

eAfrica

The electronic journal of governance and innovation

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Beyond Aid: Turning Rhetoric into Reality

TO RAISE awareness and fight for resources, international aid agencies and advocacy groups produce a regular flow of symbolic campaigns and supposedly seminal strategy reports. Each wins a few headlines, but none in the last half century brought fundamental change.

However, two new entries hope to break the pattern: the UK Commission for Africa and a plan by the United Nations to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Both reports argue that at its present pace, Africa will not meet the MDGs for more than 100 years. They propose to double aid, forgive debt, reform inefficient aid practices, end farm subsidies and stop the First World involvement in African corruption and money laundering.

But there are two major challenges. The first involves political savvy and salesmanship. When the UN meets to review MDG progress in September, Africa must persuade rich nations to match

their rhetoric with real commitments. Africa cannot rely on the UK or the tired formula of speechmaking at UN conferences. Africa must take tangible suggestions directly to legislators in French, German, Japanese, UK and US parliaments, where the budgets and rules for aid, trade and debt relief are determined.

The second challenge is Africa's capacity to utilise aid honestly and effectively. Just as oil revenue often induces corruption, massive new aid can worsen the situation in countries with already poor governance. The New Partnership for Africa's Development and the African Peer Review intend to improve governance, but major donor concessions seem unlikely without far more tangible commitments to ensure that new funds will be managed well.

This *eAfrica* examines the recommendations and problems with the UN and UK reports. Next month, we look at problems with aid administration at the coalface.



Verbatim

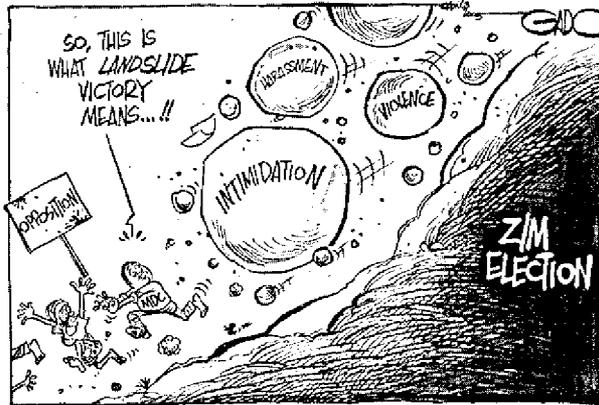
“He is treating the election like a wedding party, where the bride and groom invite friends to come and be merry. The only people that are coming to observe the elections are his friends.”

– Priscilla Misihairabwi-Mushonga, Zimbabwe opposition Movement for Democratic Change shadow foreign affairs minister, on President Robert Mugabe’s selective list of election observers.

“My family knows where I stand on this issue. They all have a code of conduct. If they don’t follow it, they will be treated like everyone else.” – Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, warning that even his relatives would not be spared in his current high-profile anti-corruption drive.

“I had no responsibility for what happened in the 16th, 17th and 18th Centuries but I ask your forgiveness for what we did to black people.” – Brazilian President Luis Inacio Lula da Silva apologising for the South American country’s role in African slavery, on a recent visit to Senegal.

“I decide, as a mediator ... concerning the elections of 2005, that the constitutional council should accept the eligibility of the candidates that will be represented by the political parties which have signed the Linas-Marcoussis peace agreement.” – South African President Thabo Mbeki, AU mediator in Côte d’Ivoire, opening the way for controversial former prime Minister Alassane Ouattara to run for president, a key demand of the rebel movement.



“The days when MPs were being intimidated by police for speaking their mind in public are long gone and President Kibaki had better understand this.” – Kenyan MP Sammy Weya, after Kenyan police questioned a member of parliament who was accused of singing a song hinting that President Mwai Kibaki was lazy, and that his wife Lucy held the real power.

“For the first three days they cut your buttocks with a razor. You lie down and they slice you. They slice your buttocks and tell you to talk.” – Itaai, a Zimbabwean refugee temporarily held at Harare’s Chikurubi Maximum Prison for having refugee status in South Africa.

“I know of plans to impeach me and I ask them to go ahead because I don’t care.” – Bingu wa Mutharika, President of Malawi, whose anti-corruption drive continues to garner disapproval among the political elite. There were reportedly 10 violations on which he could be impeached.

“Choosing the right general in the war against poverty will not assure victory, but choosing the wrong one surely increases the chances of failure.” – Joseph Stiglitz, Nobel Prize winner and a former World

Bank chief economist, on President George W Bush’s nomination of Paul Wolfowitz, US Deputy Defence Secretary, for the position of World Bank president.

“It cannot be reasonably justified in a democratic society to disallow one to contest elections on account of sex.” – A statement from the Lesotho Council of Non-governmental Organisations,

on reserving seats for women in the country’s first democratic local elections.

“The stark reality is that what kills young women here is often not promiscuity, but marriage. Indeed, just about the deadliest thing a woman in southern Africa can do is get married.” – Nicholas Kristof, in *The New York Times*, on President George Bush’s AIDS policy that advocates abstinence and marital fidelity over the use of condoms, in a continent where condoms could save lives of millions of women from being infected.

“Look at how all the intellectuals wrecked our country. How could George do any worse?” – A Monrovia resident, on soccer hero George Weah’s plans to run for the Liberian presidency later this year.

“When I got married we pulled down our bed net and gave it to the village tailor. He made the gown in a few minutes. The tailor charged only \$5.” – Atyanga Kolofrida, a Ugandan, on poor people turning bed nets into wedding dresses, a practice that has been widely discouraged. Malaria is endemic in 90% of the country.

Without Courage, Money Is Not Enough To Fight AIDS

Botswana, one of Africa's richest nations, has the money and the drugs to fight HIV, but those afflicted often don't seek treatment. A creative programme turns social stigma on its head.

JUST more than a month ago in the ballroom of Gaborone's International Convention Centre, Cynthia Leshomo was crowned Botswana's newest beauty queen. After competing against 11 other contestants, Leshomo sauntered along the catwalk, beaming in the bright lights and camera flashes, and proudly slipped into the sash proclaiming her new title: *Miss HIV Stigma-Free 2005*.

All contestants in this pageant are HIV-positive, and they're judged not only for their beauty but also as AIDS activists within their community. But it wasn't always this way. When Leshomo first learned she was HIV-positive five years ago, she was terrified.

'I was one of the people who was stigmatising other people living with HIV/AIDS because I thought young and beautiful as I was, I could not get infected. What was more, I was not of the class to be infected,' said the 32-year-old business school graduate. 'I thought I was the black sheep in the family; I thought I was cursed. I was totally in denial; I was just thinking of death.'

Facing reality

Leshomo's shame was so profound that she attempted suicide, swallowing a bottle of the antiretroviral medicines that had been prescribed to prolong her life. She slipped into a coma that lasted for two days, but awoke with a new commitment to fight the disgrace thrust upon those with the virus.

'That's why I went public with my status – to tell the whole nation, "Look here, we're living with HIV and AIDS,"' she said.

Botswana has one of the highest HIV prevalence rates in the world, with nearly two in five adults living with the



VICTORIOUS: The three finalists of the Miss HIV Stigma-Free 2005 beauty pageant. Photo: Gretchen Wilson

disease. Average life expectancy has fallen to just over 30 years, and evidence of the pandemic is everywhere. Billboards are emblazoned with images of red ribbons encouraging the public to learn their HIV status. Condoms are free in many public bathrooms. At every level of society, individuals once perfectly healthy are wasting away while pretending nothing is wrong.

'I thought young and beautiful as I was, I could not get infected'

The international community has praised Botswana's response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. This nation of 1.7 million people was the first in sub-Saharan Africa to provide a free, universal antiretroviral drug programme, which has won significant international funding and attention.

Although Botswana is one of Africa's richest countries with a massive revenue surplus, thanks to its mineral

wealth, it has learned the hard way that stigma – not simply a lack of resources – remains a leading obstacle to HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment programmes. Silence about HIV and AIDS remains widespread. Discrimination against those living with HIV – or those suspected of carrying the virus – continues to divide families and communities.

The Miss HIV Stigma-Free pageant is one of many efforts to eradicate the stigma. Four years ago Botswana's largest company, The Debswana Diamond Company (a joint venture between De Beers and the government), became the first organisation in the country to provide free HIV testing and anti-retroviral drugs, after discovering that AIDS had surpassed accidents as the main cause of death among employees.

The company knows that at least 1,300 out of more than 6,000 employees are HIV-positive. But only 410 take advantage of the treatment programme that is on offer.

'We just assumed that with such a [free medical] service that we'd be overwhelmed. But it didn't happen,' said Dr Onalethata Johnson, who coordinates the company's HIV/AIDS response. 'We have this money sitting there and it's not really being optimally utilised.'

Debswana contributes 3.1% of all workers' salaries to its HIV treatment fund. But Johnson said that presently about \$7 million is waiting to be spent.

That financial arsenal ought to allow the company to make a significant impact on the disease. But before treatment can begin, employees must be willing to learn their status. That is where fear and stigma block progress. Although the company has

a policy not to discriminate against infected employees, Johnson said many employees don't trust their employers to stick by this resolution and fear that participating in a testing programme may mean the end of their job.

'People feel that, "Well, what's in it for me, to know my HIV status? Except that I will be discriminated against,"' she said.

The sting of the stigma

Johnson said many employees who know their status don't disclose to others for fear of being ridiculed and ostracised by co-workers, friends and family.

'In this part of the world, the main mode of transmission is through sexual activity, and sexual activities are really

taboo to talk about,' Johnson said.

Cultural proscriptions against sexual discourse are not limited to southern Africa. But some experts say the widespread associations between AIDS and sex limits conversations about the complex factors that make some men and women more vulnerable to HIV transmission – including poverty, access to condoms and the inability to negotiate contraception within sexual relationships.

'It's a very sensitive topic because it's about sex,' said Richard Delate, spokesperson for UNAIDS in Johannesburg. 'So immediately when you talk about sex and HIV/AIDS, you also have to go back to the early days of conversations about AIDS, when it was associated with promiscuity. A lot of those connotations are still there.'

A key factor in the persistence of stigma is people's reluctance to publicly declare their HIV status, he said.

'We can easily say that there are millions of people with HIV, yet it's still very difficult to find someone to say they're living with HIV/AIDS,' Delate said.

Delate pointed to a recent report from South Africa, where more than one in five adults, or about 5.3 million people, are living with HIV. Last month, Stats SA, South Africa's official statistics agency, said more than 200,000 South Africans aged 20 to 45 died in 2002, more than double the number in 1997. Yet HIV remains largely invisible on the nation's death certificates, as families of the deceased often ask that the death certificates list the names of infections associated with HIV, such as tuberculosis or pneumonia.

'This is a problem of people acknowledging that [their family members] died of HIV/AIDS,' Delate said. 'We need to challenge people to be open about their status.'

But coming forward with one's status is not so simple.

'Silence about HIV/AIDS is about

An Income for Life

LAST year, Neo Chitombo became pregnant with her third child. Unemployed, she turned to *Thari ya Basadi* – an income-generating project for women living with HIV in Botswana.

Chitombo began meeting with other women, each stringing together small beads to make decorative pins and elaborate carrying cases for mobile phones.

'I would sit with the other ladies and we talked about our experiences,' said the 29-year-old Chitombo. 'The other women talk openly about their status. They have the self-confidence to share their experiences.'

To make each pin, Chitombo strings about 200 beads to form a pattern of a red AIDS ribbon. Many include rows of light blue, white and black – representing the Botswana flag. The pins are sold both locally and internationally for about \$2.25. By making 10 pins a day, seven days a week, Chitombo can earn a weekly income of about \$110.

'The money helped me buy the baby's clothing, and it helped me put food on the table for the other two kids that I have,' she said.

In addition to providing much-needed income to participants, *Thari ya Basadi* also aims to dispel widespread shame about the virus. To do this, each of the women sells her own products along with cards that include their photograph and personal story.

'The mission is to break down stigma, so that the buyer can look at the photograph and then look at the seller and say, "Oh, this is you who made this pin,"' said Michelle Schaan, founder and director of Health Promotion International, the non-governmental organisation that provides financial assistance to the group. 'It opens doors to speak more freely about HIV.'

Today, Chitombo spends most of her time as an educator at the HIV/AIDS Control Centre, a private company that offers counselling and information on HIV/AIDS to businesses in Botswana.

'I always tell people about *Thari ya Basadi*,' said Chitombo. 'I ask women if they want to have a day with us, and feel how it is to be in a group like that, where we give each other support.' – **Gretchen Wilson**

Thari ya Basadi can provide pins to conferences or businesses around the world (including special orders). For information call +267 3908180 or +267 72198036.)

security,' said Mathula Lusinga, a 29-year-old Zimbabwean living in Johannesburg. 'If you're sick, you need to keep your job, you need to keep your friends. A lot of companies and a lot of people still do not see AIDS as a normal disease, so people feel that the security of those things will be taken away by disclosing it to people.'

This is what happened to Kesego Basha-Mupeli, founder and director of the Centre for Youth and Hope AIDS, a local support group. Three years ago, she worked as a store clerk and disclosed her status to her supervisor.

Her boss told others about her status, and a week later, her job was eliminated.

That year, Basha-Mepeli organised the first Miss HIV Stigma-Free pageant.

By celebrating the beauty of the contestants and the positive contributions they make to treatment in their communities, Basha-Mepeli hopes the pageant will wipe out the shame associated with the disease and encourage people to get tested for the virus.

Educating the community

In her fight against stigma, Basha-Mepeli has a growing list of allies. The Urban Youth Project, a Botswana government initiative, the UN Foundation and UNAIDS all target young people most at risk of

contracting the virus, including street children, orphans, young commercial sex workers and unemployed youth. Counselling and testing centres are widespread and the Botswana Network of AIDS Service Organisations funds small initiatives that respond to stigma at a community level.

Botswana's political leadership has publicly addressed the HIV/AIDS stigma. President Festus Mogae, who himself has tested HIV-negative, has encouraged others to seek voluntary testing and has often stated that those not infected by the virus are still affected by it. Botswana's Minister of Health Lesego Motsumi has declared that initial prejudice against those living with

Boosting African Research to Fight AIDS

IN THE global fight against HIV and AIDS, not all research is created equal.

One of the most significant challenges in the field of HIV research has been adequately investigating the various forms of the human immunodeficiency virus. The fastest-growing strain is known as HIV-1, subtype C. This version is the most common throughout southern and eastern Africa, as well as much of Asia, including India and Nepal.

But to date, much research on HIV has been conducted on another subtype, subtype B, which historically was the predominant subtype in Europe, the Americas, Japan and Australia. As a result, most of the antiretroviral drug regimens developed to stem HIV were designed for use against subtype B in Western countries.

'In the West, the conditions for doing research may be ideal, but the applicability may not be relevant to the situation on the ground in developing countries,' said Thumbi Ndung'u, laboratory director at the Botswana-Harvard AIDS Institute Partnership for HIV Research and Education (BHP) in Gaborone. 'When this kind of research is done here [in Africa], the implications for public health are enormous, because they're actually being tested in an area

with significant rates of HIV infection.'

BHP is one of a few efforts in Africa to command leading research on the virus that has so dramatically debilitated the continent. Other projects include Uganda's Joint Clinical Research Centre in Kampala and the East Africa office of the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative in Nairobi.

BHP's undertaking began in 1996 as a research and training collaboration between the Botswana government and the Harvard AIDS Institute. Five years later, the project opened a state-of-the-art laboratory in central Gaborone. Here, the local and international staff conducts epidemiological and laboratory research on various aspects of the virus, including the prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) and the genetic components of HIV-1, subtype C.

Vaccine development is also a focus area for BHP. This initiative includes a number of investigations, including a Phase I safety trial on an experimental HIV vaccine candidate, as well as a vaccine preparedness study to determine the feasibility a large Phase II trial in Botswana.

'We believe ultimately a vaccine will be used to stop the spread of the virus,' said Ndung'u. 'So we're trying to understand the body's immune system's response to

the virus.'

Another objective of BHP is the investigation of the efficacy of Western drugs and patterns of drug resistance in subtype C.

'Some of the research we're doing is pretty cutting edge. For example, we're looking at vaccine design questions, exploration of immune response,' said Ndung'u. 'Those kinds of things have universal applicability.'

Human resources capacity-building is also a major component of BHP's operations in Gaborone. Through its KITSO AIDS Training Program, local health care professionals augment their clinical exposure to HIV and AIDS through a collaboratively-developed curriculum. In addition, the facility itself provides important infrastructure needed to train the nation's future researchers and scientists.

Ndung'u said some of the methods employed by BHP researchers are particularly innovative, especially in the exploration of minor drug-resistant variants of HIV.

'Those kind of things haven't been studied anywhere in the world,' he said. 'The lessons that we learn can be widely applicable to other developing countries where HIV may be a major burden on the population.' – **Gretchen Wilson**

HIV has already resulted in 'devastating negative consequences' by adding to stigma, inducing fear and curtailing standard diagnostic practice. Many ministers and members of parliament also bring up HIV/AIDS when addressing their constituencies and the public.

Yet the complex social and cultural values that lead to avoidance of HIV testing and treatment remain difficult to defeat.

'Stigma around disease is not particular to Africa or HIV/AIDS. It's something that exists in all cultures,' said Brad Ryder, spokesperson for the African Comprehensive HIV/AIDS Partnerships, a public-private partnership between the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, US pharmaceuticals group Merck and the Botswana government. In 2000, the Gates foundation and Merck each contributed \$50 million to a fund for HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention, and Merck contributes select medications for treatment. But to date, Ryder said just over half of the fund's \$100 million has been allocated.

'We are a little behind schedule,' said Ryder. 'We would have thought it would be done by now. But when working with local programmes, you can't just come in as a donor and throw money at the programmes.'

Stigma about HIV/AIDS has also delayed the anticipated progress, Ryder said, adding that the reasons for stigma go beyond the taboo nature of HIV transmission.

'HIV/AIDS was traditionally seen as a death sentence,' Ryder said. 'There was no known treatment. Until people became aware of what treatment was and how it could help them to prolong their lives, people didn't come forward.'

When Botswana rolled out its publicly-funded antiretroviral treatment programme three years ago, an estimated 110,000 people were in immediate need of drug treatment. Initially, many were reluctant to take advantage of the free services. But in 2003, the government introduced routine

HIV testing throughout the health care system.

Breaking the silence

By December of last year, Ryder said 32,000 patients were enrolled in the national programme, known as Masa, while another 7,000 receive drugs through privately-funded schemes. While this is only a fraction of those who need treatment, he said widespread treatment is crucial in the battle to end the shame surrounding HIV.

'Now I think we're seeing a great change,' Ryder said. 'As people see their friends, their relatives, their neighbours essentially taken back from their death beds as a result of ARV therapy, we see now a greater number of people coming forward for testing and seeking treatment for HIV/AIDS.'

Such a climate is what makes the Miss HIV Stigma-Free pageant possible. This year, the catered gala drew an audience of 500. On stage, each of the glamorous and healthy contestants had a chance to proclaim why she refused to be ashamed of her status.

'I have broken the silence. I have done what I could do to destigmatise AIDS,' said the outgoing Miss HIV Stigma-Free, 33-year-old Kgalalelo Ntsepe. Addressing the winner, she said: 'You will be subjected to prejudice. Be brave; be passionate. No one is more ignorant than the man or woman who doesn't know his or her status.' – **Gretchen Wilson**

'HIV/AIDS was traditionally seen as a death sentence. There was no known treatment'

'I have broken the silence. I have done what I could do to destigmatise AIDS'

Briefly

Africa calling: The continent has the world's fastest growth in mobile phone use, with more than 82 million users. According to a recently-released study that examined the social and economic impact of cellular telephones, backed by UK mobile phone giant Vodafone and the Centre for Economic Policy Research, in countries where there had been greater mobile use, there had been a higher rate of economic growth.

Diplomatic debt: Financial constraints have forced Kenya to scale down its overseas missions. Seventy diplomats – none of whom are ambassadors – were recalled at the end of March. The country has incurred a debt of \$4.1 million this financial year at its 38 embassies, high commissions and consulates around the world. The debt has reportedly accumulated from unpaid bills, rent and salaries, a situation that Foreign Minister Chirau Ali Mwakwere allegedly said was not new.

Going after graft: In March, President Olusegun Obasanjo fired the minister of education, Fabian Osuji, over allegations of bribery, and sacked the housing minister early in April. The Senate Speaker Adolphus Wabara, the country's third most powerful politician, resigned following corruption allegations. Wabara and five other legislators have been indicted.

Abrupt halt: Voter registration in Zanzibar turned violent and had to be suspended as the island prepares to take part in Tanzania's national elections in October. Tensions rose between supporters of two main parties, the Civic United Front (CUF) and Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM). In addition to the street violence, the CUF leader's house was attacked and set alight. The CCM has accused the CUF of illegally registering people in Zanzibar, whom it had taken from mainland Tanzania.

SPECIAL FEATURE

Is a Big Push the Answer?

Two new development blueprints put Africa centre stage, but leave basic questions unanswered.

EVERY few years in the global aid industry a new big idea washes ashore, sweeping over the wreckage of a past big idea gone wrong. In the 1960s, when central planning was the rage, money was poured into massive African irrigation and industrialisation projects. These once *avant-garde* approaches soon unravelled and sustainable development became the next big idea. When sustainability was not enough, experts advocated community participation in planning.

Structural adjustment came into vogue to remedy the chronic deficits, hyperinflation and crumbling currencies of the 1970s and 80s. In the 1990s structural adjustment's zeal for macro-economic stability gave birth to the idea that aid should be primarily focused on poverty alleviation.

Two recent reports – by British prime minister Tony Blair's Commission for Africa (CFA) and by economist Jeffrey Sachs on behalf of the UN Millennium Project – have thrust another grand idea into the mix: Africa is stuck in a 'poverty trap' from which it cannot escape without a so-called 'big push'. Both reports argue that so far aid has been dribbled out in small measures, tantamount to sending a single fire-fighter to an entire block of flats engulfed in flames. To douse the flames, they recommend a package of dramatically larger aid flows, complete debt relief, improved governance, and fundamental changes to the rules of aid and trade.

The Sachs report – *Investing in Development: A Practical Plan to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals* – includes a 300-page summary and nearly 3,000 pages of supporting reports. The Sachs effort is preparation for a major review of progress toward the UN's poverty reduction goals, which is set for September 2005. The CFA report, *Our*



THIS IS MY OFFER: UK Prime Minister Tony Blair is trying to put the plight of Africa on the agenda of rich nations. Photo: Southphoto

Common Interest, is the by-product of a year-long process of public meetings and research, the results of which Blair will use to push for changes in policy toward Africa when the UK assumes the leadership of both the Group of Eight and the European Union later this year.

The Sachs report calls for developed nations to boost aid from 0.25% of the gross national product in 2003 to 0.7% by 2015. The CFA proposes a 100% debt cancellation for the poorest countries, the creation of an international financing facility to front-load development funds to Africa in the next few years, and \$75 billion a year in additional development expenditure with one-third to come from African states and the balance in new aid.

The depth of the problem

Although more than \$1 trillion in aid and loans have been transferred to Africa in the last 50 years, much of Africa is poorer today than at independence. In 1965, the average African income was more than twice the income of east and south Asians. Today Asian incomes

are more than double those in Africa. Between 1990 and 2001, the number of Africans living on less than a dollar a day rose from 227 million to 313 million, according to the World Bank.

Based on present trends, the UNDP estimated in 2003 that it will take Africa until 2147 to meet the Millennium Development Goal of reducing poverty by half. Indeed, the gap between African performance and many of the MDGs is widening. As a result of the lack of progress in Africa, the UN Development Programme decided last year that it would no longer try to estimate when Africa would meet the MDGs.

'Tropical Africa, even in well governed parts, is stuck in a poverty trap – too poor to achieve robust and high economic growth and in many places too poor to grow at all,' the Sachs report asserts.

The big push concept argues that governance reform alone will not be enough to break out of this trap because unique circumstances hold Africa back, including high transport costs and

SPECIAL FEATURE

small markets; low farm productivity; a particularly high disease burden; lingering effects of colonialism and the Cold War; and a slow uptake of new technology and skills.

Both reports argue that – given Africa's present low levels of funding, high debt service costs and limited human capacity – the continent will fail to make meaningful progress on health, infrastructure and particularly education. Most of the continent cannot even afford to offer free primary education and the poor quality of instruction is doing nothing to help Africa gain ground on the rest of the fast-developing world.

Trevor Manuel, South Africa's minister of finance and one of 17 CFA commissioners, argues that if governments fully met public demand for health and education they would have nothing left for any other aspect of government.

The governance conundrum

Advocates of good governance argue that the idea of a big push is not new at all. Donor aid began in the 1950s with the optimistic belief that a concerted effort by developed nations would allow poor countries to leap over intermediate stages of development into industrialised modernity. Why, they ask, if that earlier big push failed, will this one be any more successful?

The first development push failed, in part, because donors turned a blind eye to corruption when recipients were considered necessary Cold War allies. Aid projects and advice were often ill-conceived for African realities or they naively assumed that states possessed the needed managerial and technical expertise. And many recipient countries focused more on exploiting aid flows for personal gain than learning how to maximise their impact.

Some of the past problems of aid have been fixed, but many have not. Blair and Sachs argue that the lack of progress is precisely why the world must redouble

its efforts and fix what remains broken. In moral terms, they ask, how can the world stand by and watch a catastrophe unfold? In political terms, how many more civil wars will erupt if African economies are allowed to implode?

For a continent where lack of money is all too common, the demand for more aid has been heartily embraced by political leaders. But the weakness of African governments complicates the issue.

Significant studies note that if Africa

Improving Aid Effectiveness

THE CFA argues that aid is more effective when it backs national priorities and endeavours, and in ways that:

- enhance the use of local knowledge;
 - strengthen existing systems (such as budgeting, monitoring and accounting, procurement, auditing);
 - enable authorities to make better policy decisions;
 - promote accountability to citizens;
 - reduce the burden that transactions place on already stretched governments;
 - channel assistance in ways that do not undermine public decision-making;
 - strengthen local systems, and;
 - conduct business so that government accountability to citizens is promoted.
- The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development guidelines on aid recommend that it should;
- align with country policies and strategies for reducing poverty;
 - make use of and support national systems;
 - be co-ordinated and harmonised with other donors;
 - provide predictably over the longer term; and
 - not be disruptive of annual budgeting practices.

does not improve the governance environment into which aid is poured, it will not have the desired effect of improving productivity, creating jobs or building competitive industries. Advocates of good governance assert that massive financial intervention will just exacerbate corruption, much as a sudden influx of money from oil or diamonds have destabilised many countries. Aid also can make it easier for countries to dodge the difficult process of internal reform and make governments less accountable to voters, who won't be asked to foot the bill because donors have done so.

The third way

The Blair and Sachs reports are significant because they attempt to end the stalemate that has raged for a decade between advocates of good governance and champions of compassion. The CFA and Sachs reports attempt to break the impasse by noting that aid and good governance need not be mutually exclusive but can be done simultaneously. Sachs argues that aid can fix governance problems if it is targeted at improving the systems of government, particularly in six key areas: public administration, the rule of law, transparency and accountability, political and social rights, sound economic policy and supporting civil society.

'Governance, in short, should be considered in operational terms, subject to investment and improvement,' the report says.

However, evidence suggests that aid projects to improve governance have fared poorly. Last year, South Africa completed a study of aid directed at improving governance entitled *Donor Supported Public Sector Reform in Africa – Dependency, Partnership and Development*. It concluded: 'Hundreds of millions of dollars have already been spent on training individuals and developing institutional systems and procedures, the collective impact of which is obscure and difficult to describe. The World Bank considers that projects and loan

SPECIAL FEATURE

CFA: Improving Governance

“EFFECTIVE states – those that can promote and protect human rights and can deliver services to their people and a climate for entrepreneurship and growth – are the foundation of development. Without progress in governance, all other reforms will have limited impact. While there have been improvements in many African countries, weakness in governance and capacity is the central cause of Africa’s difficult experience over the last decades. Improvements in governance, including democracy, are first and foremost the responsibility of African countries and people, and they take time and commitment. But there are also actions that outsiders can take both to support and to avoid undermining good governance. Two areas are crucial: capacity (the ability to design and deliver policies) and accountability (how the state answers to its people). The proposals are:

- providing strong political and financial support for the pan-African and regional organisations, particularly the African Union and its programme Nepad;
- making changes in donor behaviour, to get fully behind a comprehensive national strategy for capacity-building;
- building up professional skills and knowledge, including by revitalising Africa’s higher education, especially in science, engineering, and technology;
- broadening participation and strengthening institutions that improve accountability, including parliaments, local authorities, the media, and the justice system;
- increasing transparency of revenues and budgets, especially in countries rich in natural resources. This also makes a powerful contribution to conflict prevention;
- tackling corruption, including repatriation of stolen state assets; and
- strengthening the quality and management of data.”

activities focussed directly on public sector reforms have performed worse, on average, than other bank activities.’

An internal World Bank review in 2001 concluded that ‘on average 33% of [completed] civil service reform interventions and 38% of ongoing efforts achieved satisfactory outcomes. Even when desirable, outcomes were not sustainable.’

The South African study noted: ‘Donor or lending interventions have tended to deal with the technocratic systems rather than the fundamental problems of the post colonial state. They have also often insulated government institutions from deep-seated maladies by allowing them to outsource, privatise and de-centralise non-essential activities to the detriment of sectoral reforms and efficient service delivery.’

‘The lack of sustainability or limited impact, reflected in many donor supported governance activities, is often attributed, albeit intuitively, to a lack of organisational grounding and ownership, which results in known bad habits,’ the report concluded.

Reforming aid processes

Both the CFA and Sachs reports take that poor track record on board with a crucial qualifier: massive new aid without reform in aid institutions and African governance won’t work.

‘Without aid practices improving significantly from what they currently are, it would not be advisable to increase aid flows substantially,’ the CFA notes.

The CFA thus touches on a core issue that is discussed but not resolved by the New Partnership for Africa’s Development. Nepad and aid donors are unanimous in calling for improved aid mechanisms and African governance, but are vague on which should come first, the new funding or the improved governance. The CFA argues that aid can be doubled without causing distortions, but a major review of progress and governance would be necessary in three years to determine

if further expansion of aid can be digested.

The CFA notes particularly that wealthy countries have an obligation to improve the way aid is administered. ‘Africa must accelerate reform. And the developed world must increase and improve its aid and stop doing those things which hinder Africa’s progress. The developed world has a moral duty – as well as a powerful motive of self-interest – to assist Africa. We believe that now is the time when greater external support can have a major impact and this is a vital moment for the world to get behind Africa’s efforts,’ the CFA report argued.

That aid is poorly administered is not new. The Blair and Sachs reports are just the latest in a very long line of seminal reports and books outlining myriad problems with the complex procedures, self-interested bureaucracies and obtuse goals that make aid dysfunctional.

Sachs lists 10 problems causing dysfunction in the aid delivery system, including policy incoherence, lack of coordination between multilateral donors, lack of focus on MDGs, and a short-term focus on project definition and finance that causes volatile funding levels and detracts from long-term institutional improvement.

For example, many donor countries still ‘tie’ aid so that it must be spent on contractors and suppliers from the giving nation. Recipients thus have to use equipment and consultants from a variety of countries instead of choosing the most cost-effective solutions. The Organisation for Economic Development and Cooperation (OECD) estimated that tying can drive up costs by 15-30% and up to 40% for food aid.

Most donor nations set aid budgets yearly and rarely commit to projects lasting longer than two or three years. Projects to teach improved agricultural methods often spend the first year on setting up administrative systems and field offices. Risk-averse farmers will watch field trials but not partake until

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solid evidence of success is noted. If logistical or other problems intrude, a three-year project can be in its last year and still have made little headway.

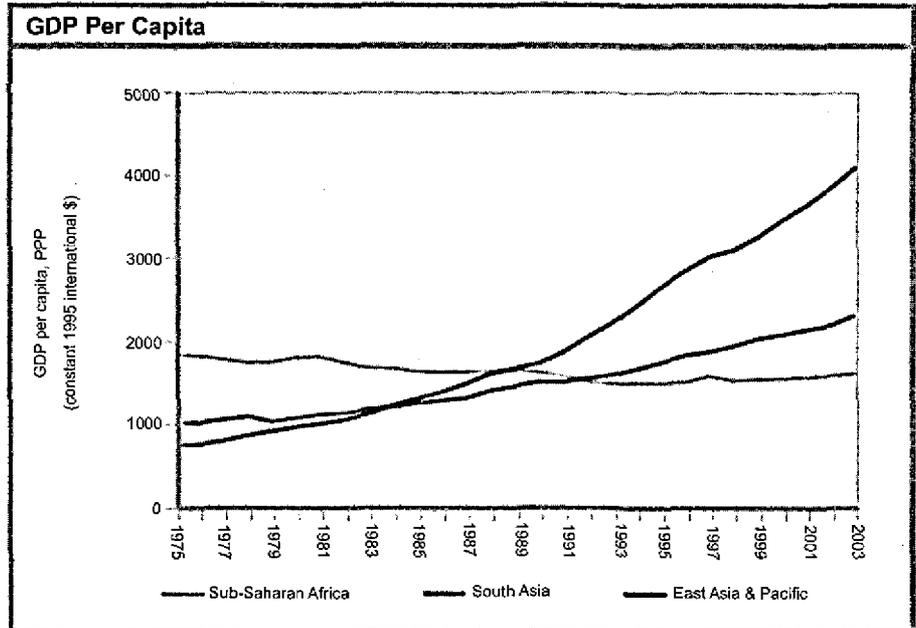
Rhetoric versus reality

Blair and Sachs may wrest some meaningful change from the developed world because both are linked to key summits later this year, which will highlight Africa's plight and put the case for donors to step up action to ease poverty on the continent.

But some critics are quick to dismiss the big push, pointing out the failure of previous high-minded efforts to help poor countries and the gap between rhetoric and action. Others note that the CFA in particular highlights inconsistencies in Britain's own policy. In 2003, there were 14 African countries affected by wars and 10 of these had bought arms from Britain, according to the UK-based development agency Action Aid. The EU, under British Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson, is putting pressure on African governments to open up their domestic markets to free-trade deals that could be devastating for local agro-industries such as tomato paste in Ghana and sugar in Uganda, said Action Aid.

The CFA calls for the international community to 'open international negotiations on the development of an international arms trade treaty' and to 'adopt more effective and legally-binding agreements on territorial and extra-territorial arms brokering'. Yet Britain is the main base for arms brokers and transporters operating in Africa and firms supplying weapons to the governments of Sudan and Zimbabwe as well as Congolese militias who operate with impunity there.

To stem the brain drain in the health sector, the CFA report says: 'Donors and African governments should urgently invest in training and retention to ensure there are an additional one million health workers by 2015.' Yet Britain is one of the main Western recruiters of



Source: World Bank, 2004

African-trained health workers at great cost to the continent.

On the West's role in African corruption, the UK government is also on weak ground. The CFA argues that developed countries must rein in corrupt foreign companies operating in Africa. British banks were holding \$1.3 billion looted from Nigeria by the late dictator Sani Abacha, but the UK government did not co-operate with Nigerian efforts to recover this stolen wealth. While global press coverage focused on the CFA, another report by the OECD singled out the UK as the only member nation that has not yet complied with the OECD anti-corruption code requiring it to enact laws by which its national companies can be prosecuted for corrupt practices abroad.

Public relations or something new?

Supporters argue that such inconsistencies reflect the report's candour and are a necessary first step. In a world inured to rhetoric, sincerity is no longer enough.

'The Africa Commission is just warm words until governments take action,' said Peter Hardstaff, head of the World Development Movement, a UK-based lobby group that focuses on poverty.

'Unless we deliver, it'll be just another report,' said Myles Wickstead, the Commission's director, at the launch of the report in March.

But there was praise from some African analysts, who welcomed the Commission's fresh approach to Africa's problems, especially its recognition that IMF-style aid conditions and structural adjustment packages had failed.

'The report marks a creative shift in policy thinking on Africa. 2005 is the time for this bold rhetoric to be matched with real measures that will transform structures that cause poverty in Africa,' said Thomas Deve of MWENGO, a regional NGO based in Harare.

Moeletsi Mbeki, deputy chairman of the South African Institute of International Affairs, who gave evidence to the Blair Commission last year, backed the report for its emphasis on Africans' responsibility for reform.

'I think the Commission's job was not to find policy solutions but to spark debate. Development policy is about cultural and political issues, this is the job of indigenous leaders. The Commission deserves credit for recognising this.

'The report touches on or addresses

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most of the critical issues. My only complaint is that it puts too much emphasis on aid going directly to governments. African governments keep trying to imitate the Washington consensus, yet they lack the capacity to implement even limited policies prescribed by Washington,' said Mbeki.

Who will do the work?

South Africa, which arguably has the largest, best financed civil service on the continent, is chronically unable to spend the funds allocated for public works. (See story on page 15.)

'Future implementation,' Sachs warns, 'often cannot proceed without a dramatic expansion of human capacity to deliver services ... There is also a severe shortage of managers in most line ministries,

especially at the district and community levels.' Help will be needed from 'NGOs or the private sector, with real input from civil society.'

He notes that the effort will need far more accountants, managers, teachers, health professionals, economists and agricultural instructors, but he also notes that African primary, secondary and tertiary education needs to be revamped to expand both the quantity and quality of graduates.

If African governments have severe capacity constraints limiting their ability to digest current aid levels, how will they effectively manage a doubling or tripling of aid in a few years? And how long would it take Africa to gear up to absorb the new largesse, if it comes through?

Sachs notes that managing the big push will require a thorough transformation of nearly every area of African governance. 'The implementation challenge has two main aspects. One is the sheer range of interventions that should be implemented simultaneously to achieve the Goals. The second is the need to reach large parts of the population to have a measurable impact on national outcomes,' Sachs wrote.

'His argument is "just increase the money and everything will be fine". Sachs had to be forced to include corruption as a factor in underdevelopment because he didn't want to give reasons not to increase aid,' said one aid specialist in South Africa.

Thus, the big push implies but does



More Production, More Growth

Trevor Manuel is South Africa's Minister of Finance and one of 17 members of the Commission for Africa. *eAfrica* spoke to him at the presentation of the CFA findings to 11 former African heads of state in Johannesburg, South Africa.



Q: How can Africa effectively absorb a doubling of aid as the CFA and Sachs reports recommend?

A: Without doing anything else you can double aid levels effectively.

It is important to understand the relationship between the Sachs report and the CFA. The way we are going the Millennium Development Goals won't be obtained for 100 years or more unless there is a major intervention in key areas. Even if Africa obtained the MDGs, it would still be far behind the rest of the world.

A pure focus on alleviating poverty won't get you to grow. You will be dealing with the symptoms rather than the causes. Unless we enlarge the productive side of the economy, we can't achieve the MDGs.

That is why the CFA focused on the productive side of the economy. If you were to meet all of the MDGs on health and education, the majority of countries would spend all of their resources on

that and would be in debt without doing anything else. Too many countries rely on a single commodity. There is too little intra-African trade. To diversify there is a skills base that you need where aid can help. In agriculture, for example, a big problem is you don't have the roads so you can't get from farm to market.

The route to market is fundamental to the success of changing agriculture. You have a lot of land far from the roads that cannot be used or where people cannot participate in markets. We in Africa don't have developed infrastructure to move produce from one country to another. Focusing aid on those things can help growth.

Q: Both the Sachs and CFA reports mention significant capacity problems constraining the ability to make use of significant new aid. What can be done about the capacity shortage?

A: There are more African engineers and scientists working in the US than on the continent. We spend about

\$20 billion a year on importing expatriate professionals. We must change those issues and universities so we can hold people. If government doesn't have capacity, they won't be able to deliver. In this the regional economic communities will be vital.

Q: You have said that the benefits of Nepad ought to flow first to the countries that sign up for peer review. Why?

A: We have 24 countries signed up for peer review and they represent 73% of the African population. Within the context of Nepad, I don't want the African Peer Review Mechanism to become a new set of conditions, but it is important that those countries that bare their souls should be recognised. Peer review brings risk and that risk should be met with the reward of the early flow of capital to states that have signed up.

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not overtly discuss a key problem: It will necessarily bring in a massive cadre of foreign experts, consultants and development officials at a time when Nepad is calling for Africa to learn how to solve and manage its own development.

'Structural adjustment was devastating because it ignored the human element and just went for growth. Now we've realised that growth wasn't enough, but the Sachs report seems to be still too much a top-down economist's view,' said a social scientist at one South African-based aid agency.

'The major problem with the report is it didn't say how this new aid will be used. It just wanted to justify increasing aid. But the capacity just isn't there. There is a real problem finding good people to work on this in Africa, including Africans,' she said.

Unfashionable as it may sound, Africa will have to bring in more foreign expertise to make up for the shortfall in capacity, said Mbeki. 'When capacity fails, you have to bring in outsiders. We're going to have to go back to the situation in the 1960s when Africa needed lots of expatriates, but they should be here to strengthen civil society and non-state bodies not tinker with government.'

'The report says Africa needs \$500 million a year to strengthen universities, but African scientists have gone to Europe or America and they won't come back. Western scientists, on the other hand, may be willing to come for two years at a time and we have to use them,' Mbeki said.

Reaction

What matters more is the reaction in the G8 members, who will be called on to make difficult changes to aid systems, fund debt relief and push through changes to trade rules. Already the US government has ruled out the International Financing Facility so aggressively marketed by British Chancellor of the Exchequer

Gordon Brown. The US Treasury Undersecretary for International Affairs, John Taylor, said in late March that the US supported in principle the Commission's report, but could not commit itself to the finance facility, which would borrow money on global capital markets to be repaid from future national aid budgets.

'The report has some good material on ways to reduce poverty. We support its goals and agree with its emphasis on measurability,' he told journalists in Nairobi, Kenya.

'The proposed International Finance Facility works for Britain and other countries, and that is fine. But for us, and others like Canada and Japan, our laws are such that the legislature cannot commit the nation's funds many years into the future.'

The US and Paul Wolfowitz – the incoming president of the World Bank – believe in linking fresh aid to good governance.

The Blair report also calls for Africa to match aid donors' funds. Trevor Manuel told journalists in Cape Town: 'Twenty five billion [dollars] would have to come from Africa – and it's there that you need to change taxation, you need to tax the elite – this does not happen enough in African countries. You need to prevent the outflow of capital and President Mbeki has spoken about (creating) a fund that would trap African pension funds, some 67% of which is invested in Europe and the US.'

Despite these reservations, Nepad has welcomed the Blair report.

'We need to get the buy-in from the African governments, then we have to work out how the proposals could be implemented,' said Mohammed Jahed, chief economist at the Nepad secretariat, in response to the report.

'But our main concern is that the Blair proposals still have to be sold to the G8.' – **Peroshni Govender, Paul Adams and Ross Herbert**

Briefly

No local justice: UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan has submitted 51 names of Darfur war crime suspects to the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague, following a Security Council decision. Sudan rejected the Security Council vote and vowed not to hand over any of its citizens to a foreign court. However Nigeria – backed by the US, in principle – has advocated an African tribunal to prosecute war crime suspects. Meanwhile, scarcely a month after joining the ICC, Kenya is planning to sign a bilateral immunity agreement from the court with the US, effectively making the East African country a safe refuge for American criminals.

Forgotten: About a million people have died and three million urgently need assistance in strife-torn eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. The region is now the 'biggest, most neglected humanitarian emergency in the world today', according to UN undersecretary-general for humanitarian affairs, Jan Egeland.

Moving, but where to? Squabbling over which city the Somali transitional government should relocate to when it finally moves from Kenya – where it has been since its inception in October 2004 – is threatening to further delay the administration's return to its homeland. President Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed and Prime Minister Mohammed Ali Gedi are against relocating to Mogadishu, for security reasons, angering other cabinet members and members of parliament.

Mover & shaker: Corruption, economic and rural development will feature high on the agenda of Namibia's new President Hifikepunye Pohamba, who took over in March from Sam Nujoma, the country's president since independence in 1990. Pohamba has shuffled his cabinet, and relocated the police force from home affairs to the newly created ministry of safety. Some believe he should demonstrate his seriousness about fighting corruption by abolishing the position of minister without portfolio held by the ruling party's secretary-general.

SPECIAL FEATURE

Blair: Our Common Interest

TONY Blair launched the report of the Commission for Africa, *Our Common Interest*, in March. Below are main points from the Executive Summary.

Getting Systems Right: Governance and Capacity-Building

Africa's history in the past 50 years has been blighted by two areas of weakness – capacity, the ability to design and deliver policies, and accountability.

Weak capacity is a matter of poor systems and incentives, poor information, technical inability, untrained staff and lack of money. Donors must invest to improve Africa's capacity, starting with a system of higher education, particularly in science and technology. They must help to build systems and staff in national and local governments, but also in pan-African and regional organisations, particularly the African Union (AU) and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (Nepad).

Donors must support national priorities of African governments rather than allowing their own procedures to undermine the building of a country's capacity. Money and state assets stolen from the people of Africa by corrupt leaders must be repatriated. Foreign banks must be obliged by law to inform on suspicious accounts. Those who give bribes should be dealt with too; and foreign companies involved in oil, minerals and other extractive industries must make their payments much more open to public scrutiny. Firms who bribe should be refused export credits.

The Need for Peace and Security

The most extreme breakdown of governance is war. Aid should be used to tackle the causes of conflict. That means improving the management of government incomes from natural resources and international agreements on how to control the 'conflict resources' which fuel or fund hostilities. It also means controlling the trade in small arms.

Leaving No-One Out: Investing in People

Funding Education for All will provide all girls and boys in sub-Saharan Africa with access to basic education. Secondary, higher and vocational education, adult learning and teacher training should also be supported. Donors need to pay what is needed to deliver on their promises.

Eliminating preventable diseases like tuberculosis and malaria hinges on rebuilding systems to deliver public health services. This will involve major investment in staff, training, new medicines, better sexual and reproductive health services and the removal of fees paid by patients, which should be paid for by donors until countries can afford it. Scaling up services needed to deal with HIV/AIDS must be given priority.

Going for Growth and Poverty Reduction

The developed world must support Nepad's programme to build public-private partnerships to create a stronger climate for growth, investment and jobs.

Donors should double spending on infrastructure – from rural roads and small-scale irrigation to regional highways, railways, larger power projects and Information and Communications Technology (ICT).

More Trade and Fairer Trade

Africa does not produce enough goods, of the right quality or price, to enable it to break into world markets and it faces indefensible trade barriers, which, directly or indirectly, tax its goods as they enter developed markets.

To improve its capacity to trade, Africa needs to make changes internally – improve its transport infrastructure to make goods cheaper to move; reduce and simplify the tariff systems between African countries; reform excessive bureaucracy, cumbersome customs procedures and corruption by public servants.

Rich nations must also dismantle barriers erected against African goods, particularly in agriculture; abolish trade-distorting subsidies to agriculture; lower tariffs and other non-tariff barriers to African

products. They must also not demand reciprocal concessions from African nations.

Where Will the Money Come From?

We call for an additional \$25 billion per year in aid, by 2010, with a further \$25 billion a year by 2015.

Ensuring the money is well spent will depend on two factors. First, good governance in Africa must continue to advance. Second, donors must significantly improve the quality of aid and how it is delivered. That means more grants, more predictable and untied aid, and donor processes that are less burdensome on the already stretched administrations of African countries.

The African Development Bank needs to be strengthened and the role of the Economic Commission for Africa enhanced. The IMF and the World Bank must give higher priority to Africa's development. They must become more accountable and give Africa a stronger voice in decision-making.

Rich nations should commit to a timetable for giving 0.7% of their annual income in aid. Aid should be front-loaded. Innovative financing methods such as international levies on aviation should be developed.

For poor African countries, there must be a 100% debt cancellation.

Conclusion

Bold comprehensive action on a scale needed to meet the challenges can only be done through a new kind of partnership. In the past, contractual and conditional approaches were tried, and [they] failed. What we are suggesting is a new kind of development, based on mutual respect and solidarity, and rooted in a sound analysis of what actually works.

This can speed up progress, building on recent positive developments in Africa, towards a just world of which Africa is an integral part.

SPECIAL FEATURE

Sachs: A Practical Plan to Development

IN JANUARY, the UN Millennium Project, an independent body advising UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, published *Investing in Development, A Practical Plan to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals*. Below are excerpts of the project's top 10 recommendations based on the findings of its 10 task forces.

Strategies to achieve MDGs: Developing countries should adopt strategies bold enough to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015. By 2006, countries must have poverty reduction strategies in line with the MDGs.

Scale up public investments: The MDG-based poverty reduction strategies should anchor the scaling up of public investments, capacity building, domestic resource mobilisation, and official development assistance (ODA). It should aim to strengthen governance, promote the private sector, human rights and engage civil society. The strategies should:

- Be based on an assessment of investments and policies needed to reach the goals by 2015.
- Spell out national investments, policies, and budgets for the coming three to five years.
- Focus on rural and urban productivity, health, education, gender equality, water and sanitation, environmental sustainability, science, technology and innovation.
- Focus on women and girls' health including reproductive health, access to economic and political opportunities, right to control assets and freedom from violence.
- Promote transparent and decentralised governance mechanisms.
- Include strategies for training and retaining skilled workers.
- Outline income generation strategies for poor people.
- Be tailored to support the special needs of landlocked, small-island, developing, least-developed and fragile states.
- Mobilise increased domestic resources by up to four percentage points of GNP by 2015.
- Work out an 'exit strategy' to end aid dependency.

Transparent development: Developing countries should implement these strategies in transparent and inclusive processes, working closely with civil society organisations, the private sector and international partners.

Fast-track countries: International donors should identify at least a dozen MDG 'fast-track' countries for a rapid scale-up of ODA in 2005.

Quick wins: Developed and developing countries should launch 'Quick Win' actions in 2005. They include:

- Free distribution of malaria bed nets and anti-malaria medicines for all children in affected regions by the end of 2007.
- Ending user fees for primary schools and essential health services by the end of 2006.
- Bringing 3 million AIDS patients in developing countries onto antiretroviral treatment by the end of 2005.
- Expanding school meals programmes in hunger hotspots using locally produced foods by the end of 2006.
- A replenishment of soil nutrients on farms with nutrient-depleted soils, through free or subsidised distribution of chemical fertilisers and agro-forestry, by the end of 2006.

A massive training programme of community-based workers should aim to ensure local communities have expertise in health, education, agriculture, nutrition, infrastructure, water supply and sanitation, environmental and public sector management.

Cross-border projects – infrastructure and governance: Developing countries must align national strategies with regional initiatives like Nepad and the Caribbean Community, and should receive increased donor funding. Regional groups should implement high-priority cross-border infrastructure projects with donor aid and carry out peer-review mechanisms to promote best practices and good governance.

Donors double aid and increase debt relief: High-income countries should increase ODA from 0.25% of donor GNP

in 2003 to around 0.44% in 2006 and 0.54% in 2015 to support the MDGs. ODA quality should be improved to include aid that is harmonised, predictable and largely in the form of grants-based budget support. Debt relief should be more extensive and generous.

- ODA should be based on actual needs to meet MDGs and on countries' readiness to use the money effectively.
- Criteria for evaluating the sustainability of a country's debt burden must be consistent with the achievement of the goals.
- Aid should support MDG-based poverty reduction strategies, rather than support donor-driven projects.
- Donors should measure and report the share of their ODA that supports the actual scale-up of MDG-related investments.
- Middle-income countries should also seek opportunities to become providers of ODA and give technical support to low-income countries.

Open access to rich countries' markets: High-income countries should open their markets to developing countries and help least developed countries raise exports through investments in trade-related infrastructure, including electricity, roads and ports.

\$7 billion a year for science and technology: International donors should mobilise support for global scientific research and development to address special needs of the poor in areas of health, agriculture, natural resource and environmental management, energy and climate. The total needs should rise to about \$7 billion a year by 2015.

Better donor coordination: The UN Secretary-General and the UN Development Group should strengthen the coordination of UN agencies, funds and programmes to support the MDGs at headquarters and country level. UN country teams must be properly trained and work closely with the World Bank, IMF and regional development banks to improve technical advice and support the goals.

SPECIAL FEATURE OPINION

New Money, Old Buckets Anger South Africa's Poor

Capacity, not lack of cash, undermines Pretoria's bid to ease poverty

IN FEBRUARY, residents of Phomolong, a township near the South African mining town of Welkom, looted local businesses and threatened to attack resident officials perceived as corrupt. Two days later, another township, Mmamahabane, erupted in violence as residents tried to block traffic on a main highway to publicise their frustrations. Similar episodes erupted across the Free State province, in central South Africa.

The spark for the riots was the region's archaic 'bucket system' of sanitation: many townships have no flush toilets and rely on often delinquent municipal workers to carry away fetid buckets of human waste. Although failure to pick up the buckets fuelled the riots, protestors turned violent to denounce much deeper problems of widespread municipal corruption, poor sanitation, bad housing and a long list of undelivered government promises.

The situation in the heart of sub-Saharan Africa's most developed country ought to be a warning to advocates of massive increases in aid to Africa.

Just not enough

Britain's Commission for Africa report calls for a 'big push' in spending on healthcare, education, roads, sanitation and other services by rich donor countries to help Africa achieve the Millennium Development Goals of halving poverty by 2015.

Yet, South Africa's attempt at eradicating poverty through spending more on services to the poor shows that committing more money alone is not enough to get results. Of all African countries, South Africa is probably the best equipped to tackle poverty. It has wealth and resources, and the government has shown commitment

to helping the poor. Yet this wave of riots exposed the gap between President Thabo Mbeki's vision for improving the lives of the poor and actual progress on the ground.

Each year the national government allocates more money – in the form of grants to local governments administered by the provinces – to meeting its goals of halving poverty and unemployment by 2014. Yet a large part of this money remains unspent. As of last December, only 56% of all Municipal Infrastructure Grant funds provided to the provinces for local service delivery projects had been allocated. Even at national level many ministries chronically fail to spend the funds allocated to them and large portions of donor aid has sat unspent.

Delivering his State of the Nation address in February, Mbeki acknowledged that his government has a human resources problem that is impeding its ability to deliver services to the people.

'We have to deal with those within the public service who, because of their negligence and tardiness, deny many of our people services due to them, in instances where resources have been made available to deliver those services,' the President said.

'I'm puzzled,' said Minister of Education Naledi Pandor after Mbeki's address. 'Provinces will say they have no funding, but when I check the numbers I discover that they have not used their infrastructural grants,' she told the *Mail & Guardian*.

However, Helen Suzman Foundation Director Lawrence Schlemmer argues that the central government failed to consider the lack of skills and resources in public administration when laying out its ambitious poverty

alleviation schemes.

'The rather heroic phrase "rolling out" is regularly used, suggesting vast carpets of reform being spread across the landscape of need,' he recently wrote in *Business Day*. 'All too often, however, the carpets of delivery have so many holes that they fall short of the coverage intended. It is not for want of good intentions – government really wants to help the poor – but its intentions far outstrip its ability.'

Lack in delivery

In his most recent report to parliament, South Africa's auditor-general found that 61% of all senior management posts in the provincial and local government departments responsible for service delivery were vacant. Local and provincial governments in particular are hobbled by the lack of people with the skills in project management, accounting and engineering that are needed to deliver services on the ground. According to government figures, only around 8% of government workers qualify as 'highly skilled,' while roughly 90% are considered either low- or semi-skilled.

The riots in the Free State have at last made these shortcomings painfully clear to government, critics say. During the violence that spread out from the Ntabazwe township near Harrismith, after police killed a youth during a demonstration last September, local councillors reportedly refused to meet their constituents because they feared for their own safety.

Visiting the province two weeks after the shooting, Mbeki lambasted local officials: 'Of course, resources are limited, but still, why should stinking buckets not be collected for two

SPECIAL FEATURE: OPINION

Zim Poll Fallout

THERE'S ongoing disagreement about the role played by African countries in sanctioning ZANU-PF's landslide in Zimbabwe's parliamentary elections on 31 March. Delegations from the South African government, ruling African National Congress, parliament and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) all said the poll echoed 'the will of the people', contradicting local Zimbabwean observers and foreign press who considered the election deeply flawed.

South African President Thabo Mbeki says the global media had prejudged the election; critics say Pretoria deliberately set out to legitimise a ZANU victory.

While less violence erupted than in past elections, allegations of systematic rigging soon surfaced. The opposition Movement for Democratic Change charges that 250,000 more votes appeared between the polls closing and the final result 48 hours later. The voters' roll may have contained over 2 million dead, relocated or fictitious voters. Millions of expatriates were disenfranchised. Over 130,000 potential voters (about 10% of total voters) were turned away in six provinces. Observers had limited oversight of ballot counting. State-owned media allowed the MDC token coverage, having demonised them for six years. Constituencies were carved up anew to boost the number of rural seats and dilute the opposition's urban dominance. NGO voter education campaigns were banned. Rural voters feared casting ballots for the opposition, and the only foreign observer teams came from countries friendly to Harare.

Last August, SADC countries agreed on election guidelines, that, among other things, called for freedom of association, political tolerance, judicial independence, equal access to state media, impartial electoral institutions and voter education. Zimbabwe has failed to meet at least eight of the ten key standards, raising the question about how this contest can be called free and fair. South African government observers, according to Elinor Sisulu of the Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition, found these 'elections credible on grounds that they would never accept in South Africa.' – Steven Gruzid

weeks? Why are the taps not fixed?' he demanded.

According to Siyabonga Memela, manager of the local government centre at the Institute for Democracy in Southern Africa, one of the main reasons is that the task of rolling out services ultimately falls on the sector of government least able to cope with it: the municipalities. Poor rural communities, which have the greatest need of development, also suffer because the people with the ability to solve local problems have migrated to the cities.

'A lot of grants are available for local municipalities, but there is always under-accessing because nobody in local government is able to put together projects to address the development needs of the communities,' he said.

Politics, rather than need, often dictates where new government housing and services are provided, he says. In the Phomolong township, for example, residents complained that precious public works jobs were allocated not by the prescribed system of drawing ID books from a bucket at random, but according to the whims of local officials. In other communities, officials pay themselves exorbitant salaries and drive luxury cars, but refuse to fill vacant posts or balance municipal budgets, Memela said.

Visiting some of the communities torn by civic unrest in the Free State, Darryl Worth, who represents the province on the local government committee of the National Council of Provinces, said he was shocked by the evidence he saw of corruption and ineptitude. In one township, he saw abandoned piles of bricks that were provided at least three years ago for new government houses, which were never built.

Money is routinely squandered in corrupt tendering processes and on projects that are never completed, he said, while municipalities also fail to take advantage of grant funding opportunities because their finances

are in disarray. For example, municipal governments entitled to claim back money from the province for providing basic water and electricity to the poor often fail to do so because no-one is keeping track, he said.

According to *Business Day*, a survey of all 284 municipalities conducted last year by government found that nearly half needed urgent help with managing their billing systems, municipal debts and service delivery programmes. Government has responded by establishing Project Consolidate, a programme that will mobilise teams of consultants to help 136 municipalities sort out issues ranging from corruption and political infighting to accounting ineptitude.

'Now we realise that it does not matter what policies people in the first and second coaches of the gravy train produce if the group in the last coach have no capacity to implement,' President Mbeki said at a local government conference in March.

After attempting to delegate service delivery to the municipalities, government is now trying to reassert its control over local spending and accountability through Project Consolidate and a range of other legislation.

'The president should not allow new policy to be approved unless it contains a realistic assessment of capacity for implementation, resources and manpower available to support it, and of the likelihood that corruption will undermine its effects,' Schlemmer argued.

The same advice could be applied to the Commission for Africa report. The Commission urges rich countries to increase current levels of aid to the continent by \$50 billion per year by 2015, but it does not explain how its ambitious plans will be carried out by the people on the ground, and where the skilled managers, accountants and engineers will be found. If South Africa is struggling to spend funds, what will a flood of new aid do in the rest of the continent? – Megan Lindow