



BANQUE AFRICAINE DE DÉVELOPPEMENT

# Remarks at the Save the Children Global Leadership Conference

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Your Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Good evening.

I want to begin by thanking you for your invitation and for associating the African Development Bank to this Save the Children Global Leadership Conference.

Since its creation in 1919, your organisation, Save the Children, has been the gold standard when it comes to the welfare of children across the world.

I suspect I may have been an early beneficiary myself. Like many Rwandans of my generation, I lived in a refugee camp as a young boy, between the ages of eight and eleven.

There were not many charitable organisations looking after African refugees in those days, but I know that Save the Children was one of them.

The last hundred years has seen steady improvements in the state of the children around the world.

We all know that – even in some of the rich countries of today – at the turn of the 20th century up to 30% of children never reached the age of five.

Along the way, economic growth, social policy, improved health care, advances in medicine (including vaccines and immunisation) and better living conditions (such as safe water and sanitation) have made a huge difference.

However in many parts of Africa and Asia the conditions have worsened, from malnutrition, infant mortality, and illiteracy, to child labour and child soldiers.

But even in rich countries, children as young as six were still working down coal mines due to parental poverty, and inadequate or badly implemented labour laws.

As recently as our own lifetimes, children in rich countries were dropping out of school before the age of fifteen, to look for work to provide for their families.

So much remains to be done everywhere to ensure children's rights, protection and welfare, and to give them hope, opportunity and the ability to live in a better world.

It is therefore a source of satisfaction to note the

dramatic decline in the deaths of children under five in the last decade in Africa and Asia.

Perhaps this is the great – and uncelebrated – success of our times.

Equally gratifying has been the real progress made on universal primary education for both boys and girls, even though quality and learning outcomes remain an issue everywhere.

This, we owe to the turnaround in economic growth, better safety nets, improved nutrition, and especially to concerted global efforts and partnerships on immunisation and vaccinations, on malaria and tuberculosis. This has been the work of many Governments and Organisations such as GAVI, UNAIDS, and the Global Fund for AIDS and Tuberculosis.

However, between twenty-five and thirty million children worldwide still are not vaccinated, because vaccines are unavailable, and health services are poorly equipped or inaccessible. There are issues of how these achievements in the health sector can be sustained and self-financed.

Today, millions of children still are out of school and go to bed hungry – a hunger that in turn will stunt

their brains and impact their educational scores and hence job prospects.

Many children still labour under unacceptable conditions. Many are victims of human trafficking or death in fragile states, and in countries at war or in prolonged conflict.

Ladies and Gentlemen, since the turn of the millennium, there is no doubt that Africa has turned a corner. That may be fragile and incomplete, but it is a reversal in fortunes nonetheless. Economic growth prospects are much improved in most countries, and there have been real social achievements. This includes progress on HIV/AIDS, due to available, cheaper antiretroviral drugs.

Tony Blair described Africa in early 2000 as the scar on the conscience of the world. Last month, he described Africa as the most exciting place on planet earth because of its opportunities.

In this year alone, despite sluggish global recovery, lower commodity prices, slowing down of large emerging markets, twelve Sub-Saharan African countries will grow at over 7%, another dozen or so at above 5%.

Africa continues to be the second fastest-growing

region if the world, driven largely by investments, domestic demand and growing regional trade.

So children of Africa born in the last two decades of Africa face much improved conditions, and have better prospects.

However hubris has never been a good counsellor.

Stories of Africa rising are as misleading as their opposites, the Africa doomsday scenarios. Nothing is pre-ordained, and the future depends very much on what we do today.

Economies may have reversed the years of negative real per capita growth of the 1980s and 1990s – the so-called ‘lost decades’ of Afro-pessimism – but we began from a very low base. It will take at least another decade and a half of sustained growth to change the continent’s living conditions irreversibly.

Then look at the demographic dynamics. Population growth in regions such as the Sahel remains very high, as high as 3.9%, while internal migration has accelerated with up to 40% of people now living in unplanned, poorly equipped cities and towns, amidst squalor and unemployment.

Meanwhile the economic growth drivers remain very

narrow; economic transformation is limited; and the share of agriculture and manufacturing has actually declined, with African economies still operating at the lower levels of global value chains.

As a result, young people – around 15 million of who enter the labour market each year – cannot find jobs, either because few are available, or because their skills do not match the needs.

And in some regions, as they cannot find jobs or see hope for the future, they become easy victims to terrorist groups, or human traffickers promising them imaginary El Dorados, only for them to perish in the Mediterranean.

This is not only an indictment on Africa's leadership or on all of us, but it is also a clarion call.

So what is it that calls for action today to give the children, the young people of Africa, a hope?

There are many things we have to do, but today I will pick only three.

First, we have to create a peaceful, stable continent. The biggest challenge we face for young people of Africa is in fragile states or those recovering from conflicts.

That is where a special effort is required.

Not only because millions are trapped in those regions, but because of regional spill-over effects such as refugees and displaced persons.

That is where all the systems – those of primary health care, of basic education and of infrastructure – are at crisis point.

That is where our performance in meeting the Millennium Development Goals is poorest. That is where we have child soldiers, and other abuses.

Think of a young boy or girl born in Somalia in 1990. For twenty five years all they have known is war and death.

The Ebola crisis was a clear demonstration of how an otherwise perfectly controllable epidemic could get out of control and become a disaster due to the breakdown in primary healthcare and capacities.

The second thing which calls for leadership is the fight against inequalities and the promotion of inclusion. That means ensuring that children of poor people, both boys and girls, get into quality school, and that no region, ethnic group or religious group is left behind.

This is the only sure way of breaking the intergenerational transmission of poverty.

Economic growth is only a means to an end.

Economic growth that is not shared is unsustainable socially and politically. It squanders talent, chokes economic prospects, and – by hindering social mobility – it undermines the very basis of harmony and peaceful societies.

In September at the UN, the Global Community will chart a course on the new Sustainable Development Goals.

At the end of the year, hopefully, there will be an agreement on Climate Change.

And between these two landmarks, we hope we will find a way forward on financing development.

It is quite feasible to eliminate absolute poverty by 2030, if economies manage to grow at above 7% consistently. There will still be large swathes of poverty – especially in more affected countries – but this goal is achievable.

The key challenge in getting these economies to

expand at more than 7% per annum is to close the deficit in infrastructure, in particular energy.

Yesterday, the Africa Progress Panel issued its report on energy and climate.

It shows the ground we must cover to ensure that energy is available, accessible, affordable and sustainable, including for poor people who are now dependent on the biomass.

We have here to deal with the energy constraints which place a major brake on the continent's growth prospects.

Finally, an area where Africa is capable and indeed where it offers real opportunity is in the digital economy.

The advent of and the accessibility of mobile telephony has already made a big difference in the lives of the poor. Think of the impact of financial inclusion.

I dream of a day when every young person in Africa has access to affordable internet.

In the 19th Century, people built railways to connect the world. The global railway network of today is the

internet. This is where knowledge is to be found; this is where jobs will be created; this where we can accelerate access to education, improve on health access, and markets.

As telecom infrastructure improves, I hope and expect that governments and the private sector will work together to make this possible.

These are all things central to what the African Development Bank does. They are all central to our new Ten Year Strategy for 2013-2022. On September 1, it will be my honour to pass on the responsibility for piloting that Strategy to my successor.

I have no doubt that with stronger partnership between our two organisations, we can prevail.

Ladies and Gentlemen, in spite of the global financial crisis and the complex geopolitical crises of today, I have heard that there hasn't been a better time to be alive.

I have often wondered about this. It very much depends on circumstances of your birth, of where you live, and under what type of government.

What I am sure about, though, is that today the world has more than enough means to provide a better life for the children of the world.

Thank you for inviting me and God bless you.