

## **Africa - an agenda of hope**

Intervention at the first meeting of the Africa Commission  
on Effective Development Cooperation with Africa  
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Christian Friis Bach, International Director, DanChurchAid

Your excellencies, fellow commissioners.

Firstly, I would like to thank the Danish government for this important initiative and for the invitation to participate. I am indeed honoured to be part of the Africa Commission serving with the distinguished delegates seated around this table.

Many people in Denmark and Europe see Africa as a continent of hopelessness.

I see it - and experience it - as a continent of hope.

African countries have made significant progress during the past decade. Democracy is on the rise. Growth rates around and even beyond 10 percent are materialising in several countries. There have been significant improvements in education and health. The security framework has improved. And most encouraging perhaps: The Africans themselves are more optimistic when it comes to the future than people in most other developing regions.

However, enormous challenges are in front of us. In front of Africa.

I would like to point to some important challenges at this first meeting. Each of them grows from civil society concerns. Each of them are critical in building an agenda of hope.

The first challenge I would like to stress is strengthening **agricultural development**.

Agriculture is key to employment, growth and poverty reduction in Africa. Agriculture is the most important sector for any reform agenda in Africa and has been the engine behind recent growth successes in several African countries - from fruit and flowers to fair trade coffee.

Importantly agricultural growth has strong growth linkages to other economic sectors. A 1 dollar growth in agricultural income typically translates into an increase of 2,5 dollar in total income in

the society as a whole. Agricultural growth therefore translates into rural and urban industrialisation, into growth and employment creation - also for young people who may want to seek job opportunities outside farming.

Agricultural development is also key to poverty reduction in Africa. GDP growth originating in agriculture is two to four times more effective in raising incomes of extremely poor people than GDP growth from other sectors.

There is a need for increased support for rural infrastructure, institutional development, land reforms, organisational development, rural finance and insurance.

There is a need for enhanced investments in rural education, extension services and into research and development while promoting easier access to intellectual property rights in agriculture, modelling the progressive steps made in medicine.

There is a need to promote trade and agricultural reforms to ensure increased market access and integration for African agricultural products and overcome the many new barriers that poor farmers in Africa face - from sanitary and phytosanitary standards to demands for traceability.

And there is a need for higher public spending on public goods to facilitate agricultural and rural growth. Public spending for farming in Sub-Saharan Africa is only four percent of total government spending and the sector is still taxed at relatively high levels. While around 75 per cent of the poor live in rural areas, only four per cent of official development assistance goes to agriculture. These numbers should be multiplied. Instead of a four-four ratio it should increase to a 20-20 ratio. 20 percent of public funds and 20 percent of development aid should be targeted towards public goods in support of agricultural development.

Investments in agriculture will have large returns, spurred by the high world market prices on agricultural commodities, and are desperately needed to avoid strong negative impacts from increasing food prices and climate change.

The second important challenge is **youth involvement**. As you will see on the discussion paper on youth - prepared by a group of young people from northern Ghana as an input to the Commission - the subtitle is "caught between Traditional Arrogance and Political Indifference". These young people from Ghana stress that many African countries are challenged with massive youth unemployment and hopelessness attributed partly to the indifference of political actors towards designing youth development policies and partly due to outmoded cultural practices by

traditional leaders on roles of community members. They want a cultural revolution in Africa to change youth images, influence and institutions, they want the youth to be included and consulted in decision-making processes and they want educational systems in Africa to build on respect and involvement, innovation and entrepreneurship not on disrespect and corporal punishment.

The third challenge is **women's economic empowerment**.

Women play a key role in economic development, food production, health and education - but do not face equal rights or opportunities. As an example of the unreleased potential new research shows that total agricultural output in Sub-Saharan Africa could increase by 6-20 percent if women had the same access to agricultural inputs as men.

It is thus crucial to strengthen women's position, recognizing their experiences, knowledge and role in food production and work to transform patriarchal power structures, ensure women's property rights and provide access to resources and credit.

It is important - in Denmark as well as in African countries - to recognise gender equality goals within the political, legal, and socio-economic spheres of the society as crucial to the achievement of sustainable economic development and pro-poor growth.

And governments must provide funding and mechanisms for assessing policy and business initiatives and increase women's participation in general in all national development policy and planning processes. Financing towards gender mainstreaming has increased significantly, but it still constitutes only 3,6 per cent of the total development assistance.

Gender equality is not only a women's issue it has to involve both men and women. Here the people of Africa face an important challenge.

The issue of **climate change** will affect Africa severely. All our efforts during the past decades to reduce hunger and poverty in Africa will be at risk. It is therefore critical that we work together to limit global warming to less than two degrees, but that we do it in a manner where we safeguard the right of all people everywhere to reach a dignified level of sustainable human development. We need a fair global burden sharing arrangement based on capacity and responsibility and here the international community must provide significantly increased, predictable and additional funding to the worlds' poorest countries to facilitate sustainable adaptation to climate change.

Strengthened technology transfer and access to new and clean technology to African countries in support of both mitigation and adaptation will be a critical factor, and we must ensure that trade barriers or intellectual property rights do not stand in the way.

And finally we must ensure that the International Climate Negotiations are inclusive and transparent, with full participation of developing countries and strong avenues of influence for civil society. The Danish government, hosting COP-15, has a special responsibility and a unique opportunity.

Finally, I would like to point to issues of labour rights and the development of decent work conditions in Africa to ensure that the benefits of growth and globalisation goes not only to the few, but to the many people in Africa in need of prosperity, dignity and security.

This is the goal we must strive for. Here, as in all areas of democracy, growth, employment and poverty reduction, a strong and vibrant civil society plays a critical role.

I would end by once again thanking the Danish Government for this important endeavour. I hope and trust that the Africa Commission will provide valuable input into an agenda of hope, and I look forward to working together with all of you in doing so.

Thank you.