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Implementing Blair's Commission Report for Africa



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THE recent release of the report of the Commission for Africa has generated several comments concerning the significance of its findings for Africa's development and of international support for that effort. Much less, however, has been said about the implications of the report for the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the process of taking the recommendations forward. These are equally important.

One of the five objectives of the Commission was "to support the best existing work on Africa, in particular, the **New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD)** and the **African Union** and help ensure this work achieves its goals". This objective no doubt allayed the concerns of those who feared that the Commission might divert attention from NEPAD. But, there are other significant ways in which the work of the Commission has complemented NEPAD.



The Commission's report has underlined many of the priorities of NEPAD. For example, it places considerable emphasis on the need for:

- Effective governance and capacity building
- Peace and security
- Investing in human development
- Poverty reduction
- Fairer trade
- Increased aid to Africa.

Regarding the last point, it is significant to note that when NEPAD first estimated that Africa would need about \$64 billion annually to achieve an estimated seven per cent annual growth rate; this figure was derided as unrealistic. Yet the Commission for Africa now advocates an immediate doubling of aid to Africa, bringing it to about **US\$50 billion per annum** and estimates that Africa will need about **US\$75 billion by 2010** to meet the various needs which the Commission has articulated.

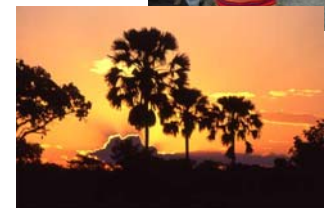
Since NEPAD was created in July 2001, and adopted as a programme of the African Union in July 2003, one major international event or the other has cropped up every year to dominate the global agenda, threatening to eclipse international attention to Africa's development. Fortunately, the UN General Assembly's annual debate on NEPAD, and G8's annual discussion on its Africa Action Plan have ensured that Africa's development remains on the global agenda. The report of the Commission is a major boost to the effort at international policy dialogue and actions in support of Africa.



The report's recommendation that an effective independent monitoring mechanism should be created to be supported by a small unit within an existing African or international institution is also consistent with the orientation of NEPAD for periodically evaluating progress both by Africa and its development partners. The creation of such a unit calls for an African Union-United Nations partnership to ensure both regional legitimacy and international credibility. Just as there was initial scepticism about the establishment of the Commission, great expectations has now been aroused by the bold and imaginative recommendations it has outlined. The hard part now is how to build international consensus on and generate momentum for action around the report's key recommendations.



In this regard, four steps will aid that process. First, leadership by example - by the initiating government in embracing and enacting some of the key recommendations of the Commission - can help galvanize more international support. Hence, the UK government's recent decisions to relax conditionality in its aid policy; to double its bilateral aid to Africa in 2005 and to write off 100 per cent of the debts to the poorest countries are substantively salient. Second, the Summits of the G8 in Gleneagles, Scotland, and the EU should strive to adopt the report's main recommendations. This will be consistent with the support that these two Summit forums have expressed for African development and for NEPAD, in particular. Third, the process of considering the report will be helped greatly by some rank-ordering of the various recommendations directed at Africa's development partners.



Such a process would contribute to a productive dialogue in the summits planned for later in the year. A careful review of those recommendations indicates that they could be classified into three

main categories, namely: those that entail financial commitment; those that require change of legislation, for example, concerning repatriation of illicitly acquired state funds and assets from developed countries to Africa; and those that require goodwill and change of attitudes, for example giving greater voice in multilateral institutions to African countries.

Fourth, the report can provide fresh encouragement to African governments to deepen their policy commitments to launch Africa on the path of enhancing its productive capacity, strengthening its administrative capability and promoting accountable governance - essential ingredients for sustained growth and poverty reduction. Concerted action on these issues is required on the part of Africa and its international partners to help overcome obstacles to Africa's development. This will pave the way for an Africa that depends more on its competence and productive capacity than the world's compassion to survive and succeed: in short, a strong and prosperous Africa, which is in our common interest.

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