Reviewing the Commission for Africa

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Why the Commission for Africa?

The report of the Commission for Africa was published on 11th March to generate interest in and commitment to Africa. The 400-page CfA report, titled **"Our Common Interests**", sets out to "examine Africa's past, present and future" and provide an "assessment of the situation in Africa and policies towards Africa". The Commissioners also planned to generate increased support for the G8-Africa Action Plan and the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD). The central question asked by the *Commission* was this: *What can the rest of the international community do to support successful African development?*

The report has been viewed in some quarters as "a Marshall Plan for Africa". It talks about spurring "Africa's turning point", presenting a "forceful response" to Africa's vast challenges, based on "a partnership between Africa and the developed world that takes full account of Africa's diversity and particular circumstances".

British Prime Minister Tony Blair declared the social conditions in Africa "a scar on the conscience of the world". The gives numerous specific instances of this scar:

- Africa's share of world trade constitutes only 2% of all trade.
- 4 million children in Africa under the age of five die each year, two-thirds from diseases which could be cured with such low cost remedies as Vitamin A supplements, oral re-hydration salts, insecticide-treated-bed-nets, and medicines to treat intestinal worms.
- Half of Africa's population lives on less than one dollar a day.
- Africa has experienced more coups, wars, and violence than any other region.
- Africa has more displaced people than any other region in the world, and more economic dislocation and damage, as a result of war (p38).
- Africa is urbanising at twice the rate of Asia and Latin America (p50).
- 300 million Africans do not have access to safe water. 60% do not have access to basic sanitation.

What does the Commission want to see done?

The Commission makes a number of bold recommendations, and group them under several headings, essentially things it would like to see happen to turn-around the African condition:

- governance and capacity building
- peace and security
- investing in people
- growth and poverty reduction
- more and fairer trade
- where the money will come from (both internal and especially external sources)
- how to make it happen (the roles and responsibilities of different actors)

Governance and capacity building

The Commission notes that governance is at the core of Africa's challenges; it highlights progress in that African leaders in the main are committed to free and fair elections, and to remain in power in accordance with the provisions of the constitution under which they came to power.

Specifically it recommends that:

- Pan-African regional bodies and programmes such the AU, ECOWAS, SADC, NEPAD, and the African Peer Review Mechanism should be supported.

- African countries should work with bodies such as the Africa capacity-building Foundation, the Partnership for African Capacity-Building, and African Regional Technical Assistance Centres, to draw up comprehensive capacity building strategies.
- Africa's institutions of higher education should be supported with $500 million a year for the next ten years, and $3 billion should be provided over 10 years to support centres of excellence in science and technology.

Peace and security

The report observes that in Africa we have 13 million displaced people and 3.5 million refugees, more than anywhere else in the world.

It calls for prevention of conflicts and recommends that we should:

- Reduce unequal access to resources based on ethnicity, religion, etc.
- Improve our early warning, mediation, and peace-keeping systems (p41)

On the international front:

- A UN Peace Building Commission should be set up during the course of 2005 (p42)
- Negotiations to set up an International Arms Trade Treaty should commence no later than 2006, and that in the meantime there should be more rigorous enforcement of existing regulations (UN)
- The UN should Identify, legislate, and enforce rules on conflict resources (p41)

Investing in people

The Commission addresses issues of education, health and social inclusion. It notes that under present trends we in Africa shall achieve the MDGs not in 2015 but between 100 and 150 years later.

In line with its focus on poverty reduction, the Commission places great emphasis on providing education and the provision of health services to Africa's population.

In the area of basic education it recommends that:

- Under the banner 'Education For All' Africa should provide free education at primary, secondary and 'higher' levels, including adult learning and vocational training. This, it says should be funded by the rich countries of the world.
- We ask the rich countries to help us provide more places for girls in the classroom.
- We ask the rich countries to set up and fund regional networks to support us in the development of more appropriate curricula at all levels.
- We reduce our teacher pupil ratio to under 1:40.

Growth and poverty reduction

The report concludes that: "Africa is poor ultimately because its economies have not grown."

In order to ensure growth and poverty reduction it recommends that Africa should:

- Invest heavily in improving our investment climate for local entrepreneurs.
- Devote about $20 billion a year on infrastructural development in order to achieve growth rates of 7% a year.
- Double the area under irrigation by 2015 (p50)
- Improve our storage facilities, roads, and energy infrastructure with support from the rich countries so that we reduce the level of post harvest losses that we suffer from. The report estimates that for an investment of between $30 million and £50 million, maize worth $480 million a year can be saved. (p50)
- Trade more with one another within Africa, especially food and other crops, which it estimates could be worth $50 billion compared to $17 billion from sales outside Africa. (p50)

- Improve land rights especially for poor people and women (p50)
- Increase the capacity of our local governments to manage urbanisation, and their own capacity to plan for it.

It calls on the rich countries to:

- Provide $10 billion for infrastructural development up to 2010 and another $10 billion after that date, subject to review. (p49)
- Use the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency to insure foreign and domestic investments in post conflict countries. (p49)
- Give $100 million to an African Enterprise Challenge fund to increase the access small enterprises have to finance.(p52)
- Give $100 million over the next 10 years to improve climate observation through the Global Climate Observing System.
- Include, by 2008, climate change risk factors as an integral part of their project planning and assessment programmes. (p51)

More and fairer trade

The report acknowledges that African goods suffer from severe tariff and non-tariff barriers as they enter western markets. It describes the barriers and subsidies as "absolutely unacceptable" and says that they are "politically antiquated, economically illiterate, environmentally destructive, and ethically indefensible." (p256)

The report suggests that in order for Africa to increase its income from trade the continent should:

- Improve road, rail, and water systems to help us get our goods to market quickly and cheaply. (p53)
- Streamline customs procedures thereby reducing the time required to clear goods. Customs delays add 10 per cent to the cost of exports.
- Create regional trade blocks by removing internal trade and customs barriers.
- Reduce dependency on primary commodity exports. (p54)

The report calls on the rich countries to:

- Progressively reduce all tariffs to zero by 2015 (p55)
- Apply international health and safety standards rather than those that they have developed specially for themselves.
- Ensure that any deal at Doha must allow reforms to proceed at a pace agreed by us not forced upon us.
- Conduct The Economic Partnership Agreement the EU is negotiating with Africa on the same terms as the Doha round. i.e. to deliver development, with no demands for reciprocity required of us.
- End all export subsidies and trade distorting support by 2010. (p55)
- End immediately all export subsidies and trade distorting support for Cotton and sugar.
- Transform Rules of Origin so that more countries are included and these countries should henceforth be required to add only 10% to the value of the goods to qualify. This would raise $5 billion a year for Africa and mean a full 1% increase in our global rate of growth. (p56)

Resources

The total cost of the projects envisioned will be $75 billion a year by 2010. The key issue is of course where the funds will come from to finance these recommendations. A number of possible sources of financing - foreign direct investment, remittances from the Diaspora, reversing capital flight from Africa, increasing savings, and increased aid - are examined. Having dismissed all but aid as not feasible, the Commission concludes that a doubling of aid is the best way of generating the finance required for these programmes.

The rich countries should contribute $25 billion a year. During the second phase, i.e. after 2010 the report estimates that should be able to provide another $12.5 billion, while the rich countries increase their contributions by another $25 billion a year.

This aid the reports says should be:

- Based on our priorities
- Used transparently and productively
- Free from strings.
- Paid directly into African government coffers.
- Committed for periods longer than three years.
- Given mostly as grant and not as loans.
- In support of the drive to increase income the Commission says that:
- All multilateral and bilateral debt (stock and service charge) should be immediately cancelled for poor sub-Saharan countries (p60).

Where necessary to achieve MDGs there should be immediate measures put in place to finance 100% debt service cancellation (p60). Quoting the Monterrey Commitments it declares "No country genuinely committed to poverty reduction, good governance, and economic reform will be denied the chance to achieve the MDGs through lack of finance".

Making it happen

This singles out certain actors and institutions and their role is vital in making all these goals become reality. As such the Commission recommends that:

- The World Bank, IMF, and WTO should structure their strategies to focus on development, growth and poverty reduction and announce these new strategies during the 2005 annual meetings;
- Africa should be given a greater say in the decision-making of the IBRD and IMF.
- The top jobs in IMF and IBRD should be open to any one and the selection made transparently and openly;
- Africa should be represented on UN Security Council;
- Finally the Commission recommends that there should be independent monitoring of progress on implementing its' recommendations and that this should be done annually by two people, one African and one International, with secretarial support from an existing African or international organisation.

What will it achieve?

The report almost makes promises that are going to be difficult to fulfil. It says certain crucial results will be achieved if all the recommendations are implemented. If all the recommendations are implemented then:

- Africa will achieve an average annual growth rate of 7%; this is a bold proviso and we will have to keep those who make it to these promises;
- 5 million additional hectares will be under irrigation and productivity will increase by 3.4% a year;
- All people needing Anti-retroviral treatment will get it by 2010;
- HIV/AIDS infections among young people will be reduced by 25% by 2010;
- 5m orphans and vulnerable children will be provided with access to basic services by 2010;
- 40m allowances of - $6 per month - will be provided as child support and disability support each year by 2015;
- there will be universal free primary education by 2015;
- secondary school gross enrolment rate will reach 50% by 2015;
- there will be free access to basic health services for all by 2015;
- the number of health workers will be tripled producing an additional 1 million extra doctors and nurses by 2015;

- the lives of over 5 million children under the age of 5 will be saved, and 5 million adult deaths will be prevented between 2006 and 2015;
- 500m people will be treated by chemotherapy against debilitating parasitic diseases by 2015;
- 380 million women and children will be protected against vitamin and mineral deficiency by 2006; 2006 is of course around the corner and civil society should already prepare to measure these promises and targets;
- 95 per cent of pregnant women and children will receive bed nets and will be treated for malaria 2015;
- 70% of TB cases will be treated by 2015; and
- Polio will be eradicated by 2008.

A critical analysis of the report

The report addresses the linkage between local and external factors and the global economic and governance regime; the continent's poverty situation is inextricably linked to challenges of global trade, finance, and governance.

What is now needed is for the report to be engaged in terms of clear benchmarks and indicators for measurement. It is also going to be important to see whether the British Government would be able to lock G8 and EU members into serious reciprocal commitments and pledges on aid, trade, market access, and debt eradication. Indeed, it will be important to distinguish between pledges versus commitments.

This report raises very serious challenges, and it has some major pitfalls. We will have to look out for the challenge and problem of political will, on the part of both African and western constituencies, to see whether they are committed to make the partnership work.

One trap the report itself falls into is to engage Africa in moralistic as opposed to "self-interest" terms; there is therefore not enough reference to power and interest considerations, an insufficient ingredient to generate action and commitment over the continent.

The biggest challenge for the Commission for Africa, and for its report is that Britain will find it exceedingly difficult to persuade fellow G8 countries to abandon trade subsidies and open their markets, effectively control arms traffic and finance a massive expansion of development aid. For very long, the world has just not been serious about Africa; there appeared not to be the realization that it is in the west's strategic interest to help stabilize the continent and live up to their historical commitments toward Africa.

It should also be stressed that proposals are not balanced carefully enough between mainstream and orthodox macro-economic growth theories, and a new developmental paradigm that places social policies and social development at the heart of poverty eradication. While no one can dispute the need for faster economic growth, it is crucially important that substance and meaning is given to the idea of the democratic developmental state.

Finally, on the question of an International Finance Facility, we should remember that in 2004 already, some G8 countries were lukewarm about the idea. Britain should therefore carefully spell out how they will go about getting buy-in into the process, or propose what alternatives it has if the idea should fail.

The report proposes the phasing out of some subsidies in the developed countries in order to address the unfairness of the current system of trade. It should be noted however that addressing market access limitations are not the central problem for Africa in the global trading system. Only those African countries with stronger export capacities are likely to benefit from better terms of trade.

We should also start with the basics, and see whether Britain and other G8 and EU countries could start with a basic idea such as living up to the 0,7% of GDP aid levels. That will be a true sign of commitment by Britain and the west and a breakthrough for mutual accountability and responsibility between Africa and the west.

It is critical to spell out in greater detail how people could participate in real and meaningful ways in politics. The report is for example silent on the crucial issue of meaningful gender participation and addressing the gender relations of powering Africa. While it raises the issue as an important one, it is important to spell out in detail how this issue is to be addressed in the continent.

On Governance, it is important for all of us to develop indicators that spell ways of holding both Africa and the west to account for commitments made and actions undertaken. As in other areas, we must watch out for a gap between promise and delivery. In short, the Commission for Africa report makes such radical suggestions in the areas of continental and global governance as it affects Africa. We must specifically be vigilant to whether actors on both sides of this divide – Africa and the Industrialized North – will live up to some of the radical governance provisions.

On the recommendation for greater transparency in the Extractive Industries, it would be interesting to see whether powerful foreign governments and companies from the industrialized north will live up to these far-reaching proposals.

We need monitoring mechanisms to see whether the outside world lives up to peacekeeping commitments, and whether donors would commit to 50 per cent of the already-existing African Union Peace Fund. The AU and sub-regional bodies have in recent years shown great willingness to keep the peace in Africa. Problem is that they lack resources, finances and equipment to do so.

So while in the report the international community is urged to help bolster Africa's peace support operations capacity, reality is that there has been over the past years peacekeeping disengagement from Africa.

The Commission's calls for investments in schools, clinics, and other educational and health facilities are key elements of the developmental state; yet the issues of social policy are not given enough attention in the report. While the report speaks of combining "people's participation in growth", it still locates it too much in neo-classical economic orthodoxies, underpinned by market economics.

The Commission's encouragement for African governments "to remove school fees for basic education", and for donors to fund the costs of such development projects until African governments can absorb the costs themselves, is a radical departure from World Bank and IMF orthodoxy, which called for African governments to levy school fees.

The report proposes another specific idea: that donors should make a long-term commitment to fill the financing gap in cases where African governments are not able to provide fees for basic healthcare. This is important, and we should be vigilant to see how these are met. But it is also important for us to see how African states scale up HIV/AIDS as a policy priority.

So the call by the report for top priority to be given to scaling up HIV/AIDS treatment should be taken seriously. Existing systems to tackle HIV/AIDS treatment must be strengthened. In recent years there have been much talk of the Global Fund for Aids. Yet we know that progress here is also uneven at best. As such, donors are asked to help address the $3.2 billion shortfall for 2006 for the Global Fund to Fight HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. Donors should also "develop incentives for research and development that fit the health requirements in Africa", and set up purchase agreements for medicines and increases in direct funding for African-led research.

The Commission report call for Africa's capacity to trade and to negotiate more effectively to be enhanced, and that the industrialised world's trade barriers should be dismantled as a matter of urgency. While these recommendations are important, yet they will be the result of taxing negotiations between the developing and developed worlds. Third, transitional support to help African countries adjust to new trading regimes must be provided. These again are far-reaching proposals that speak to the core interests of the west; and would be interesting to see whether the British government will succeed in even modestly moving its G8 and EU partners along this path.