NOT JUST AID

HOW MAKING GOVERNMENT WORK CAN TRANSFORM AFRICA

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INTRODUCTION

Country ownership has become the new watchword in development. The problem for traditional donors is that ownership is too often code for convincing developing country governments to adopt the donors' agenda as their own: a way of securing influence without imposing conditionality. What is really needed is genuine country leadership. As President Obama said when he announced the United States' new development policy at the UN Millennium Development Goals summit in New York in September, "We will partner with countries that are willing to take the lead. Because the days when your development was dictated in foreign capitals must come to an end."

My central message to the traditional development community is that to get the leadership you say you want from African countries, you need to start by putting yourself in the shoes of leaders themselves. In this essay, I want to set out what I think the development community needs to do to make this commitment to country leadership a reality. My argument is threefold.

First, leadership is fundamentally about getting things done. No two countries are alike, but what I have learned from my own time in office and from speaking to leaders across the world is that the challenges of government are—perhaps surprisingly—similar whether you are in London, Delhi or Accra. You need a vision for where you want to take the country, rooted in people's aspirations for themselves and their families. You need to be willing to make tough choices and be disciplined about what you focus on, which is politically difficult. But the really hard part is putting in place the machinery that will make it happen. Government is a race between expectations and capability. As a leader, you either reform government fast enough to deliver what people expect of it, or you lose the support to govern. I know from my own experience how demanding this can be.

I. Address of President Obama to the UN Millennium Development Goals Summit in New York, 22 September 2010. http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2010/09/22/remarks-president-millennium-development-goals-summit-new-york-new-york

Second, good leadership is therefore not merely a function of good intentions but of the capacity of the institutions that support leaders to turn those intentions into practical results. As I found during my ten years as Prime Minister, that capacity is often under-developed, even in a country like the UK. When I was first elected, I thought it was the leader's job to set the vision and let the system get on with implementing it. What I came to realise was that if I waited for the system to do what I was asking of it, I would never be around long enough to see it. I complained at the time of having 'scars on my back' from the frustratingly slow pace of reform. And if that was true for me running the government of one of the world's richest countries, imagine what it is like for the leaders of the world's poorest.

Third, this means that the development community needs to do more to support, not just exhort, leaders to do the right thing. Keeping leaders honest is essential: no leader deserves a blank cheque. I support the spread of democracy because the best judges of what the people want are the people themselves. I support the fight on corruption because it is a cancer that eats away at the bonds of trust and reciprocity on which all societies depend. But I believe that effective governance requires the presence of capacity, not just the absence of corruption. And I believe that, in the long run, real democracy requires credible political alternatives, and that the ability of people to choose governments on the basis of policy platforms and their competence in delivering them is central to both development and democracy.

I am an optimist about Africa. I believe that, with the right leadership, Africa has the potential to be to the first half of this century what Asia was to the second half of the last: an engine of prosperity capable of lifting millions out of poverty and allowing them to experience the opportunities of the global economy, not just its vicissitudes.

THE OPPORTUNITY OF AFRICAN LEADERSHIP

The time is ripe for a new approach to supporting African leadership. African economies are moving in the right direction. Economic growth across the continent has been strong, averaging 4.9 percent from 2000–2008.² And the growth registered in the last decade is just the tip of the iceberg. In the next decade, consumer-facing industries, infrastructure, agriculture and natural resources will add a trillion dollars to the continent's combined GDP.³ I have visited half a dozen African countries in the last few months and in each one the story is the same: investors are coming in, diasporas are coming back, and opportunities abound.

This turnaround in economic performance has been powered by dramatic improvements in political stability and the quality of governance.⁴ Incidents of civil violence fell 34 percent between 2004 and 2008, while scores on the Ibrahim Index of African Governance have improved in 42 out of 53 African countries since 2002.⁵ Sierra Leone is a case in point. Ten years ago, I authorised the British military intervention to disarm the rebels and end the civil war that had terrorised the country for a decade, with tens of thousands killed and 2 million displaced from their homes. A decade later, Sierra Leone has seen two sets of free and fair elections, its first peaceful transfer of power and, according to the World Bank, one of the fastest improvements in political stability of any country in the world.⁶

At the same time a new and more mature partnership is emerging between African countries and the international community: a partnership founded on

^{2. &#}x27;Lions on the Move: The Progress and Potential of African Economies', McKinsey Global Institute, 2010. http://www.mckinsey.com/mgi/publications/progress_and_potential_of_african_economies/pdfs/MGI_african_economies_full_report.pdf

^{3.} Ibid.

^{4.} As Steve Radelet notes, this is one of the key reasons for thinking that current growth performance is different from, and more sustainable than, earlier growth spurts. *Emerging Africa: How 17 Countries Are Leading the Way*, Steve Radelet, 2010. http://www.cgdev.org/content/publications/detail/1424378/

^{5.} African Economic Outlook 2010 (http://www.africaneconomicoutlook.org/); Ibrahim Index of African Governance 2010 (http://www.moibrahimfoundation.org/en/section/the-ibrahim-index).

^{6.} Worldwide Governance Indicators 2010. http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/index.asp

the recognition that whatever developed countries' moral or strategic imperatives in supporting Africa's development, the responsibility for determining Africa's future rests with Africans. As Nobel laureate Wangari Maathai has put it, "the fate of Africa depends on its own leaders and its own citizens." Or, as President Obama put it during his visit to Accra last year, "We must start from the simple premise that Africa's future is up to Africans."

This new partnership is being driven by trends both within the traditional donor community, and without. Within the donor community, the focus has shifted decisively towards increasing the effectiveness of aid, ensuring that it offers countries a hand up not a handout. The World Bank, USAID, DfID and others have been breaking new ground in supporting genuine partnership with African countries. Five years ago, the world's richest countries came together at Gleneagles to pledge a doubling of yearly aid to Africa and a 100 percent relief of multilateral debt for eligible Highly Indebted Poor Countries—a pledge which has seen \$100bn of Africa's debt stock wiped out over the last 5 years. Those were big achievements, and I'm proud of them. I remain convinced that aid still has a positive role to play in Africa's development. But the other, less noticed milestone was the Report of the Commission for Africa, which said that development could not be about aid alone and had to be about partnership and governance, and I also welcome the growing consensus on that. 9

Outside the donor community, the rising influence of China and other emerging powers, and the growth of new south-south partnerships, have challenged the traditional donors' intellectual monopoly on how development assistance should be provided. China's investment in African infrastructure has skyrocketed, rising by 46 percent a year between 2001 and 2007. China's annual

^{7. &#}x27;The new Africa starts here: how to make the people prosper', The Times of London, 6 June 2009. http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/article6436725.ece

^{8.} Address of President Obama to the Ghanaian Parliament in Accra, 11 July 2009. http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-ghanaian-parliament

^{9.} Our Common Interest, Report of the Commission for Africa, 2005. http://www.commissionforafrica.info/2005-report

infrastructure commitments south of the Sahara are now around double those of the World Bank. ¹⁰ I know that there are heated debates about what China is doing in Africa. But we shouldn't miss the lessons of how it is going about it. The Chinese approach is focused on delivering rapid, visible results. Whatever we think of it, it is certainly meeting a real demand felt by African leaders for politically significant 'quick wins'. Even if we do not always agree with it, we need to recognise and respond to the power of this approach, and its impact on the expectations of African leaders and citizens for other development assistance.

But the biggest opportunity of all is the new generation of visionary, reformist leaders that has emerged in many African countries, intolerant of the old excuses, determined to turn the page on the past. Not all of these leaders will succeed—risk is inherent to real leadership—but the signs are positive. In Liberia, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's strong stand on corruption has helped Liberia climb 51 places on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index in just two years. The people of Rwanda, under Paul Kagame's leadership, have transformed a country that was torn apart by genocide into a stable, high-growth economy, through private sector-led development that has delivered annual GDP growth of 7.1 percent, a doubling of per capita income, and some of the fastest improvements in the investment climate of any country in the world. In Nigeria, Africa's most populous country and economic giant, the challenges of leadership come together on a grand scale, with violence marring the 50th anniversary of independence and peace in the Delta still fragile. President Goodluck Jonathan has taken personal responsibility for reform, including of the country's power sector so long a brake on Nigeria's economic development. And elsewhere in West Africa, Sierra Leonean President Ernest Bai Koroma—elected on a promise to "run the government like a business"—has signed performance contracts with his Ministers, and in just three years the Government has managed to bring light to Freetown—once dubbed the darkest capital city in Africa—by

^{10. &#}x27;Lions on the Move...', MGI, 2010, supra.

increasing the supply of grid electricity more than fivefold, and has doubled the number of children born in hospital by eliminating health user fees for pregnant women and children under five.

It was conversations with Africa's leaders that led me to establish the Africa Governance Initiative (AGI), a charitable foundation of which I am the patron. The problem, they explained to me, was not a lack of vision: they had a very clear idea of what they were trying to achieve. Nor was it necessarily a lack of resources, since their development partners provided generous support to many of their priorities. What was missing was the capacity to bring the two together. The development world was abuzz with talk of country ownership. From Monterrey to Paris to Accra, declarations had been made and communiqués issued affirming that the principles of country ownership should be at the heart of all development assistance. As Prime Minister, summits like these were my stock-in-trade. But now that I was able to see things from the other side of the table, I could see that they weren't enough. Leaders needed practical support in creating a system that would help them articulate and deliver on their priorities, so that donors could align their assistance behind them.11 But that support, these leaders told me, was hard to find, particularly for the heart of government, and for the agencies charged with encouraging the growth of a vibrant private sector.

^{11.} As a 2008 World Bank report noted, "these principles require greater commitment from, and expanded capabilities for, leadership. Political leaders are responsible for setting goals and priorities, mobilizing consensus, and engaging both government officials and other stakeholders to deliver on results. Leadership development therefore must be supported" ('Leadership for Development Results: Country Case Studies', World Bank Group, 2008, http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTCDRC/Resources/Leadership_CS_inside_finalo608.pdf).

THE CHALLENGE OF SUPPORTING LEADERSHIP

It's easy to see why supporting leaders to deliver would present a challenge to the development community. In the first place, leadership seems too ephemeral a concept to find many champions at a time when the emphasis is on interventions that will deliver predictable, scalable results—especially when pressure on the public finances is squeezing budgets and reducing the appetite for risk. This has been exacerbated by a paucity of useful research on how and why leadership matters and how it can be developed. According to a recent study, of the more than one thousand articles over five years in two of the leading academic journals in development studies, only seven referred to leadership.¹²

While the emphasis on rigour and results is to be welcomed, it is a mistake to ignore leadership just because it is risky and hard to measure. In the West, we instinctively recognise that politics and performance go hand in hand, and that leadership is essential to drive through reform. But in Africa we have a tendency to treat government as a technocratic exercise that we can somehow make to fit our own plans and timetables. Of course, it's not. What another former British Prime Minister once called "events, dear boy, events", are a huge part of what you spend your time worrying about as a leader. I ended up spending six months of my life dealing with an outbreak of foot and mouth disease that threatened to destroy Britain's agriculture sector. It wasn't what I came into politics to do, but as a leader you don't get to choose what comes at you. All you can do is try to segment away some part of your attention to focus on moving forward the reforms that really are your priorities, whilst simultaneously dealing with the day-to-day crises. But there's absolutely no point in designing an abstract plan for government that doesn't take account of the political reality that will shape whether it is feasible. If we miss the politics, we miss the point.

In so far as they have thought about leadership at all, the development community has often been preoccupied with minimising leaders' ability to do

^{12. &#}x27;Leadership, Politics and Development: A Literature Survey', H. Lyne de Ver, LECRP, 2008. http://www.lpdlec.org/ftp/download/Public%20Folder/Background%20Paper%2003.pdf

harm, not maximising their ability to do good. There are understandable historical reasons for this: Mobutu Sese Sekou, Charles Taylor and Idi Amin are just three of them. More generally, the 'big man' tradition still casts a long shadow over Africa. Of course, not all of the older generation of African leaders succumbed to the traps of corruption and mismanagement. But much of the blame for the continent's stunted development since independence can be laid at the door of a set of greedy, incompetent and authoritarian leaders—and the governments in developed countries that helped prop them up.

There is no doubt that the democracy and accountability revolution that has swept across Africa over the last twenty years has done immeasurable good. From anti-corruption campaigners in Kenya and Nigeria to pro-democracy protestors in Guinea, the quiet heroism of the people who have fought to take back their government from the autocrats and the plunderers is truly inspiring. Nor is there any doubt that their work remains unfinished, and must continue to be supported. The question is whether it alone will yield the leadership Africa needs.

Every leader must balance the risk of committing 'errors of commission', doing things they should not do, against the risk of committing 'errors of omission', neglecting to do the things they should. Yet when it comes to Africa, the development community seems to be much more worried about the danger of doing wrong than the challenge of getting things done. The major donor countries of the OECD invest more than \$3.5bn in governance every year, but much of this—perhaps as much as 60 percent—is focused on tackling 'errors of commission' through public financial management systems, strengthening of civil society and oversight bodies, support to parliaments, media, NGOs, human rights watchdogs and anti-corruption commissions. The question is not whether these things are important—they clearly are—but whether more and different support needs to be given to leaders to help them do the right thing, not just catch them when they do wrong.

In fact, supporting leaders is crucial to creating the conditions where real, vibrant democracy can flourish. It is not a question of doing this instead of

strengthening transparency and accountability. The two must go hand in hand, to create a positive cycle where elected leaders are able to deliver for their citizens, in turn nurturing a politics that is about issues and competence not just ethnicity or patronage, and which offers a model to inspire future generations of leaders. But to get there we need a proper understanding of the realities of leadership.

Government is not a single, monolithic thing, with a single set of views and interests, even if it is convenient for outsiders to think of it that way. It is a set of sometimes co-operating, often competing organisations and personalities, with different values, worldviews, incentives and loyalties. What follows from that, as Carlos Lopes argues, is that "a state overstepping its bounds in certain areas could be woefully inadequate in others", ¹³ and thus may need to be strengthened at the same time as it is checked. That's also why strong individual institutions must be matched by mechanisms to make government work as a coherent whole, and more than the sum of its parts.

We also need to remember just how unprecedented are the demands we are placing on African governments. As Lant Pritchett has argued, when western countries were at a comparable level of income to African countries today, government institutions were rudimentary and fulfilling basic needs for security and some modicum of economic opportunity were about the limit of their ambition. He were also, of course, highly undemocratic. African governments today not only need to get the basics right but are additionally being asked to deliver justice, healthcare, schooling, environmental protection, gender equality and a whole panoply of other standards and services, even when they have only just emerged from conflict, and even when these are things that western governments themselves have only adopted relatively recently. And they are expected to do all this with a fraction of the resources and revenues:

^{13. &#}x27;Should we mind the gap?', C. Lopes, in *Capacity for Development: New Solutions to Old Problems*, Fukuda-Parr, Lopes and Malik eds., 2002.

^{14. &#}x27;Capability Traps? The Mechanisms of Persistent Implementation Failure', L. Pritchett, M. Woolcock and M. Andrews, CGD Working Paper 234, Center for Global Development, 2010. http://www.cgdev.org/content/publications/detail/1424651

Sierra Leone, for example, has just 3.3 doctors per 100,000 people (with only 75 doctors in government service). The UK has 66 times as many. Similarly the US government 100 years ago had three times as much revenue per capita as the Ugandan government (even factoring in all its development assistance) enjoys today. Of course, as the rise of East Asia shows, 'catch-up technologies' allow countries kickstarting their development later to develop much faster than the West did. But they also need access to 'catch-up governance' if they are to develop the institutions and techniques needed to run a modern state.

In these highly resource-constrained environments, leaders face a daily dilemma: do they try to govern responsibly, and drive a weak and cash-strapped bureaucracy to deliver the services that will persuade people that government is on their side; or do they take the easy way out, and secure the loyalty of their citizens through patronage, favours and intimidation? The rationale for encouraging contested elections, supporting powerful anti-corruption authorities and other accountability mechanisms is to sharpen leaders' incentives to choose the first path. But this assumes that the capacity of the state to respond to what leaders ask it to do is not in question. While this might hold true in developed countries (and it's easier said than done even there, in my experience), it is certainly not the case in many African countries.

^{15. &#}x27;Fragile States: Stuck in a Capability Trap?', L. Pritchett and F. de Weijer, *World Development Report 2011: Background Papers*, 2010. http://www.hks.harvard.edu/fs/lpritch/Fragile%20States%20-%20stuck%20in%20a%20capability%20trap.pdf

INTO PRACTICE

In short, Africa doesn't just need game-changing technologies; it needs game-changing leadership, and we need to support it. What would that support look like? First, it would be aligned behind leaders' priorities. This ought to be self-evident. Yet the evidence still suggests that on average only 60 percent of it is. 16 And even when capacity support is broadly aligned at a macro-level, the type of support that is provided is not necessarily what governments really want or need. The Government of Rwanda's Strategic Capacity Building Initiative, which is designed to pool donor support for capacity development and deploy it to address critical capacity needs identified by the government as a barrier to achieving its top policy priorities, is an innovative approach that is already being discussed as a model for other countries to follow. 17

Second, it would have the right scope. Many capacity interventions seem to fall into one of two traps. The first trap, associated with the oft-criticised 'Project Implementation Units' attached to some donor programmes, is to suck capacity into a parallel structure that stands apart from the rest of the system. The risk of this approach is that it creates temporary islands of excellence that do not strengthen (and in some cases actually undermine) the capacity of the government to deliver in future. The second trap, often a consequence of trying to avoid the first, is to embark on sweeping, long-term public service reform programmes that try to transform the performance of the whole system. The risk of this approach is that while it holds out the promise of sustainability, it is an illusion, because these programmes struggle to generate the momentum they need to overcome inertia and opposition. As the World Bank noted in a recent report, "The Bank's experience with civil-service reform has been, to put it politely, mixed." In my view, these programmes can't succeed unless

^{16. &#}x27;Survey on Monitoring the Paris Declaration', OECD, 2008. Indicator 4. http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/58/41/41202121.pdf

^{17.} Still Our Common Interest, Commission for Africa progress report, 2010. http://www.commissionforafrica.info/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/cfa-report-2010-full-version.pdf

^{18. &#}x27;Africa's Future and the World Bank's Role in it', World Bank Group, 2010. http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTAFRICA/Resources/Africa_s_Future_and_the_World_

they have the backing of political leaders, and they won't get that backing unless leaders can see a clear link to the things they most care about: delivering tangible results that citizens will notice. So while islands of excellence are never enough, reform in a vacuum, or focused on vague generalities, does not work either. What we need is a middle ground that links long-term system improvement to leaders' more immediate political incentives. One big lesson from my time in office, and the work I have done since in Sierra Leone, Rwanda and Liberia, is that the best way to build effective institutions is to focus on a small number of priority projects, and drive the system to deliver these in a way that both ensures that they get done and strengthens its capacity to take on other projects in future.

Third, it would provide practical support to leaders themselves. In any system, particularly one with weak capacity, the attention of political leaders—particularly Presidents and others at the centre of government—is one of the few reasons that things get done. As Prime Minister, I didn't start to see real improvement on many of the issues that were my personal political priorities until I bolstered the capacity of the centre, by setting up the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit in 2001, which ensured that I was getting frequent updates on the progress of my priorities and which arranged for me to have regular stocktakes with the relevant ministers in each area to 'hold their feet to the fire' and find out what the blockages were. I also needed policy specialists within my office to give me independent, expert advice on issues and decisions. In my experience a strong centre of government improved, not weakened, the capability of the rest of government.

I hear the same message from the leaders I work with today. As Ellen Johnson Sirleaf said on my recent visit to Liberia: "a well-performing Presidency and

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^{19.} Others have recognised the importance of this. Kathy Cahill, Deputy Director of Integrated Health Solutions Development at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, for example, has said that "political leadership is critical to ensure that effective health interventions reach women and their families." http://www.ministerial-leadership.org/events/aspen-institute-receives-87-million-grant-bill-melinda-gates-foundation-ministerial-leadershi

Ministry of State enhances the work of all of our other sector ministries." The lesson I draw from this is that the effectiveness of the centre in managing the leader's time—how access to the leader is regulated, how the leader's day is allocated, the quality of the analytical support and advice the leader receives, the way in which the leader's decisions are communicated to the rest of the system, the ability of the leader to track progress on his or her priorities—is a critical capacity need. The Africa Governance Initiative's work suggests that even simple improvements to the systems around a leader—such as reforms to presidential diaries, standard reports from ministries on performance, or more effective Cabinet processes—can have a huge impact on a leader's capacity to drive delivery.

In providing this practical support to leaders we also shouldn't forget that it is the international community itself which often places some of the biggest demands on leaders' time. I've spoken to Ministers in Africa who have been asked by donors to attend three-day strategy retreats, taking them away from their ministries in a way that would never be acceptable in a western government. And I've met senior officials in finance ministries who spend 60 percent of their time servicing donor missions. We should be asking ourselves: is this really the best way to get the effective leadership we talk about and which Africa needs?

Finally, support would be provided by people and organisations that, without compromising their impartiality, are comfortable with politics. Like any other reform, developing capacity is about change, change is about choices, and choices are political. However technocratic we might try to make it sound, every capacity development intervention is political to some degree because it creates winners and losers, strengthens some rather than others, and pits reformers against the status quo. Yet the risk of being 'too political' is sometimes overblown while the alternative risk—of interventions failing because they do not understand or engage with the politics of reform—is often understated.

The work I now do in Africa provides vivid evidence of this. In a country like Liberia, recovering from a brutal conflict which decimated infrastructure and public services, and drove out human capital, it is easy to see why everything feels like a priority. But no government can do everything at once, especially with scarce resources. Tough choices and trade-offs are inevitable, and while technical analysis is essential, the final decisions are always political. That's why to engage effectively with African leaders we need to be able to think politically not just technically. This doesn't mean being partisan or backing one political player over another. But it does mean recognising that when we work with leaders we are working with politicians, facing a particular set of pressures and with a particular set of priorities, and standing in a leader's shoes means understanding what these are.

CONCLUSION

Leadership matters. If it didn't, the world would not be watching with quite such baited breath to see what happens in Zimbabwe if elections go ahead next year as planned, or speculating about what presidential and gubernatorial elections in Nigeria in April will mean for the world's eighth most populous country, or wondering how the statecraft of the Government of South Sudan will change should it become an independent country following the secession referendum scheduled for 2011.

But while the development community recognises that leadership matters, it has been reluctant to go beyond a fairly superficial engagement on the question of what effective leadership is and how to encourage it. I have argued in this essay that it is not enough for the development community to just say that Africa needs more Mandelas and fewer Mobutus. Instead, it needs to give careful thought to how it defines, supports and incentivises good leadership in a way which gives substance, not just symbolism, to the term 'country ownership'. The ultimate goal must be to create a dynamic where current African leaders can deliver real improvements in the lives of their citizens and where the next generation of leaders—in some countries the first to grow up under stable, democratic rule—have models of true public service they can aspire to follow.

No-one has done more to put the issue of leadership at the centre of the development debate than the businessman and philanthropist Mo Ibrahim. In 2007, he established a prize to reward African leaders who govern effectively and retire at the appropriate (constitutionally mandated) time. Yet after honouring Mozambique's Joaquim Chissano in its first year and Botswana's Festus Mogae in its second, the prize committee has decided not to award the prize for the last two years. Critics have made much of the failure to find a worthy recipient, taking it as further evidence of "the pitiful state of democ-

racy in Africa".²⁰ I disagree with that diagnosis. I remain an optimist. As I look at the current generation of African leaders, and to the young people growing up in the countries they lead, I see many with the instincts to be future prizewinners. The development community already invests a great deal in keeping them honest. The question is whether it invests enough in supporting them to succeed. Good leadership is about capacity, not just character.

Tony Blair

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This essay was prepared for a public address by Tony Blair hosted by the Center for Global Development in Washington, D.C., on December 16, 2010.

^{20. &#}x27;No one worthy: Mo Ibrahim prize for good governance in Africa goes unawarded', *The Times of London*, 20 October 2009. http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/africa/article6881564.ece