

## THE G20 NEEDS TO SUPPORT REFORMIST AFRICAN LEADERSHIP

19 Apr 2011

### Op-Ed by Toni Blair on G20 and African Leadership

The last 10 years have seen Sub-Saharan Africa's economy grow by nearly 5 percent annually. In the next decade, the growth of consumer-facing industries, infrastructure improvements, rising agricultural productivity and increased extraction of natural resources will add another trillion dollars to its combined GDP. The crucial question for this year's G20 summit is what the group can do to help ensure that Africa's economic success can be converted into development for its people, many of whom still live in extreme poverty. As a member of the Africa Progress Panel and Patron of the Africa Governance Initiative, I am personally committed to a new partnership between Africa and the international community to help achieve this aim.

I am immensely proud of what we achieved at the 2005 G8 summit at Gleneagles. Gleneagles saw the G8 nations take far-reaching steps in debt cancellation worth more than \$100 billion to the poorest African nations. Every day since, aid given to developing countries has been saving thousands of lives.

But aid alone is not the answer. I believe that, ultimately, Africa's future prosperity lies with the decisions of Africa's leaders. It was a key finding of last year's Africa Progress Panel report that Africa needs leadership that is democratic, accountable and transparent. Africa also needs leadership that is effective, that can shape plans and deliver real change for the people who need it most.

The problem for many African countries is not the absence of the right vision or the right intentions. It is the simple lack of capacity to achieve them. Government today, even in the West, often has far less to do with ideology than with delivery. The techniques of government are in some respects similar to those needed in the private sector -- the right mix of focus, prioritization, capable people and machinery to deliver, performance management and innovative ideas. This is hard enough for developed nations, but it is a vast challenge for African leaders, whose governments often lack the most basic levers of delivery, the expertise and the know-how.

In the last three years, the charity I set up, the Africa Governance Initiative, has focused on just these issues, working now in Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Liberia -- countries that have each undergone a remarkable transformation in recent years. And the advances I see in Kigali, Freetown and Monrovia are just part of the change now happening across Sub-Saharan Africa. There is still a long way to go. But the feeling of optimism is palpable.

For its part, the international community needs to find new ways to support, not just exhort, leaders in Africa to do the right thing. The democracy and accountability revolution that has swept across Africa over the last 20 years has done immeasurable good. But African citizens deserve elections that are about changing lives, not just changing leaders.

Instead, the goal must be to create a dynamic wherein current African leaders can deliver real improvements in the lives of their citizens and wherein the next generation of leaders have models of true public service they can aspire to follow. What these leaders need is practical support in articulating and delivering on their priorities, so that the international community can align its assistance behind them -- helping to realize the aspiration of country ownership.

The turnaround in Africa's economic performance has been powered by dramatic improvements in political stability and the quality of governance -- and by the emergence of a new generation of visionary, reformist leaders. But good leadership is about capacity, not just character. The international community already invests a great deal in keeping Africa's leaders accountable. The question is whether it invests enough in supporting them to succeed.

As my fellow members of the Africa Progress Panel pointed out at their meeting with President Sarkozy earlier this year, the G20 can provide part of the answer. It can boost efforts to support the priorities of this new generation of African leaders by building on the work of the G8 and harnessing the capacity, development experience and resources of its expanded membership.

If African leaders are enabled to fulfill the enormous potential of their people and countries, I am convinced that the continent will be the economic and political success story of the 21st century.

*Tony Blair is a member of the [Africa Progress Panel](#) and patron of the [Africa Governance Initiative](#).*