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The Conference on Africa's Imperative Agenda met in Nairobi December 5 - 6, 1994 bringing together over sixty African and global politicians, intellectuals, public servants, businessmen and communicators under the Chairmanship of H E Mwalimu Julius Nyerere. The Conference was opened by H E Daniel arap Moi, President of Kenya and hosted by Mr Philip Ndegwa. The basic background document on which discussion focussed was AFRICA TO 2000 AND BEYOND: Imperative Political and Economic Agenda by Mr Philip Ndegwa and Prof Reg Green.

Participants agreed that the situation of Africa today was alarming following a decade and a half of political, economic and social unsuccess internally and of marginalisation globally. However, they also agreed that continuation of these trends was not inevitable as evidenced both by earlier success and by signs of hope in significant, if isolated, achievements nationally, sub-regionally and continentally during the past decade and a half.

A reversal of the negative trends was seen to be both possible and necessary. The sooner action on a sustained, coherent basis can begin the better. The obstacles to success will be increased by delay. Only Africans can fragment and marginalise Africa and only Africans can create a renewed vision and agenda based on commitment to, and renewing the process of, development in Africa. Without African initiatives global respect and involvement would continue to decline and, in any

case, only Africans can develop Africa -- not outsiders -- no matter how well intentioned and informed.

The Conference is aware of steps toward reappraisal and redesign of action by other African fora -- notably the OAU, ECA and several sub-regional bodies. These are very valuable and, indeed, in the articulation of specific action programmes go much further than a brief conference can. But past experience in Africa warns that, without a coherent vision with high level political commitment and a broad base of institutional and popular understanding and support, such proposals often become academic papers, memorable only as tombstones of lost opportunities. To contribute to avoiding a recurrence of that process which has been so expensive to Africa and Africans has been the central goal of the Conference.

The renewal of vision, commitment and forward movement in development needs a process, not a one off declaration no matter how well crafted. That process requires political commitment at the highest levels, but also participation by public servants, intellectuals, communities with common concern, residents of localities and communicators.

Such a process has several levels: national, sub-regional, continental and global (joint African approaches to and bargaining with other global actors bilaterally and in the United Nations/Bretton Woods extended institutional family). These levels require interaction -- that is, sub-regional and

continental agenda need to be built from national priorities and at the same time, the national development processes need to be designed to incorporate and support sub-regional and continental initiatives.

To be effective, a process of dialogue to renew Africa's development must be based on commitment, in particular commitment to act together at different levels on an agreed priority agenda. Commitment -- from the highest political level through to the household and individual levels -- flows from a shared vision, not from particular institutions or concrete policies and programmes. The latter are essential to giving life to the vision but cannot substitute for it.

To be successful, a new or renewed vision of Africa's development by Africans needs to relate to the present and future African context within the present and future global context. The vision of the liberation of Africa from colonial rule exemplifies how a shared vision can lead to a common commitment and, over time, to successful building up of continental, sub-regional and national dynamics leading to achievement of the central goals of the vision. It also illustrates the need for a limited number of top level decision takers to spearhead the agreement on the vision and the process of its implementation, linking their substantive work with the ability to communicate it to other decision takers, public servants, intellectuals, civil society leaders, and ordinary people who give it the necessary broad support base.

The vision needed today is one of development in Africa by Africans beginning now, with its goals the main political, social and economic aspirations for 2020, and with an immediate action agenda for at least the next five years. In one sense the 1950-70's vision of ending ignorance, disease, malnutrition, poverty and lack of freedom more generally remains valid. However, it needs urgently to be reoriented in light of the experiences of the past two decades and of the changing global context.

To implement a vision requires processes and institutions at national, sub-regional and continental level. For institutions, as with the vision repositioning, renewal and capacity building are likely to be more central than fresh starts. The OAU needs to be reoriented to focus on conflict avoidance and resolution; continental action and development of knowledge in respect to development, and to building up common African stands on such issues as debt reduction and mutual benefit environmental protection contracts calling for negotiation with the North. Sub-regional bodies can and should play a broader role, not only in the linked production infrastructure-trade enabling areas but also in development and exchange of knowledge, specialised capacity building, response to shocks such as the 1991-1993 Southern African drought and broader coordination of national social and economic policy. The African Development Bank needs to reorient its advisory and financial roles to relate more closely to actual country contexts and development priorities and, together with ECA, to build on its applied research and analysis base.

At all levels dialogue and action will benefit from being more open processes with involvement by a range of enterprise, common interest, professional and other bodies as well as governmental ones. The emergence of an increasing number of independent policy analysis institutes and of civil society group analytical capacity can play a welcome role in informing dialogue and discussion.

Similarly national, subregional and continental common interest and social sector bodies -- e.g. enterprise associations, trade unions, women's organisations and religious groupings -- need to rethink, update and reposition themselves to participate more effectively in dialogue and in the process of reaching and sustaining commitment to a **common African vision of the development of Africa by Africans.**

International and foreign national agencies, NGOs and foreign enterprises likewise need to rethink their goals, roles and activities in Africa. They should recognize that only an African owned vision and process of development to which they relate can create an enabling climate in which they can play constructive and mutually beneficial roles.

A vision and institutions alone are not enough to sustain a dynamic even though they are necessary to institute it and to review it regularly. (The last is important -- many of Africa's present problems result directly from slow understanding of and response to, radical global changes since 1979-80). Concrete goals, programmes, policies and resource allocations can

give life to a vision, move reality toward its goals and validate both commitment and joint action.

Prioritisation is necessary -- resources are limited. To plan to go forward is necessarily to choose what to do first. But so long as a concrete set of actions is relevant to the priority agenda, speed in gaining successful movement in the right direction is more crucial than fine tuning. In any event, within the renewed development vision differing contexts will require different concrete action programmes both sub regionally and nationally.

Enabling poor households (and poor countries) to become less poor and then not poor is a central element in the vision. Its realisation turns on achieving effective access by all Africans to: health, education, water, infrastructure, nutrition, livelihoods (especially small household farming and both formal and informal sector wage employment) and markets. Empowerment to access includes state human and infrastructure investment, but also policies to enable enterprises, households and individuals to produce and to participate more. Both labour intensive infrastructure investment and paying living wages to public servants are often among the means to more efficient public sector contributions to poverty reduction by improving capacity and by directly raising household earned incomes.

A twenty five year vision -- and a five year agenda -- also need to address environment. If Africans are to pass on the heritage of their land to their children in as good a shape as

they received it, action is needed. User friendly and participatory environmental sustaining actions (including e.g. agro-forestry, pollution control, population policy) are needed.

Enabling and empowerment necessarily include gender issues, not in the sense of separate women's projects but of effective access to mainline programmes in health, education, water, infrastructure, employment, land and markets as well as to dialogue and the political process. Differentiated approaches within these to relate to women's needs, capabilities and activities vary contextually, but means to reduce women's workload, including less time-consuming access to health services, water and fuel, will be important.

No one conference can produce a vision, secure political commitment to it, reposition institutions, articulate a priority list of concrete actions. This conference was no exception. What it can do -- apart from its impact on what participants do individually -- is to call for:

- a. continued vision of development oriented dialogue and conversation locally, nationally, sub-regionally and continentally.
- b. the urgent creation of a small group of leaders -- including but not limited to heads of state -- to carry forward the construction of a redefined development vision to lead into the institutional, programme and policy priority agenda, and to communicate that vision to Heads of

State via the OAU and, to do so more broadly, via sub-regional and national dialogue and the mass media. That ultimately political process is the means to secure the political commitment needed to launch and to sustain strategic action to regain an African forward dynamic.

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