AFRICA’S REFORMERS
Re-wiring governance

DEMOGRAPHY
Africa’s young policy makers flex their muscles

SERVICE DELIVERY
Who are Africa’s front runners?

INTERVIEWS
Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
Lamido Sanusi
Paul Kagame
Joyce Banda
Hailemariam Desalegn
Nick Thompson

Effective governance: From potential to progress

Sub-Saharan Africa is rich in resources, talent, energy and spirit. But it has not been rich in leadership. It is made up of rich countries that have been poorly managed. “These words from President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia, Africa’s first female head of state, are testament to years of wasted potential in too many African countries. The continent remains resource-rich – with vast mineral reserves, fertile soil, and a young workforce. But as President Johnson Sirleaf says, these will only turn from potential to progress if African countries are well led and well managed. That’s why governance matters: to achieve honest and effective leadership and the proper management of resources. And it is why we set up the Tony Blair Africa Governance Initiative (AGI) five years ago, to bring a new approach to this issue. We are focused on effective governance: the capacity of government to deliver public services to its people. As President John Mahama of Ghana said at the first meeting of the new Global Network of Delivery Leaders, convened recently by Jim Kim, president of the World Bank: “I believe delivery is at the core of governance. We can come out with beautiful policies, but policies alone will not do the job. In order to succeed as a leader, you need to deliver on your programmes.” This is the founding idea behind AGI.

It takes us in a different direction and to different places than other types of governance support. We are focused on the centre of governance. We work on systems of implementation; the critical functions of prioritisation, planning and performance management. And we have a model that combines teams of professionals working inside partner governments with the support and advice of our patron, Tony Blair; to the presidents we work with: shoulder-to-shoulder, leader-to-leader. We began in 2008 in Rwanda and Sierra Leone. Today, we are also privileged to be working in Liberia, Guinea, Nigeria, South Sudan and Malawi – and I hope in other places soon too.

As we celebrate our fifth anniversary I’m delighted to be supporting The Africa Report to bring you this special report: ‘Africa’s Reformers’. Some of the issues in the report are of course contentious, and we at AGI don’t agree with all of the conclusions drawn, but that’s exactly the kind of open debate we need on these tough topics. I’m particularly pleased that, through-out the report, we hear from African leaders themselves, as they articulate the challenges they face and their visions for the future.

The discussions raise big questions; the importance of the “elusive quality” of leadership, especially in those chaotic early days in the toughest and loneliest of jobs – that of a president; the changing demands that leaders place on the development community as they seek to move from a relationship based on aid to one of partnership, and the need for external technical assistance to be based on personal skills and values as much as academic knowledge. Change starts with trusting relationships, not a technical manual.

All of this poses difficult questions. Governance is complex and political, and politics tend to bring many solutions. It challenges agencies like ours to adapt to the local context, as ideas imposed from the outside will not stick. There is a debate to be had around the political and economic transitions that African countries are going through, each in their own way from their own unique background – debates to be had primarily in and by the countries themselves. And there are challenges around media and accountability, because the capacity of government to deliver good hand-in-hand with the capacity of civil society to hold government to account. Those two sides to governance sit together as the cornerstones of real democracy, alongside free and fair elections.

None of this is easy. But if we come back to President Johnson Sirleaf’s words we have a foundation for optimism. The failure of leadership and management may have defined Africa’s past. They lie at the heart of the challenges ahead. But there is a new generation of leaders who I believe can take African countries from being rich in potential to being rich in the things that really matter – jobs, wellbeing, health, and education. I hope you enjoy reading about some of them in this report.

Nick Thompson is chief executive officer at the Tony Blair Africa Governance Initiative

The Howard Buffett Foundation has teamed up with the Tony Blair Africa Governance Initiative and the World Food Prize Foundation to launch the 40 Chances Fellows Program to identify the most innovative, market-based solutions to addressing food insecurity in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Malawi, and Rwanda.

To learn more visit www.40chances.com/fellows/
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### Foreword
Nick Thompson, chief executive of The Tony Blair Africa Governance Initiative, outlines the importance of leadership in shaping Africa’s future.

### Feature
**From rulers to leaders**
A new generation of policy makers is exercising influence, with implications for Africa’s development trajectory.

### Interview
**Kampeta Sayizoga**
Rwanda’s permanent secretary to the ministry of finance, at 33, is one of the many women driving change. She speaks about the impact of youth and gender on policy formation.

### Feature
**Staking a claim**
Leaders in post-crisis states face the tough task of bringing their nations back from the brink.

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**Re-launching a demographic dividend**
Studies have linked democracy to improved social indicators, but debate rages about the causal mechanisms at play.

### Interview
**Hailemariam Desalegn**
The Ethiopian prime minister on healthcare reform, mass mobilisation and the legacy of Meles Zenawi.

### Feature
**Re-wiring governance**
Africa’s media landscape is opening up, putting governments under greater scrutiny than ever before.

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**Re-wiring governance**

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CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT: Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Nigeria’s finance minister; Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, president of Liberia; Lamido Sanusi, governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria.

BELOW: Trainees learn to repair hospital equipment in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
F or decades, government jobs across much of Africa were allocated according to patronage, kinship or social network. At the top, strongmen dominated politics from the end of colonial rule to the 1990s, with barely any rulers peacefully ousted at the ballot box.

Today, things look very different. The organisation of African states worried little about undemocratic practices. Its successor, the African Union, is less tolerant. Most of the continent’s dictators are either out of government or out of touch.

A new generation of leaders is entering politics, their outlook more cosmopolitan than their predecessors. “Globalisation has brought what is happening around the world into our living rooms and so people no longer feel as if our part of the world is so secluded and we can carry on at our own pace,” says Kingsley Moghalu, deputy governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria. “They see what is happening all over the world and people want to enjoy the stability, economic growth and other positive attributes they see in other societies.”

Obasanjo Aganju, points out that, along with a change in consciousness, there is also a shift in skillsets, with managerial experts increasingly powerful within his government. “When you look at the different portfolios in Nigeria, in the most critical ones you have technocrats,” he says. The same is true in Kenya, where several key posts are now occupied by technically skilled policy makers with diverse global experiences. At 47, Phyllis Kandie, cabinet secretary for East African Community affairs, commerce and tourism, was previously an investment banker; and an adviser to the World Bank and European Union. Henry Rotich, at 44, is cabinet secretary at Kenya’s Treasury, and has previously worked for the country’s central bank, and for the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Harvard graduate Adan Abdulla Mohammed is cabinet secretary for industrialisation, having previously been chief administrative officer at Barclays Africa.

The old guard stands down
Libera’s Ellen JohnSirleaf, aged 74, stands out as a leader intent on ushering in a new guard. Since coming to power in 2006, the Nobel Peace Prize-winning president has sought out promising young Liberians at home and abroad, and was instrumental in training and government work. “The president is consciously trying to put the younger generation in leadership positions,” says Steven Radelet, a government adviser.

Amara Konneh, the 41 year old finance minister, is one of Africa’s most impressive young leaders. His nouse was evident in his early twenties when, displaced by civil war and living in a camp in Guinea, he convened an ad-hoc administrative committee, opened a school and worked with the United Nations to meet the needs of refugees. After emigrating to the US, he returned to Liberia in 2006 and in a short space of time has made remarkable headway.

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Lessons learned
Policy makers in their 30s and 40s do not remember Africa’s jubilant independence, but they did witness as youngsters its worsening economic fortunes at the 1970s were on. Now, they are eager to change that story.

Sierra Leonean economist Omotunde John- son, a former IMF official, says the world’s economic trajectories of post-independence Africa influenced how today’s leaders think about governance. “Countries had seen the consequences of overvalued exchange rates, governments’ excessive borrowing from central banks, non-concessional foreign borrowing, produces prices of state-owned marketing boards that resulted in huge taxation of agricultural commodities, subsidies and price controls for grain and fuel, and mismanagement of government budgetary revenue, especially from natural resources,” he says. “These made them sit up and rethink their whole budgetary management as well as other aspects of their macroeconomic manage ment.”

In several resource rich nations, leader ship changes have been accompanied by more responsible management of revenues. “The government framework surrounding resources extraction; the knowledge surrounding the various resource curse types from yesterday; and the level of transparency that envelopes resource extraction are so much improved,” says Goolam Ballim, Standard Bank’s chief econom ict, referencing the development of sovereign wealth funds and more robust petroleum develop ment bills, which attempt to share resource revenues more equitably between investors, the state and its citizens.

Policydisconnects and economic crisis are not the only reasons today’s leaders seek a root-and-branch reform of government. Conflict has also been a catalyst. Paul Kagame, the Rwandan president, references his country’s 1994 genocide as the starting point of today’s developmental success. “Our tragic history, and many of the problems we have faced, bad as they are, are also constructive. We have learned to live within our means. We have tried and we have learned that we cannot do this. We have to find ways that we can improve our way of life,” he says. ‘Success also has to come from a mindset that nobody is going to come and take you out of trouble without your participation.’

Nigeria’s new cadre
In Nigeria, a combination of greater skillsets and younger perspectives are coming together to improve a broken system.

A power privatisation programme, the first attempt in half a century, promises to improve catastrophic energy supplies.

Anti-corruption efforts are starting to bear fruit in the extractive industries, albeit from a low base. “Nigeria is an example par excellence of the resource curse. And [they are] now working away at getting the figures out, and doing audits, and making things more transparent... They have revealed some very considerable moneys that have been paid over, giving some ammunition to parliamentary inquiries,” says Clare Short, chair of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI).

The overhaul of banking regulations has seen the country’s financial services sector emerge from a state of mass fraud and ineffi ciency, under the leadership of the soft-spoken central bank governor Lamido Sanusi. Appoint ed in the midst of a debt crisis in 2009, his bold moves to fix Nigeria’s corruption-stricken banks topped eight local chief executives and ushered in sweeping reforms aimed to protect deposi tors’ cash, recapitalise banks, boost financial inclusion, and curb illigal financial flows. His prudent monetary policy has brought inflation down to single digits and stabled the exchange rate, protecting jobs and growth along the way.

Making those changes in one of Africa’s most notoriously opaque economies is no easy task, but Mr Sanusi has stuck to his guns. “Throughout my tenure of governor I’ve had a very clear sense of who I am there to serve. I have no doubt in my mind that my pri

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than the government. In the first year, around an electronic wallet system to distribute subsidy
days we ended the corruption of 40 years.”
educe going missing along the way. “It was a very
seeds failing to reach farmers and much pro-
tion, with government-supplied fertilisers and
subsidy programme was rampant with corrup-
in a pitiful state. A longstanding national input
agricultural economist and former vice presi-
ded it. The type of zeal that he has shown
positive externalities emerging from Lamido
standard Bank’s Mr Ballim argues that his reforms
is already wired in a particular way.”
are inevitable risks of back-tracking when Mr
Sanusi steps down in 2014. “Who is chosen as
governer will be important for the sake of the be-
belief in the reform and how it will continue,”
he conceded. “But I have tried to get the board of
the central bank involved. I have tried to get
everybody to own these policies… I am hoping that,
having carried the institution along with me,
that they really do believe in it, and that
whomever comes in will find an institution that
is already wired in a particular way.”
Mr Sanusi leaves a meaningful legacy. Stan-
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you are standing on the side of the weak against
enlightened depositor,” he explains. “But since
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necessary: a world view. You absolutely need to
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A poll by Gallup showed that Rwanda is now
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In Africa, Rwanda has been rated the best
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Interview

Kampeta Sayinzoga
Permanent Secretary to the Rwandan Ministry of Finance

“The perception has changed dramatically. All of a sudden it is becoming cool to have a young leadership”

INTERVIEW BY ZOE FLOOD

R

sounda’s permanent secretary to the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, and secretary to the Treasury, cut an unexpected figure. Just 33 years old and female, Kampeta Sayinzoga is far from the normal demographic for someone in her job.

“I’m in a position that normally should be for a 65 year old man, and I’m a 33 year old woman,” she tells This Is Africa, seated on couches in her plain office in downtown Kigali, Rwanda’s capital. “It sends a signal to the youth, that if you work hard and develop your skills, there’s absolutely no reason why – at 27, even – you shouldn’t be in this seat.”

A masters in economic development from Nottingham University, a stint with the World Bank and time as the ministry’s chief econom- ist and director of macro policy, as well as exposure to a variety of political systems in Belgium, South Africa and the UK, all make Ms Sayinzoga an example par excellence of a young, cosmopolitan generation of policy makers making their way into African govern- ments.

Since her appointment in 2009, she has worked on headline-grabbing initiatives, lead- ing technical teams for the country’s maiden international bond issuance and its first, heavily oversubscribed initial public offering, in which the government floated a 25 percent stake in Rwanda’s only brewery, Bir Liquor, on the national stock exchange. "The government was selling shares as most decisions took place in Minskotin [the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning],” explains Ms Sayinzoga.

She describes the successful launch of a $40m eurobond in April this year as her proudest moment at the ministry: “It epitomises all the hard work Rwandans do on a daily basis – it was a seal of approval from the business community.”

Ms Sayinzoga brings to the job an impa- tience with accepted practices – she describes herself as “a bit of a bulldozer in a bureaucracty” – while colleagues speak of her furious work ethic. But she’s also, quite possibly, just more efficient than her elders. “What would probably take my dad [Jean Sayinzoga, chair- man of the Rwandan Demobilisation and Re- integration Commission] four meetings, will take me one BlackBerry instant message,” she jokes.

She is not alone in Rwanda, which has a government that is both unusually young, and dominated by women. Notable figures along- side Ms Sayinzoga include Ires Mpoirana, the former director of the National University of Rwanda’s journalism school and current director of the cabinet office of the president; Yolande Makolo, communications director for the presidency; and Clare Akamanzi, acting CEO of the Rwanda Development Board. Each is challenging burdensome bureaucracies and bringing corporate practice to government.

“Because we are so few with each other as young people, we are capable of telling each other the truth,” says Ms Sayinzoga. “If a col- league disagrees with the permanent secre- tary’s idea or proposal, she’ll probably just re- ply to my BlackBerry (Blackberry instant messenger) and say: ‘This is a stupid idea, why would you think that, let’s remove it’. There’s no reason to be defensive. If I’m 33 and make a mistake, I did it in my good faith, maybe I didn’t look at the bigger picture. I won’t take it personally that I made a mistake and then try to cover up my mistake,” she adds.

“Public policy is a bit of a messy process, it’s never scientific. Sometimes you get it right, sometimes you get it wrong. And I think at our age it’s easy to say ‘Well I tried, tough luck’, and you move on. But I think with older genera- tions, sometimes the ego thing creeps in.”

But while Ms Sayinzoga differentiates herself from older officials, including her own father, she is also aware of the shortcomings of young leadership. “It’s a risk to bring in young leaders like me, we may have the energy and the passion but we also sometimes do not have the experience to step back and under- stand politics,” she says, before adding that she doesn’t have any political ambition. “My ambition is not to become an MP or a minister. I just want to contribute where I am and then move on.”

Ms Sayinzoga says her priorities are to cre- ate meritocratic and sustainable institutions, and to communicate to the population what the government intends to do for them. “You need to have a bureaucracy that does not have a clientelist, patronage system. You need to have systems of appeals that are working,” she argues.

Plugging into governance

One area of focus for Ms Sayinzoga is ICT, which is not only an economic enabler but can also strengthen popular engagement with government. “We are trying to create an accountability model where the citizens hold you directly accountable, not your political party,” Ms Sayinzoga says. “That is why we want by 2017 the entire popula- tion [to] have broadband, because you can’t stifle citizen accountability if everybody has Twitter... I mean there is nothing you can do about it. If somebody is unhappy they will tweet, they will make it public,” she argues.

Whether the authorities will tolerate direct political opposition is another ques- tion. This is still a country with sensitivities about criticism of government and dissent- ing voices regularly cite the arrest of political opposers.

Ms Sayinzoga refers often to “patriotism” as a driver behind both her work and Rwanda’s post-genocide success, and describes de- velopment as a question of national security. “As long as people are happy and busy, are getting wealthier, that’s what counts,” she says. “You don’t think of killing your neigh- bour when you’re making money.”

For Ms Sayinzoga, a teenager at the time of the 1994 genocide, the question is how the next generation – her own young children’s generation – will sustain the urgency she feels.

“What brought Rwanda where it is to- day is that passion, that feeling that you can make a difference, you can see the product of what you do,” she says, describing how many of the country’s current leadership returned from the diaspora and wanted to build a home reflective of their ambitions.

“The bait for us was patriotism – the need to change the reputation of our nation, from genocide to success story,” she says. “My child will not have that need because he will inherit a nation that is known to be a success story. So the question is, what will drive him to push this country to the next level?”

While the president is known for en- couraging youth achievement, he is also understood to have a tight inner circle – Ms Sayinzoga is married to his nephew. But she says that it is vital that people “believe in hard work” as leading to success: “They need to see the results, they need to see that so-and- so is working hard, look at where he is,” she says. “They need to look for a job and have the job because they are the best at something, not because they are my cousin, they are my uncle.”

Ms Sayinzoga feels that Rwanda is setting the tone for other African countries, where initial scepticism at women in power and the promotion of young leaders has increasingly shifted to excitement.

“I think the perception has changed dra- matically. All of a sudden it is becoming cool to have a young leadership,” she says. “It is like, oh, you can reach these results, while having all these young women in powerful positions.”

For Ms Sayinzoga, the more balanced representation of men and women in gov- ernment provides complementarity. “I think generally women are a little more risk averse about it. If somebody is unhappy they will tweet, they will make it public,” she argues.

Fresh from its recent international bond issuance – in which, by Ms Sayinzoga’s ac- count, both she and her male superior played complementary roles and closed an order book of over $3.5bn – Rwanda’s current govern- ment will continue to prioritise the coun- try’s economic development.

“Stimulation to economic growth and high standards of public integrity, much more than multiparty democracy, are the hallmarks of Rwanda’s strategy. But Ms Sayin- zoga and her peers may have a rare op- portunity to remake the country’s political culture at the same time, and she is keen to leave that legacy: “When I can almost become irrelevant, when an institution can almost work on autopilot, then you have mature in- stitutions,” she says.
Policy

Starting from scratch

Policy makers in post-crisis states face the tough task of bringing their nations back from the brink. Their first challenge is to restore public finances and stabilise economies

Guinea in freefall

After years of civil unrest, a 2008 military junta ousted Guinea’s government, catalysing two years of intense economic decline. In 2010, after the first free elections in its post-independence history, the military leadership handed power to a transitional government.

The finance minister of today’s civilian government, Kerfalla Yansané, recalls the scene when a new administration arrived: “The fiscal deficit, inflation, depreciation of money – all indicators were in red,” he says.

The macroeconomic situation nosedived between 2009 and 2010, while international reserves dwindled. Higher costs hit households, and poverty rates increased to 56 percent in 2010, from 49.2 percent in 2002, figures from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) show. But once relations with the IMF and the World Bank were resumed in 2011, the new government wasted no time in stabilising a catastrophic situation, setting itself the initial target of curtailing the fiscal deficit and reducing inflation. In 2012, GDP growth reached 4 percent and international reserves rebounded. By July 2013 inflation had fallen to just over 12 percent.

Responding to worries over past procurement agreements, Mr Yansané’s ministry has revised down mining investment projections. It has completed the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) programme for the country, as well as the Heavily Indebted Poor Coun- tries’ Debt Initiative, reducing government debt by two-thirds. Major investment in public services, especially education, the justice system and the police force, and construction work around the capital, are all promoting growth and the country’s tapping the regional CFA bond market for capital.

Chasing former glories

Malawi and Guinea never looked like post-independence success stories, but elsewhere on the continent there are countries with positive past experiences to draw on. Côte d’Ivoire was once referred to as the ‘pearl of West Africa’. But even after the death of its leader Félix Houphouët-Boigny in 1993, it has been beset by conflict, peaking in a civil war between 2000 and 2003. Côte d’Ivoire had a booming economy from 1960 to 1999,” recalls the prime minister, Daniel Kablan Duncan. “But from 2000 to 2010 there were some dis- turbances and GDP growth was at a maximum of 1 percent. There was an increase in poverty, instead of a decrease as there was in the past.”

At the lowest point in 2011, GDP contracted by -4.7 percent. Fast forward to today, and the turnaround is impressive. The government – led by Alassane Ouattara – has engineered a “spectacular” recovery, according to one African Development Bank report. Growth is touching double digits, twice as high as any recorded rate over the previous decade – and inflation is low. The country has completed the Heavily Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) programme for the country, as well as the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries’ Debt Initiative, reducing government debt by two-thirds. Major investment in public services, especially education, the justice system and the police force, and construction work around the capital, are all promoting growth and the country’s tapping the regional CFA bond market for capital.

Reforms in the coffee, cocoa and electricity sectors, and improvements in the business climate.

In recognition of its progress, the African Development Bank – which left Côte d’Ivoire during the civil war – now plans to relocate its headquarters back from Tunisia by 2015. For the first time since the conflict, Côte d’Ivoire is starting to look forward.

Never waste a crisis

The experiences of all three countries provide support for the old maxim: never let a crisis go to waste. Some African countries have found themselves stuck in a rut - never breaking out of poverty, never quite collapsing, and instead hovering in a developmental purgatory. Others, like the Central African Republic, continue to fall. But a handful of nations which have faced major setbacks, whether through civil conflict, economic mismanagement or a combination of all, are using that experience as a reason to take bold measures, and start afresh.

Joyce Banda, president of Malawi

Malawi: tough love

Malawi has not been subject to as steep a govern- ment collapse as Guinea, but it did face its fair share of severe economic mismanage- ment under the leadership of the late Bingu wa Mutharika. Joyce Banda, the current presi- dent, recalls what she found after arriving in office following Mr wa Mutharika’s death in 2012. “I came to power in very challenging cir- cumstances that required me to focus on lead- ing the nation and rebuilding the economy,” she says.

Malawi was saddled with a growing fiscal deficit, rising inflation and depleted in- ternational reserves caused by an overvalued exchange rate. The government’s domestic payment areas were $100m and external payment areas by the private sector were $600m. Public services had been degraded and donors had withdrawn budget support.

Ms Banda took tough corrective measures, depepping the overvalued Malawian kwacha from the dollar, ushering in a painful 49 per- cent devaluation of the currency. Her govern- ment tightened monetary and fiscal policy and removed corruption-prone fuel subsidies. The prime minister, Daniel Kablan Duncan. “But from 2000 to 2010 there were some dis- turbances and GDP growth was at a maximum of 1 percent. There was an increase in poverty, instead of a decrease as there was in the past.”

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Healthcare: A democratic dividend?

Studies have linked democracy to improved social indicators, but debate rages about the causal mechanisms at play

BY ELEANOR WHITEHEAD AND ZOE FLOOD

In the 1990s, the Nobel prize-winning economist Amartya Sen made a compelling case for democratisation. “No fam- ine has ever taken place in the history of the world in a functioning democracy,” he wrote. This is because governments “have to win elections and face public criti- cism, and have strong incentives to undertake measures to avert famines and other catastro- phes,” he said.

His argument has shaped thinking in countless areas of public service delivery – from education to infrastructure; but none more so than healthcare. Democracies, this author wrote, have higher standards of living, better access to medical care, and improved social indicators, but “the health needs of their populations than dic- tatorships.

Democracies tend to entrenched longer-term institutional reforms, Ms Grépin tellsThis is Af- rica. “The effects of democracy are more than a short-term initiative, such as an immunisa- tion programme, which don’t always have last- ing effects,” she argues. “Democracy can bring large-scale reforms that create new things or radically transform institutions, such as uni- venal healthcare or health insurance.”

And true enough, major changes are emerging in some of the continent’s most established democracies – often involving fi- nancial protection schemes. The most obvious example comes from Ghana, a poster child for poli- cal stability in an otherwise rocky region. Ac- cording to Gallup data, 75 percent of the west African country’s population consider its elec- tions to be honest versus a median of just 41 percent over 19 sub-Saharan countries. Correspondingly, Ghana was also one of the first countries in Africa to enact universal health coverage legislation.

In 2003, roughly a decade after entering a multi-party democratic system, Ghana raised VAT by 2.5 percent to fund a national health insur- ance programme. Policy makers noted that earmarking the increase for health expendi- tures made it an easier sell to voters, who were overextended by the existing fee-based ‘cash- and-carry’ system.

“It’s pretty impressive that there was enough political support to be able to pass a new value added tax, but it happened because there was backing from people who were fed up with the old system and felt that they were paying too much out of pocket for their medical care,” explains Gina Lagomarsino, assistant professor of global health policy at New York University. In a paper entitled ‘Democratisation and Universal Health Coverage: Dictatorship, on the other hand, depresses public health provi- sion, as does severe income inequality, ethnic heterogeneity, and persistent international conflict.”

In 2003, roughly a decade after entering a multi-party democratic system, Ghana raised VAT by 2.5 percent to fund a national health insurance programme. Policy makers noted that earmarking the increase for health expenditure made it an easier sell to voters, who were overextended by the existing fee-based ‘cash-and-carry’ system.

But there’s still a way to go. According to the National Health Insurance Authority, by the end of 2010 there were over 8 million active subscribers to the health insurance scheme – 34 percent of the Ghanaian popula- tion. Financial protection schemes do not necessarily equate to improved health, and though Ghana has seen meaningful reduc- tions in child and maternal mortality, it will still struggle to meet health-related Millen- nium Development Goals.

Similar schemes are in play in other de- mocracies too. South Africa, though a country without a credible opposition party, has held regular democratic elections since the end of apartheid in 1994. The majority of its citizens still cannot afford private medical insurance, and rely on overstretched public hospitals. However, in April 2012 the government started piloting a national health insurance scheme, which will be phased in nationally over the next 14 years with the aim of generating uni- venal coverage. “These first steps towards es- tablishing national health insurance are truly historic,” the health minister Aaron Motsoale- di said at the time.

But the link between democracy and im- proved health outcomes is not watertight. There are plenty of nascent democracies which are failing to enact meaningful reform while more autocratic African regimes are per- forming well.

“Several of the countries that right now are seen as the big success stories in public health are not very democratic,” argues Peter Berman, a health economist at the Harvard School of Public Health.

Rwanda provides a case in point. The coun- try, led by Paul Kagame’s RPF party, is flagged as “not free” by Freedom House, and is named an “authoritarian regime” by the Economist Intelligence Unit’s Democracy Index. Yet this is a government with a strong roadmap for human and economic development. “Rwanda started out with somebody who, yes, is autocratic, but who genuinely wants to see these indicators change,” Ms Grépin says. After the 1994 genocide – which destroyed national health facilities, saw disease run rampant, and left many rape victims with HIV/AIDS – life expectancy stood at just 30 years. Today, citizens can expect to live an average of almost double that. Over the last decade, Rwanda has registered some of the world’s steepest health care improvements, and is on track to meet most of the MDGs. Deaths from HIV/ Aids and malaria have each dropped by roughly 80 percent over the last 10 years, while
maternal and child mortality rates have fallen by around 60 percent.

Part of Rwanda’s success stems from the fact that its healthcare services reach rural citizens. The government stresses multi-sector coordination, and requires government ministries to work together on crosscutting issues, which include both communicable and non-communicable diseases. But its governance system is also decentralised, meaning that it hands responsibility to local government and authorities and holds them accountable for their efficiency. At the bustling Kimironko Health Centre, a 20-minute drive from the city centre through Kigali’s ordered streets, a young nurse named Francine Niyamarugisha explains that performance is evaluated quarterly by the district hospital. “All of us have our indicators. When we perform very well, we get our performance-based financing,” she says.

Across the country almost 50,000 community health workers have been trained to deploy services to marginal populations. Nurses at the Kimironko Health Centre assist in that process. “We work with the health workers who go out into the community. They do different things. Some sensitise the community on disease prevention, some treat malaria, others work on maternal child health. They refer cases they cannot handle to the health centre,” Ms Niyamarugisha explains from a plainly furnished private office.

Like Ghana, Rwanda runs a universal health insurance scheme, though it has fared rather better in its roll out. Upwards of 99 percent of the population is covered by the community-based Mutuelles de Santé programme, which has more than halved average annual out-of-pocket health spending. The system is funded by a mix of donor money and community contributions, though the government subsidises contributions for the poorest.

“When people don’t have savings they cannot face catastrophic expenditure so people are dying because they don’t have the funds to pay,” says Agnes Binagwaho, minister of health, from her Kigali headquarters. “By decreasing the impact of catastrophic expenditure for healthcare we increase the access.”

In the squat Kimironko Health Centre, which deals with most of the suburb’s non-life threatening medical complaints, dozens of men, women and children queue to hand over their health cards. “If patients are part of the Mutuelles de Santé, they pay 200 Rwandan francs ($4.50) a year and get all the services they need, from consultation to lab tests, and then whatever is remaining is paid by the Mutuelles de Santé,” Ms Niyamarugisha explains. “Ever since the Mutuelles de Santé was introduced, there has been a huge difference. You look at paying 3,000 Rwandan francs ($45) per year and then you get treatment.” Thirty-year-old Margaret Yamuragiye, a slender sociology student who has been diagnosed with malaria, waits patiently in the reception of the clinic for her prescription. “Before I got my Mutuelles card I would fear that I could not go to the clinic because it would be too expensive. Today if I have simple cough or flu, I come to the doctor, I don’t wait to see if it gets worse,” she says.

Huge challenges remain, notably in human resources. “The number of trained doctors is limited. They are not willing to go to remote communities and the best ones prefer to go private after a short government stint,” explains one Kigali-based civil society worker, who requested anonymity. In an effort to meet the shortfall and ensure that doctors’ skills are up to international standards, the government has set up a ‘Human Resources for Health’ training scheme. “[But] the type of diseases we face we need to create the personnel to respond to these diseases, we need to create the capacity in teaching institutions,” explains Ms Binagwaho.

Asked if she is pleased with progress, the health minister argues that there is a way to go still: “Let’s say ‘yes’, with a big room for improvement always.” She adds, smiling. “We find ways to improve now that we didn’t even think about five years ago, but the more you improve, you find you reach a stage where there is more to improve – and it is quite exciting.”

“There are parallels to be drawn with Ethiopia, another automatic regime which has taken a decentralised approach to healthcare, following resource rollout. Starting from a low base, the Horn of Africa country has spent a decade creating a rural health outreach programme and has trained a network of around 40,000 extension workers to bring basic care to rural communities.”

Mr Binagwaho says, “The governments in Ethiopia and Rwanda have come to power after periods of crisis or revolution, and those authoritarian leaders are very committed to social and economic development. They’re not very democratic but they have the power and authority to allocate resources towards population health needs,” Mr Binagwaho argues.

So perhaps there isn’t a binary answer to the democracy-healthcare question. “There are authoritarian governments that care about the people and there are autocratic governments who don’t. It’s the argument about the beneficent dictator and then there are democracies like Ghana where their politicians respond to a broad public demand, and then there are democracies where the politicians respond to narrower interest groups which have political power,” he says. “There is no simple equation between democracy and caring about public health.”

Infographic: Africa’s conversions

Governance is a crucial variable in determining sustainable development outcomes across Africa. A 2013 assessment produced by The Boston Consulting Group and AGI, which measured 150 nations across 10 dimensions, found that sub-Saharan African countries are among those making the biggest gains in converting wealth and growth into ‘well-being’ globally. But compared to Asia’s top performers, many others – especially landlocked and resource-rich countries – are lagging.

Wealth into well-being

The mortality rate of children under the age of five has dropped in every sub-Saharan African country.

Healthcare in Ethiopia and Rwanda improved markedly from 2005 to 2010

Infographic: wealth into well-being

Wealth into well-being

Growth into investment attractiveness

Over the last five years, better governance has been the biggest differentiator between top and bottom quintile countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

The data for this infographic comes from The Boston Consulting Group’s Sustainable Economic Development Assessment Method (SEDA) which was used earlier this year to conduct a study on Africa in partnership with the Tony Blair Africa Governance Initiative. SEDA created SEDEs systematically assess and compare the socioeconomic development of 150 nations across 10 dimensions—such as healthcare, education, infrastructure, governance. The SEDE model measures how well a country translates its wealth into overall wellbeing for the population. It can also assess a country’s progress in converting recent GDP growth into improved well-being, as well as the ability to sustain those improvements in the future. For more information on SEDEs, and to read the full Africa report go to bostonconsulting.com/public-sector
President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf reflects the grim conditions facing the early transitional government and her own administration when it arrived after elections in 2005. “We inherited a broken country in which infrastructure had been destroyed, institutions had become dysfunctional, most of the skills had left the country, and our relationships both within our region as well as external had been totally undermined,” she says. “Hope was lost. It was like starting all over. Values had been totally turned around; people just survived any way they could. That is what we had to deal with; we had to completely rebuild.”

This year the country celebrated 10 years of peace just as a chief perpetrator of its civil war, Charles Taylor, failed in his appeal against a life sentence. No longer viewed as an off-limits war zone, Liberia has peace and stability. Monrovia’s infrastructure has been rebuilt, and hundreds of kilometres of freed roads have been resurfaced. The Mount Coffee hydroelectric dam on the Saint Paul river looks set to bring electricity to a country that has gone years without a grid. Reconstruction efforts are afoot at the Freepost of Monrovia, and scholarship and vocational training programmes have been launched for thousands of young people. The government’s fiscal buffers, at around $300m, are a great improvement on the $80m left in the coffers when President Johnson Sirleaf first arrived. Over the past three years, the economy has grown by an average of 7 percent per annum. Rubber and timber exports have risen, and a flurry of foreign direct investment agreements have seen inflows into palm oil, iron ore and offshore oil. Ecobank, Access Bank, BRP Billiton, China Union and ArcherMitchel are among those seeking out new business, their capital inflows in turn stabilising the Liberian dollar.

A report by Global Witness was discussed in February by the Liberian branch of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative found major governance lapses in the procedures governing the awarding of contracts. Daily acrimony fills the local media.

The president argues that it is Liberia’s increased transparency that is allowing so many problems to surface: “We have promoted an open society in which all resources are respect- ed. This is why corruption became a household word, no longer hidden under the table, but one that everyone can discuss,” she says, hitting back at what she calls the misinformed public debates on the issue. “We’ve had three audits, external audits, which have shown how resources were paid for and where they went.” A report by Global Witness was discussed in February by the Liberian branch of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative found major governance lapses in the procedures governing the awarding of contracts. Daily acrimony fills the local media.

The president admits that both the government and the media need to step back and take stock. “We believe we are going through a phase on both sides,” she acknowledges. “The media need to be more responsible so that their rights are protected. They need to do self-censorship through the press union.” The government, in its turn, is eliminating draconian anti-press laws, and signed the 2007 Table Mountain agreement supporting press freedom in Africa. But the president warns that if the media does not maintain high standards of investigative reporting, it could see its freedoms curtailed by subsequent governments. “There is going to be an administration that will follow me. I am open, I am committed, I will uphold the freedoms of everybody, but if they abuse the free- doms, in the administration after me you could have some serious reversals,” she says.

This year, a depressing higher education saga – in which not a single candidate out of nearly 25,000 passed a university admission exam – provided more bad news made worse by the media’s coverage, the president argues. The West African Examination Council had previously introduced lower standards for Liberia due to the civil war and its impact on education. The new admission exams were “an attempt to introduce a testing system that was of the quality and standards internationally, and to stop using the curve system which had been used in the past,” she explains. Mrs Johnson Sirleaf says she was “not surprised” about the results, but that she would have liked for the news to be handled differ- ently, with an “opportunity to sit down around the table and discuss it before it went public.”

None of that means the results were not of serious concern. “We wanted to move up [to the higher standard test] so we can get our students at the same level as all other West African stu- dents, and the test was to see where the prob- lem was. And sure enough the problem came out. For us it is a wake up call,” she says.

The results show a pattern repeated else- where in Africa, with greater school enrolment rates improving. Liberia has been on a big push to get children into school, scrapping fees in 2007 and offering free uniforms. Inflows from the back of these reforms and schools were “overwhelming,” Mrs Johnson Sirleaf recalls. But that exacerbated a major problem: the lack of teachers and facilities. Liberia was heavily depopulated and many schools had no electricity and too few books. “All of those were missing, all of those are what makes quality education. What you said that just enrollment is not the answer,” she adds.

The president describes education as a “long haul” policy area, and is now bringing na- tional stakeholders together to fix the problem. “Mrs Johnson Sirleaf could be forgiven for being overwhelmed by the demands of fixing a country that was, 10 years ago, reduced to ashes. She is palpably tired, and seems to be look- ing forward to the end of her second term as president, when she will step down, although she has vowed to stay engaged in Liberia’s devel- opment.”

As we close the interview, she is handed a ‘Tutu desk’, developed by the respected Arch- bishop Tutu, to be put in her office. She is think- ing forward to the end of her second term as president, when she will step down, although she has vowed to stay engaged in Liberia’s develop- ment.

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Since the birth of foreign aid after World War II, substantial funding has flowed into "technical assistance," a development sector covering everything from restructuring central banks to rewriting mining codes. Its goal is to help governments get the fundamentals right, strengthening the systems and procedures of governance. There is no use building rural HIV clinics if the health ministry is selling antiretroviral drugs on the black market or mismanaging its budget; nor is it much good donating free laptops to children if the electricity grid doesn’t reach them. “Well-targeted technical assistance can help governments set up ministries and tailor regulations to help guide their countries out of poverty and end their dependency on aid,” says Justine Greening, UK international development secretary.

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Liberia’s president, tells This is Africa that technical support from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank was “absolutely critical” in helping her country rebuild after years of civil war. Antonette Sayeh, Africa director at the IMF and former finance minister in Liberia, agrees: “We drew extensively on the IMF’s expertise, notably in public financial management, tax policy, and revenue administration,” she says.

Governments of mining hydrocarbons producers, wary of the dangers of the resource curse, are soliciting support for industry regulators, and are dancing particularly on Norway’s expertise in the sector. Ghana developed local content policies with the help of the Norwegian Petroleum Directorate, while Kenya’s national oil company invited a Norwegian government and oil industry partners to share their experience of the oil and gas sector as a guide for the east African nation. Norway partnered the African Development Support Facility, which helps governments to negotiate with oil, gas, and mining companies, and funds a hydrocarbons training programme in Musambili. Norway’s minister of international development, Helgdi Edelstein Holm, says these kinds of TA are “absolutely necessary if countries are to build a modern efficient state that can stand up to international companies and protect the interest of the countries’ citizens.”

Other nations are working to reform procurement processes that have historically been the root of many a corruption scandal. According to the World Bank, 94 percent of sub-Saharan African countries have passed modern procurement legislation since 2000. “These reforms have provided a strong regulatory base for governments to achieve value for money and maintain transparency in a way not possible 10 years ago,” says Sarah Latini, a legal consultant in the World Bank’s Africa regional procurement office.

The World Bank, in partnership with regional economic groupings like the West African Economic and Monetary Union (Wamu) and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (Comesa), is working with governments to entrench these changes.

Some of the most effective reforms have been those that address the underlying capacity issues as a component of civil service reform, those that take sector-specific approaches, and those that harness the power of civil society to reinforce accountability and transparency,” says Ms Latini.

Country ownership
But technical aid has its critics. As far back as 1968, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (Oecd) said it needed to be “better coordinated at the country level”. In 1969, the Pearson Commission proclaimed that technical assistance “often develops a life of its own, little related in either donor or recipient countries to national or global development objectives”.

Donors can dig a well and provide clean water or vaccinate a child against polio, and clearly show their achievements. But the outputs of technical assistance, on the other hand, “are not easy to count and measure”, acknowledges Norway’s Mr Holmás.

Some critics argue that technical assistance gives donors too much influence over government policy. Market reform-minded aid has had a tendency to tie disbursements to policy initiatives promoting liberalisation. Harvard’s John Dramani Mahama, president of Ghana; and David Cameron, UK international development secretary. ADMU DRAMANI MAHAMAH, president of Ghana; Macky Sall, president of Senegal; Abiy Ahmed, Ethiopia’s prime minister; Jakaya Kikwete, president of Tanzania; and Paul Kagame, Rwanda’s president, “but at the end of the day we should be in driving seat. These are our countries, we are the ones who suffer from the problems.”

But difficulties arise for donors when governments pursue policies which conflict with the values of the aid donor. Homophobic legislation, corruption, human rights abuses, and complicity in conflict are among the reasons national donors have pulled aid from several African governments recently. Multilateral partners have done so as well. Last year, the IMF cancelled a $322m loan accord with the Democratic Republic of Congo after its government failed to provide details on an asset sale made by its national mining company Gecamines in June 2011. Aid cuts to Rwanda last year, following allegations that its government is funding rebels in eastern DRC, left 12 percent hole in its budget.

Aid freezes are controversial methods of discipline. Public budgets are upended, sometimes harming innocent ministries; and constant concern about aid volatility means sometimes harming innocent ministries; and constant concern about aid volatility means some of discipline. Public budgets are upended, sometimes harming innocent ministries; and constant concern about aid volatility means some sometimes harming innocent ministries; and constant concern about aid volatility means some...
Development

It was founded in 2008 on the premise that many African governments “lack access to high quality local advice” that can help set their transformation agendas,” the group’s 2013 progress report says. “And when international institutions and other external partners provide analysis, governments often do not trust the messengers.”

Its list of achievements is long. Acet helped develop a legal framework for public-private partnerships in Brazil, and supported the development of aid strategies in Ghana and Liberia. In Sierra Leone the group advised the government on petroleum revenue laws, and in neighbouring Liberia it is assisting the national oil company in the development of its policy and legal framework, both in partnership with the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation and the World Bank (WBG). “We set the goal of going beyond policy analysis and advocacy to undertake advisory engagements in supporting governments to strengthen their capacities and institutions,” the group’s report says.

As Acet’s partners suggest, international NGOs can also provide technical assistance – and the resources transparency movement stands out here. “It started with Global Witness and Publish What You Pay,” says Claire Short, chair of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) and former UK secretary of state for international development. European governments, notably those of Scandinavia, the Netherlands and the UK, have been key supporters of Global Witness, another pressure group.

“There was something in it for everyone. Governments wanted a greater say in how their money was spent. A big pursuit of investment, civil society wanted money spent well for the benefit of the people, and companies didn’t want their reputations to be further damaged,” she recalls.

In 2006, Mawunts Banda, a Malawian journalist writing for the Nation newspaper, unearthed evidence that a former education minister used public funds for his wedding. Following the public outcry, “he became the first cabinet minister to be dismissed in the country’s history,” recalls Mr Banda.

In Kenya, the twists and turns of the Anglo leasing scandal – in which a plethora of phantom companies were used to perpetrate fraud on the Kenyan taxpayer through non-delivery of goods and services – have played out in depth in national newspapers.

Across much of the continent, political performance is subject to greater scrutiny; the public broadcastsc a legal review of President John Dramani Mahama’s government’s financial management Act, widely hailed by external actors for laying the foundations for responsible revenue management. It has continued with a systematic and transparent process to review mining contracts; a huge transparency development allowing citizens and civil society to hold their government to account.

Ms Kaimal says Guinea, which partnered with local civil society and mining investors as it developed a new law for collaboration. “EITI encourages governments to consult with all stakeholders during the design of natural resource legislation; the wider consultation, the better the result and the stronger the law in the long run,” she argues.

But just like government partners, civil society can find that working closely with countries saddled with a history of corruption presents serious operational challenges. RWI has to safeguard against that. “Our engagement with governments is based on rigorous assessment criteria including the government’s commitment to reform and our ability to add value,” Ms Kaimal explains. “Transparency and citizen engagement is the cornerstone of our government assistance. Hence, we do not support governments in countries where the citizens’ fundamental freedoms of speech, assembly and associations are restricted by law or as a matter of practice.”

External institutions cannot be naïve about contexts – it is often the weakest countries that need most support, and partnerships are inherently risky. But the risks of not engaging are arguably higher. Jonas Moberg, head of the secretariat for EITI, says stakeholders are under pressure to lay the right foundations from the start. “We see in country after country that if you don’t get it right from the beginning it becomes such a difficulty in then trying to rectify the mistakes of the past.”

“I believe sustained reform comes from within, but that external actors can help,” says deputy director Sunetra Kaimal.

The group has helped create laws and institutions across the continent. Take Ghana, where it provided analytical support to the creators of the 2011 Petroleum Revenue Management Act, widely hailed by external actors for laying the foundations for responsible revenue management. It has continued with “analytical and logistical support” for the Public Interest and Accountability Committee – a multi-stakeholder body which monitors oil revenue intake and adherence to the Act.

In Guinea, RWI has worked with the government on mining sector reforms since 2011, when a democratically-elected government took leadership following a 2008 military coup. “We provided extensive inputs to the revision of the mining code, which resulted in a new law which provides for stronger financial gains by the state and takes many strong steps towards transparency and accountability. We also worked closely with the government as it developed a systematic and transparent process for reviewing mining contracts,” Ms Kaimal says. That included collaborating with a technical committee responsible for contract reviews to launch online publication of all mining contracts; a huge transparency development allowing citizens and civil society to hold their government to account.

Ms Kaimal says Guinea, which partnered with local civil society and mining investors as it designed new legislation, is a role model for collaboration. “EITI encourages governments to consult with all stakeholders during the design of natural resource legislation; the wider the consultation, the better the result and the stronger the law in the long run,” she argues.

The Catholic priests started producing their own radio programs and newspapers, unearthing stories and forcing the government to act. “This is really the only political force that has been able to fight back with the government,” says Ms Kaimal.

“Transparency and citizen engagement is the cornerstone of our government assistance. Hence, we do not support governments in countries where the citizens’ fundamental freedoms of speech, assembly and associations are restricted by law or as a matter of practice.”

External institutions cannot be naive about contexts – it is often the weakest countries that need most support, and partnerships are inherently risky. But the risks of not engaging are arguably higher. Jonas Moberg, head of the secretariat for EITI, says stakeholders are under pressure to lay the right foundations from the start. “We see in country after country that if you don’t get it right from the beginning it becomes such a difficulty in then trying to rectify the mistakes of the past.”

Media

Africa’s media landscape is opening up, putting governments under greater scrutiny than ever before.

In Zambia, where the government has faced allegations of a crackdown against independent media outlets, the vice president mulls some of the potential dangers of poor journalism. Earlier this year a group of Zambian Catholic bishops released a letter raising concerns about the country’s political climate, highlighting “the arbitrary use of power by government officials, intimidation and threats of arrest against leaders and individuals who speak against government”. They also cautioned in an increasingly homogenised media space to preserve the leadership to separatists in Barotse, in the country’s Western Province, where there were allegations of abductions, arrests and torture.

“There is a lot of loose talk,” Guy Scott, the deputy leader says in response to these allegations. “The Catholic priests started producing a lot of stories about what people who had disappeared at the hands of government authorities, or had been locked up, so much so that a group of foreign ambassadors went to Barotse to look into this and they found that it wasn’t true – that the guys were exactly where they were supposed to be, or they had been arrested and charged and were due in court. And the priests just said ‘Oh sorry’,” he recalls.

“But when you’ve got people spreading rubbish stories it is poor journalism, or is it dangerous? People who spread these stories are a curse and I don’t know where...
The cut off line is, between saying that this is treason, or this is just incompetent reporting.*

Africa’s league tables
In the global stand on press freedom, media free- dom - the Reporters Without Borders Freedom of the Press index – Africa performs relatively well. Ghana ranks higher than the US, Na- mibia beats Canada and Botswana surpasses Japan. South and east Asia is more troubled, with the likes of Vietnam, China and Pakistan ranking much lower than the bulk of the African cohort. Only a handful of Africa’s most troubled states – Somalia, Eritrea and Su- dan – are in the bottom 10. It is not only the wealthiest African coun- tries which are doing well. Niger is a strong performer, with a pronounced opening up from 2011. Forty-five private newspapers compete with a state-owned daily and regular protests critic of government, and three private te- levision stations operate alongside two state-run stations. In June, a government decree decrimi- nalised media offences, lifting just fines rather than jail time. No reports have yet surfaced of the government trying to inhibit foreign journal- ists when covering sensitive events in the north.

But while there are still a large number of coun- tries in which media freedom is being contest- ed. In August, editor of Liberian media house FrontPageAfrica was detained for reporting on the police. In August, editor of Liberian media house FrontPageAfrica was detained for reporting on the police. In August, editor of Liberian media house FrontPageAfrica was detained for reporting on the police. In August, editor of Liberian media house FrontPageAfrica was detained for reporting on the police. In August, editor of Liberian media house FrontPageAfrica was detained for reporting on the police. In August, editor of Liberian media house FrontPageAfrica was detained for reporting on the police. In August, editor of Liberian media house FrontPageAfrica was detained for reporting on the police. In August, editor of Liberian media house FrontPageAfrica was detained for reporting on the police. 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bring educational enrolment – including girls. That has brought us to achieve the [MDG] target," Mr Desalegn says. "If the people own the programmes, I think they can implement them quickly and aggressively with a good quality result."

Health outcomes are also improving. By 2012, Ethiopia reduced child mortality by two thirds – three years ahead of the MDG deadline. That was thanks, in part, to the fact that it manned its clinics with large numbers of qualified staff, mirroring its agriculture sector strategy, where extension workers provide local support to the country’s millions of farmers.

“We deployed more than 37,000 health extension workers in our villages, where we have one health centre for every 85,000 people,” the prime minister says. Most extension workers are women with a high school education and one year of training. They work in pairs in villages, which former leader Julius Nyerere attempted to move locals into model villages, which ended in the deaths of nearly 200 Tanzanians, with claims of government and many civic organizations objected to the government’s heavy-handed programme.

State-led development

Yet while Ethiopia’s government is more purposeful than most in Africa, with a reform programme penetrating all levels of government and many civic organizations, the model is a state-led one and has been criticised as such. Dissenting groups argue that the government is intolerant of dissent, and that the country does not have a genuine multiparty democratic system.

Human Rights Watch alleges state repression, and NGOs have criticised land reforms for displacing populations to make way for foreign investors, especially from the Gulf. Environmentalists warned that the Grand Renaissance Dam, which will be one of the largest hydroelectric power plants in Africa when completed, threatens the Nile’s waters and local ecosystems. Mr Zenawi controversially dismissed those concerns, claiming activists were more interested in rescuing butterflies than ending human poverty.

Many crucial sectors, including telecommunications and banking, are closed to international investment, which businesses say is holding back Ethiopia’s growth.

State-led development models can be dangerous. In its early independence period, Tanzania’s ujamaa programme attempted to move locals into model villages, which former leader Julius Nyerere believed would be better suited to his vision of African socialism. But many peasants objected to the government’s heavy-handed programme.

In the end, the challenge for any government pondering a ‘command’ model is whether this can be combined with democratic accountability, opposition pressure and freedom to dissent. While there are internal checks and balances in terms of how the Ethiopian ruling party operates, there is no cross-party structure in which the government could be removed if it failed to deliver. Is there anger bubbling beneath the surface? Clashes during the disputed elections of 2006, which ended in the deaths of nearly 200 Ethiopians, would suggest so.

Yet Mr Desalegn asserts that Ethiopia’s model will ultimately be a democratic one. “We are clear in our mind that democracy is not a kind of governance you choose out of the types of governance. It is an existential issue for us. Otherwise you cannot accommodate all the diverse needs,” he claims. “Ethiopia is a diverse country in terms of ethnicity, religion, age, because of the demographic situation in Africa, where 60 percent of the population is below 30. All this has its own needs and aspirations, and that can only be accommodated in a democratic setting.”

He argues that “democratic developmentalism” is a must, and will separate Ethiopia from the east Asian economies his government openly admires. Ethiopia, like the east Asian tigers, keeps certain strategic sectors closed to foreign investors and the political system is top-down. More directly, the country has a strong trade and investment relationship with China which shapes its wider policy framework. But the country will develop along different lines, he claims.

“What we get from them [east Asia] is ideas, rather than copying everything. You have to take this idea, adapt it to your own situation and study your own setting and then use it as is needed for the country,” the prime minister explains.

“The Western democratisation is the best system of democratic government. What was lacking in Taiwan, Korea and Singapore in the early stage of development? Democracy. The three branches of government, checks and balances, were not there. So we mean democratic developmentalism, we say it is possible to have both of them together.”

It remains to be seen whether Ethiopia can combine the activist state role employed by the east Asian tigers without relying on similar authoritarian structures. If it can, it will join a very small number of countries that have managed to achieve the rare goal: the democratic, developmental state.
AFRICA’S REFORMERS
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