

**11. The institutional forms or structures underpinning  
an African renaissance  
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The year 1997 was in many respects the year of South Africa's reawakening. Following Thabo Mbeki's epoch-defining address, "I am an African", delivered at the inauguration of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa in 1996, an era of discourse, introspection and thinking about the challenges facing South Africa and the African continent took root.

Theologians brushed up their 1970s and 1980s thoughts on liberation theologies and adapted them for Africa's reawakening of the 1990s. Economists rearranged and enhanced their strategies for the continent's social-economic development. Politicians visualised a united democratic, peaceful and powerful Africa, and put forward grand designs such as the Millennium Africa Recovery Plan and Omega, which culminated in today's African Union and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

I was called upon to reflect on the institutional forms which should underpin an African renaissance. My thoughts are captured in the following essay.

"Control your destiny or someone else will", is one of the rules by which Jack Welch, General Electric's fiery CEO, lives and wins. I choose to pluck a leaf from this most compelling philosophy of life.

Whatever else I say to you today may or may not be useful, but if your purpose is an African renaissance, there is nothing else that I could share with you that would go to the heart of my message as this does:

Be master of your own destiny!

The concept of an African renaissance has become central to South Africa's vision as a country and the geo-economic role of the African continent and its member states. No doubt there are a variety of nuances in the meaning of the concept, but there seems to be consensus about what is meant by an African renaissance. It is a concept that has deep and diverse historical roots that can be traced from Marcus Garvey's attempts to rally the African diaspora; Frederick Douglas's vision of a proud and achieving black people; Kwame Nkrumah's anti-colonialism and African political imperative; shared by the Pan Africanist Congress; Julius Nyerere's idealised primitivism of ujamaa; the emergence of a movement called Kwanzaa in the US; Steve Biko's Black Consciousness Movement; and finally through to today's most visible protagonists, Yoweri Museveni of Uganda, and of course, Thabo Mbeki.

Every society experiences a renaissance to varying degrees from time to time. It is a process of rebirth, renewal, revival, revitalisation, reawakening, self-re-invention, even rededication characterised by a surge of interest in learning and a reorientation in values.

At the core of the African renaissance vision is, or should be, the acceptance that Africa's

people and their institutions have a capacity and the responsibility to create, foster and maintain economic, political, social and moral processes and practices that define Africans as competent, proud citizens of the world, on a par with the best in the world.

The African renaissance is a concept which insists that technical and economic efficiency and processes are not ends in themselves but are only important for the goals they seek to achieve. In this instance, the goal is the development and prosperity of Africa as a geo-economic space, and of its people, defined not by race, but by spiritual identity.

It is accepted that it is necessary to create a sense of efficacy, to reestablish in the African the laws of control over one's own destiny. It is to create an African, in his individual and institutional manifestations, who is not merely a product of his environment but one who creates the environment and shapes events. An African who is excited by a sense of mission and the challenges ahead.

At the risk of sounding frivolous at a moment of such import for us as a people, I should like to illustrate the inadequacy of focusing on institutional forms or structures as a means of underpinning the African renaissance. I should like to invoke the much-neglected truism and received wisdom of the professions that deal with social and health pathology, namely "prevention is better than cure". It is a maxim that holds that in order to create a healthier nation, you do not build hospitals, you get people to adopt healthier life-styles; in order to combat drug addiction and abuse, you do not build rehabilitation centres, you encourage informed and responsible use of drugs; in order to address the problems of malnutrition and other eating disorders, you do not build slimming clinics and so-called fat farms, you educate and encourage responsible eating habits and exercise.

That is all very well when the population is largely healthy. However, when one is dealing with a pathologically diseased, drug-addicted, malnourished population, you do need the hospitals, the rehabilitation centres, the "fat farms". Much more importantly though, we also understand from the professionals in these fields that however strong the institutional structures are, a lasting cure is only likely if

- there is a full, unconditional admission and acceptance that there is a problem;
- there is a clear understanding of the problem and its causes;
- there is a desire to be rid of the problem; and
- there is an unwavering will to do something about the problem.

In essence, unless there is a change in the mind-set, in the attitudes, in the self-perception of the patient, no structures, systems, processes or institutional forms, can achieve anything without a fundamental change in the self.

To be blunt and to the point, Africa is a pathologically diseased, drug-addicted, malnourished patient. No amount or quality of institutional forms or structures will be sufficient to rehabilitate Africa unless Africa unconditionally acknowledges and admits its problems, develops a sufficient understanding of the problem; expresses a desire and exhibits an unwavering will to solve the problem. Unless we do this, we will stand accused of indulging ourselves in intellectual romantic idealism.

Whether we have sufficient desire and the will to mount a successful renaissance, time will tell. What a gathering such as this can do is to force Africa to look into the mirror, to acknowledge our problems, and to develop an understanding of the causes of these problems.

I stand here as one from Africa and I wish to offer an admission and an understanding, as a patient so to say, of the ills that afflict us. In front of this august audience, it is appropriate to acknowledge that mine is not a scholarly, researched viewpoint, it is the understanding of a layman. The eminent scholars among us are here to give a more scholarly, researched treatise on the condition of Africa.

In the first instance, Africa has major problems, and by and large, the problems are of our making. It does not benefit us to externalise the causes of our problems. We are a sick continent and we are largely to blame for it. We are a continent afflicted with war, famine, pestilence, incompetence, corruption, disease, crime and a generally declining standard and quality of life.

What then are some of the root causes of the malaise that afflicts Africa? Here are at least 10 of the causes that readily suggest themselves:

### 1. Forms of government

Africa inherited colonial forms of government, mainly of Anglophone and Francophone influence. The forms of government are largely parliamentary and parliament, instead of the constitution, is sovereign. This in effect is rule of man rather than rule of law, an opportunity Africa's political elite have lost little time in exploiting. We compound this by conflating the three key institutions of government, i.e. the executive, the legislature and the judiciary, wherein all these become the manifest expression of one man's will, either the President for Life or the Redeemer, hitherto known as a second-rate general in the army.

### 2. Group hegemony

We have taken for granted and perpetuated the notion of the group instead of the individual as the basic unit of political analysis and expression. Our politics are permeated by a concept of group rights instead of individual rights. We therefore create and / or solidify the existing schisms along ethnic, religious or ideological lines. In such politics the losing groups lose not only the elections, if there are any, but they lose their political, economic and human rights as well, if they are lucky. It is not uncommon in Africa for them to lose their lives as well.

### 3. Zero-sum mentality

Our concept of life and its rewards, especially politics and the economy, is that of a zero-sum game. Our political and economic exchanges are characterised by a do-or-die mentality. In our understanding, success can only be at someone else's expense; achievement means someone else has failed. As Steven Covey puts it in his book *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Africa suffers from a syndrome of scarcity mentality where almost by

definition, someone's gain is always someone else's loss.

#### 4. Victim mentality

Africa suffers from a victim mentality, a profound sense of lack of efficacy, victimised by events, others and circumstances beyond our control. We are victims of nature and the environment around us. We are at the full mercy of climatic conditions, droughts, floods and whatever else nature throws at us. We are unable even to mitigate the consequences of these natural disasters. We suffer just as much from the pestilence and diseases caused by ecological imbalances.

We lie prone in the wake of the forces and consequences of geopolitics. Our usual response is that of supplicant, cap in one hand and a begging bowl in the other. Our best response is usually one of petulance and futile defiance. In our heyday, we could play off one geopolitical parent against the other, East against West.

We are just as helpless in the face of world financial markets. Our currency movements and valuations are determined by forces we scarcely understand, never mind influence. We rely entirely on commodity prices, whose markets are controlled off-shore by those who have no connection with these resources except on the trading screen. We stand in awe of the world bourses, holding our collective breath to find out how the Nikkei or the Dow has performed overnight and what its portents are for us. We fulminate against the multilateral funding institutions such as IMF and the World Bank, even as we beg for yet another extension or rollover of our debt.

#### 5. Investment and wealth

Our attitude to investment and wealth reflects our scarcity mentality. We consume everything, including our seed stock for the future, with the justification that there is nothing to spare, that Africa is going through its metaphorical "seven lean years". However, even in our increasingly rare "seven years of plenty" we choose conspicuously grand consumption to make up for the lean years.

We choose instant gratification over generational investment. We bequeath less to each successive generation and reminisce wistfully about an era gone by when we had plenty. We invest nothing but still expect the fruits of investment.

We produce nothing of consequence except the natural resources we harvest. Our concept of wealth is closer to the feudal economy than it is to the industrial economy, never mind the information economy. Because our concepts of wealth are feudal, represented largely by material tangible natural resources, the concept of information and information technology as wealth, completely eludes us. We therefore continue to flail helplessly, in the vain belief of the national sovereignty of markets and our ability to control our national economies and to insulate them against international influences.

### 6. Investment in education

There are two enduring images of the children of Africa. One is of the emaciated child with a distended stomach and flies swirling around a sunken face with vacant eyes that await death. This is an image beloved by aid agencies and the media to portray the plight of Africa. The other image is that of an 11-year-old toting an automatic assault rifle and a rocket launcher on his back, used as a storm-trooper in genocidal wars. For now these images still drown out the images that we have in the recesses of our consciousness of children used as free labour to eke out subsistence in rural communities, or of street children in urbanised communities on the fringe of criminality who are used as fodder in prostitution, drug-peddling and gang wars.

Rarely do we see the face of Africa's children as a freshly-scrubbed shiny face, eager with curiosity and thirsty for knowledge, full of confidence and free of the cares of the world. Year after year the educational budget in Africa, which should be our biggest investment in the future, lags behind that of the defence budget and one would venture to say, less than the amount lost due to corruption and kleptocracy.

When we do get around to investing in education we invest less in the areas that really matter, such as the actual education of children, especially in mathematics and science. A greater proportion of our budget is consumed in building administrative edifices and ministerial headquarters. Our educational policies are often more parochial than informed by the universality of knowledge and technology. We expend a great deal of effort debating and assessing knowledge and technology, based on their origin and perceived ideological parentage rather than on their applicability and utility to our circumstance and needs.

### 7. Conflict resolution

In Africa we seem to have a simple approach to conflict resolution. Might is right. We also appear to have a penchant for terminal solutions - i.e. nothing but the total annihilation of our opponents. Legal, moral or rational mediation or negotiations based on inalienable rights rarely suggest themselves as recourse for conflict resolution.

### 8. Ethics and morality

The social, economic and political decay of Africa is as much due to a complete collapse of public and personal morality as it is to other factors. When both the elite and the under-classes abandon morality in pursuit of power and / or wealth, this sets the stage for endemic corruption and crime. Over time we have come to accept that the only crime or sin as it were, is to be caught doing wrong. There is a tacit understanding that everybody somehow perverts the system and that they are fools if they do not.

But in Africa our worries are not only about personal morality, they are perhaps more importantly about public morality. We have reached a point where we have institutionalised public immorality as reflected in the political and economic policies and decisions made by many a leadership. These are obscene, not only because their consequences are unjust but because those consequences are fully intended by a corrupt and cynical leadership.

### 9. Self Image

We are rarely, if ever, the scribes of our own history, the chroniclers of our achievements and failures. Even if we were, there is little other than a litany of woe and recriminations about the venality of conquering nations and the generally poor hand that life has dealt to Africa. We have had little in the way of achievement to chronicle in the past couple of centuries. Our fondest reminiscences of our achievements are about the ancient kingdoms of Shaka, Mwene Mutapa, Gao and Timbuktu.

As a consequence, we have little to enthuse and energise succeeding generations by way of a mythology of success; by way of role models in the areas of the economy, academia, science and technology and statesmanship.

Our cultural images and icons are determined and propagated by media controlled by entities that are at best indifferent to or derisory about Africa. We have long since reached a point where black in general and African in particular, is synonymous with inferior and with failure. We have learnt, and our children continue to learn, that there is nothing to admire or emulate in Africa. Our best and brightest therefore denigrate all that is African and would even deny their racial identity if it were possible, as they deny their cultural identity in all their waking moments. We have no pride as a people, and the little pride we do exhibit is occasioned more by anger at our lowly position on the international totem pole than by the satisfaction of our undisputed achievements.

### 10. Vision

We are brought here today by a vision, a compelling vision of Africa's ascendant statesmen, foremost among them Yoweri Museveni and Thabo Mbeki, the two young leaders most associated with the vision of an African renaissance. The African renaissance is presented as a pan African vision, conceptualised, articulated and driven by a visionary leadership.

Unfortunately, it is a vision that has not yet found expression in a manner accessible and practical to the lay person. As a consequence, the African renaissance as a vision has come to mean anything and signify nothing to those whose lives it is meant to transform. They understand the vision as an intellectual pre-occupation of the political, economic and academic elite. Amongst those in the media and those generally derisory of Africa, the African renaissance has become a caricature, a rod to lash those leaders who have been brave enough to articulate and promote this vision. They are quick to pronounce the African renaissance a failure as they gleefully watch Africa continue to struggle with generations-old problems.

But perhaps again in this endeavour, we lay the seeds for our failure. Perhaps the focus on an overarching pan African vision will not serve our collective aspiration and purpose as a people as well as a micro-focused approach would. Africa might be served best if, by an African renaissance every individual understood that the vision is about individual and institutional excellence. As currently conceptualised and propagated, we run the danger that people will understand the African renaissance to be the concern of continental leadership and governmental institutions with little relevance to individual effort and application in our personal, occupational and civic responsibilities.

This then is a layman's perspective of Africa's malaise, designed to add to our admission that Africa has a problem, and our contribution as a people to these problems. This is not Afro-pessimism or self-negation. It is the admission of an alcoholic that he has a problem, that no matter the environmental pressures, he carries a large measure of personal responsibility for the problem.

This is not to say there are no institutional forms or structures of excellence in Africa. There are many individual institutional beacons of hope that can, and probably will, light the way in our quest.

If I may be indulged, I should like to point to my institution Eskom as such an institution trying to underpin the African renaissance. Eskom has embraced the African renaissance as its own mandate and this informs our approach to excellence in our own operations, to extending electricity to all South Africans and importantly to extending a hand of co-operation and technology-sharing with electricity utilities across the continent, as far north as Egypt and Morocco including the Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Tanzania, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Major hydroelectricity projects are being planned in a number of African countries and Eskom has been invited as a partner of choice.

However, Eskom's aspirations are to demonstrate its excellence far beyond the continental borders of Africa. Many of you will have heard about the new nuclear energy technology being spear-headed by Eskom, called the Pebble Bed Modular Nuclear Reactor. Simply put, this is a fail-safe, relatively inexpensive modular nuclear technology to produce electricity. It is a technology that has achieved certification from international nuclear technology regulatory authorities. An important part of our pride as an African utility is that we are so far ahead in this technological race that none of the international utilities, or multinational technology and energy companies, is even in the race. Eskom intends to begin exporting this technology worldwide in less than a decade, thereby providing an excellent opportunity to demonstrate Africa's technological prowess to all the Afro-pessimists here and abroad.

In conclusion, ladies and gentlemen, despite the tenor of the greater part of my address to you today, I believe there is a light at the end of the tunnel ... and that the light will be from electricity, provided by Eskom. Eskom is dedicated to energising this economic reawakening. We are committed to illuminating this proverbially dark continent, to bringing light and enlightenment to our beloved needy continent. The cardinal aim is to help catalyse the process of firmly locating Africa in our geo-economic sphere of the globe, integrating it into the global economy as a participant worthy of unconditional respect.

The essence of the consequence of an African renaissance should be

An African who is master of his destiny

An African who has a clear vision of the future

An African who is known for what he or she stands for

An African who is a profoundly moral being

An African who is renowned for integrity

An African who is capable and competent in everything she undertakes

An African who leads our Renaissance

Africans who take individual responsibility for their own actions

Africans who, when they look in the mirror, see the hand of God.

When that consequence obtains, it must be recorded that Eskom played a significant role in providing the infrastructure for making it possible for the African to conceptualise the mirror, to manufacture it and to provide the light which enables him to see this hand of God in the mirror.