



*Action for a strong
and prosperous
Africa: the response*

Report of an open electronic discussion in response to the Commission's Consultation Document, '**Action for a strong and prosperous Africa**', November 2004

December 2004



Preface

Between 15 November and 3 December 2004, later extended to 17 December, an open electronic discussion of the Commission's Consultation Document, *Action for a strong and prosperous Africa*, was held.

In total 203 participants registered, including 104 located in the UK, and 69 in twenty-one African countries. They were asked to respond to issues raised in the document, with contributions invited on three broad themes: financing for development and opportunities for economic growth; human development, culture and participation; and, governance, peace and security.

Some 276 postings in all were made. This report summarises them. The main body covers the three themes, with comments and proposals sorted by the sub-themes or 'threads' identified in advance. Many direct quotes have been included to capture the flavour of the discussion. The original postings, arranged by theme and thread, can be seen at:

http://www.odi.org.uk/africaconsultation/africa_cgi_bin/discus/discus.cgi.

The discussion was managed for the Commission by a team from the Overseas Development Institute, co-ordinated by David Sunderland and made up by Ed Anderson, Daniel Demie, John Lakeman, Peter Gee, Chris Taylor, Victoria Wheeler and Steve Wiggins.

The Commission for Africa

The Commission for Africa is an initiative of the UK Prime Minister, Tony Blair, to provide a coherent set of policies to accelerate progress towards a strong and prosperous Africa. It will report in spring 2005, including recommendations to the G8, EU and other wealthy countries, as well as African countries.

<http://www.commissionforafrica.org>

Overseas Development Institute

ODI is Britain's leading independent think-tank on international development and humanitarian issues. Its mission is to inspire and inform policy and practice which lead to the reduction of poverty, the alleviation of suffering and the achievement of sustainable livelihoods in developing countries. It does this by locking together high-quality applied research, practical policy advice, and policy-focused dissemination and debate. It works with partners in the public and private sectors, in both developing and developed countries.

<http://www.odi.org.uk>

Table of contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
MAIN REPORT	9
Financing for development and opportunities for economic growth	9
Investment climate	9
Opportunities from trade	9
Debt relief	11
The volume and effectiveness of aid	13
Infrastructure	16
Natural resources	17
Climate change	19
Human development, culture and participation	22
Culture and the arts	22
Primary and secondary education	26
Tertiary education & professional training	28
Health, water and sanitation	30
Participation	32
Migration and urbanisation	34
Governance, peace and security	36
Building effective states	36
Conflict and insecurity	38
Reducing corruption	40
Social protection and vulnerability	41

Executive summary

Financing for development and opportunities for economic growth

To improve the **investment climate** for Africa, contributors stressed advertising the opportunities of Africa, to counter the frequent negative images of the continent. A slogan was suggested:

"Every one of us is an African".

But in addition Africans themselves need to invest in Africa, both by mobilising internal savings and by attracting funds from expatriate Africans.

Trade preferences were debated. Some had allowed industries to develop: sugar was a case where there were strong employment multipliers. Proposals to eliminate EU preferences were thus to be resisted. But others pointed out that to rely on preferences was risky. Preferences to African countries were, moreover, possibly unfair to poor countries in the rest of the world.

Value could be added to traded goods by processing raw materials, but learning to develop and market such produce required support.

Relaxing strict rules of origin that apply to some trade agreements would allow new manufacturing industry to export to lucrative markets in the North.

Opinions were sharply divided on **debt** relief. For some, much of the debt was the result of result of Western impositions, and mistaken development advice: was it then fair to insist on repayment?

'Do not make the global poor pay for the follies of the world's sophisticated financiers.'

But others were concerned that countries that had misused funds or borrowed recklessly should gain from debt relief, while more prudent states did not.

Was more **aid** needed? Some thought its value was marginal compared to the benefits of more trade and private investment. Others believed that much good could be done with aid used wisely, but noted that the quality of aid left much to be desired; both in the way some donors lavished funds on expatriate staff and consultants, and in the corrupt use of aid by some countries.

Aid could be increased by getting the industrialised countries to live up to their promise of transferring 0.7% of GNP. The UK, it was proposed, should hold a referendum on achieving the target by 2006.

For some, investment in agriculture was central, given the ability of farming to generate jobs and reduce the cost of food. But others disagreed, seeing low returns in the sector.

Several writers stressed the value of improved finance for small business development, through micro-finance, 'mini-finance' for larger businesses, and 'muni-finance' to local authorities for community programmes.

An intriguing way to harness the skills of the multi-nationals to local development was proposed:

'The large multi-national corporations that have African subsidiaries should be encouraged each to foster at least 25 small African entrepreneurs and if necessary to establish Small Enterprise Promotion Centres ... where small entrepreneurs can get the advice and help they need to make their venture a success.'

Investment in **physical infrastructure** — including water resources and supply, roads, telecommunications, and electricity — was also supported. Not only would this help draw in foreign investment, but also it was a feasible and ethical use of aid monies.

The possibilities of telecommunications and information technology were commended; sectors where there was much scope for private investment and public-private partnerships.

Concern was repeatedly expressed that the Commission had not taken natural resources and environmental issues seriously enough. It had, moreover, a narrow focus on selected problems, ignoring other salient matters — such as desertification. The consequent loss of land, water and vegetation gives rise to ‘rural exodus, poverty, famine and growing conflicts.’

Poor governance was cited a major reason for loss or degradation of natural resources. A new development was the export of resources, including logs, to China and East Asia, some of which had been extracted unscrupulously.

Working with local people to conserve their resources in their immediate locality, and finding livelihoods that conserve, rather than degrade, resources was widely recommended. Local had to be empowered to take control over their resources. Eco-tourism was an example: it had the potential to create jobs and conserve resources.

Organic, low till farming, with minimal use of external inputs, and conservation farming, that makes full use of soil moisture, were seen as ways to feed Africa.

Climate change provoked sharp differences of opinion. Some saw it as ‘irrelevant’, while others saw it as critical threat. That Africa had contributed little to the problem did not mean it would not suffer the consequences:

‘... the effects of global warming will soon undo any advantage that may have been gained in Africa from debt relief.’

Responses suggested were to make full use of the potential of irrigation, and to develop renewable energy sources — a measure that would also foster new skills.

Human development, culture and participation

Culture, in the widest sense, attracted much attention. Given the acknowledged diversity of cultures, was there such a thing as ‘African’ culture? Or even national culture?

Many saw local cultures as having been subordinated, first to cultures brought in by colonial powers, and now by a globalised, international media. This has not only impoverished the cultural life of Africa, but has also impeded economic and social development.

Remedies suggested included rediscovering, revaluing and reinvigorating indigenous elements. This would be the foundation for more appropriate development practice, based on appreciation of diversity, participation and dialogue.

‘It has been said that development without culture is “growth without a soul”.’

More specific recommendations included that of promotion of indigenous languages, of books printed in the vernacular; and of the value of drama.

‘Performing artists have produced excellent work in diverse fields such as the fight against AIDS infection, in developing national identities, and discussing gender issues; they can be encouraged also to engage with peace issues and conflict resolution.’

Turning to culture more narrowly defined as the arts, several postings noted that, quite apart from their intrinsic value, the arts had economic value. Culture was an international industry and Africa should make full use of its riches. Contributors lamented the weak support that most states offered to art and artists of all kinds.

In **primary and secondary education**, more attention to vocational and specialised training was recommended, perhaps using apprenticeships within secondary schooling, so that fee-paying parents can be reassured that their children will get work as a result.

Education could be improved by encouraging more participation by parents in education provision, by twinning African schools with counterparts in the North, and by using child-to-child teaching.

The issue of the language of instruction came up, with clear recommendations for multi-lingual education that would allow primary pupils to be educated in their vernacular.

Expatriate Africans can assist education:

‘The least Africans in the Diaspora can do is support education back in their countries.’

African **universities** would benefit from partnerships with their Northern counterparts. The potential of electronic learning and distance education were stressed.

Much support was expressed for **vocational and adult education**: seen as vital for generating the skills for development, within a framework of life-long education:

‘Skills empower individuals, enabling them to contribute to the economy and support the local community and the family. We tend to place too much emphasis on degree level learning and neglect skills learning.’

Discussion of **health** was dominated by HIV/AIDS. In stemming this, cultural norms, including sexual behaviour needed changing. Grandmothers have a key role in transmitting norms to their grandchildren: work with them.

Some were concerned that important dimensions of the HIV/AIDS crisis did not get the attention they deserved. Included were the fate of women and girls who bore the brunt of the epidemic, the rising rates of child malnutrition, the plight of Africa’s 12 million orphans, and hospice and palliative care.

To improve the delivery of health services, handing over services to local providers and communities was suggested. Transport affects health: it gives access to fixed health facilities, and facilitates immunisation, surveillance and education. User fees for health services were condemned, one writer remarking:

‘... taking money off poor people when they are sick is not a good idea.’

There was a strong plea for giving attention to **water and sanitation**, however mundane activities in these areas may be.

‘Water and sanitation aren't particularly ... newsworthy, but they are the priorities of poor people.’

There was clear support for encouraging more **participation**, through more consultation and encouraging the voices of those not usually heard when decisions are made. Women’s exclusion from decision-making was especially worrying, leading to a proposal for a ‘Gender Equality Development Fund.’ Theatre can give people voices, make use of indigenous knowledge and include those usually left out.

The economic motivations for **migration** were emphasised: creating jobs back in home areas was the way to curb excessive migration. The international ‘brain drain’ was particularly worrying:

‘The best of Africa's intellectual capital is outside ... the continent proper. ... We have to find new ways of harnessing Africa's global intellectual capital.’

Proposals included reverse migration as well as job swaps between Africa and the industrialised countries.

Governance, peace and security

General proposals to **build more effective states** included constitutional reform, with electoral democracy, free media, independent judiciary, etc. Some recommended work with local government, a level not only close to people but also one that may function even when

the national administration does not. Twinning towns in Africa with those in the industrialised world can help build capacity and raise aspirations.

There was support for the use of electronic media for governance ('e-government'):

Several voices noted how *not* to build states. Dependency on aid was particular danger.

A lively debate broke out over the causes of **conflict**. Poverty and starvation were blamed by some contributors: they led to struggles over resources. Water was a particular concern. In contrast, others saw ethnicity and tribalism as the main culprits, observing that conflicts break out even in the more prosperous parts of Africa.

Some contributions also noted the role of neighbouring countries in stirring up conflict, and recommended that aid should be suspended to such states. Large conflicts may result from small disputes, so that these need to be monitored before they expand.

Several contributions noted the importance of democracy and better governance in providing security. More specifically, the scope for civil society was noted, observing the good work done by:

'... growing networks of peace activists in Africa, for example the Coalition for Peace in Africa and West African Network for Peace.

Some states, however, wary of domestic and international NGOs, as well those that represent Africans in the Diaspora, discourage such work, or set up 'official' NGOs.

Including women and youth in peace talks was another suggestion:

'Women are often inextricably connected to conflict and to processes of conflict resolution but yet are disempowered once peace talks begin.'

Where international mediation was involved, the demands on time and patience are heavy, but worthwhile:

'... dialogue is inevitable for success and will have to take place before crises break out. It is particularly challenging given the asymmetry in analytical capacity [between international agencies and African bodies]. ... There is no replacement for political will to support endogenous African initiatives.'

Peace settlements are often fragile, raising the risk that conflict recurs is high as the transition to peace is made. Effective reconstruction after conflict is vital.

Most agreed that **corruption** is a scourge for Africa and its development. Political and civil service appointments were often seen as a way to enrichment — for life. A distinction was, however, drawn between large-scale embezzlement that some elites carried out, and the more everyday bribes taken by low-level functionaries such as police and customs officers:

'corruption caused by greed has to be tackled differently to actions to provide for family and community, which can sometimes be perceived as corruption.'

Remedies were seen generally in independent media and judiciary. More specific, additional action was to pay civil servants living wages, audit donor funds rigorously, publicise tax returns from public figures, and generally encourage civil society to scrutinise government — community radio was invaluable in this. The value of learning from experiences in other parts of the world in tackling corruption was commended. Funds sent to the industrialised countries that were proceeds of illicit activities should be frozen.

On **social protection and vulnerability**, a contrast was drawn between the present lack of provision, and the past when

'... many African countries did have social security systems such as universal free health care system and pension. After structural adjustment was introduced, those schemes were almost wiped away.'

Lack of insurance makes people unwilling to take on the risks of investment. Recent initiatives to re-introduce social welfare, such as Ghana's health insurance scheme and Tanzania's pensions, were thus welcome.

Main Report

Financing for development and opportunities for economic growth

Investment climate

The obstacles to attracting foreign investment were clear: including:

‘ ... political instability, lack of cultural dynamism, lack of patriotism (both in leaders and citizens — this problem is enhanced by what the foreign media portray in their respective countries about Africa) and finally lack of action-oriented economic policies.’

Getting the private sector, either international or domestic, to invest was proving problematic. Donor agencies apparently do not have the answers. As one contributor put it:

‘ ... the existing liberalization handbooks hardly highlight what states should do when the private sector fails to deliver as expected ...’

Several contributions argued that there were some good prospects, and that it was important to advertise the attractions. Hence:

‘The African continent needs a marketing campaign to raise the level of awareness of all that is positive, the success stories and where things are changing for the better.

‘ ... Hilary Benn [the UK minister for international development] himself said on the Today Programme [an influential UK current affairs programme] ... that it is this positive talk that is needed in order to encourage investment.’

And:

‘There needs to be a strenuous campaign to persuade the populations of wealthy western countries that the welfare of Africa matters to them. I suggest that a suitable slogan for this campaign would be, "Every one of us is an African".’

Other contributions stressed the importance of developing the internal market in Africa, a matter that would mean investing in infrastructure and encouraging trading within the region.

Import-substituting industrialisation had not worked in the 1960s, but since today’s internal markets are so much larger, the strategy might be re-visited.

Some pointed out that it was not just a question of attracting international investors, but that was much to be done to mobilise African funds. Said one contributor:

‘The real problem ... is to break down the barriers hampering the functioning of a single financial market and, of course, by providing potential borrowers with more information and making easier the access to the source of capital for investment.’

And another added:

‘Savings and Investment need to be encouraged by Africans for Africans.’

Opportunities from trade

Most contributions debated trade preferences, illustrated by the case of sugar. As either members of the Asia, Pacific & Caribbean group, or in some cases as Least Developed Countries, parts of Africa enjoy preferential access to the protected EU market, and in particular, the highly protected sugar market. The benefits are clear:

“Real” fair trade sugar is ACP and LDC sugar imported into Europe under the ACP-EU Sugar Protocol and trade preferences. The preferences are worth around 300% to 400% of the world market price to the sugar farmers and workers in Africa.

‘Fair Trade coffee, meanwhile, pays a premium of around just 60% of the world market price of that product. ... liberalization of the coffee market has badly hurt countries dependent on coffee (e.g. Burundi and Ethiopia). Let's not do the same for sugar.’

There is, however, a very real chance that these preferences will soon be lost.

‘... the European Commission proposes, and the UK vigorously supports, a reform of the EU sugar policy which is explicitly designed to keep out sugar produced in Least Developed Countries; in other words the Commission proposes to strangle LDC sugar industries almost at birth.’

The advantages of sugar exports were illustrated by the case of Kilombero sugar mills, Tanzania — see Box 1.

Box 1: Development multipliers: the case of Kilombero sugar mills, Tanzania

‘... since 1998, some US\$50 million has been invested (by Illovo Sugar, South Africa and ED&F Man, UK) in the two Kilombero sugar mills situated in a remote and poor area of Tanzania.

‘Kilombero now directly employs 6,000 people and indirectly up to 100,000 people in the local community depend on sugar production to lift them above a subsistence level.

‘There are now 16 primary schools on the estates, and one secondary school, all funded by Kilombero Sugar Ltd., educating some 6000 children.

‘In addition, the estates fund clinics for primary healthcare and HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention, including the provision of anti-retrovirals.’

‘As production has expanded since the Illovo takeover, the region has witnessed rapid growth in the number of local support firms such as haulage companies, cane cutters and mechanics.

‘While Kilombero produces mostly for the domestic market, the forthcoming lower EU sugar price has put its annual export of 11,000 tonnes of raw sugar to the EU into doubt. Kilombero's 6,000 already-poor outgrower farmers are likely to be those hardest-hit by lower farm-gate prices per tonne of cane. The decline also puts downward pressure on domestic prices just as Kilombero is moving into the production of higher value-added refined sugar.’

But others replied that to rely on preferences was risky, since they could be withdrawn; and that the privileges enjoyed by some African countries might be at the expense of equally poor and deserving nations in Asia. It was noted that:

‘Africa already has highly preferential access, and improving this only for Africa would disadvantage other poor developing countries notably in South Asia.’

There might also be drawbacks in the wider scheme of development:

‘Countries trying to protect preferences can also hinder larger liberalisation goals, which is counterproductive from global development perspective.’

A further concern was the foreign ownership of some sugar mills, and where the benefits thus accrued.

'In the case of Zambia, both the production of sugar and utilisation of EU market is controlled by a MNC which has only limited local linkages. Further, most of the sugar cultivation is controlled by foreign investors. The main benefit and local linkage which the company could show is that it employs about 6,000 people as cane cutters. The local cane producers claim that they are not getting any extra benefit from the higher EU quota prices, then who benefits most?'

Otherwise, contributors noted the potential of processing local raw materials.

'Africa should be encouraged to process their products and sell them as finished goods.

'There should be some kind of financial assistance for those companies and individuals who intend to spearhead exports of value added products from Africa. Tea, Coffee, Cocoa and other agricultural produce should be marketed in finished and packed form right from Africa. There should be a funding facility to cater for those marketing activities.'

Rules of origin were cited as an obstacle to industrialisation:

'What could be done for all developing countries would be to make it easier to establish new manufacturing industries by allowing more use of imported inputs (relaxing rules of origin). The EU could follow the US example on this.'

Debt relief

Several contributions saw debt, in common with other ills, as resulting from Western impositions, mistaken development advice and conditions.

'Since 1980 the co-called "Washington consensus", including ideas of "governance" such as representative democracy, rule of law, property rights, free markets etc have been directed at Africa with the effect that per capita income has declined.

Looking at the list in the [consultation] doc[ument], it looks like the approach is to do more of what has been tried in the last 20 odd years.

Doesn't the issue of why the Washington consensus has failed these countries need to be addressed in a meaningful way in the report? The WB and the IMF have no interest in addressing this because they are the ones who have failed in Africa.'

'... a lot of debt was incurred because the lenders got it wrong, and then relied on the idea of sovereign debt being good as gold, when in fact the development process and global economics had created bankruptcy for the borrowers. ...

'In my view all old debt should be frozen until the parties have decided who is to blame for the old debt fiasco. Where lenders are at fault, cancel the obligation. Where government borrowers have misplaced the funds, do some forensic accounting and recover the funds wherever they may be. Do not make the global poor pay for the follies of the world's sophisticated financiers.'

On the other hand, there were concerns over any blanket programme of debt forgiveness, since in some cases the debtor countries had mis-used the original funds.

'It seems unfair to the countries that managed their economies to 'forgive' only the debt of countries that are hopelessly in debt. Some countries in Africa have not lost

vast sums or stolen themselves into bankruptcy. They have instead enforced good standards and implemented sensible strategies. Where is their 'forgiveness' money?

'Blanket calls for total debt forgiveness promote bad governance.'

'... some countries have gone into debt because of poor domestic financial policies, high levels of corruption and overall lack of the rule of law and good governance.'

'Does wiping out debt mean countries can begin with clean slate to begin borrowing again that can possibly lead to similar fate in the future? If so, what are the new measures that can be taken to prevent this?'

These contributors were adamant that any debt forgiveness or new funding must be linked to firm commitments to more responsible use of development funds.

'I would like to see more responsive action from the countries receiving debt relief. What plans are in place both short and long-term to bring about sustainable development? We need to identify the capacities on the ground, and also the gaps that hinder development.'

'... debt management must be coupled with strict adherence to democratic principles. Nonetheless, these should not be imposed, but should be an initiative of the affected party. However, Africa should also understand that it can not keep asking for outside assistance without dealing with its internal affairs first.'

'The NEPAD initiative is a good one in this regard, though one must add that 3 years later, it is still only rhetoric.'

Some technical issues were flagged as well, the problem being that:

'... despite enormous increases in exports the average ratio of debt to exports has widened since 2002. A combination of ... interest rates dropping and a declining US dollar are having a greater impact on HIPC's ability to repay debts than changes in their exports.'

The way debt is discounted, or not, affects estimates of the debt. Typically the headline figures refer to the nominal debt, not the discounted net present value (NPV) that may be far lower. The implications are clear:

'If the western public and elites read reports saying the NPV of HIPC debts is a total of US\$10–15bn and not the currently stated US\$80bn there could be a effect on the political will to cancel debts.'

The decline of the dollar, moreover, also pushes up the cost of debt that is recorded in IMF Special Drawing Rights (SDRs), but commonly reported in US dollar equivalents.

Debt forgiveness by public creditors will increase the value of the remaining commercial, private debt. Do commercial lenders deserve such a dividend? A response would be to:

'...to increase the call for Commercial debt buy-backs, now, while the debt is at its cheapest, and secondly to caution against increasing the amount of Commercial debt, save in situations where it is new debt at good levels.' ... and

'... the Commission should consider lobbying against any Paris-Club creditor selling its debts to Commercial concerns, which would probably increase the likelihood of that debt not being relieved.'

Finally, it was pointed out that some debt is necessary, in that borrowing is an important source of funds for investment:

‘The bottom line is that places like Africa do not have enough debt, and therefore not enough infrastructure and therefore not enough productivity and therefore not enough per capita income.’

The volume and effectiveness of aid

Is aid needed? asked one contributor: after all

‘According to the data, aid has seldom had a statistically significant effect on recorded output one way or the other. Its impact is simply too puny when weighed against that of private investment, technological change and trade.

‘Lancaster’s cautious conclusion is that "aid has had no significant impact, either positive or negative, on economic growth in the region." [Michael] Edwards comes to a bolder conclusion: "The best performers in terms both of growth and poverty reduction have been the least dependent on aid projects." Even British economist Paul Mosley, a long-time defender of aid, supports that statement. Mosley recently presented evidence that between 1960 and ‘90 "the net impact of aid . . . [was] neutral overall, probably positive in most Asian countries and almost certainly negative in most African countries." That is, in Africa more aid has meant poorer economic performance.

‘I do not believe that it is the responsibility of the tax-payers of the "West" to see to it that laws are changed and all roads are paved with foreign aid on foreign soils.’

But others disagreed:

‘I disagree with the insinuations that increased resources will not make difference in the development of Africa and in achieving the MDG.

‘I have seen communities transformed and lives completely changed with the availability of funds to provide water for a community, schools for children and micro-credit for women groups.’

Might increased aid ‘erode domestic ownership of poverty reduction strategies?’ ‘No’, since

‘... every country independently develop their PRSP with the support of their development partners. ... How does influx of fund erode the ownership on the part of the government when the nation begins to harvest the gains of the interventions and indices are showing improvement in the lives of the people?

‘To achieve the MDG, Africa needs extra funds whether the funds are internally generated or through aids is another matter.’

For those in favour of aid, the volume could be increased by encouraging the newly-rich nations, such as Singapore and Brunei to contribute. Countries such as the UK should reach the UN target of 0.7% of GDP:

‘Why not campaign for a referendum on this issue in the UK (and other countries) to allow the public to vote on such an important issue?

‘... is there a reason in principle why we can't do it by 2006?’

And if funds are the issue, it was pointed out that there is also scope in some countries for raising more domestically, through effective taxation.

More debate, however, arose over the quality of aid. Currently, it was argued, there were failings in the way aid is provided. On the donor side, it was argued that funds are wasted on too many expatriate consultants. Local capacity exists. In addition:

‘... aid agencies often fail to co-ordinate their demands, often field untrained, inexperienced and sometimes incompetent staff, turnover staff at important junctures, and act in an authoritarian manner towards sovereign governments ...

‘The inadequate coordination of procurement and disbursement regimes, failure to co-mingle funds, sloppiness in monitoring the final destination of funds, prima donna behaviour by some members of aid agencies, overriding commitment to a home-base or agency agenda, rather than the welfare of the country receiving aid, hyper competition among agencies, lack of or inadequate evaluation of aid agency delivery, etc. — are also major inhibitors of development.

On the domestic side, corrupt use of funds was highlighted:

‘Eradicating corruption or at least mitigating against corruption is key not only to aid-effectiveness but to the effective use of all in-country resources. ... Identifying the corruption "hot-spots" and taking appropriate steps to reduce risk seems an obvious first step.

‘Procurement and contracting are obvious "hot-spots" and should be identified as such at government level.’

The allocation of logging contracts was mentioned as another corruption ‘hot-spot’.

Another contributor thought corruption would be ‘better fought by NGOs and media’, than by formal controls.

Other suggestions included tracking each pound of budget support through the system, and generally improving management:

‘There is very little "management information" in the [official development assistance] ODA community, and performance in development is rarely objectively measured. Bad financial behaviour is frequently hidden, and therefore flourishes.

‘... existing financial resource flows could be of very much more development value if there was excellence in transparency, accounting and accountability, and effective monitoring and evaluation (TAAME).’

On the political conditions for aid, there was support for democracy through free elections:

‘Donors should make sure that countries enjoying aid are applying democratic constitutional changes as well as active pursuit of corruption through independent bodies (i.e. from government).’

An objection to peace as a criterion was registered: a better yardstick would be that the country is not fomenting unrest in its neighbours, and is prepared to abide by international arbitration for cross-border concerns.

Aid should be given, it was argued, in conjunction with measures to strengthen civil society organisations.

Turning to the priorities for aid, there was a sharp disagreement over agriculture. Some contributors lamented the lack of attention to agriculture in the consultation document:

‘ [it] gives scant attention to agriculture at a time when international support to agriculture is also at an all time low.

‘Recent trends in development assistance towards programmatic assistance have given little attention to agriculture ...

New and innovative approaches are required to secure the livelihoods of millions of small scale farm households today and to enable them and their families to rise sustainably and with dignity from poverty both through agriculture and through diversification from agriculture to non-farm activities including those outside of rural areas.’

‘The lack of attention given to agriculture in the Commission's paper is quite extraordinary ... The Commission must push agriculture right up the agenda.

‘This requires not only much greater budgetary allocations to agriculture by governments and donors, but also new thinking that learns from and builds on examples of successes to ensure that budgets are effectively spent.

In contrast, it was argued that agriculture

‘ ... requires huge investments and the return on the investment is usually low compared for example in investing in industrialization.’

Other differed, arguing that:

‘All the evidence ... suggests that linkages between industrial growth (urban-focused) and poverty reduction are weak — at least compared to agricultural growth linkages.

‘Poverty reduction will remain a predominantly rural challenge for some time to come, despite urbanisation trends, and agricultural productivity is a powerful predictor of poverty levels in cross-country analyses both within Africa and across other developing regions.

‘Moreover, there is a well-established body of evidence showing the importance of raising agricultural production and incomes both to keep down the cost of feeding people in cities and to expand the market for manufacturing products.’

To which the original contributor responded:

‘ ... in view of the small allocations of land and the facts that more than 70% of the population work in agriculture, I believe that investment in that sector in Africa is not really the best way to go. It will have no noticeable effect on poverty reduction. We cannot support subsistence farming.’

Small-scale finance for businesses was seen as priority by another couple of writers.

‘Financing small business should have its own place on the ground of both donors’ involvement and the ... increasing importance of the micro credit movement.

Micro-finance has benefits in:

‘a) the labour market, by creating new jobs), b) the capital market, by knocking down the existing barriers between the financial circuits), c) trade, with new entrepreneurs, import substitution result and widening the list for exports, d) economic development, by adding value to the national product.’

‘... the best a government can do is to [pave] the way for a sound start-up of the business in a favourable legislative framework with suitable infrastructures and leave financial providers and entrepreneurs to run in a free market.

Agreeing, a second contributor argued in addition for ‘mini’ and ‘muni’ finance:

‘... rather than expanding just the micro-finance to micro-business and petty traders, it would seem that mini-finance is needed also so that some rather larger production works and job creation can go on as well.

‘... there needs also to be a way for certain community projects to get funded to improve the productivity of the area ... a road, a bridge, a community center, whatever. The community value created by funding these needs is impressive especially when the contracting work is done by local contractors and business people. I call this muni-finance!’

Other contributions favoured funding for health, especially primary health and HIV/AIDS care, gender-balanced education, and physical infrastructure — including water resources and supply, roads, telecommunications, and electricity.

A specific objection was made to general budget support, arguing that this would act against countries learning to work within their own capacity.

An intriguing suggestion for fostering growth in the private sector was put forward:

‘The large multi-national corporations that have African subsidiaries should be encouraged each to foster at least 25 small African entrepreneurs and if necessary to establish Small Enterprise Promotion Centres in different parts of Africa where small entrepreneurs can get the advice and help they need to make their venture a success.’

Infrastructure

Contributors agreed that investing in physical infrastructure is a priority, stressing that it was needed, and was feasible.

‘The Commission should put most weight on infrastructure: this can be promoted and funded from outside, in contrast to ‘conflict prevention’ where it is arrogant for outsiders to intervene.’

Another noted that it encouraged foreign investment:

‘In a recent seven country study titled “Investment for Development”,¹ which included Zambia and Tanzania found that infrastructure is a key determinant in attracting FDI [foreign direct investment], much more than incentives offered by the states.

‘Further, states should take the lead in the provision of infrastructure and public private partnerships should be promoted in this area.’

The potential of the private sector to make investment was illustrated by the case of Nigeria, where:

‘The recent positive impact of improvements in private sector driven GSM phones is evidence that given a good enabling environment, the private sector can perform.’

¹ <www.cuts-international.org/ifd-indx.htm>

Specific mention was made of communications:

‘Voice over Internet Protocol (VOIP) and WIFI are best options for Africa. ... Pilot Projects in this respect are required for low cost ICT projects in schools NGOs and CBOs. Democratising Cyberspace will be a good policy initiative for Africa in the Information age.’

Similarly, support for safe water, ‘an absolute must’ was offered.

Two contributions emphasised the importance of roads. Taking note of local preferences in road design and construction was recommended, on the basis of experience in the Horn of Africa:

‘There was a consensus that better roads were needed, especially roads that could be used "year round". But the need for European (or U.S.) type roads was considered a stupid waste of money.’

In this case, a European donor was spending more on studies of roads than the cost that local contractors would charge to get the job the done. Hence the comment:

‘A fund that supports community level infrastructure would be of great development value.’

Natural resources

Concern was repeatedly expressed that the Commission had not taken environmental issues seriously enough; and that it had a narrow focus on selected problems, ignoring other salient matters.

‘It is a serious oversight that the CfA’s Consultation Document does not mention the need for improved natural resource management as a condition for economic growth and human development in Africa.’

The majority of Africans live in rural or semi-rural settings and depend directly on natural resources for their livelihoods: on agriculture, animal husbandry, hunting and fishing for their food, on forests and woodland to provide building materials for their houses, on wood for fuel, on rainfall and natural hydrological systems for water, on medicinal plants for their healthcare, and on a range of activities based on natural resource use for their income.’

Two other documents were commended, the Africa Environment Outlook, and the NEPAD Environment Action Plan.

Some stressed the importance of governance in managing natural resources. For example, it was indicated that:

‘The management of Natural Resources in Africa for the past hundred years or more has been a disgrace. Almost nothing has been done right, and it is a very sad commentary on both political and corporate leadership and civil society in general.’

‘Openness, accountability, efficiency, and transparency must be the norm not the exception. We must all - private, corporate, NGO, government - be treated the same. Encouraged when we succeed, challenged when we fail and, frankly, condemned when we abuse.’

A somewhat unexpected angle on the governance of natural resources, particularly forests, was concern over the unscrupulous approach to obtaining raw materials employed by some East Asian companies:

'I am particularly conscious that the Commission (and the G8) does not seem aware of the competitive threat to the "West" which China and the "East" pose in Africa.

...

'China has major interests in the extractive industries (particularly oil, timber and cobalt) of such conflict-prone countries as the Sudan, Equatorial Guinea, Congo (Brazzaville), Democratic Republic of Congo, and Mozambique.

'China also has substantial interests in Africa's marine fisheries — through over-fishing, China, like the EU (/Spain), is reducing the availability of a basic source of nutrition for large numbers of Africans, and, as a consequence, this is expanding the market for bushmeat.'

In looking for solutions, a consensus formed around working with local people to conserve their resources in their immediate locality, and finding livelihoods that conserve, rather than degrade, resources. Here are some examples:

'... how can forests and wildlife be protected? Only by education and supporting projects that benefit the local population as well as forests and wildlife.

'The governance of the protected areas has to shift from the centralised style of management and give the locals the power to manage their own resources.'

'Local communities play an important role in managing and using local resources to ensure their conservation and sustainable use.

'Rural women in particular, play a vital role in the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. Often being responsible for gathering fuelwood, building materials, medicines or food, they are also frequently most directly affected by a local loss in biodiversity. Their involvement in natural resources management programmes is a key to ensuring that the use of resources for subsistence purposes is sustainable, and that livelihoods are secured.

From Zambia came mention of one successful programme:

'An example of how this can be done is being developed by the Wildlife Conservation Society in collaboration with the government of Zambia, UNDP, the World Food Programme, the Whitley Laing Foundation, and others.

'The COMACO project (wcszam@coppernet.zm ...) has increased the agricultural yields of farmers in the Luangwa region to the point where over 6,000 households have now achieved food security. The inputs required to achieve these results are provided in return for an undertaking by villagers to stop illegal hunting. Wildlife monitoring demonstrates significant increases in wild animal populations in the areas where COMACO is being implemented.

'The approach has been so successful that the Zambian government and WCS now wish expand to it to other regions of the country.'

Specific enterprises that might be promoted included tourism. As one writer put it,

'There is talk of presenting a more positive image of Africa, but no mention is made of tourism — surely the most positive image most people in the developed world have of the continent. ...

'Perhaps the best known success story is that of the mountain gorillas. Low volume, high price gorilla tourism has become one of the mainstays of the economy of

Uganda and Rwanda. ... Uganda puts 20% of all ape-viewing revenues into a community fund to build schools, clinics, water-pumps, etc.'

'Eco-tourist businesses owned and managed by the indigenous population rather than the traditional, wealthy corporations and investors ... comes to mind. Financing could be through secured loans to land owners with preference given to enterprises where land is owned by co-operatives. A pool of professionals could be provided for these schemes, especially at the start, to oversee / train until the debt has been repaid.'

'Photo-tourism (a huge economic engine in some countries), trophy-hunting (a significant player in others), game ranching (a major industry in south Africa) all rely on a viable environments and species. Remove the species through neglect, mis-management, greed, persecution, displacement and you lose options and opportunity.'

On the subject of bushmeat, it was noted that:

'Given that bushmeat provides much of the protein needs for a substantial proportion of Africa's population, it is imperative that hunters, traders and consumers are given the necessary tools and knowledge to make the trade sustainable and legal.

'And given the evidence for disease transmission to humans from wildlife used as food (HIV, SIV, SARS, Ebola), it is also imperative that public health advice is given to those butchering species from which we can catch such diseases.'

A strong plea was made for organic gardening, the promotion of which requires neither research nor expensive purchased inputs, only teaching and extension.

'The biggest problem in Sub-Saharan Africa is hunger and little is being said about it. I have lived there and taught many organic, no-till, permanent bed gardening and farming workshops there. This is the solution to most of the problems. It is profitable.

'No till organic farming is all that is needed, not research, not more inputs — just teach farmers.'

Finally, the potential of local processing — to save transport, add value — was noted.

Climate change

The importance of climate change provoked a sharp division of opinions. On one side were the doubters, who argued that the issue was a distraction from more pressing concerns. For example:

'Climate change is not an issue in Africa. It should not even be mentioned in the consultation document.'

'Climate Change is an irrelevance for Africa ... its many countries should use all the fossil fuel they have to earn income, power machines, provide electricity and warmth, and rely only on 'renewables' where there is no cheaper alternative.

'Neo-imperialism takes many forms, and the exporting of finance, know-how and technology for net emission reductions under the label of global warming and asserted ... planetary 'catastrophe' ... is little more than this.'

Others were of the exactly opposite opinion, thus:

‘The argument that climate change is irrelevant is at best misjudged, and at worst very cynical, if not most irresponsible.’

Stated one, while another noted the consequences:

‘Although the countries of the region may not be responsible for the phenomenon, they are not safe from the impacts ... [that] ... will likely affect areas including habitats, wildlife, terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems, goods and services. Developing countries currently bear the brunt of climate variability through natural events such as droughts and floods. And their vulnerability is likely to increase as food and water become scarce.’

A third commentator agreed:

‘There is increasing evidence that the effects of global warming will soon undo any advantage that may have been gained in Africa from debt relief. The incidence of vector borne diseases is rising, the effect on agriculture is increasingly severe and the diminution of water supply is leading to increased conflict.’

Suggested responses to the problem included making full use of the potential for irrigation, including groundwater, and developing renewable sources of energy. The latter offers opportunities for developing skills:

‘... renewable energy technologies (RET) and energy efficiency programs provide new areas for human capital development in Africa. ...

‘Cautious entry, preceded by careful, detailed analysis of introduction of renewables under different scenarios, ought to take place now. Then, we would be able to benefit from "learning by doing", not "perishing by ignoring". ...

‘... the choice is before the continent: ride the wave of "knowledge economy" to "sustainable development", or incur the "mineral resource curse" through "ignorance and neglect".’

The potential and importance of conservation farming as a way to combat low and variable rainfall was stressed as well:

‘Rural poverty stems from poor crop yields due to inappropriate agricultural practices. Conservation Farming practices (CF), developed and widely adopted in Brazil and modified for application to a range of African conditions, has already proved effective in combating food security issues in Zambia ...

‘Sustained training and demonstration of these appropriate farming methods can address many of the constraints to development without social upheaval or major investment.’

From those unimpressed by the threat of climate change came a call to address what was seen as a more urgent problem, that of desertification. The loss of ‘land, water and vegetation’ gives rise to ‘rural exodus, poverty, famine and growing conflicts.’

‘Africa's desertification is strongly linked to poverty, migration, and food security. In many African countries, combating desertification and promoting development are virtually one and the same due to the social and economic importance of natural resources and agriculture.

‘When people live in poverty, they have little choice but to overexploit the land. When the land eventually becomes uneconomic to farm, these people are often

forced into internal and cross-border migrations, which in turn can further strain the environment and cause social and political tensions and conflicts.

'In many countries inadequate land policies (or lack thereof) and land laws are some of the root causes of land degradation.'

Human development, culture and participation

Culture and the arts

A thread that attracted more postings than any other, much discussion was taken up by exploring the nature of culture, its interactions with economic and social development, and the implications. Only a few postings dealt specifically with the arts.

Most contributors defined culture in its widest sense of a set of ideas and beliefs that gives meaning to life.

‘Culture ... needs to be understood as the sum of implicit assumptions any society makes about itself and its environment.’

One contributor saw definitions of culture arrayed along two axes: one ran from the narrow definition of culture as the arts to the wider sense ideas and beliefs, the other, less familiar, concerned the locus of culture, the axis running:

‘... between a pan-Africanist sense of "African culture," and a sense that roots culture more locally, in language and religion and environmentally shaped practices and views of the past.’

On this axis, he added, ‘national culture’ sits somewhere between the two poles. Many of the other correspondents recognised the local specificity of culture, and emphasised the diversity of culture within the continent: yet there was also a tendency to posit ‘African culture’ against a ‘Western culture’, as though these two entities were to some extent uniform.

Other remarked that living culture, by its very nature, was always changing.

‘Cultures in Africa are fluid, heterogeneous and ever changing. There seems to be an expectation outside the continent that African culture and arts are legitimate only when they "traditional".’

If this were true for Africa, it was equally true of Europe. Arguing against some who seemed to assume that Europe was able to develop using its indigenous culture, it was pointed out that:

‘The ideologies of modernity, modernization, modernism and post-modernism all rest on opposition to the historical popular cultures of Europe, especially agrarian cultures but also those of urban communities oriented to a largely rural world.’

The great majority of postings saw Africa as having seen local culture subordinated, first to those brought in by colonial powers, and now by a globalised, international media. Not only has this impoverished the cultural life of Africa, but it has also impeded economic and social development. For example:

‘Africa has ... hardly developed any of its indigenous systems and human resources. This has been due to imposed foreign knowledge systems and training. ... African communities have abandoned their known agrarian, medical, economic, linguistic, political, - cultural systems.’

‘Africans are tired of being trained in their own countries to be pseudo Europeans who find it difficult to adapt to their own environments and develop.’

‘Our problems are ... rooted in a vicious cycle of misplaced values and low-esteem we have of ourselves.’

In some cases regret for loss of indigenous culture was accompanied by affirmations of the value of African cultures, in some cases arguing for the superiority of the latter:

‘... mainstream European psychology is thoroughly primitive compared to most traditional African cosmologies and, yes, psychologies.’

On the consequences of cultural marginalisation for development, contributors noted:

‘... all the well-laid plans of the last fifty years have only managed to exacerbate Africa's problems precisely because people on the continent don't live in a political, social or economic vacuum.

‘Consequently what aid agencies and NGO's have managed to do is impose 'alien' ideas in communities that already had their own local hierarchy's of inequality, with the well to do managing to benefit from all the help available at the expense of the poor for whom the help is intended.’

‘... development assumes that the European legacy will replace the African legacy, but we are then constantly surprised when African societies evolve in unexpected ways.

Some correspondents went on to link culture to development as social process, participation and communications:

‘... planning and implementation have been vertical, have not taken into account the local cultures and have not left any room for real participation in the decision-making process.

‘Many international development agencies have now incorporated in their jargon the words “culture”, “participation”, “communication”, as key for successful and sustainable development. However, in practice, they rarely follow their own discourse.

What were the remedies for this malaise? Most suggestions argued for rediscovering, revaluing and reinvigorating indigenous elements. For example:

‘What needs to be done is an accelerated documentation of African knowledge systems and best practices.’

‘We must research into African philosophy. Some say African does not have philosophy, that wisdom belongs to Socrates, the key is in the hands of Aristotle. What about the African Ifa Curpus? The wisest of all!’

‘The compilation of "Cultural Gazetteers" on the basis of already existing anthropological data wherever it is available can provide the basis for culturally sensitive developmental activities.’

Not everyone agreed: there was a plea that if Africa were to develop, it must leave behind its culture and integrate into the rest of the world. A more qualified remark was that:

‘... we should make a distinction between harmful cultural practices which hinder development and compromise human rights and those which promote life and liberty. No society is exempt from this.’

A renewed appreciation of local cultures would be the foundation for more appropriate development policy and practice.

‘Culture is the basis on which development has to be built; it must inform the whole. Of course the technical and other quantitative aspects are essential, but they are

dependent for their success on being rooted in the local population as it is, in the culture that the people constantly reproduce and constitute.’

‘It has been said that development without culture is “growth without a soul”.’

This would imply more recognition of diversity and:

‘... a far more culturally inclusive and sensitive approach to African development as a whole, which ensures that development priorities and programmes are tailored to meet the many different cultural realities of Africa today: this cultural dimension needs to be reflected from poverty reduction strategies and country plans, across to local implementation of projects by donors and their partners.

‘The reduction of complex realities to such broad categories in order to manage them is in danger of becoming a continuation of the colonial project through aid programmes. This should be strongly resisted in favour of a more subtle discourse that recognises diversity within Africa, mutuality in cultural engagement, and modernity and mutability in cultural expression.’

It would mean more participation and dialogue:

‘... until both the organisational culture of the development agencies and the levels of culture of the potential beneficiaries find some degree of harmony in terms of expectations of development interventions, we will always hear of these horror stories.

‘Perhaps, one way in which we can rise above these difficulties is through a process such as this discussion which allows people to explore their similar and different conceptions of constructs such as culture.’

This would be in stark opposition to some development practice that sees ‘communication’ as being some form of marketing. A case from Mozambique is cited, see the accompanying Box 2, that elicited the following comment:

‘X’s account illustrates how much ‘communication’ is misunderstood as public relations and marketing. His attempt at a real communication and dialogue process, that has communication as an exchange at its centre, and treats culture as a crucial part of that exchange is still sadly missing in a lot of development communication.

Box 2: Participation in HIV/AIDS strategy in Mozambique

‘During 2003, at the request of the National AIDS Council and UNICEF, I was in charge of designing a national communication strategy to combat HIV/AIDS in Mozambique. I facilitated a participatory process, which would take into account language and culture, and would be specific to the various sectors of society. For that to happen, more than 40 organisations dealing with HIV/AIDS participated in a one-year long process, including local NGOs, government agencies, bilateral and multilateral organisations.

‘By the end of 2003, we had a “validation workshop”, where the final draft of the strategy was discussed, amended and approved.’

‘What happened next is very sad. The National AIDS Council, headed by a politician ... and the Mozambican office of UNICEF ... decided to bury the strategy.

'The participatory and cultural sensitive approach was not what they had in mind. ... What they really wanted is more institutional visibility through mass media, which in Mozambique is almost irrelevant for the majority of the population.

'The lesson is clear: unless the institutional decision-making process at the top becomes more transparent, culture and participation will not be effectively part of the development agenda.'

More specific recommendations included that of promotion of indigenous languages:

'Language I consider to be the first factor in people's culture, the bond of every communal existence. There should be a programme targeted at the young generation to respect their own language. I feel very concerned about the lost languages in Africa.'

To which another commentator noted the need for books in local languages:

'Since initial literacy skills are most effectively acquired when taught in a mother tongue, this is an obvious area for more investment.

'Sadly, very few children in Africa are given the opportunity to learn to read books in their mother tongue. More needs to be done in partnership with the local book trade.'

Drama had a role to play as well:

'Cultures are only alive when they are in flux. Theatre is one of the most effective methods of engaging with the shifting layers of change that are the lifeblood of culture.'

'Performing artists have produced excellent work in diverse fields such as the fight against AIDS infection, in developing national identities, and discussing gender issues; they can be encouraged also to engage with peace issues and conflict resolution. ... They can help to replace antagonistic attitudes with tolerance.'

Turning to the arts more specifically, several postings noted that the arts, quite apart from their intrinsic value, can help economic development:

'The fastest growth sector in the world today is the trade in cultural goods. African arts ... [have] been acknowledged for stimulating and sometimes determining music, dance, architecture and fashion in the west. How much has Africa got from this contribution to the world? Very little, you would agree.'

'... the UK's cultural industries generate around 4% of GDP, which far exceeds manufacturing. It is disappointing that the cultural industries are rarely supported by the development sector for their contribution to economic growth, let alone for their benefits in contributing to the development of social capital, civic participation and well-being across Africa.'

'... an appropriate "exploitation" of cultural heritage sites would encourage activities in tourism and associated sectors, which would in turn strengthen the sustainability of conservation operations and improve the livelihoods of the community.'

That said, public support to the arts was often weak:

'The government is considering selling the National Theatre of Nigeria. The government do not see the importance of culture and arts in peoples' life.'

Primary and secondary education

Several contributions recommended more attention to vocational and specialised training, perhaps apprenticeships within secondary schooling, so that fee-paying parents can be reassured that their children will get work as a result. Contributors proposed that:

‘Preference should be given to short-term and on-the-job training. People in Africa who are given scholarships for long-term training rarely use it, but are appointed in fields for which their training is of no use.’

‘... we need more vocational and technical training centres ... In Togo for example, many parents prefer for their children to attain a higher education, sometime they will force these kids to embark in a study that is total different from their interest.’

Agriculture, argued one writer, provides ‘educational opportunities to teach biology, math, history, and so on’; as well as creating ‘community through such activities a community gardens, community kitchens and other shared activities.’

On ways to improve the quality of primary and secondary education, general points were made about the need to research the issue, to monitor experience and to learn from best practice — that should then be scaled up. One submission noted the urgent need to:

‘Establish long-term strategies for building the capacity of educational planners to monitor and evaluate basic education systems.

‘Provide "hands-on" experience in the application of modern survey research methodologies to studies that can be used to make informed decisions about the Quality of Education.’

Another recommended

‘... to establish banks of best practices (modern and indigenous) from similar areas and peoples. ICT is a good example of the means to enhance knowledge transfer and sharing.

‘Others should include: People-to-people encounters, inter-and intra-school partnerships, business relations, media, family/household dialogue, adult education forums, public meetings/events, etc.’

Encouraging more participation in education provision was another theme, illustrated by the case of the Tanzania Primary Education Development Program (PEDP 2002–2006):

‘Within PEDP, grass root organizations and community members have direct participation through school committees. Resources trickle down from development stakeholders and the central government through District Councils and down to schools. School committees have wide community representatives who identify, plan ... education projects of their choice.

‘At the start of PEDP school committees were revitalized through re-election of new community representatives and training. They received training to enhance their capacity to managed a community school unit and PEDP as a community program. ... The committees are gradually integrating this support from the central government with own community own resources.’

Twinning African schools with counterparts in the North was also proposed:

‘School partnerships are a strong way of providing direct teaching experience (through teaching exchanges) between rich and poor countries.

‘The Wales-Lesotho Link, a charitable organisation that twins the two countries has been conducting successful teaching exchanges for many years.’

‘Every African School and University needs to be twinned with an appropriate Developed Country counter-part educational establishment. This will help to bring about personal linkages between African and Western youngsters from which both sides will benefit enormously.’

‘(School twinning) could be much the best organized at school and PTA level, given suitable impetus from government. If you're not yet inspired, have a look at the charming little story of Mathias and Amadou which you can find at http://europa.eu.int/comm/development/body/publications/descript/publ_11_en.cfm

One way to get more girls into school is to provide scholarships, but from what age?

‘In Sierra Leone ... Government has a policy of providing scholarship for girls from the Northern and Eastern Regions of the country, who have passed the National Primary School Examinations, and are to enter secondary school.

‘At times, I sit wondering whether such good gestures from the government should not even start at kindergarten level. I don't think they need to wait till the girl gets to secondary school.

‘Schooling is a process and it happens in stages. The girl has to go through primary schooling before entering secondary school. What happens to those within the ages of 5-11 years who are still not in school? Is it that they will never have the opportunity to through schooling?’

Another suggestion was that: ‘Child-to-child teaching is a very efficient and cost-effective means to educate large numbers of children and in particular girls.’

The issue of the language of instruction came up, with recommendations for multi-lingual education that would allow primary pupils to be educated in their vernacular.

‘... begin with first language education and a bilingual strategy. This approach has been tried quite successfully in Mali.

‘What's also interesting there is that it was done as part of a community schools approach, where the teachers of the first grades were local people who had some education and were trained for the job. This proved cost effective and had the bonus of community involvement (both in the management of the school and in understanding the curriculum which was in their primary language ...’

A contrary tale was heard from South Africa:

‘Unfortunately the South African government, in spite of much talk about the cultural diversity of the “Rainbow Nation”, is undermining mother tongue education in Afrikaans, even in the Western and Northern Cape Provinces — the western 40% of the country's area — where Afrikaans is the mother tongue of most inhabitants.’

For teaching additional languages, International House noted its interest in training African teachers, especially ‘in Lusophone Africa to improve their command of English and to make them aware of the methodologies that can work when resources can be very limited.’

Other points raised were those of access to education by the disabled, above all those blind or visually impaired; and ways in which expatriate Africans can assist education:

‘The least Africans in the Diaspora can do is support education back in their countries.

‘If anything they need to pay back for the educational services they had benefited from by helping their former schools acquire ICT tools and connectivity with which they can access the global sea of knowledge that has eluded those back home.’

Tertiary education & professional training

‘Everyone knows that the promotion of science and technology is essential for any kind of economic progress that Africa needs if it is to compete in the twenty-first century.’

The importance of tertiary education for leadership was stressed:

‘... in francophone West Africa I encountered brilliant students, but none whose minds encompassed system-critical thinking, cultural politics, and sustainable development.

‘Who, then, will lead these African countries to better governance, new modes of development, (r)evolutionary analyses, educational reform, and participatory development?’

‘More primary and secondary education, however desirable, may not yield local leaders more apt to effect societal change. ... Especially at the tertiary level, where graduates directly connect to the power structure, we must invest in education that is culturally strengthening and pedagogically critical.’

Improving tertiary education might involve partnerships:

‘African universities will have to collaborate with universities in the developed world to maintain their status as institutions of higher learning.

‘New technologies and systems are now in place for e-learning instead of sending graduates for further training abroad who in many instances will not return to their countries.’

The value of distance learning was supported:

‘Use of distance learning in higher education – for example through the Internet as in the case of the Virtual African University – is to be more supported and generalized.’

The value of partnerships for scientific research was illustrated by a Dutch initiative:

‘... in the early 1990s the Netherlands Directorate General for Development Cooperation (DGIS) established the Multi-Annual Multidisciplinary Research Programmes (MMRPs).

‘At present there are nine MMRPs — four in Africa, three in Asia, and two in Latin America. Unlike many other forms of North-South research collaboration, the MMRPs were set up to carry out multidisciplinary, location-specific and demand-led research. DGIS provides long-term support, but the Southern partners are autonomous in terms of programme management, setting the research agenda and implementing the research.’

Other points made on university education were the need to help fund subscriptions to scientific journals, and to offer concessionary fees for those nationals of Commonwealth countries studying in the UK.

It was also suggested that all university students should take a course in development studies.

One contributor noted the dangers of populist approaches to university education:

‘Extending the number of higher education institutions should not be encouraged in response to ‘public demand’ as it leads to deterioration of the quality of the education.’

‘University education must not be ‘free’ — except to exceptional high school graduates. This will make sure the shift to the more crucial vocational/college education.’

There was much support for vocational education:

‘More emphasis on vocational higher education — rather than the usual university-type — should be supported to produce the qualified skilled labour force needed for development rather than adding highly ‘educated’ — if not qualified — people to the unemployment roster (Egypt is a good example).’

‘... vocational learning has a key role to play in fostering economic growth and social inclusion.’

‘The lack of skills, such as motor vehicle engineering, plumbing, electrical installations, catering, ICT etc., enforce continued dependence on foreign companies. Small and medium enterprises cannot develop effectively.’

‘Lack of a skilled workforce means that maintenance does not occur and structures and systems become decrepit, inefficient, unhealthy and dangerous.’

‘Skills empower individuals, enabling them to contribute to the economy and support the local community and the family. We tend to place too much emphasis on degree level learning and neglect skills learning.’

‘... economic growth must be supported by effective vocational education. This will ensure that the local workforce can participate in foreign projects and then carry them forward in terms of maintenance and upkeep. Skilled people can also operate within SMEs to meet local needs.’

Providing people with skills is one thing, finding them a job is another:

‘... the value to African society is only going to be realized when there are productive jobs for these trained professionals to do.’

A cautionary voice, however, was heard regarding training for civil servants:

‘Workshops should not be overdone. Some civil servants in Africa go from one workshop to another, with very little time in between for work.’

In similar vein, a strong plea was made for adult education, within a framework of life-long education — a concept well accepted in the North:

For Africa ... we need this dual track approach to lifelong learning that encompasses vocational education, education for democracy and community participation, plus

education that provides the basic learning foundations to enable people to continue learning throughout their lives.’

‘... for more people to benefit from higher education, we need an educated population as a whole. Better educated adults result in better educated children. Adult education specifically ... embraces community education, work based education and public (eg health) education.

‘Community education is a key medium for ensuring informed participation in decision making a grass roots level ... [it] is also a resource for ensuring the appropriate revival and relevant use of indigenous knowledge, [as well as] a necessary resource for skills and knowledge updating — to ensure Africa is not left behind in the knowledge and ICT market.’

Libraries are a way to support this:

‘Once literacy skills have been acquired and a reading culture established through good quality school education the next step is to ensure that both are maintained: readers must be able to access books in their communities.

‘Most people in Africa cannot afford to buy books and rely on libraries to access shared resources. Yet library services are under-funded, and many are not recognised as contributing towards education goals. For instance, in 2003 Malawi’s National Library Service received no funding to buy books for the 1,000+ library centres that it services.

‘Despite under-investment, libraries are transforming themselves into centres for community development, actively meeting local information needs in areas such as HIV/AIDS, and citizens rights, as well as education and lifelong learning.’

Health, water and sanitation

Unsurprisingly the HIV/AIDS pandemic attracted much attention. Suggestions were made about stemming the spread of the condition, and on care and treatment.

On the former, the value of considering the effects of economic and social development on the pandemic was stressed. An example was the likely future development of nickel and platinum mines in Burundi:

‘Their eventual development would present an increased risk of HIV spread in the region. The establishment of social housing for workers’ families near the mines would reduce the risk.’

Another suggestion was to look to change cultural norms, including sexual behaviour, to stem the spread of HIV. Grandmothers have a key role in transmitting norms to their grandchildren: work with them.

In care and treatment, important dimensions were being overlooked. These included: orphans and children;

‘It is very surprising that the plight of sub-Saharan Africa’s 12.3 million orphans and the plight of their caregivers is not even mentioned [in the consultation document]. These children suffer in many ways: the psychological trauma of losing a parent, frequently denial of their basic rights, decreased access to education and health care and often assuming immense responsibilities within the household.

‘... the Commission is wasting an important opportunity to advocate for the implementation of the internationally agreed ‘The Framework for the Protection, Care and Support of Orphans and Vulnerable Children living in a World with HIV

and AIDS' ... [that] .. has been endorsed by amongst others DFID, USAID, UNICEF, UNAIDS and recently the World Bank.

that women bear the brunt of the epidemic, both as the majority of the infected and as principal care-givers;

'There must be financial support for community initiatives that promote equitable access to sexual and reproductive health services for young women and girls, for sexual health education programmes for young women and men and for prevention and treatment strategies that address the gender and socio-cultural aspects of the pandemic.'

the impacts on child malnutrition;

'I am stunned to see so little discussion of the worsening situation of child malnutrition. In eastern Africa, according to current projections of progress to the 2015 Millennium Development Goals, rather than halving the 1990 rates of child underweight, rates in eastern Africa will have increased by 25%. Unless the HIV-malnutrition nexus is prominently addressed in the Commission, it will fail to make any lasting intergenerational impact.'

and, the provision of hospice and palliative care:

'There is a great unmet need for hospice and palliative care. With limited access to ARVs or other pain- and symptom-controlling drugs, many patients die in pain, and in isolation with uncontrolled symptoms. ...

'Principles of palliative care, including pain control, must be adopted as part of any country's national HIV/AIDS care strategy.

'There needs to be a strong education and training programme for HIV/AIDS health professionals, public health workers and lower grades of health care staff in palliative care, as well as for family carers.

'Allow availability of strong opioids, like morphine, for pain control, and appropriate drugs to treat opportunistic infections.'

That information on HIV/AIDS be made available to the disabled was another point.

Several correspondents agreed that delivery of health services was critical, but there were varying suggestions of how to improve such delivery. Some contributors were sceptical of government capacity, recommending:

'Facilitate community initiatives to create the required infrastructure, provide the staff, and get paid by the community ... do not expect a bankrupt central governance organization to deliver services at the community level with no money and no realistic incentives.'

As well as arguing:

'This will also require a long term commitment to community consultation, participatory development and a realisation that social and economic determinants are just as relevant to health as clinical trials. The alternative is that we will keep running around in circles like we have been for the past 50 years. We have the drugs, we have (some of) the research, we now need to deliver this in a meaningful and sustainable way.'

User fees for health services were condemned, remarking:

‘Quite simply taking money off poor people when they are sick is not a good idea.’

‘Cash and carry health systems have to be reformed! Ghana has introduced a form of national health insurance, which although in its infancy (and will take time to be implemented fully to all the population) could prove to be a useful start for others.’

Bed-nets to reduce malaria were a case in point. DFID helps subsidise the cost of chemically-treated nets to households in Kenya, but is not prepared to distribute them for free. Since some people are too poor to afford the nets at any price, coverage is reduced. Given the costs of malaria, this seems a false economy.

Looking at obstacles to better health care, one correspondent criticised the use of mass media campaigns with indiscriminate targeting:

‘Mass media campaigns can help in the short term, but unless people develop a more critical awareness about issues that affect them, long term, sustainable progress is unlikely.’

‘... people, even those in large organisations, [should] step outside the social marketing/advertising campaign mindset and focus more on low tech, low cost, participatory, people-centred modes of communication.’

‘My own work, using interactive visual materials for learning about health, helps even non-literate people to develop critical awareness about health issues such as HIV/AIDS. There is much potential for the further development of simple visual materials for all sorts of education and communication needs. This people-centred approach, by its nature, respects and involves local culture and, where they exist, local art forms.’

Other recommendations for health care included paying attention to transport. Poor transport limits the access to fixed health facilities, and impedes immunisation, surveillance and education work.

One commentator added that the document needs to focus more on primary health care.

There was a strong plea for giving attention to water and sanitation, however mundane activities in these areas may be.

‘Water and sanitation are not being adequately prioritised by donors and Africa countries resulting in a decline in funding, despite poor people themselves continually prioritising these issues in participatory poverty assessments.’

‘It is therefore not surprising that the infant mortality MDG is off track considering that water related diseases are one of the biggest killers of children, if not the biggest. There is virtually no mention of the vital role watsan plays in poverty reduction in the consultation document. Water and sanitation aren’t particularly sexy or newsworthy, but they are the priorities of poor people.’

Participation

There was clear support for encouraging more participation, through more consultation and encouraging the voices of those not usually heard when decisions are made. One contributor pondered the roles of those sufficiently privileged by their education to take part in electronic consultations:

'I do not believe that development is targeted at people like me who have access to internet, have an opinion and have a voice. I am as developed as the next European.

...

'[we] the developed and educated Africans have a responsibility to make sure we have incorporated the views of those Africans whom we think we are working on behalf of. So I would like to see the document say something about encouraging developing voice for the voiceless: and these are not only women and children but also people with disabilities.'

The exclusion of women was taken up by other writers. For example:

'... make gender equality a core component of the report and not treat it as a cross-cutting issue. ...

'Women would be able to support and align with this initiative when this is done. ... the Commission's submission to the G8 and other donors should emphasize this.

Agricultural development schemes designed for women, it was pointed out, were often done so on the basis of assumptions about women's interests and needs, rather than by asking women what they wanted.

To improve the participation of women it was proposed:

'... encouraging more women into top economic and political positions to curb the stubborn African male ego and encourage women to mainstream into leadership and development as opposed to child production.

'... political and economic projects from the North should prioritise women's participation.'

'... a Gender Equality Development Fund (GEDF) as one of the initiatives that can be considered.'

A plea was made for using theatre to give people voices, to make use of indigenous knowledge and to include those usually left out:

'By using arts, culture and theatre we have found that that decision-making can be influenced from grass roots level.

'Theatre for development projects can not only start debates in communities but also policy makers can be invited to experience the drama, hear and see the issues that need addressing.'

Other correspondents noted that participation succeeds when the issues in discussion are those that matter to them such as their livelihoods; and that people need to be informed, both on 'their roles and responsibilities as citizens of a State' and on the 'operations of their governments.'

Several contributions looked at the sources of successful participation. The Commission was encouraged to look for success stories from the grass-roots. In general, it was argued,

'more than anything else, participation has to come from within and not without. Its time we all sensitized the need for all to act and not some. It starts with our homes and families and moves to our surrounding and eventually a nation...'

One danger was that of non-governmental organisations that were promoted by the state, that failed to do anything other than echo the voice of government.

‘Many African countries restrict NGO participation in development projects through laws. Unless these laws are changed to ensure not only the freedom of association without undue government interference but also the freedom of expression and changes to 'press laws' there will be no real public participation and aid is more likely to be diverted to 'leaders' through corruption.

Those choosing an NGO with which to work should ask hard questions about the transparency, democracy, accountability, procedures, objectives and strategy of their proposed partners.

The Commission should adopt the "Guidelines on Principle and Good Practices for the Participation of Non-State Actors in the Development Dialogues and Consultations" proposed by the EC http://www.aprodev.net/devpol/Documents/6_DOC_C-1-2-number1b.pdf.

Finally, the question of just how much participation was wanted was raised:

‘Is just turning up at a meeting and not joining in participation? At the other end of this increasing crescendo of participation does the power shift to the participants and the agendas for their own development rest finally in their hands? How much participation do you want? How much participation can you handle?’

Migration and urbanisation

Given that ‘People would usually prefer not to move and have economic opportunity in the local area than a big distance from the family and friends’, the question of why people migrate was posed:

‘Many opinion polls and participatory surveys in Africa have demonstrated extremely high aspirations for mobility outside country (or continent) of origin. This exists despite high levels of pride in being African. We have to question what makes people want to leave their homes.’

In reply, it was pointed out that:

‘We might be surprised at the different economic opportunities there are in the urban area that do not exist in the family community including petty and not so petty crime, economically enriching prostitution, and so on.’

The converse also applied: if we want to stem migration, then jobs have to be created in the areas of origin.

The ‘brain drain’ was noted:

‘The best of Africa's intellectual capital is outside ... the continent proper. ... in the Knowledge Economy, intellectual capital is fungible. We have to find new ways of harnessing Africa's global intellectual capital.’

Proposals to reverse or correct for loss of talent, included reverse migration as apparently once promoted by the International Organisation for Migration; as well as job swaps between Africa and the industrialised countries.

To facilitate urbanisation, it was suggested that:

‘The establishment of sub-continental centres of excellence in skills adapted for the challenges of urban environments could be one avenue for exploration soon.

'The emergence of African super cities has created a requirement for sanitation and specialised education facilities, as well as for microfinance and other support functions.'

Governance, peace and security

Building effective states

States, it was pointed out, can be built through constitutional reform, with electoral democracy, free media, independent judiciary, etc.:

‘... government has a role in promoting development, but this is mainly through providing a conducive atmosphere for development to take place through appropriate legislations, sound economic policies, fair and transparent bidding/contracting procedures, anti-corruption measures and upholding and strengthening laws.’

Others emphasised the potential and importance of improving local government, sometimes in cases where central government is ineffective:

‘... all across Africa, efforts are underway to build stronger, more responsive, more service oriented basic local governments embodying the ideal of integrated public service. ... local governments ... reach the most people, are closest to the people’s control and engender democratic practice, and provide the environment by which peace, predictability and investment are enhanced.

‘Effective states must be effective at the local level. On the other hand, local level government can be effective even when the national state is in crisis.

‘It is often the case that local government is more sensitive to the needs of local people than its central counterpart.’

Twinning towns in Africa with those in the industrialised world can help build capacity and raise aspirations.

Success in improving local government

‘... requires careful delivery of funds to encourage pro-poor development, local ownership, self-sufficiency and long term results.’

A cautionary note, however, was sounded about ‘local ownership’. In some cases national governments used this term to exclude external interest in affairs with international ramifications:

Let us re-define 'local ownership' to also mean the rights of all citizens (including Diaspora) to participate.

‘Also let us remove projects with potential global effects from this condition. Dams to be erected along the Nile have global effects by virtue of affecting wetlands and the flora and Fauna including migratory species. They may also add to the climate change. We have to use our heads and not run after 'slogans' that seem to mean good but are used to evade global accountability!’

A couple of contributions supported the use of electronic media for governance:

‘E-governance provides an opportunity for enhanced transparency and accountability in the public sector. In some countries through e-governance there have been improved flows of information and implementation of public service delivery programmes between the different levels of government within the existing decentralised framework.

‘However setting up systems of e-governance that are simple and applicable at decentralised levels remains a key challenge. Holistic Capacity building rather than isolated pilot phases for e-governance application is critical for effective management.’

‘E-governance should provide an opportunity to reduce substantially the amount of paper consumed in preparing and disseminating reports and other aid documents.

‘E- governance should provide an opportunity to restore clarity to language used.’

Several voices noted how not to build states, or were sceptical of current approaches. One danger was dependency on aid:

‘States which are highly dependent on donor funding risk losing accountability to their own populations. Doubling aid and donor-determined priorities intensify this risk.

‘The Commission should explore ways of delivering aid which build local institutions, rather than bypassing them.’

Another concern was the way that NEPAD had been established:

‘ ... with no consultation with NGOs and as such missed real public participation.

‘We believe that [NEPAD] only reflects and protects the interests of ‘African leaders’ and is just a trial to escape being accountable to their own people or the donors.

‘The African Peer Review Mechanism only includes ‘administrative’ aspects of governance and does not extend beyond that to the more critical issues of democracy and corruption, which have more diverse effect on development. Besides, what is the value of a review by a peer who is equally committed to the same wrong practices?’

One writer worried that nation-building can see local groups dispossessed, since the exercise is:

‘ ... much more about an underlying struggle for control of the economic power (and the security apparatus) that is associated with national political control.

‘The loser almost everywhere ... has been one or other of the internal local segments. National (central) control of natural resources, and "property contracts" with international actors has enriched a lot of corporate stockholders as well as a lot of political power-brokers, but at whose expense?’

Going beyond nation states, concern was expressed over the lack of influence of Africa in international forums, there was in effect:

‘ ... global apartheid and the systematic exclusion of Africa from real power or influence in international decision-making. Unless Africans have an equal and effective voice when major global decisions are taken, the Commission will be as ineffective as the Brandt Report, UN Economic Commission for Africa (1958); the Global Coalition for Africa (1990), the UN Initiative for Africa (1996).

The writer asked that the Commission consider the recommendations made in December 2004 by the UN High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, concerning ratifying the state of the International Criminal Court, and a seat for Africa in the UN Security Council.

Conflict and insecurity

A lively debate broke out over the causes of conflict. Poverty and starvation were blamed by some contributors, for example:

‘Starvation causes conflict — usually at first internal as in the case of Darfur, but then may extend to neighbouring countries affected mostly by massive refugees.

Poverty leads to struggles over resources. Water was a particular concern:

‘Water infra-structure investments are a must to prevent conflict in Africa.’

In contrast, others saw ethnicity and tribalism as the main culprits, observing that conflicts break out even in the more prosperous parts of Africa:

Ivory Coast, the scene of one of the latest wars, was one of the richest countries in Africa. The civil war in Rwanda between the Tutsis and Hutus was also very ethnic, and it spilled over into the war in Congo.’

‘It is Africa's uniquely intricate tribal structure that underlies many of its conflicts and yet one hardly sees it discussed in this context.’

A potential resolution of these differences may lie in the:

‘... distinction between root causes and triggers of conflict. My guess is that [the] root causes boil down to poverty and control of resources. Triggers of conflict could be ethnic, territorial, political, religious, etc.’

Some contributions also noted the role of neighbouring countries in stirring up conflict, and recommended that aid should be suspended to states that invade, or encourage strife, in their neighbours.

Large conflicts may result from small disputes, so that these need to be monitored before they expand:

‘... small-scale clashes within a state could well be early warning signs of larger problems to come. It is essential that the possible link between small-scale conflicts (possibly over natural resources, often disguised as religious or ethnic) and large-scale events should be investigated, and in the event of a positive correlation, small-scale clashes could be used as early warning systems of potentially wider problems.

On preventing conflict, a general point was the need for democracy:

‘Peace and security in Africa can be achieved through matured political leadership and sustained democratic practices such as, change of government through the ballot box, respect of the rule of law and human rights and restraint of interference from colonial masters.

‘Countries still under oppressive rule should be sanctioned and not be courted.’

More specifically, several contributions looked at the scope for civil society, reporting, for example on the:

‘... growing networks of peace activists in Africa, for example the Coalition for Peace in Africa and West African Network for Peace.

‘The individuals in these networks are committed to and expert in the use of non-violent techniques to prevent resolve and transform conflict. A very small amount of funding, probably less than £5M per year, would transform the effectiveness of their work, by funding: training ...

‘These networks, if better resourced, could grow considerably over the next ten years, offering a genuinely African resource based on a blend of local and international approaches to peace-building.’

In process, a key feature of civil society:

‘will also need to be inclusivity and 'networking' and in particular a multi-level and multidimensional approach to resolving conflicts.’

Agreeing with the potential, one respondent noted the poor record of governments in permitting or tolerating national NGOs, or in setting up NGOs that are instruments of the state, or of co-opting existing NGOs. The writer regretted that:

‘Single-party states neither tolerate nor recognise any other centres of power within society except that of the party and state — which have become almost synonymous. People’s organisations are tolerated only as long as they adhere to the state’s definition of development or if they exist to provide alternative conduits of foreign aid.’

States tend also to be wary of both international NGOs and that those that represent Africans in the diaspora, although both of these can play a useful role.

Including women and youth in peace talks was another suggestion:

‘Women are often inextricably connected to conflict and to processes of conflict resolution but yet are disempowered once peace talks begin.’

Where international mediation was involved, the demands on time and patience are heavy, but worthwhile:

‘Supporting peace and security in Africa is complex and time-consuming. ... This time- and resource-consuming dialogue is inevitable for success and will have to take place before crises break out. It is particularly challenging given the asymmetry in analytical capacity [between international agencies and African bodies].

There is no replacement for political will to support endogenous African initiatives.’

A very specific recommendation was to control international gun-running:

‘The developed world should discourage the gun-running that has characterised their double standards in Africa.

‘It has become apparent ... that while the North sees Africans as savages who cannot rule themselves and take arms at the least provocation, it is the developed countries that in many cases sell the guns on credit to warring factions to loot resources in areas that are captured.’

Peace settlements are often fragile, raising the risk that conflict recurs is high as the transition to peace is made. The importance of effective post-conflict reconstruction cannot be underestimated. This:

‘... involves going beyond peace building to ensuring sustainable development. This requires a comprehensive process of rebuilding the socioeconomic frameworks of conflict affected countries.

‘The NEPAD peace and security programme is in the process of developing a strategic framework for post conflict reconstruction. This initiative needs to be supported.’

Reducing corruption

All agreed that corruption is a scourge for Africa and its development, lamenting that often political and civil service appointments were seen as a way to enrichment — for life.

A distinction was, however, drawn between large-scale embezzlement that some elites carried out, and the more everyday bribes taken by low-level functionaries such as police and customs officers:

‘corruption caused by greed has to be tackled differently to actions to provide for family and community, which can sometimes be perceived as corruption.’

In similar vein it was pointed out that:

‘An act of "Corruption" as perceived by a Westerner is often a "moral and family duty" to an African. Some acts of "moral duty" to a Westerner can be seen as "corruption" to an African.’

Most postings referred to corruption by people in government, so that one correspondent recommended that:

‘Donors should stop funding corrupt Governments, it is time to change approach and mechanisms of assisting African Countries.

‘Aid should be channelled through NGOs, Churches, more international organizations should come to Africa and must work with the people directly. Governments have failed and we cannot trust them or expect change from them when they have resisted change for four decades.’

Not all agreed, however, that non-governmental organisations are free from corruption.

Corruption was compounded by the guardians of public interest, including the police, judges and other officials of the courts, also taking bribes.

In looking for remedies, the value of independent media and judiciary were recommended. More specifically and in addition, the following points were made:

- Pay civil servants, including police and customs officers, decent salaries to reduce the need to take bribes;
- Donors should ensure that all funds provided are rigorously audited, including those supplied to NGOs;
- Demand tax returns from public figures, and publicise them:

‘Tax returns of all elected officials and high ranking employees of the executive branch (and their spouses and independents) should be made public. Any undue increase in wealth accumulation should be investigated. In this regard tax reforms should be supported to include tax returns as ‘family’ rather than individual tax returns as well as increasing the power and capacity of tax agencies to conduct audits.’

- Improve independent scrutiny by civil society by offering or support, or at least removing impediments to community radio:

‘... support community radios and abolishing any laws that restrict their spread and activities. They can play a major role in exposing corruption at the community level by local government officials.

A strategic issue that stems from the distinction between high- and low-level corruption is:

‘ ... do we start to tackle the problem of corruption from below, i.e the individuals, the common man and the society who feel the pinch of poverty more, or do we start from the top, i.e the government and the ruling class who are the main perpetrators of corruption?’

At least two contributors noted the value of learning of the experiences of other parts of the world in tackling corruption.

It is interesting to see that there were few responses to the issues of business and corruption posed in the initial questions, although there was support for efforts to freeze funds sent to the industrialised countries that were proceeds of illicit activities.

Social protection and vulnerability

Only three postings responded to these issues.

In the past, it as reported,

‘ ... many African countries did have social security systems such as universal free health care system and pension. After structural adjustment was introduced, those schemes were almost wiped away.’

Lack of insurance makes people unwilling to take on the risks of investment. Recent initiatives to re-introduce social were thus welcome. Examples include:

‘Ghana is just about to introduce a health insurance scheme after thirty years they abolished a free health care system.

‘Tanzania has established a semi government agency to run a pension scheme. Also there are small but workable health insurance schemes running.’

Another contribution noted that social protection would come with the jobs created by ‘small domestic industry units’ in rural growth centres. They would ‘also reduce the ever-growing rate of rural-urban migration.’

Finally, the multiple threats from climate change, ranging from water shortage to coastal flooding and storm damage, and the consequent impacts of farming and human health, were noted by contributor. These would ‘undermine the legitimacy of governing authorities and increase instability in affected states’, and raise ‘the likelihood of violent conflict.’