

Reflecting on the High Level Meeting on Africa's Development Needs

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Monday 22nd - It was Africa's day on the sides of the 63rd General Assembly of the UN. Many heads of state and Government both from Africa and other member states of the UN attended the 'High Level Meeting on Africa's Development Needs'. Presidents Kagame (Rwanda), Koroma (Sierra Leone), Sirleaf Johnson (Liberia), Museveni (Uganda) and others were there

as was Abdulaye Wade (Senegal) and King Mswati of Swaziland. Two noticeable absentees were Umaru Musa Yar Adua of Nigeria and Thabo Mbeki of South Africa. The former stayed away amidst recent rumours that he is seriously ill including speculations that he was going to resign while the latter actually resigned after a long losing battle with his colleagues in the ANC who recalled him on the eve of the meeting. Both countries are Africa's power houses and the main pillars of the NEW PARTNERSHIP FOR AFRICA'S DEVELOPMENT (NEPAD) which is really the agreed framework for Africa's development that is being reviewed as part of this meeting. However for every President that could not come there were scores of others attending.

The agenda included a review of commitments and implementations of Africa's development. There is a consensus that we know what Africa needs, what is lacking is the political will both by Africa's leaders and leaders of the International Community who claim they want to support Africa. They do the talk but are not willing to walk the walk. Yet Africa does not need new commitments, it just need a fulfillment of those on the table some of them gathering dust for several decades.

For instance the commitment to contribute 0.7 % of GNI of each rich country's budget to International Development later incorporated into goal NO 8 of the MDGs in 2000 has been there since the later 1970s. There is growing frustration that no more purpose can be served by any more meeting about renewing commitments. The UN report on MDGs and the Africa Steering Group Report identified the funding gaps between commitment and actual delivery. 10 countries have done all the pilot required, built the model villages, the costing, the budgeting, evaluation, monitoring required and yet their coffers are still empty. There was anger and frustration from unexpected quarters at the side event on the "Gleneagles Scenario Approach to Scaling up ODA" because there is ample knowledge about what works, where it works and how it works, but insufficient resources to accelerate fulfillment of the goals.

Before the Round Table on mobilizing resources for development which was chaired by President Kagame of Rwanda, I had asked him a rhetorical question: "Must Africa accept every invitation to Dinner?". His answer was blunt: No. Then I suggested to him that he should consider hosting a mother of all conferences about Africa's development at which we will put a moratorium on any further talks about Africa's development and Africa begins to engage in the practical efforts at developing itself based on its own resources, resolve and genuine partnership. He said he would think about it. Knowing him to be one of the most assertive and focused leaders on the continent, I will not be surprised if he actually calls this meeting. And I think there will be a lot of responses to it because Africans must be tired of being discussed, analyzed and evaluated by others or begging others to help sort out their problems.

I personally think that both the "Development Needs" and the "Call to Action on MDGs" High Level Meetings in New York will be a watershed. If there is no concrete action after this, no one should bother turning up for any future ones.