THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FUTURES INTELLIGENCE CAPACITY IN REALIZING THE AFRICAN DREAM

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There is need to disperse with certain conceptual issues here at the very onset. First is the idea of futures intelligence capacity. Second is the 'African Dream'. At a high-level conference on Africa organized in 1990 by the Dutch government, the African problem was debated. Like many other such gatherings around that period, this meeting took place against the backdrop of an overweening pessimism about the prospects of Africa to redeem herself. This pessimism was predominately the view of many looking at the continent from outside. This is however not to say that there were no problems of human development facing the post- independence African states. As is the case today, the continent was faced with a myriad of challenges. This was also the time of the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) and their effects on African economies. Centralized planning and 'government – driven' development programs characterized the dominant strategies for development in most countries on the continent at the time. It is therefore no wonder that the Maastricht gathering proposed the re-orientation of development planning and management in Africa from the short- term state- driven approach to long-term and more inclusive perspectives. In order to accomplish mission, the African futures/ National long- term perspective studies (NLTPS) program was initiated in 1992 with the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

The point is that African leaders and planners need to be sufficiently knowledgeable about the objective conditions at present and have credible evidence-based insights into the future. It's only this way that leaders can build prosperous societies for the current generation and those after them. This is the idea of futures thinking. The African dream is a rather subjective notion. One Africans dream may not necessarily be shared by the rest of the people at the national and Pan- African levels. Leaders who have claimed direct links with the ‘people of Africa’ have themselves gone ahead to loot their countries’ resources, stifle people’s freedoms and consign the people to hopelessness. Yet in every successive election, such leaders would launch their visions and agenda for their countries. In our case in Kenya, the word ‘vision’ has gained more currency than the ‘dream’. As you know, we are going to the polls in just two months’ time and all contenders for the presidency and parliamentary seats are aggressively marketing their ‘visions’ to the voters. Even Ghana’s impending General Election in 2008 has unearthed on its path ‘vision’ as the political marketing buzzword. My own latest book is entitled ‘*A Leap into the future: A vision for Kenya’s Socio- political and Economic transformation*’.

What I consider to be the African dream is a peaceful and prosperous society in which every human being is free from want and insecurity. A society that respects individual collective rights and freedom and accords equal opportunity for personal development to all its members irrespective of their religion, sex or ethnic identities. Simply, a place to feel at home for all of us.

Where are we with Human Development in Africa?

There are monumental problems in Africa. It is true that sub-Saharan Africa accounts for 60 per cent of the reported HIV/AIDS cases in the world. Malaria remains a headache of the health sector on the continent. The education systems in most of our countries are still very poor and millions of children either drop out of school or achieve much lower than their potential as a result. Our transport and communication infrastructure are dilapidated all around, while energy production and use remains low, especially in rural areas. Here we are in Africa, after contributing so much to the world economy and global civilization, still lagging behind as technologically the most backward continent in the world. Plagued by famine, ravished by floods, invaded by diseases that were eliminated by science from the face of the earth some years ago, and wasting our environment with little concern nor knowledge that it is in our interest to sustain it, Africa seems to languish in the past as other societies benefit from technological progress in improving the livelihood of their people.

But that is not all there is. After some hesitation in the 1980s, African countries have generally responded to the HIV / AIDS pandemic with vigour. Uganda and Senegal set the pace for the rest of us by lowering infection rates to single digits. My own country Kenya followed suit and the infection rate now stands at 6% .And while it is true that African economic growth rates per capita fell for most of the 1980s, evidence is the recent years reflects a turnaround, as a result of reform measures adopted in the 1990s and good weather. Progress in democratic governance in Africa, weighted by national population, has been more impressive than in some other regions. Armed conflicts have been wound down in Angola, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Sudan. Peace making and stable national governance are on the way to Somalia. All this owes a lot to African initiatives, as does the multinational effort to stabilize the complex conflicts in the Great Lakes Region with South Africa at the helm.

In considering the future of Africa, it is important to have a critical appreciation of its past. The last time I visited Malaysia, I was struck by the awesome progress that Malaysia has made in the last three decades! It was not just the splendour of Lankawi Island as a holiday resort that truly impressed me. It was also the road network, housing in Kuala Lumpur, commercial buildings in Kuala Lumpur, new industries (including automobile production), infrastructure and most important of all the fact that Malaysia today has full employment and like most OECD states, she has to deal with the problem of illegal immigrants coming from less developed neighbouring states. You all know the grave problems we all face in Africa on all those fronts.

In our conversations, Malaysian leaders told me that when they visited my country Kenya in the mid-1970s, they were similarly struck by the progress Kenya had made since independence compared to where they were at the time! Kenya's economy was then growing at 7 per cent annually. She had just won the right to host the first United Nations agency in the developing world, namely UNEP. The first ever World Bank-IMF annual conference in a developing country was held in 1974 in Nairobi. But what had struck the Malaysian most was that at the time, Nairobi (and Kenya) had better infrastructure than Malaysia, and it was also better managed. At the time, Nairobi was clean, traffic moved efficiently and there was a public bus transport system (the Kenya Bus Company) that met commuter demands adequately.

Kuala Lumpur was nothing like this. So Malaysian leaders decided they would make their capital as good as – or better than – Nairobi. They requested the Kenya Government to allow Malaysian planners and civil servants to take courses at the Kenya Institute of Administration (KIA), then Kenya's premier public service training institution, and the Kenya Government obliged. Today we call this technical assistance – in this case from Kenya to Malaysia. I am informed the records are actually available in KIA archives.

Today, nearly all African countries could do with technical assistance from Malaysia. You all know the story because comparison between economic performance of East Asia and Africa has become the staple of many studies from the World Bank, most prominently the 1993 study entitled *The East Asian Miracle*, but also from journalists, scholars, and *soi-dissant* "experts", many of whom engage in wholesale denigration of African capabilities. People with their noses so deeply buried in statistical number crunching that they are oblivious of the world around them. People devoid of any nuances understanding of the economic history of Africa, who unfortunately have had a greater influence in economic policy making in Africa than they deserve.

It is sufficient to observe that, while the Kenyan economy grew at 7.9 per cent between 1965 and 1969 – the figures are from the World Bank – East Asia, home of the future "Asian Tigers" only managed an average of 4.2 per cent in economic expansion – about half that of Kenya. We had a slightly higher per capita income than Malaysia in 1965. Today, Malaysia has a per capita income in excess of US$ 4,000 that is rising. We in Kenya have one estimated at just about US$ 330, which has been falling! In 1970 Ghana and South Korea had a similar per capita income (about $ 500). Today, South Korea has a per capita income thirty times higher than that of Ghana. This is the kind of raw comparison to which we have been treated *ad nauseam.*

What went wrong in Africa?: Dispelling the myths.

Let us begin with dispelling some popular myths. First, it is not cultural differences! Much has been made out of cultural stereotypes between East Asians and Africans, especially by Western scholars. But this cannot tell us why Kenya was doing better than Malaysia in the 1970s. Neither the Kenyan nor Malaysian culture has changed between 1970 and today. The cultures are the same old ones.

Second, it is not geography about which so much has been written especially in the policy and academic circles. Africa indeed lies mostly in the tropics, where diseases are endemic and climatic changes unpredictable making agriculture perilous. But not all African states fit the stereotype. In Eastern Africa, for example, we have a huge variety of climatic and topographic zones – the cool Ethiopian and Kenya highlands, the tropical coastlands, the African savannah, semi-deserts, snow-capped mountains, etc.

Third, it is not just a matter of pursuing the right macro-economic policies, and then letting the free market to deal with “micro” (i.e. sectoral and specific project) issues. To give just one example, Ghana made exceptional progress in meeting most of the macro-economic and economic deregulation targets required by the donors. But look at the Ghanaian economy today. Per capita income is at just about where it was before reforms. Worst of all, there has been no *structural* change in the economy. Ghana is basically still an exporter of raw materials – agricultural-based (like cocoa), or minerals (like gold). Is it any wonder that Africans are so skeptical about old-fashioned neo-liberal economic policies?

What I deduce from this is that market-driven deregulation and macro-economic stability are necessary but not sufficient conditions for rapid economic transformation. Hard-nosed innovation in selected economic sectors through private-public partnerships seems to be the key to our problems in Africa. A profit-making state intervention in support of selected local-foreign enterprises so that they are cost-efficient in international markets is the key. Comparative advantage in the international markets is created by purposeful human innovation, not natural resources (as the textbook says). This is true of the Asian experience and it is true of Africa if she wishes to industrialize.

The Present and Future of Africa: Some Critical Factors

We need to look at the history, the global environment, the political power structures, and the cultural predispositions as some of the key variables that have contributed to the state of the arts in Africa and also as the main shapers of the continent future:

First, of course, is our history: if Africa had been allowed to develop the way she was doing under the kingdoms in West Africa and the savannah civilizations her levels of technological achievement would be different today. But these are the *ifs* of history that would not help us much today to shape up and get on with the job. If slavery and the slave trade had not disrupted socio-economic progress in the vibrant parts of Africa, maybe matters would be different today in terms of development and technological advancement. After all Great Britain, with so much superior military might, could not subdue the Kingdom of Buganda at the end of the 19th century and had to banish the *Kabaka* (Buganda's king) to the Seychelles to get a foothold in the kingdom. Where would Buganda be today had the British not interfered with its forward march into the modern world? Such questions and arguments may be good for putting our case for "reparation" from the Western imperialists but they may not be very useful in getting our acts together today to galvanise our cultures and peoples in the fight against poverty and for development based on technological advancement.

Second is our current location in the globalized village called the *world economy* that makes us start off as underdogs in world trade in goods and services as well as in international politics. What Samir Amin once called *accumulation on a world scale* still lives with us.[1] .Its effects are dramatized everyday, either on the floor of negotiations at the World Trade Organization or when IMF/World Bank missions visit poor African countries to rescue them from "balance of payment crises". One only needs to read Joseph Stiglitz to see how these "economic missionaries" hardly solve the problems of the poor and merely do "rescue operations" in the interest of global capital.[2]

Third is our own cultural and political inertia to confront and deal with these problems in a way that can rescue Africa from the current predicament through what Mahathir Mohammed, once Prime Minister of Malaysia, called *smart partnership* with the globe. Prime Minister Mahathir's idea was that the developing countries can actually leap frog from their present predicament of backwardness and underdevelopment if they re related to each other as smart partners, and if they adopted internal policies and programmes that are consciously aimed at pushing them into the same levels of development as their

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[1] S. Amin, *Accumulation on a World Scale* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974).
[2] J. Stiglitz, *Globalization and Its Discontents* (New York: Penguin Books, 2002).

imperialist adversaries in the long run. In less than twenty years Malaysia has developed from a poor Third World country into a medium income modern society that will say goodbye to poverty before 2015.

The Role of Futures Intelligence

I have gotten it from the organizers of this conference that the notion of **"Futures Intelligence Capacity" (FIC)** refers to an organized system for collecting, analyzing, and synthesizing future- related information that changes response to user feedback, allowing organizations to better plan, learn and implement.

At the Pan- African level, the FIC will be an important framework for determining the real drivers of the continents future. Let's not forget that the variables of the future are very highly dependant on the current situation. Judging from the prevailing conditions in Africa, a number of factors will play the deterministic role in shaping the nature and quality of life of successor generations. Information gathering, analysis and synthesis under the FIC framework will do well if it is focused on the following areas:

First is leadership, particularly political leadership but without undermining the critical roles of other leaders in society. A political leadership capable of championing the course of national, regional and Pan- African development and ensuring that all potential for development on the continent are optimally utilized is required in Africa. Such leadership must of necessity place very high premium on the development of human resources. The FIC needs to review our capacity to invest adequately in education: primary, secondary, tertiary and university level education.

Secondly, is the development of infrastructure and national integration. Making sure that agriculture and industrial production is stimulated by a home market which works, first and foremost because the people can feed themselves and produce enough for domestic consumption as well as for exports.

Third is Africa's use of science and technology to position the continent strategically in the global market, particularly in the telecommunications sector and out-sourcing business. When the African Academy of Sciences (AAS) was founded in the mid-1980s, I had the privilege of serving as its first Head of Programmes. Our aim was, among other things, to champion a *science-led development process in Africa* believing full well that without science and technology, little would happen in Africa in terms of eradicating poverty. The founding President, Professor T.R. Odhiambo, was himself an entomologist and had specialized in research that aimed at improving agricultural productivity in Africa by scientifically controlling insects and pests destructive to animal and plant life while also improving plant and animal varieties that are more resistant to hostile environments while being amenable to high yields. The International Centre for Insect Physiology and Ecology (ICIPE) that Odhiambo founded in Nairobi in the sixties is now a well-known centre for insect science research as well as a leading R&D outfit in Africa. It has developed a science and technology park, and works with peasant farmers to improve honey, cereals and tubers production using environmentally friendly technology among other things. This, I think, is where the African renaissance in science and technology will come from: applying knowledge to solve our problems through learning, research, discovery and innovation. Not surprisingly, when we started the journal of the African Academy of Sciences over twenty years ago, we called it *Discovery and Innovation.*

Finally, is the objective conditions under which we interact with the rest of the world, particularly the developed world. Our first arena of interaction with the rest of the world is through *trade*. We must change the structure of trade. Our goods in trade must change away from raw materials and unfinished goods to value added goods and manufactures. This means priority must be given to investments and intra-African trade. This further means greater emphasis on infrastructure development to promote economic and regional integration in Africa.

What I see therefore as the critical role of the Futures Intelligence is to bring forth adequate information and analysis on these and other main areas so as to assist in drawing policy trajectories that would move the continent's development agenda forward. The Futures Intelligence capacity must facilitate conscious planning by a leadership that is acutely aware of the main drivers and determinants of future circumstances at a particular conjuncture in the continent's history.

There is yet another role for the futures intelligence capacity. FIC must assist the people of Africa and their leaders in promoting the correct projections of the continent's future. The study of Africa's development is the pre-occupation of many people and institutions across the world. Some of these, particularly those outside Africa have no idea what goes on in the continent yet they release publications and deliver regular lectures on the challenges facing us. I must say that some of these 'analysis' make for very absurd reading. Let me share with you the passage which I came across recently from the website of an organization calling itself The Free World Academy'. They have a program quite similar to what we meet to discuss here today. Theirs is called *'Futures Studies'* and this is what they say about the future of Sub-Saharan Africa:

'The surveys realized by the CIA and some private think tanks about the future of Sub Saharan Africa, show that the situation is not going to improve ***. Our estimate is that it is going to worsen!***

'Firstly, the population is expected to reach 1,320 million ***in 2030.*** *This huge growth should increase political instability, ethnic strifes and anarchy in towns. Secondly, we expect a slow down of oil prices between 2015 and 2030. Thirdly, we have now to take in account a* ***new driver: The islamic surge*** *which could affect West and Eastern Africa with the emergence of a terrorist tank.*

Regarding ***South Africa****, the government restrained therapy on HIV and follows the same policy as Mugabe: The white farmers are driven from land they have tilled for decades and their farms are divided into small plots with low productivity. Presently, the new fade is to change the name of the towns. As a result of the poor governance, there is a lack of confidence: White people and big money are more and more fleeing away (In Australia notably). In our opinion, South Africa will progressively get the same face as the other African countries in the future'*

(http://www.freeworldacademy.com/globalleader/africa.htm)

For those of us who do not believe this, let us stand up, and through such initiatives as the FIC, speak for Africa to insure and guarantee our common future in a world that is threatened by Afro-skepticism with 'analysts' and 'experts' grounded in lamentations of the past.