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THIS IS Africa

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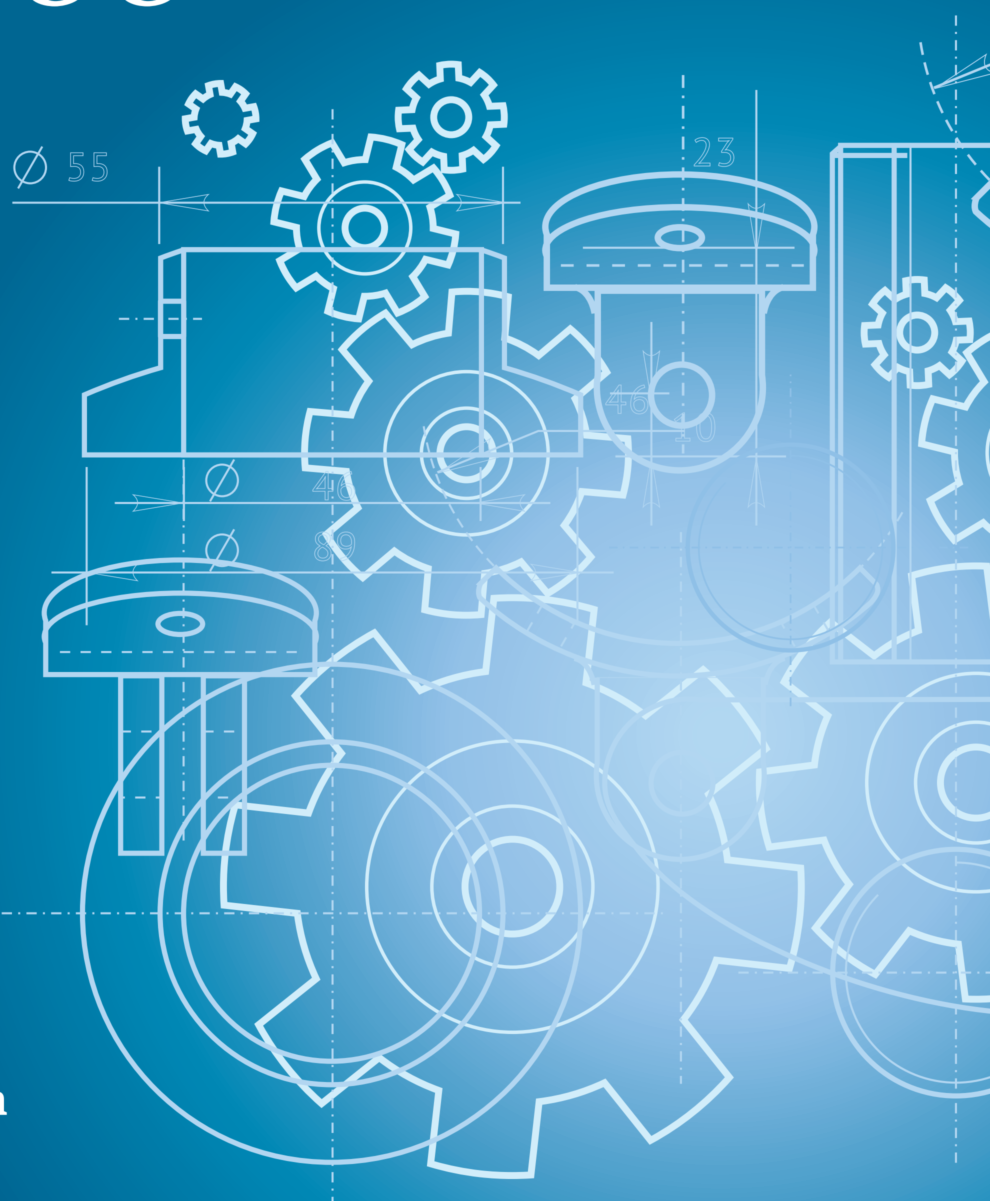
AFRICA'S REFORMERS
Re-wiring governance



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 government. 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 *This is Africa* 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, throughout 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 know-how. Change starts with trusting relationships, not a technical manual.

All of this poses difficult questions. Governance is complex and political, and politics tends to bring messy 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 goes 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 grounds 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, well-being, 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

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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 hosital equipment in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

From rulers to leaders

A new generation of policy makers is exercising influence in Africa, with a growing cohort of women taking charge

BY ADAM GREEN AND ELEANOR WHITEHEAD

For 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 Unity worried little about undemocratic practice. 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."

Nigeria's trade and industry minister, Olusegun Aganga, 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.


Nigeria's finance minister, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala

PHOTO: ERIC HOLTHAUS/OXFAM AMERICA

The old guard stands down

Liberia's Ellen John Sirleaf, 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 offered them 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 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.

As planning minister, Mr Konneh led the implementation of Liberia's first poverty reduction strategy, which connected 10,000 households in Monrovia to the power grid and restored basic government services including health, education and policing to all 15 counties. As finance minister thereafter, he implemented an action plan for the first 150 days of the president's second term, which saw the rebuilding of the container terminal at the port of Monrovia, and the completion of a new highway from the capital city to Buchanan, which cut in half a four hour journey.

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 as the 1970s wore on. Now, they are eager to change that story.

Sierra Leonean economist Omotunde Johnson, a former IMF official, says the woeful 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, producer 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 re-think their whole budgetary management as well as other aspects of their macroeconomic management."

In several resource rich nations, leadership 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 yesteryear; and the level of transparency that envelopes resource extraction are so much improved," says Goolam Ballim, Standard Bank's chief economist, referencing the development of sovereign wealth funds and more robust petroleum development bills, which attempt to share resource revenues more equitably between investors, the state and its citizens.

Poverty 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, also constituted a lesson. [It] had its own silver lining in the sense that people have internalised it, they have felt pain. We are there to say: 'No, you can't keep like this, we don't deserve to be like this. There is a way out of this'," he tells *This is Africa*.

"[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 extractives industry, 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 money that hasn't 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 inefficiency, under the leadership of the soft-spoken central bank governor Lamido Sanusi. Appointed in the midst of a debt crisis in 2009, his bold moves to fix Nigeria's corruption-stricken banks toppled eight local chief executives and ushered in sweeping reforms aimed to protect depositors' cash, recapitalise banks, boost financial inclusion, and curb illicit financial flows. His prudent monetary policy has brought inflation down to single digits and steadied 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 primary constituency is the poor, uneducated, unenlightened depositor," he explains. "But since you are standing on the side of the weak against the rich and powerful you end up with opposition every single step of the way. It's faceless largely, but it's really about groups and classes who continue to benefit from the status quo who don't like the change."

The governor is proud of the reforms. "In 2009 there was a sense that certain people were untouchable; if you have enough money and enough political connections you can do what you want to do. And I think that just being able to remove those CEOs and prosecute them was a great achievement," he says.

There is still work to be done, and there are inevitable risks of back-tracking when Mr Sanusi steps down in 2014. "Who is chosen as governor will be important in terms of the belief in the reform and how it will continue," he concedes. "[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 whoever comes in will find an institution that is already wired in a particular way."

Mr Sanusi leaves a meaningful legacy. Standard Bank's Mr Ballim argues that his reforms have influenced central bank governors across the continent. "You have a leadership influence emanating out of the better policy makers and positive externalities emerging from Lamido Sanusi," he says. "He has taken the financial services sector, riddled with instabilities, and transformed it. The type of zeal that he has shown to central banking and broader citizenship has created a sense of competition amongst African central bankers, who show him enormous regard."

Meanwhile, Nigeria's agriculture reform agenda – led by Akinwumi Adesina, a young agricultural economist and former vice president for the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa – has been equally impressive. When Mr Adesina arrived in post, Nigerian farming was in a pitiful state. A longstanding national input subsidy programme was rampant with corruption, with government-supplied fertilisers and seeds failing to reach farmers and much produce going missing along the way. "It was a very corrupt system, one of the most corrupt systems that I've ever seen," recalls Mr Adesina. "My job was to clean that up and it took us 90 days. In 90 days we ended the corruption of 40 years."

His ministry and the central bank launched an electronic wallet system to distribute subsidy coupons which helped farmers purchase seeds and fertiliser directly from companies rather than the government. In the first year, around 1.5 million farmers were involved. With an average of five people per household, that means around 7.5 million people would have directly benefited from the programme. "Taking the government out of buying and selling seed also saved the government $158m a year," he claims.

Last year, companies sold $10m worth of seed for the first time in Nigeria, directly to farmers. "In one year, the number of seed companies went from 11 to 70 because they could see that the government is out of the way and the farmers are getting the inputs," says Mr Adesina. The withdrawal of government from fertilisers has encouraged major capital investment, including bold plans launched by Aliko Dangote to build a major fertiliser plant. He says his efforts are working in the long-term favour of Nigeria by reducing the import bill. "When you import something from a country you are creating jobs over there, and creating poverty in your own local domestic market, because you are not producing what you consume," he warns.

Women in charge

African governments feature a growing constituency of women, who across the continent are filling posts traditionally dominated by men. Among the most senior are the likes of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who in 2006 became Africa's first female head of state. Last year Joyce Banda became president of Malawi, and in September Aminata Touré was named prime minister of Senegal. Women have also taken power in the most senior ministry of all – finance – in Uganda and Nigeria, where the indefatigable Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala keeps a lively roster of male ministers in check.

"Africa is very progressive, more progressive than other continents. What I find is that I have come into office and I am only one of two [female] presidents, but you find our African men have created space for women to participate in leadership," Malawi's President Banda says. "I have been gender minister, foreign minister, vice president, I am president now. I can't remember a day in those 10 years when I saw anything from a man that suggested to me that I was being undermined."

This isn't just a question of playing catch-up; Africa has made greater gender gains than many other regions. The average representation for women in sub-Saharan parliaments stands at 21 percent, compared to 9.8 percent in 1995, figures from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) show. That's enough to make many more developed Western nations blush: female MPs make up 22.5 percent of the UK's House of Commons, and 17.8 percent of the US Congress. In fact, of the 36 global lower houses of parliament that have reached the 30 percent threshold considered necessary for women to have an impact on decision-making, 11 are in Africa. Those include some of the continent's lower-income nations, such as Burundi and Mozambique.

Amara Konneh, Liberia's finance minister

"A lot of these [African] countries have emerged in their recent past from conflict and have used the opportunity of reconstruction to address discriminations that have afflicted them. For many of them ensuring that women were part of the political process was a priority," says Kareen Jabre, head of the IPU's gender programme. "It was a way of acknowledging the role that women played in liberation movements; that they took on responsibilities during the civil conflict and that they are part of the solution now."

The most impressive gains have come from Rwanda. After parliamentary elections in September, the proportion of women in the country's lower house reached an unprecedented 64 percent – the highest rate globally. Many of the country's female politicians put that down to the inclusiveness of the reconstruction process. "In Rwanda we were for a long time a society in which women were not given political space even if they had the education," explains Marie Josée Kankera, an MP and former deputy speaker.

But the war changed those possibilities. "We had so many widows, and those widows were mobilised to work hard, to travel, to get enough income to feed their kids," she says. "We were mobilised to contribute to the redevelopment of our country, to increase our economic capabilities, to finalise our education. After the war, women, girls, boys, and men worked together to rebuild the country."

PHOTOS: GETTY

Those changes were institutionalised in 2003, when President Kagame engineered a new constitution for Rwanda, which mandated that 30 percent of all decision-making positions must be held by women. "We are aware that historically the ground has not been level, so we had to create some kind of balance by really trying to uplift women," he explains. That shift has catalysed more equitable legislation, impacting in turn on discrimination. In 2012, a poll by Gallup showed that Rwanda is now considered the safest place for females to live in Africa by its residents.

In Malawi, too, President Banda notes that her gender has influenced her policy decisions. "I saw it as a calling where as a mother, as a grandmother, and as the first woman president in Sadc [the Southern African Development Community], I had a duty not to fail, otherwise I would have failed all the women," she explains. "I saw myself as a pioneer and a role model who should set the pace for good governance, poverty eradication, the fight against waste and corruption, and bringing issues of gender equality, girl child education and maternal health to the forefront of the development agenda."

Limits of technocrats

While better governance requires a more diverse demographic in government, one thing is clear: in a nation's early days, or its most troubled hours, the head of state position remains critical. The qualities of those leaders go further than technical skill or a stint at Citibank.

"There has been a certain generation of leadership which began to have very specific visions of where they wanted to lead their countries," says the Nigerian central bank's Mr Moghalu. "You have people like Meles Zenawi in Ethiopia and Paul Kagame in Rwanda. Everyone may not agree with their style of leadership and their actions, but there is no question when you study them closely that these are leaders who have something that Africa needs: a world view. You absolutely need to have a very conscious world view."

There is an inconvenient truth here; those two countries heralded as the most 'developmental' in contemporary Africa both receive criticism for their weaker democratic credentials, at least as measured by the political space and the competitiveness of elections. Even Africa's best-governed state, Botswana, has never seen a transfer of party power.

Mr Kagame is under fire by those who say Rwanda's politics are highly authoritarian and without strong and free opposition, but many Rwandans support him because they don't think another leader would bring the same reforms. Is he vital to Rwanda's development trajectory, or could the changes continue without him? Asked how long is too long to retain power, the president doesn't give a firm answer. "I can't effectively answer that, in a sense of saying: 'At what point'. It is a bit complicated. Is five years enough? Is it 10, 20?" he responds.

Mr Kagame says countries have a range of democratic settlements, from those enforcing term limits on incumbents, such as the US, to those who do not, such as the UK. Either way, the noise around his position in government has become a distraction, he claims. "I think the debate has been too simplified and we run the danger of saying: 'No, the stroke of a pen matters more than the circumstances or even what people want or say'," he says. "In my mind, let's grapple with the problems and with these questions that we must answer. Are we sticking to the democratic principles of accountability, of transparency and, at the end of it, of delivery?"

There is no doubt that Mr Kagame has been a driver of Rwanda's accelerated development. But in the end, he acknowledges that institutions are more important than people and that a reform programme can only be deemed a success when its momentum outpaces its original architects. China's key reformer, Deng Xiaoping, left government just as his changes were taking effect. George Washington, the founding leader of the US, refused to run for a third term – thereby setting a two-term limit only once broken, by Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Africa has its own example in Ghana. Many pleaded with Jerry Rawlings not to leave government back in the early 1990s, fearing his reforms would fall apart, returning the country to its dismal state. Mr Rawlings was not worried; he assumed his vice president, John Atta Mills, would win. But as it happened, he lost to John Kufuor, leaving nascent reforms in the hands of the opposition. Yet, far from falling apart, Ghana was strengthened, and has enjoyed six peaceful elections since to become one of the strongest democracies, and best governed countries, in Africa.

"You need to move from power invested in a person into creating the institutions," says Liberia's Mr Radelet. "That transition is really critical."

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

Rwanda's permanent secretary to the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, and secretary to the Treasury, cuts 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 economist 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 governments.

Since her appointment in 2009, she has worked on headline-grabbing initiatives, leading 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, Bralirwa, on the national stock exchange. "The government was selling its shares so most decisions took place in Minecofin [the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning]," explains Ms Sayinzoga.

She describes the successful launch of a $400m 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 impatience with accepted practices – she describes herself as "a bit of a bulldozer in a bureaucracy"– while colleagues speak of her ferocious work ethic. But she's also, quite possibly, just more efficient than her elders. "What would probably take my dad [Jean Sayinzoga, chairman of the Rwanda Demobilisation and Reintegration 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 alongside Ms Sayinzoga include Ines Mpambara, 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 free with each other as young people, we are capable of telling each other the truth," says Ms Sayinzoga. If a colleague disagrees with the permanent secretary's idea or proposal, "she'll probably just reply to my BBM (Blackberry instant messenger) and say: 'This is a stupid idea, why would you think that, let's shelve it'. There's no reason to be defensive. If I'm 33 and make a mistake, I did it in 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 generations, 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 understand 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 create 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 population [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.

"What brought Rwanda where it is today is that passion, that feeling that you can make a difference, you can see the product of what you do. The bait for us was patriotism – the need to change the reputation of our nation, from genocide to success story"

Whether the authorities will tolerate direct political opposition is another question. This is still a country with sensitivities about criticism of government and dissenting voices regularly cite the arrest of political opponents.

Ms Sayinzoga refers often to "patriotism" as a driver behind both her work and Rwanda's post-genocide success, and describes development 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 neighbour 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 two young children's generation – will sustain the urgency she feels.

"What brought Rwanda where it is today 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 encouraging 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 dramatically. 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 government provides complementarity. "I think generally women are a little more risk averse in decision-making and we tend to be quite detailed," she says. "Men – and I don't like the generalisation – tend to be a little bit more big picture and more risk prone, and in development you need both."

Fresh from its recent international bond issuance – in which, by Ms Sayinzoga's account, both she and her male superior played complementary roles and closed an order book of over $3.5bn – Rwanda's current government will continue to prioritise the country's economic development.

Commitmxent to economic growth and high standards of public integrity, much more than multiparty democracy, are the hallmarks of Rwanda's strategy. But Ms Sayinzoga and her peers may have a rare opportunity 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 institutions," she says.


PHOTO: AFP/GETTY

Joyce Banda, president of Malawi

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

BY ADAM GREEN AND ADRIENNE KLASA

Political leaders campaign in poetry, as the saying goes, but govern in prose. Nowhere is this truer than Africa, where the public purse groans in the face of huge demands and policy makers face tough choices about how to spend each dollar.

Prioritising is tougher in failed or failing states, where incoming leaders must pick up the pieces left by their predecessors. But in three recent cases – Guinea, Malawi and Côte d'Ivoire – leaders have made impressive strides in very difficult environments.

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 nose-dived between 2009 and 2010 as government expenditure doubled. The budget deficit was above 1 percent of GDP per month, and the central bank was being used as the regime's personal piggy bank. "They used to take money from the treasury, convert it into foreign currencies and then take it outside the country. That is why you can't understand why this deficit was allowed to exist. It was all used for foreign consumption," Mr Yansané argues.

Official procurement processes were brushed aside with contracts considerably exceeding available resources. "You would see big projects – to construct a school, or a hospital – the money would be taken out of the Treasury, and when you sent people to the field to ensure that they are building, nothing would be there," he says.

The west African country's resources sector, meanwhile, was in tatters. "The legal framework in the years 2009/2010 was completely rotten," Mr Yansané recalls. "Contracts were signed without due process, in opacity... There were informal systems in place between the presidency, political parties, some sort of cronyism, that made these contracts go through."

Poor economic management saw inflation soar from 7.9 percent in December 2009 to 21 percent by the end of 2010, while international reserves dwindled. Higher costs hit households, and poverty rates increased to 58 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 curbing 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 frozen public contracts while it verifies that groundwork is "effective". A legal review of the mining sector is underway, with investigations into deals signed during the junta period, and the country has taken the rare step of agreeing to publicly publish all contracts. A 2011 mining windfall tax restored public infrastructure investment and a new mining code, adopted in April 2013, imposes harsher penalties for failure to develop concessions, along with higher taxes and royalties on miners' profits. The reforms "have freed almost 8 percent of the mining cadastre, because it turned out that these licenses were not implemented at all during the past few years," he says. "This is an area whereby corruption was really very high."

But the measures have come with consequences. Risk consultancies cried 'resource nationalism' and in May, the government revised down mining investment projections by 33 percent. Politics are still fractious, with vote rigging allegations overshadowing September parliamentary elections. Long-term recovery will stretch well beyond the leadership of the 75 year-old President Alpha Condé, but the government has at least halted Guinea's freefall.

PHOTO: GETTY

Malawi: tough love

Malawi has not been subject to as steep a governance collapse as Guinea, but it did face its fair share of severe economic mismanagement under the leadership of the late Bingu wa Mutharika. Joyce Banda, the current president, recalls what she found after arriving in office following Mr wa Mutharika's death in 2012. "I came to power in very challenging circumstances that required me to focus on healing the nation and rebuilding the economy," she says.

Malawi was saddled with a growing fiscal deficit, rising inflation and depleted international reserves caused by an overvalued exchange rate. The government's domestic payment arrears were $183m and external payment arrears by the private sector were $600m. Public services had been degraded and donors had withdrawn budget support.

Ms Banda took tough corrective measures, depegging the over-valued Malawian kwacha from the dollar, ushering in a painful 49 percent devaluation of the currency. Her government tightened monetary and fiscal policy and removed corruption-prone fuel subsidies. "The policy reforms required a very strong and determined position and it was possible for me to sacrifice my political career," the president recalls.

But there were unintended consequences. Prices of basic goods increased by as much as 50 percent and fuel prices rose by 30 percent, lifting the cost of public transport. Citizens were outraged. "Most people doubted that my policy reform programme could succeed," Ms Banda acknowledges.

The full upshot of those reforms is yet to be seen, but recent data suggest that, despite the costs, they are working. By June this year, macroeconomic indicators covering inflation and price stability were under control. Real GDP growth in 2013 and 2014 is expected to rebound to 5.5 and 6.1 percent, respectively, anchored on the recovery in agriculture, manufacturing and trade. Revived tobacco production, rising foreign exchange reserves, and improved availability of fuel, have all boosted growth. The World Bank describes the government's strengthening of public finances as "outstanding".

There are still deep-seated challenges for Ms Banda, especially following a corruption scandal in October which forced her to dissolve the entire cabinet. But if her government can stay the course and avoid the ill-conceived policies of its predecessor, Malawi could be on the road to a more sustainable economic model.

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 ever since the death of its leader Félix Houphouët-Boigny in 1993, it has been beset by conflict, peaking in a civil war between 2010 and 2011. "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 disturbances 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 Countries initiative, reducing government debt by two thirds. Major investment in public services, education, the justice system and the police force, and construction work around the capital, are all promoting growth and the country is tapping the regional CFA bond market for capital. Reforms in the coffee, cocoa and electricity sectors, and improvements in the business climate, are also supporting investment.

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 in a long time, 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, corruption, mismanagement or a combination of all, are using that experience as a reason to take bold measures, and start afresh.

A mother sits beside her baby at Kigali Central University Hospital. Over the last decade, Rwanda has registered some of the world's steepest healthcare improvements

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 famine 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 criticism, and have strong incentives to undertake measures to avert famines and other catastrophes," 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 line of thought goes, respond more readily to the health needs of their populations than dictatorships.

"Democracy is correlated with improved health and healthcare access. Cross-national analysis shows democracies have lower infant mortality rates than non-democracies, and the same holds true for life expectancy and maternal mortality," writes Karen Grépin, 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 provision, as does severe income inequality, ethnic heterogeneity, and persistent international conflict."

Democracies tend to entrench longer-term institutional reforms, Ms Grépin tells *This is Africa*. "The effects of democracy are more than a short-term initiative, such as an immunisation programme, which don't always have lasting effects," she argues. "Democracy can bring larger-scale reforms that create new things or radically transform institutions, such as universal healthcare or health insurance."

And true enough, major changes are emerging in some of the continent's most established democracies – often involving financial protection. The most obvious example comes from Ghana; a poster child for political stability in an otherwise rocky region. According to Gallup data, 75 percent of the west African country's population consider its elections 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 insurance programme. Policy makers noted that earmarking the increase for health expenditures made it an easier sell to voters, who were overstretched 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, managing director of the US-based Results for Development Institute (R4D). She notes that

PHOTO: GETTY

Ghana's funding system has given the country "a better stream of revenues for health than a lot of countries at similar income levels".

The new insurance scheme became so popular with voters that it survived a change of government in 2008. "They committed to the system institutionally, so when there was a shift in power the new government couldn't make it go away, because it had become such a popular thing," Ms Grépin recalls. "Democracy can have this effect."

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 population. Financial protection schemes do not necessarily equate to improved health, and though Ghana has seen meaningful reductions in child and maternal mortality, it will still struggle to meet health-related Millennium Development Goals.

Similar schemes are in play in other democracies 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 universal coverage. "These first steps towards establishing national health insurance are truly historic," the health minister Aaron Motsoaledi said at the time.

But the link between democracy and improved health outcomes is not watertight. There are plenty of nascent democracies which are failing to enact meaningful reform while more autocratic African regimes are performing 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 country, 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 healthcare improvements, and is on track to meet most of the MDGs. Deaths from HIV, tuberculosis 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 cross-cutting 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 Nyiramugisha explains that performance is evaluated quarterly by the district hospital. "All of us have our indicators. When we perform very well, we all 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 Nyiramugisha 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 90 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 premiums, 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 ($0.30) 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 Nyiramugisha explains. "Ever since the Mutuelles de Santé was introduced, there has been a huge difference. You look at paying 3,000 Rwandan francs ($4.50) per year and then you get treatment."


Trainees learn to repair hospital equipment in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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 want 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. "[For] 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 says, smiling. "We find things 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 autocratic regime which has taken a decentralised approach to healthcare reform, allowing resources to reach rural populations. 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.

The country has registered a more than 25 percent decline in HIV prevalence over the last decade, according to a 2012 progress report. Under-five mortality has declined to 101 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2009/10, from 167 in 2001/2. Infant mortality halved in the same period.

"Ethiopia has come a long way," says Harvard's Mr Berman. "A lot of the country is physically very difficult to get around, so they have opted for building up this lower level of the system and getting things close to people, and they have put in place a reasonably effective basic healthcare delivery system."

There are autocratic regimes in Africa which have failed to improve the health of their populations but the Ethiopian and Rwandan examples are evidence that the causal relationship between multi-party democracy and social development is far from simple.

"The governments in Ethiopia and Rwanda have come to power after periods of crisis or revolution, and these 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 Berman argues.

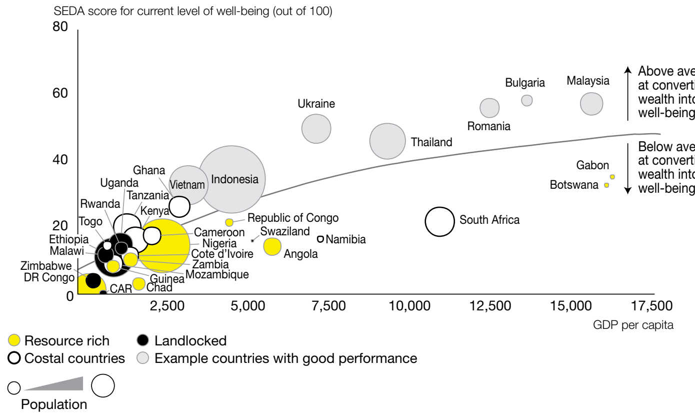
So perhaps there isn't a binary answer to the democracy-healthcare question. "There are autocratic governments that care about the people and there are autocratic governments who don't. It's the argument about the benevolent dictator. And then there are democracies like Ghana where their politicians 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."

PHOTOS: GETTY

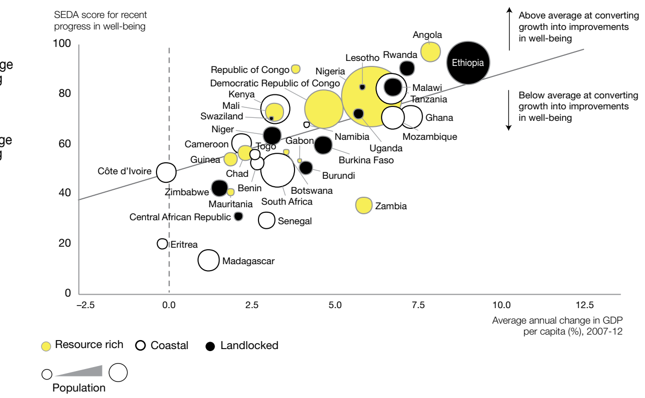
Africa's conversions

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



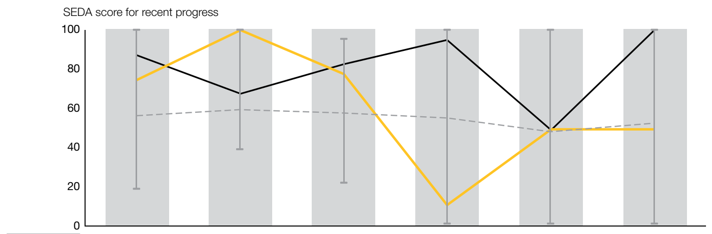
Growth into well-being



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

Ghana scores well above the coastal and African averages in the assessment of investment attractiveness

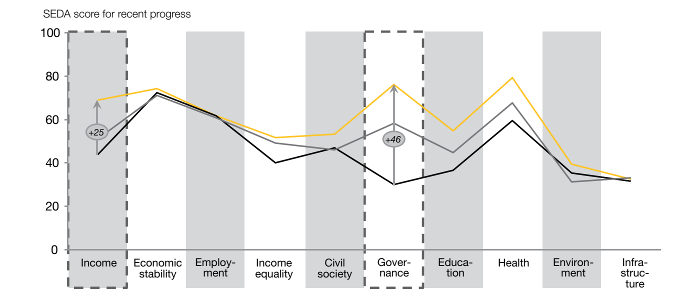
Healthcare in Ethiopia and Rwanda improved markedly from 2005 to 2010



Indicators	Change in life expectancy at birth (years)	Change in mortality rate of children under age five (per 1,000)	Change in rate of undernourishment or obesity (% of population)	Change in rates of immunization for measles and DPT (% of children)	Change in physician density (per 1,000 population)	Change in hospital bed density (per 10,000 population)
Five-year progress in Ethiopia	A 3.5-year improvement in life expectancy at birth	A 23% reduction in the mortality rate of children under age five	A 7% reduction in the rate of undernourishment or obesity	Increases in immunization rates of18% for measles and 8% for DPT	No real change in physician density	A 30-fold increase in hospital bed density
Five-year progress in Rwanda	A 2.8-year improvement in life expectancy at birth	A 29% reduction in the mortality rate of children under age five	A 6% reduction in the rate of undernourishment or obesity	Decreases in immunization rates of 7% for measles and 15% for DPT	No real change in physician density	No real change in hospital bed density

Ethiopia — Rwanda — Sub-Saharan Africa average — Range in Sub-Saharan Africa

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



Note: The top-quintile countries are Angola, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Republic of Congo, Malawi, Lesotho and Tanzania. The bottom-quintile countries are Madagascar, Eritrea, Senegal, Central African Republic, Zambia, Sudan and Mauritania. The quintiles refer to SEDA recent progress scores in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The data for these graphs comes from The Boston Consulting Group's Sustainable Economic Development Assessment (SEDA) which was used earlier this year to conduct a study on Africa in partnership with the Tony Blair Africa Governance Initiative. BCG created SEDA to systematically assess and compare the socioeconomic development of 150 nations across 10 dimensions such as healthcare, education, infrastructure, and governance. The SEDA model measures how well a country translates its wealth into overall well-being for the population. It can also assess a country's progress in converting recent GDP growth into improved wellbeing, as well as the ability to sustain those improvements in the future. For more information on SEDA, and to read the Global and Africa reports go to bcgperspectives.com/public_sector

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf

President of Liberia

"If you look at the record of Liberia, we see that each year we have improved in the fight against corruption"

INTERVIEW BY ADAM GREEN

PHOTO: GETTY

By the end of its civil war in 2003, Liberia – once a shining republic for liberated slaves – looked more like a shipwreck on Africa's western shore. Rival warring factions had decimated the country in their quest for political power, and in the process meted out some of the worst atrocities suffered anywhere on the African continent.

President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf recalls 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 upside down, compromised after decades of deprivation. 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 warzone, Liberia has peace and stability. Monrovia's infrastructure has been rebuilt, and hundreds of kilometres of feeder roads have been renovated. 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 Freeport of Monrovia, and scholarship and vocational training programmes have been launched for thousands of young people. The government's fiscal buffers, at a modest $600m, 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, BHP Billiton, China Union and ArcelorMittal are among those seeking out new business, their capital inflows in turn stabilising the Liberian dollar.

Mrs Johnson Sirleaf – a former Citibank employee with economics and public policy degrees from three US universities – is well-placed to now oversee a deepening of economic reforms. Ten years ago Liberia was among the toughest business environments in the world, especially for small- and medium-sized enterprises. Today it is ranked 149, with the sub-Saharan average at 140 in the World Bank's *Doing Business* report. Its best performance metrics are in starting a business and paying taxes, at which it ranks 38 and 45 globally. For ease of business formation, it ranks higher than Ghana and Kenya. The most challenging areas are reinforcing contracts and registering property, ranked at 163 and 178 respectively. The country has managed to sustain momentum by means of government monitoring units – the Steering Committee, the President's Program Delivery Unit and the government's communications team.

But the economy has a long way to go. Young Liberians were bypassed by the education system during the war, when many enlisted as child soldiers. They are now young adults, and finding formal employment is almost impossible. "It is very difficult to get them jobs," the president concedes. "Our response is to stress technical and vocational training to get to that target group and give them the skills so they can be employable."

The fight against corruption is growing, in part as a response to a perceived lack of momentum in the president's first term.

> "We have promoted an open society in which all freedoms are respected. This is why corruption became a household word, no longer hidden under the table, but one that everyone can discuss"

But civil society groups still attack the government for the slow pace of change. A recent report by the Liberian branch of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative found major governance lapses in the procedures governing the awarding of contracts. Daily accusations fill 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 freedoms are respected. 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 the media as though it were a financial audit, but it was actually a process audit – an important distinction, the president points out. "That audit showed the weakness of our bureaucracy, [it] did not take certain measures – [but] it was a process audit. People did not understand that, and thought it was a financial audit. We passed the financial audit test. So if you look at Transparency International today and you look at the record of Liberia, we see that each year we have improved in the fight against corruption," she argues.

Despite her advocation for greater transparency, President Johnson Sirleaf has an ambivalent attitude to the press; a sentiment that appears to be reciprocal. Liberia has been one of the most open media environments in the world relative to its income level, ranking above Brazil and Georgia in the latest Reporters Without Borders *Press Freedom Index*. But there have been growing tensions, reaching boiling point with the June closure of FrontPage Africa, a leading national newspaper, and the incarceration of its editor in chief Rodney Sieh for libel charges, which he refused to pay. Critics say libel laws are being used to crush dissent. There has also been opposition to the president's decision to appoint her sons to government posts.

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'm open, I'm committed, I will uphold the freedoms of everybody, but if they abuse the freedom, 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 differently, 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 students, and the test was to see where the problem was. And sure enough the problem came out. For us it is a wake up call," she says.

The results show a pattern repeated elsewhere in Africa, with greater school enrolment rates unmatched by improved outcomes. Liberia has been on a big push to get children into school, scrapping fees in 2007 and offering free lunches and uniforms. Enrolment quadrupled on the back of those reforms and schools were "overflowing", Mrs Johnson Sirleaf recalls. But that exacerbated a major problem: the lack of teachers and facilities. Liberia was heavily dependent on volunteers, facilities were poor and schools had no electricity and too few books. "All of those were missing, all of those are what makes quality education. So we found that just enrolment is not the answer," she admits.

The president describes education as a "long haul" policy area, and is now bringing national 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 looking 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 development.

As we close the interview, she is handed a 'Tutu desk', developed by the respected Archbishop's foundation to help children work when desks are missing. The brightly coloured, portable boards are decorated with basic arithmetic, writing spaces, clock images and maps. Taking the desk into her hands, the embattled president lets out a rare smile.

Aiding good governance

After half a century, technical assistance remains a critical yet contested method of supporting governance reform

BY ADAM GREEN AND CATE REID

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 anti-retroviral 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. Antoinette 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 rising hydrocarbons producers, wary of the dangers of the resource curse, are soliciting support for industry regulations, and are drawing 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 industry partnership to present their experience of the oil and gas sector as a guide for the east African nation. Norway part-funded the African Development Bank's 'African Legal Support Facility', which helps governments to negotiate with oil, gas and mining companies, and funds a hydrocarbons training programme in Mozambique. Norway's minister of international development, Heikki Eidsvoll Holmås, 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".

John Dramani Mahama, president of Ghana; Macky Sall, president of Senegal; Alpha Condé, president of Guinea; Jakaya Kikwete, president of Tanzania; and David Cameron, the British prime minister, at a G8 conference in London

PHOTOS: GETTY

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 Lavin, 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 (Waemu) and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (Comesa), is working with governments to entrench those 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 Lavin.

Country ownership

But technical aid has its critics. As far back as 1968, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) said it needs 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 Holmås.

Some critics argue that technical assistance gives donors too much influence over government policy. Market reform-related aid has had a tendency to tie disbursements to policy initiatives promoting liberalisation. Ha-Joon Chang, professor of economics at Cambridge University, argues that this has prevented the use of policy interventions employed successfully by late developers of east Asia.

"We want partners," says 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-giver. 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 \$532m 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 a 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 African governments tend to keep substantial amounts of donor money in reserve rather than using it productively.

No aid recipient will have perfect governance. A country could score badly on corruption indicators, for instance, but have a decent public financial management system and a critical mass of reformists that agencies can work with. Finding that cluster of reform-minded policy makers is critical according to David Booth, author of *Governance for Development in Africa*.

Other problems prevail. 'Best practice' policy reform – which asks governments to make superficial paper changes – is less compelling than the identification of key bottlenecks and the finding of nuanced, locally-rooted solutions.

> "We want partners, 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 that are there"
> **Paul Kagame**

"Governance reforms in many African countries focus on changing appearances to comply with what outsiders think is appropriate; even if these reforms fail to solve real problems," explains Matt Andrews, associate professor at Harvard's Kennedy School, which has educated many of Africa's policy leaders.

Lastly, technical assistance has been hammered for its reliance on foreign experts, to the detriment of local skillsets and capacity building. "We make too much use of long-term expat technical advisers who have little training in skills transfers, who often prefer to do the work themselves rather than train someone, and who often know little about the context in which they are working," says Owen Barder, senior fellow and director for Europe at the Center for Global Development. Kim Jaycox, former vice president for Africa at the World Bank, said in 1993 that the use of expat resident technical assistance is a "systematic destructive force that is undermining the development of capacity".

Even where agencies hire locally, this can suck national talent away from host governments, local business or civil society. Critics says technical assistance should avoid any tacit preference for non-local employees, and if it needs to rely on foreign experts, it should show a clear long-term skills transfer plan.

The NGO connection

Governments are not the only stakeholder in technical assistance. NGOs and think tanks can help drive public service delivery, and happily, local institutions are growing in strength, reducing the reliance on expatriates.

Eric Aligula, programmes coordinator for the Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis (Kippra), says local non-profits are providing an increasingly robust resource for governments to draw on: "There has been a serious skills shortage and capacity building is still a big issue, but that situation is improving," he argues. "There has been a shift and governments are looking inwards for development answers."

Kippra has worked on some of Kenya's most important development blueprints. Its research on public-private wage differentials has influenced policy making, while its public expenditure tracking informs national budgeting. "Often our reports feed directly into policy developments," Mr Aligula says.

On the other side of the continent the Ghana-based African Center for Economic Transformation (Acet) describes itself as a "policy coach". It was founded in 2008 on the premise that many African governments "lack access to high quality local advisers who 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 Rwanda, and supported the development of aid strategies in Ghana and Liberia. In Sierra Leone the group advised the government on petroleum law revisions, 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 Revenue Watch Institute (RWI). "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.

PHOTO: AFP/GETTY

Multilateral donors provided critical technical support to post-war Liberia

As Acet's partnerships 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, during the commodities boom 10 years ago, publishing disgraceful contractual arrangements and completely murky things," says Clare 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 good reputation to get 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.

EITI, which pushes governments and companies to publicly report their payments to each other, is an industry standard thanks to the backing of 17 bilateral donors. "Now, we have 39 countries reporting revenues paid to government by companies, and governments reporting what they receive, and it is being audited," Ms Short claims. This puts pressure on corrupt companies and officials, as well as strengthening the hand of the honest public figures as they push for greater transparency.

Other governance-related NGOs are getting directly involved in the nuts and bolts of governance; notably mining code reform. RWI provides a case in point: "We believe sustained reform comes from within, but that external actors can help," says deputy director Suneeta 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 reform 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 toward 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.

> "We believe sustained reform comes from within, but that external actors can help"
> **Suneeta Kaimal**

Ms Kaimal says Guinea, which partnered with local civil society and mining investors as it designed new legislation, is a role model for collaboration. "RWI 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.

But just like government partners, civil society can find that working closely with countries saddled with a history of corruption provides 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 naive about contexts – it is often the weakest countries that most need 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."

Pressing for change

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

PHOTO: AFP/GETTY

BY ADAM GREEN

In 2006, Mabvuto 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; note the public broadcasts of Ghana's legal review of President John Dramani Mahama's contested electoral victory. In Liberia, a local media NGO tracked and reported on the progress of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's government's '150 day' plan after the 2011 elections.

Media is also driving public education. In northeastern Democratic Republic of Congo, rural high frequency radio stations are protecting civilians from violence; while in Nigeria, the Securities and Exchange Commission is working with the Nollywood industry to improve financial literacy.

Voters are making more informed choices with the help of the information that the media brings. In Mozambique, the national independent newspaper *@Verdade* covered the 2011 by-election with unprecedented levels of detail. Receiving continuous updates from observers, it communicated them in real time on its live blog and through twitter updates which the electorate could also receive as a text. It also monitored the electoral registration process this summer, meaning problems such as malfunctioning printers hindering registration did not go unnoticed and a public outcry forced the government to resolve them quickly.

But the media has not always been a force for good. On occasions, it has worked against the public interest. Rwanda's genocide was largely orchestrated through local radio stations, and the current International Criminal Court investigations of Kenya includes a trial of Joshua arap Sang, a radio presenter, for charges of whipping up ethnic hatred on the Kalenjin-language radio station *Kass FM*.

Professional standards are variable, and baseless accusations, libellous claims and shoddy reporting are still common even in more established contexts. "Media in Kenya developed firstly as an entertainment platform. The effect of this is that most media houses have concentrated more on employing entertainers without journalism training, in the positions of journalists in their newsrooms," says Denis Galava, managing editor at Nation Media Group. "Not much emphasis is placed on quality, and as a result statement journalism has replaced the ethical news gathering and editing processes."

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 pointed to an increasingly heavy-handed response by the leadership to separatists in Barotseland, 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 names of 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 Barotseland to look into this and they found that it wasn't true – that the guys were exactly where they were supposed to be living, 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 is it 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 standard measuring media freedom – the Reporters Without Borders *Freedom of the Press* index – Africa performs relatively well. Ghana ranks higher than the US, Namibia beats Canada and Botswana surpasses Japan. South and east Asia appear 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 Sudan – are in the bottom 10.

It is not only the wealthier African countries which are doing well. Niger is a strong performer, with a pronounced opening up from 2011. Forty-five private newspapers compete with a state-run daily and provide regular criticism of government, and three private television stations operate alongside two state-run stations. In June, a government decree decriminalised media offences, leaving just fines rather than jail time. No reports have yet surfaced of the government trying inhibit foreign journalists when covering sensitive events in the north.

But there are still a large number of countries in which media freedom is being contested. In August, editor of Liberian media house *FrontPageAfrica*, Rodney Sieh, was detained for failing to pay libel damages following accusations that a government minister had embezzled funds. Late September saw the closure of a newspaper in Tanzania, *Mwananchi*, for running "seditious" stories, and another was banned for three months. And throughout the year, South Africa's media industry has been up in arms about a secrecy law which could hamper its ability to expose government corruption. Clashes are, the media argue, bellwethers for the accountability of government.

Reporters without Borders has flagged Zimbabwe, Ethiopia and the Democratic Republic of Congo as the most severe trouble spots. Angola may be added to that list. Human Rights Watch issued a report in August calling on the attorney general to drop criminal defamation cases against an investigative journalist Rafael Marques de Morais, whose blog exposed high-level corruption and human rights violations.

Campaigners object to the idea that defamation should ever be a criminal charge. "Criminal defamation laws are usually broadly phrased, usually they can be very arbitrarily implemented and it is a very excessive penalty. A criminal penalty is disproportionate to the crime," says Leslie Lefkow, deputy director for Africa at Human Rights Watch.

Angola's targeting of journalists is reflective of a wider crackdown on dissent. "The use of criminal defamation lawsuits in Angola fits into a broader pattern of restrictions on freedom of expression. It is one element in a tapestry of measures used by government to crack down on freedom of expression," says Ms Lefkow. This constrains the media's ability to scrutinise government, and to ensure its epic $70bn budget goes to the laudable uses to which it is intended.

Ethiopia is also a danger zone. While its achievements in social service delivery, infrastructure and agriculture are impressive, its media freedom performance is not; it is ranked 137th out of 179 countries in the 2013 Reporters Without Borders index.

Rights groups are especially vexed about a 2009 anti-terrorism law which, they say, is being invoked to enable the detention of journalists critical of the government. Reyot Alemu, a past winner of the UNESCO/Guillermo Cano press freedom prize, has been detained under the law since January 2011. Two Swedish journalists were arrested in June 2011, after entering the restive Ogaden region in southeastern Ethiopia. It was only international pressure that allowed them out after 450 days of an 11 year sentence. Hundreds of protestors gathered in Addis Ababa in September 2013 to object to the government's broader crackdown.

Soft and hard power

Uganda, historically a free media environment, has been in the spotlight for the wrong reasons this year. "On paper we have legislation that gives you the feel that Uganda could be fairly free in terms of media, and people keep saying that this regime opened up the media space. But the fact of the matter is that quality does not lie in the numbers," says Don Wanyama, managing editor of the *Daily Monitor*, a leading independent newspaper owned by the Nation Media Group.

"If you look at the few media that tried to be independent and a bit critical of government, and see how they are treated – shutdowns, denial of information, investigation of your journalists – that tells you the real situation for media freedom in this country."

In May this year, police shut down the *Monitor's* headquarters after it published a leaked letter, written by the national head of intelligence, which raised concerns about a plot "to assassinate" senior officials who claimed that President Yoweri Museveni is grooming his son for power. Authorities closed the paper for over a week and summoned Mr Wanyama before a Criminal Investigations Directorate, before charging him for withholding information from the police.

Uganda has a relatively independent judiciary, and Mr Wanyama says that on the many occasions his journalists have been taken to court they have not lost a single case. Paradoxically, that may explain the security crackdown. "Uganda stands apart owing to the strength and ability of its judiciary, which has demonstrated a commitment to media freedom whenever journalists are either charged in court or sued for libel awards," argues Mr Galava. "In response to this, the Ugandan government opts for illegal means of constraining the media such as closures of media houses enforced by the police and army."

But even the independence of the courts is tenuous, Mr Wanyama worries. "In many other sectors it seems to also be running into trouble lately – you get the feeling that the courts are becoming very politicised. We have had justice in court, but how long that will happen for is really debatable," he says.

In other media environments, subtler means are at play. "In Kenya, the government insists on indirect control of the media through threats of arrests of journalists and prosecution for criminal libel," says Mr Galava. He adds: "Secondly, by virtue of government control of several state corporations and ministries which have heavy advertising budgets, the government uses threats of withdrawal of advertising contracts against the media whenever corrupt practices within it are revealed. Thirdly, the courts award huge sums as damages for libel, this inevitably attacks the financial base of most media houses making them less willing to expose corrupt acts."

In Mozambique, squeezing revenue is also a tactic employed by government. MCel and Vodacom no longer advertise in *@Verdade* and other independents *CanalMoz* and *Savana* are feeling the pinch as advertisers pull out. Journalists say they are being forced to adopt a 'press release' journalism. Some critical stories are strategically permitted to keep up the appearance of a free press – in reality being those which the government regards as relatively harmless and already in the public domain.

"The police and national election commission are on the ruling party's side, so even in big cities they will try to prevent much reporting," says the editor of *@Verdade*, Erik Charas. He sees many "blind spots for election rigging" where an absence of press or observers will leave the door open for the ruling party to use "fraud and intimidation" to swing the vote in their favour. So *@Verdade* will try its best for "citizen reporting". The idea, Mr Charas explains, is to "have as many eyes as possible to see and report irregularities. The media can't be everywhere. But the people are."

Additional reporting by Cate Reid

Hailemariam Desalegn

Prime Minister of Ethiopia

"We are engaged in the planning process with the people, starting from the grassroots up to the prime minister's office"

INTERVIEW BY ADAM GREEN

When Ethiopia's former prime minister Meles Zenawi died suddenly last August, international media and alarmed analysts predicted the unravelling of an Africa success story. In power for 17 years, and overseeing the transformation of Ethiopia from a lost cause to a rising star, Mr Zenawi seemed integral to the country's success.

While public opinion was divided over the autocratic leader – Ethiopia is deemed 'not free' by US think tank Freedom House – few denied the developmental gains made under his watch. The Horn of Africa nation gradually shed its image as host to the late twentieth century's worst famine, and posted agricultural growth figures to rival those of Asia's Green Revolution. Between 2003 and 2010, Ethiopia achieved more than 11 percent GDP growth, hydro-electric power generation increased electricity coverage from 16 percent to 41 percent, the road network almost doubled, and the population living below the poverty line declined to 29 percent.

But Mr Zenawi was not the sole engineer of these transformations and despite talk of infighting after his death, a smooth transition followed. Hailemariam Desalegn, the former second in command, came into office to continue the agenda set down by his predecessor.

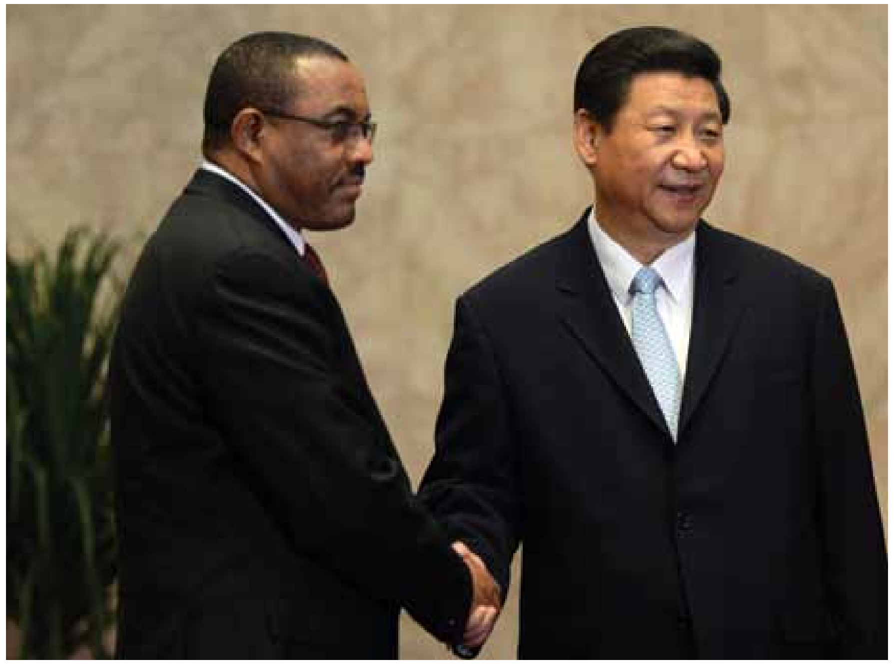
Speaking to *This is Africa*, the mild-mannered prime minister seems the polar opposite to the firebrand Mr Zenawi. But from a policy standpoint, he sees himself as a natural successor. "The most important legacy of late Prime Minister Meles was, and is, building institutions. He tried his best to build the institutions of a strong government, a strong party and mass movement," Mr Desalegn explains.

"Ethiopia is a diverse country in terms of ethnicity, religion, age... It has its own needs and aspirations, and that can only be accommodated in a democratic setting"

"Mass movement" – a model for development that galvanises all levels of government and the grassroots population – is a defining characteristic of the Ethiopian model. "We are engaged in the planning process with the people, starting from the grassroots up to the prime minister's office," he says. At the top, the government runs a 'delivery unit' providing monitoring and evaluation functions. Then, the political institutions kick in. "Parliament is very strong in checking the government in our work, that we deliver according to our plans. The party itself – the ruling party, which has a majority in the parliament – is also very strong in following up," claims Mr Desalegn.

The framework is achieving social development results. By the time the UN released its decade review of the Millennium Development Goals in 2010, Ethiopia's gross enrolment rate for primary education had reached 95.9 percent and the net enrolment rate stood at 89.3 percent, up from 79.8 and 68.5 percent respectively in 2004-5.

"If you take education, parents, teachers, students, government and civic organisations, they work very hard to



ABOVE: Xi Jinping, the Chinese president, with Hailemariam Desalegn

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 5,000 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, bringing better health services to the 85 million-strong population.

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 organisations, 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 ujaama 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, adopt 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.

PHOTO: AFP/GETTY