



African Aspirations



Extract of the report of an initial consultation
with African research and non-state organisations
on the work of the Commission for Africa

for the full report, go to <http://www.odi.org.uk/africaconsultation>

August 2004

SUMMARY

Let the Commission focus not on new ideas but on adding value to NEPAD's existing efforts to end poverty in Africa. How? By putting together a "road map" for rich nations to contribute to Africa's own efforts, implementable through the G8 Action Plans. This must include a commitment by rich nations to tackle difficult issues – specifically, aid performance, cultural imperialism, debt, intellectual property protection, Northern subsidies and trade.

Don't let the Commission be just another talking shop: it must have a sustainable legacy beyond 2005:

Let the many existing initiatives and networks within Africa and the diaspora that have relevant contributions to make to the Commission's work be fully involved;

Pay attention to 'process' issues: working relationships with NEPAD; listening to Africans; and – very importantly - practical targets to track implementation by rich nations and by NEPAD after 2005;

Collect practical examples of what's already in place, personal success stories, and positive cultural experiences – the news from Africa is not all bad;

"Changing minds" is needed as much as "money changing hands", but don't let the Commission duck issues of how it can contribute to resource mobilisation on behalf of Africa.

Clear priorities emerged between and within the Commission's theme areas:

Governance and institutions: peace and security; incentives and responsibilities;

Growth and resources: North-South relations; management of natural resources; public-private partnerships;

Empowerment and culture: education.

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>

FEEDBACK FROM AFRICAN RESEARCH AND NON-STATE ORGANISATIONS

“I will do anything in my power to support an initiative that confronts African stereotypes”

but

*“La Commission représentera une valeur ajoutée vis-à-vis des autres initiatives si seulement elle n'enfoncé pas des portes ouvertes autrement dit si elle sort des sentiers battus
[“The Commission will only add value if it opens doors that other initiatives have not already looked through”]”*

Some 65 African research and non-state organisations participated in this initial consultation which ran during July 2004 and was a pre-cursor to an organised on-line discussion which will run during August 2004 and a series of public meetings in Africa which will run later in 2004.

The initial consultation asked African research and non-state organisations two questions:

- 1. What do you think of the objectives of the Commission for Africa?**
- 2. What do you think of the Commission's July 2004 policy work programme?**

Within this, participants were asked how they think the Commission for Africa can best add value to other initiatives already underway, including those by NEPAD, the AU, the ECA, the rest of the UN (especially the summit on the Millennium Development Goals planned for September 2005) and the G8. Is it the focus on new ideas? On developed country action? On some kind of bargain between Africa and developed countries? The answers to these questions are important, because they shape the work programme. For example, if the real priority were the 'bargain', then the work programme would need to focus on the obligations of both sides and on the accountability of the two parties to each other.

The focus under the second question was on whether the current policy work programme is a good way to structure the work, i.e. the debate was not about detailed substance at this point (although in practice individual replies were brimming with imaginative ideas about practical ways forward!). Participants were asked whether these are the right topics? What would it be useful to change or add?

Participants were also invited to provide information about any events or initiatives they are involved in that they think the Commission for Africa should know about. These have been passed onto the Commission separately.

Three widely held concerns with the concept and purpose of the Commission for Africa emerged from the consultation – all to do with how it can achieve practical action for combating poverty.

1. “Don't lose sight of addressing poverty, hunger and disease”

Many participants asked that, as it gets down to detailed work over the coming months, the Commission must never lose sight of its overall goal of addressing poverty, hunger and disease. As a number of participants pointed out, poverty reduction did not make it explicitly into the Commission's five objectives.

2. ***“Results on the ground”***

Second, the Commission must focus on work that will contribute to results on the ground and not just new analysis: let it be true, as Commissioner Geldof promises, that the Commission will be more than just a talking shop. Please let the Commission keep at the forefront of all its work the need to make a real difference to the majority of ‘ordinary’ Africans who are poor and often excluded from formal political and policy processes.

3. ***“Fresh perspective on the ‘how’ not the ‘why’”***

Third, let the Commission’s “fresh perspective” focus on constraints to implementation: the ‘how’ not the ‘why’ development action in Africa isn’t working. Time and again participants referred to technically sound plans, strategies and commitments for change across any number of sectors that are remaining just that: commitments not action.

Many participants explicitly endorsed the concept and objectives of the Commission for Africa, but all feel that there are real dangers the Commission won’t achieve its laudable aims unless it addresses these concerns.

Commission for Africa Objectives

“The objectives do not necessarily focus well on the most useful or critical areas for the Commission’s work”

Participants clearly see the Commission for Africa as an important opportunity but the objectives it has specified for itself are necessary but not sufficient. A clear consensus on priorities emerged.

“Focus on programmes created by Africans for Africans”

Objective II (supporting the best of existing work on Africa) was participants’ top priority, particularly adding value and generating commitment to NEPAD. Although recognising that NEPAD has its share of problems and mistakes, participants emphasised that its programmes and plans have been generated through an extensive consultation process across the continent, and its peer review process offers an African-owned mechanism for quality control and monitoring implementation. More specifically, and highly relevant to **Objective V** (listening to Africans), participants made a plea for maximum African involvement in the Commission – not just as “listeners” and being “*invited to comment at the last hour for the sake of showing that we have been consulted*”. Participants asked that the diaspora not be forgotten, many of whom have valuable skills and the kind of perspective on Africa’s problems that comes from being able to stand back a little.

“Do not let the idea of money changing hands overshadow the idea of changing minds”

Participants did not shy away from the problems surrounding effective resource use in Africa, and the need to change the mind-sets of governments in Africa and the rich nations. But many pointed out that – notwithstanding these problems – lack of finance and capacity are bigger constraints to African development than lack of new ideas. So there was a large number of participants pushing the Commission for Africa to see how it can help mobilise resources for the work that needs to be done in Africa.

“Africans would be more interested in getting a hint on what the continent will be like after the Commission has done its activities”

Participants' next priority was **Objective I** (generating new ideas and action), which struck a negative chord with many. First is the concern that new ideas are not the main need in Africa (and “*coming from an external organisation can be threatening*”). “*There are no magic bullets for Africa and the Commission should not pretend that all that is required is something no-one has thought of previously*”. Participants want to see more emphasis on practical results from the Commission: using the best existing ideas to “*set a vision for what Africa will look like after the Commission has finished and plans to achieve this by sector*” that will have an impact on common people. The lack of a clearly identified target group for the Commission's work was mentioned. It was suggested that the focus should be on the role of rich nations in adding value to existing initiatives: a rich nations' “*road map*” for Africa was a common theme, as distinct from a second NEPAD. There were many practical suggestions on elements of a work programme to achieve this – these are outlined below.

Second is the concern that the end of 2005 will in practice be the end of endeavour sponsored by the Commission. There was a plea to spell out a list of measurable targets around which the Commission can advocate, with the focus being on rich nation commitment – for example, through existing G8 action plans. Can there be arrangements beyond 2005 for monitoring implementation of the Commission's vision by the rich nations and by NEPAD countries?

“Africa' is such a ridiculous concept as there are many diverse people here and there never can be one solution or one size fits all!”

There will be a fine line to tread in implementing Objective I between identifying common priorities for achieving development in Africa and producing a “*vision in a straight-jacket*” that fails to recognise the continent's diversity. One valuable contribution the Commission could make, mentioned by a number of participants, is to gather and publicise **practical examples** of what is already in place, personal success stories, and positive cultural aspects. So many inspiring examples of individual and group efforts to change their own small corners of Africa for the better emerged from participants' responses. Can't we do more to change the mindset of people in rich nations that Africa is a failed continent?

“The EU withdrew from grass-roots social protection ... and has carpeted the Ministry of Finance”

In relation to **Objective III** (delivering implementation of existing international commitments), participants minced no words in calling for the Commission to go beyond this and deliver a cold, hard look at the role of rich nations in maintaining Africa's poverty. This needs to cover the whole gamut of issues: from aid performance to trade policies, including cultural imperialism in its many manifestations, debt, intellectual property protection and Northern subsidies. It should focus on actions rich nations can take to change the current state of affairs and add value to existing initiatives - for example through existing G8 action plans. But there is real doubt about rich nations' willingness to commit: a “*bargain*” between Africa and the rich nations is only relevant if that latter “*are willing to stick to their side*”.

Commission for Africa Policy Work Plan (July 2004 version)

“The concern is how to move from a comprehensive list of issues to meaningful change for poor people in Africa”

Whilst there was a generally positive response to the three theme areas (growth and resources; empowerment and culture; governance and institutions), a number of participants commented that the current version of the work plan is over-focussed on delivering Objective IV (offering a fresh and positive perspective for Africa) to the detriment of addressing the Commission’s other objectives effectively. Where are the specifics on working with NEPAD; on delivering implementation of international commitments; and on listening to Africans? Participants detailed a wealth of networking and project activities which the Commission can tap into.

Participants pointed out a number of issues, embedded in these “process” questions, the decisions made about which will make the difference between a chance of success for the Commission and real risk of failure. A selection are given in Box 1.

Box 1: ‘Embedded’ issues: the missing link

Adding value to NEPAD – what’s best?

Long-term embedded technical support to NEPAD or strengthen sub-regional systems (ECOWAS, SADC, IGAD, etc)?

Working with a stable of committed governments or helping non-lead countries?

Pilot projects or known solutions?

Delivering implementation of international commitments

Promote bargaining between Africa and rich nations or African commitment to NEPAD?

New proposals for the EU presidency (eg on measures to improve civil society participation in EU aid) or links to existing G8 action plans?

Listening to Africans

Consult with ordinary people or work with apex organisations?

Focus on the excluded (women, youth, disabled, poor) or involve experts?

Use ICTs or local institutions?

Now or forever – how can the Commission promote consultation and participation after 2005?

In terms of the existing theme areas, participants gave **governance and institutions** top priority, followed by **growth and resources**, and **empowerment and culture** came a close third. Within each theme, there was remarkable unanimity on priority areas; these are outlined below. Although not the purpose of this initial consultation, many imaginative suggestions were made on how to tackle specific issues within these priority areas; these will be passed onto the Commission.

Governance and institutions

Two priority areas were identified:

peace and security

responsibilities and incentives

“Africans are weary of wars”

This participant spoke for the many who gave top priority to the need to address **peace and security** on the continent, including the role of rich nations and multi-nationals.

“There is enough capacity in Africa to make the continent a place for all. Africa must recognise and reward African capacity – but how?”

Judging by the level of concern from participants, exploring ways of achieving more equitable **responsibilities and incentives** in Africa must be a defining feature of the Commission’s work. There is great concern about the limitations imposed on Africa’s development by some governments who do not share the agenda, and by weaknesses in capacity, indiscipline and poor standards of decision-making. It is not acceptable for rich nations to ‘pick off’ a few compliant governments, leaving the majority of the continents’ population at the mercy of what has been termed ‘predatory states’.

Growth and resources

Three priority areas were identified:

- North-South relations
- Management of natural resources
- Public-private partnerships

“Real partnership between North and South”

Many participants emphasised the need to focus on how to deal with the negative impact of rich nation policies in the areas of trade, debt, agricultural subsidies, intellectual property protection, and cultural imperialism.

It is noteworthy that hardly any participants prioritised agriculture, but many singled out **management of natural resources** more generally, and particularly the need to make existing science and technology information on technologies that work more available.

A similar number emphasised the need to explore how **public-private partnerships** can better be promoted, including through a more encouraging regulatory environment.

Empowerment and culture

A single priority area emerged:

- Education

Many participants drew attention to the vital contribution education makes to the development of individuals and nations, with benefits starting immediately but spreading far into the future. For example, African ownership of development initiatives like the Commission could be greatly enhanced by focussing on education to bridge the gap between rich and poor countries and foster gender equality and development.

This consultation was organised under the direction of ODI’s Director Simon Maxwell by Elizabeth Cromwell, Fiona Drysdale and David Sunderland. Copies of this report and other materials related to the initial consultation are located at <http://www.odi.org.uk/AfricaConsultation/>

Contact africaconsultation@odi.org.uk to find out more and take part in this initiative.