

BUILDING BRIDGE WITH THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY: NORTH-SOUTH COOPERATION

By

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Political independence has not yet brought the much desired change in many African countries. Many African nations have by and large been dependent economically on either their former colonies or on the international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, the African Development Bank, the European community (EU) and others. Many have not yet been successful in standing on their own i.e. becoming self reliant or getting their products into the international market for a fair and equitable competition. As a result, they have suffered from a debilitating economy for many years now. It is very sad that over 30,000 children die daily in Africa due to poverty, malnutrition and diseases. Generally, while the winds of change and development have blown in many European as well as North American countries, the continent of Africa continues to suffer from natural as well as man-made catastrophes. Conflicts and wars caused by territorial, ideological, racial, ethnic, linguistic and many other differences have become part of the daily lives for millions of Africans. These conflicts and wars have brought not only hardship and insecurity to millions but also impoverished many African countries.

Many African leaders frequently depend upon their military might rather than seeking peaceful and democratic solutions to their internal as well as external problems created from within and imposed from abroad. Instead of feeding their people, many African countries spend a great deal of their budget to build and re-build their military might. Consequently, during the late 1980s and into the 1990s, conflicts and wars have caused loses of so many lives and forced millions of Africans to flee their countries in order to find peace and democracy not only in neighbouring countries, but also in industrialized countries.

Generally, Africa's immigrants or refugees live within neighbouring African countries consisting by and large, of rural migrants, moving over short distances. Recently, however, more and more African migrants and refugees, generally those with relatively better educational achievement and professional training have legally or illegally managed to enter the industrialized countries. These

people have lived and studied there; others have acquired skills that can be very useful and that can help move the economy of their country of origin.

International organizations such as the African Union (AU), the United Nations (UN), International Organization For Migration (IOM), The European Union and other international agencies working in collaboration with industrialized nations mainly the G-8 have been active and have done a better job in mediating and helping resolve political problems many African countries face. They have also been assisting African countries financially from time to time mainly to alleviate poverty and to address relief aid. However, their assistance has by and large been inconsistent and not sustainable. Further, their assistance focussed on politics rather than economics. Therefore, it did not help tackle the unbearable economic problems and did not bring significant change in either the economy or in the life standards of millions of African people.

Recently, however, the most industrialized countries of the world, the G-8 have finally put their acts together and made the African issue their number one priority and by doing so, they seem to have developed the right economic approach to resolve the number one enemy of the continent of Africa: poverty and under development. The G-8 countries during their summit in Scotland made a big effort to reach at debt annulment; better trade relations and more funds to poor African countries mainly those in Sub-Saharan Africa. They made a buoyant move to allocate over \$50 billion a year (on debt cancellation) in order to help poor African nations unravel their precarious economic conditions. There is also a belief that North-South cooperation will build bridge with the international community and help increase global support. This can also help create a conducive and enabling environment for the international community to create a positive setting for poverty eradication and livelihood improvement for millions of less fortunate people in many African countries mainly sub-Saharan countries. Further, this noble decision will help narrow economic disparities and increase global integration between the rich and the poor countries.

It is hoped that the G-8 leaders will continue giving due considerations to the predicament of the poor countries of Africa in order to bridge the unfair economic imbalances between the North and South. Further, it is hoped that the initiatives taken by these G-8 nations to increase development fund, cancel the cumbersome debt obligations and provide equitable and favorable

market provision for African products in the global market will have a positive impact on the economy of those poor African countries; herefore, African nations must get their acts together and do their home works in fighting rampant corruption and mismanagement and develop workable strategies in order to escape from the vicious circle of poverty and underdevelopment. It is also important for African countries to implement NEPAD to further embark on the issue of proper democratic norms, good governance and put every effort to achieve sustainable development. Here, it is important to note that Africans in the Diaspora must do their part in order to help the economy of their country of origin move forward. Many countries in Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean and the Middle-East have benefited from their Diasporas. For example, the Koreans, Chinese, Indians, Pakistanis, Vietnamese, the Jamaicans, Trinidadians, Bahamas, the Israelis, Palestinians; Somalis among many others have done a very admirable job in a variety of aspects in order to help the economy of their respective country of origin move forward. Although the Ethiopian Diaspora have done a considerable job in that regard, considering the number and the potential of the Ethiopian Diaspora, more can be done to help the economy of Ethiopia move forward.

Despite political differences, I believe Ethiopians in the Diaspora can have one and same agenda on the developmental endeavors of their country of origin. Ethiopians in the Diaspora can agree to disagree on political differences; however, they can always agree on helping their country on many other aspects such as the economic issue. They should separate political differences with economic and developmental assistance towards their country of origin. Economic assistance can among other things be done in either or the entire following manner, First, they can increase the amount of remittance they send to help their family and friends through official financial channels. Second, they can invest in their country of origin in areas of their preference and expertise and that can be done even from where they are. They can do this by pooling together their resources and establish share companies. They can, if they wish, also come back to their country of origin to settle for good, invest in their homeland temporarily or permanently and for that they can rest assured that there is a conducive and enabling environment for them here back home. It is when Africans help each other, cared for each other and their homeland that industrialized countries such as the G-8 come to their door step to help. It is imperative therefore, that the North-South cooperation continues to grow on a concrete and practical plan for

partnership and for doing business. Since Africa has different levels of development and some have better leverage than others, the North-South Development Plan must consider among others, diversity of levels of development and different leverage for better implementation purposes. Although \$50 billion a year is only 1/5th of 1% of the combined entire earning of the developed nations and thus, it may not go nearly far enough. However, the intention of the G-8 to make the African issue their number one agenda in their summit is indeed commendable. It is therefore a very good start that one can say: way to go G-8! However, the implementation of this very good intention is yet to be seen. Even though, the donors have to follow strictly whether the aid is benefiting the poor or not, the G-8 should not impose cumbersome conditional ties on poor countries. On the other hand, the African nations have a lot to do in order for this good intention to have good implementation because they have to act as partners and not simply as receivers from the other side. They have to direct along with the G-8 partners the right economic approach to their respective development strategic plan and display the highest degree of unity and solidarity in global issues towards a greater articulation of their concerns and interests. Further, African countries must strive for better representation of their national interests in the international trading system and must maintain great solidarity among them (South-South cooperation) in order to achieve these goals. South-South trade should also be enhanced and further market access from developing countries must continue to stimulate South-South trade, including through negotiations within the Global System of Preferences among Developing Countries.

A lesson can be drawn from doing business with China in that regard. China is a big investor in many African countries and result oriented strategy transform between China and Africa has been working just fine. Africans must work hard to build their market economy and have a fair and equitable access within the western market. Whereas the G-8 nations way far from the continent have been concerned about poverty in Africa, some disgruntled African intellectuals in the US and Europe and few opposition party leaders from their sanctuary in North America and Europe have publicly opposed the G-8 debt relief and additional aid to their own countries of origin. Whereas Bob Geldof, Bono, J.Saches (a renowned Economist) and millions of people around the world are campaigning for debt relief and additional aid to Africa, few African

opposition political party leaders are advocating just the opposite. What an irony and what a paradox. Isn't that a crime against humanity?