatorial Africa.

With regard to non-African countries, it is that China - whose growing economic importance in Africa matches that in other parts of the world - is so disengaged from international efforts to promote economic and political reforms in the continent. The failure to get China to support, in deed as well as words, the emerging global agenda for good governance and human rights, responsible corporate behavior, environmental protection, and the ending of violent conflicts could neutralize those efforts.

With regard to the international community generally, it is that the current upsurge of concern about Africa's distress, and the need to take decisive action in certain spheres such as the AIDS epidemic, will waver in light of the great costs involved; and that a few decades of sustained effort will be needed to bring Africa into the mainstream of global development.

10. *How will a prosperous Africa finally be constructed?*

The report of the UK Commission on Africa summarized the international consensus about Africa: "Without progress in governance, all other reforms will have little impact". The report brings to the fore the central need to improve governance and capacity building and to strengthen institutional systems. This is not the first time such observations have been made.⁴ However, the African predicament has reached such a scale that the options are now clearly demarcated. Either sub-Saharan Africa is better governed - which means the conduct of responsible officials that builds institutional capacity and expands the supply of public goods - or it will largely disappear from the global system, except as a source of minerals and other natural resources, as a supplier of semi-skilled and unskilled labor for overseas countries, and as an arena for multiple humanitarian endeavors and the containment of violent conflicts.

An international conference on "Aid, Governance, and Development in Africa" at Northwestern University, May 12-14, will bring together scholars and practitioners committed to the first option. Their work over decades emphasizes the significance of the central term in the conference title: unless Africa is better governed, even massive increases in financial aid will not bring about sustainable development. Development in

⁴ They were at the heart of the breakthrough World Bank report: *Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth: A Long-Term Perspective Study* (1989) and were the driving commitment behind the African Governance Program which I directed at The Carter Center (Atlanta) from 1988 to 1994.

Africa cannot be installed; it must be built, institution by institution, and in both private and public sectors.⁵

⁵ See Richard Joseph, "Institution-Building and Development in Africa," *Global Dialogue*, Vol. 6, Nos. 3-4 (2004), pp. 73-90.