

## **From Dependency to Self-Sufficiency**

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## From Dependency to Self-Sufficiency

The Africa Governance Initiative aims to support a new generation of African leaders building strong, transformative government institutions **BY TONY BLAIR & KATE GROSS**

### Ending Aid Dependence

AFRICA CAN END ITS DEPENDENCE on foreign aid within a generation. To some reading this, that will seem like a fantasy. But I believe the trajectory for the continent has shifted decisively. This is Africa's time. In the last 10 years, six of the world's fastest-growing economies were African. Where once Africa was a byword for bad governance and big men, now we see a new generation of leaders like Joyce Banda of Malawi and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia. Since 1991, African governments have been ousted at the ballot box 30 times. In the 30 years before, that happened only once. Now the decisions and actions of Africans will determine the continent's future.

Don't misunderstand me. I have long been and remain an advocate for aid. That is why as British prime minister I fought for the G8 to put Africa on its agenda, doubling aid to Africa and dropping the debt burden. And we've seen the results: 10 times more people received treatment for HIV-AIDS from 2003 to 2008, and the number of people living in poverty globally almost halved. Aid will remain vital in humanitarian crises—witness the importance of food aid to the millions of people suffering from the famine in the Sahel.

But aid is only part of the story, a chapter that will become less and less relevant in the years to come. The pace of change in Africa is dizzying, and the way the world works with African countries needs to change with it. The opportunity for Africa today is vast. Democracy is becoming embedded. Seventy percent of Africans are under the age of 30. Consumer spending is set to rise 80 percent by 2020, and the middle class already number over 300 million people. Africa holds 60 percent of the world's unused arable land. Soon, inflows of foreign direct investment will outstrip aid.

What African countries need to seize these opportunities are governments and economies that deliver—governments elected in free and fair elections, and once elected able to provide public goods from infrastructure to education; governments able to attract investments that bring jobs and benefits for the long term.

In countries like Liberia, Rwanda, and Malawi, ravaged by decades of conflict and misrule, government's capacity to do this is not a given. So while aid will remain important to Africa in certain circumstances, we in the developed world must shift our focus to building the capacity of African governments to take their destiny into their own hands, to keep expanding their economies, and to ensure that the benefits of growth reach all people. That's why I set up the Africa



Governance Initiative: to support the new generation of African leaders in building the government institutions they need to transform their countries. —**TONY BLAIR**

### Supporting African Leaders

IMAGINE YOU ARE ELECTED PRESIDENT of a small African country, emerging from a long conflict. The polls were free and fair—the first democratic elections your country has ever held. You enter office on a wave of public optimism, with expectations sky high. You know what you want to do to turn your country around—after all, you spent 20 years campaigning for change as an opposition leader, during which time you were imprisoned and beaten by the previous autocratic regime. What is in your in-tray the day after inauguration? The usual stuff: a worsening economic crisis, with the IMF urging you to devalue your currency and cut subsidies to the

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smallholder farmers who elected you; a list of mining investors who want to meet you, for assurance that their concessions will be safe; offers of help from the world's top philanthropists and donor agencies, each with his own pet project to roll out; a cabinet to be appointed. And to help you do all this you have, well, pretty much nothing. Certainly not the well-oiled bureaucratic machines we are used to in the West: no presidential staff, no press secretary, no legislative affairs department. In fact, almost no one to help you implement the vision you have spent so long developing.

At the Africa Governance Initiative (AGI), we believe that the developed world has been quick to act against bad leaders, but slow to support good ones. This is in many ways natural—Africa has seen more Mobutus than Mandelas. AGI is based on a deep belief that one of the biggest challenges African leaders face is not working out what to do, it's making it happen in practice. Our teams work alongside African public servants from chiefs of staff down to junior analysts to strengthen the institutions needed to deliver public goods, and experienced politicians work alongside the leaders themselves, offering the kind of support that only someone who has walked in their shoes can.

This emphasis on government capacity and leadership is important for three reasons. First, because government can change lives for the better. Without effective government, roads and power stations won't get built. Health care and education won't be provided. But where government works, the results are clear. Take the huge reduction in poverty in Rwanda: 1 million people lifted out of poverty in just five years. Second, effective governance increases the resilience of the state itself—increasing the chances of a country avoiding conflict and maintaining democracy. The third rationale for developing effective governance is that it allows countries to take ownership of their own development, reducing their dependence on outside aid. For development to be sustainable, the transfer of responsibility to developing country governments has to happen. This transfer is also what African leaders want.

Since AGI was founded five years ago, it has worked in Guinea, Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, and most recently Malawi. AGI is unique in working *inside* the very heart of government, in presidential and prime ministerial offices. For AGI, trust is a prerequisite to success. We go only where we are invited, and unusually the invitations come from the heads of state. Because of the way we work, in the inner sanctum, where outsiders are often unwelcome, building trust with governments is crucial for AGI, but it's going to be increasingly important for everyone involved in development, as we move from the old donor/recipient paradigm to a new approach based on genuine partnership between the developed and developing world.

As in life, in development there is no recipe for building trust. But there are three elements that matter: first, the ability to empathize, to stand in someone else's shoes; second, the need to follow no agenda but one's partners'; and third, the need to be attuned to the politics of reform in a way most development organizations aren't.

#### BUILDING TRUST IN RWANDA

As our first program, AGI's work in Rwanda has fundamentally shaped our model, our trust-based approach of working shoulder-

to-shoulder with African partners. In 2008, we were invited by President Paul Kagame to help him rebuild the Rwandan public service, hollowed out by years of misrule and the devastation of the 1994 genocide. His aim was ambitious: not just to maintain the progress Rwanda had made, but to go from being one of the poorest countries in the world to middle-income status by 2020.

Initially, AGI supported the development of an effective center—a presidential office, cabinet secretariat, and prime minister's office—as a means to drive development outcomes through a well-functioning system. In 2011, as President Kagame surveyed his country's progress, he decided that Rwanda needed to systematically confront the institutional weaknesses that stood in the way of delivering results. He designed an approach that would bring in foreign expertise to train a new generation of Rwandan public servants in critical development areas. This new approach—the four-year Strategic Capacity Building Initiative, which received funding from the World Bank and the United Nations, with AGI playing a pivotal role—is now live.

This is the second part of building trust: enabling government to drive its agenda, not driving our own. Whereas traditional donor-led capacity-building programs were often supply driven, detached from the political priorities of the government, under this new initiative all external efforts to build capacity are aligned behind the four areas the Rwandans have prioritized as central to their economic development: productive agriculture, generating and distributing electricity, attracting inward investment, and creating local jobs and tax revenues from the emerging mining sector. Under the initiative, AGI has worked with the Rwandan government to map the “delivery chain” for each of the priorities, to work out what capacity is lacking, and to bring in international and regional expertise to train young Rwandans.

For example, with only 10 percent of the population currently accessing electricity, the energy ministry has to increase power generation and distribution. Rwanda has the potential to explore geothermal energy, but the ministry lacked the necessary expertise. Through the Strategic Capacity Building Initiative, hands-on knowledge has been imported from Kenya, with geothermal experts coming to Rwanda to work inside the ministry. These experts are paired with young Rwandan public servants, who will learn on the job as the policy is developed and implemented.

At the same time, the analysis of the critical capacity gaps includes the heart of government—the presidency, prime minister's office, and finance ministry—so that political authority and technical reforms are bound together. This marriage between technical know-how and the politics of reform is the third way we build trust. Reform initiatives follow the government's priorities, not AGI's. And at its heart, like all development, its success depends on the interactions between people, between the exchange of ideas and knowledge, and between the developed and developing world, all of which happens only when you have trust and partnership.

Genuine partnership—working alongside government, not dictating to it over a conference table—is what African leaders will expect from the rest of the world. This is where development is heading. And it's a goal AGI strives for. —KATE GROSS