

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“This is our responsibility, it is the responsibility of this generation, it is costed, it clearly is affordable and this is what must take us forward, together.”

Trevor Manuel, at the launch of *Our Common Interest*, March 2005

When the Commission for Africa’s report, *Our Common Interest*, was launched in 2005, the Commissioners hailed the report as providing a coherent and practical package of measures for the creation of a strong and prosperous Africa. They called upon Africa and its partners to implement them. The purpose of this report – published five years later – is to find out what has happened since.

Our Common Interest argued that responsibility for tackling poverty in Africa lay in the hands of Africans and that the rest of the world, particularly developed economies, should follow their lead by providing resources, through aid and debt cancellation, but also by ending the damage being done to Africa’s fortunes by unfair trade rules, ineffective aid, corruption, the trade in conflict resources and arms, and irresponsible business practices. As the report’s title itself states, we have a collective common interest in a strong and prosperous Africa because it would lead to a more prosperous and secure world.

The Commission’s recommendations had considerable influence. It contributed to the agreement at Gleneagles to double aid to Africa and provide 100% debt relief to eligible countries. It contributed to the creation of the Investment Climate Facility for Africa, the Infrastructure Consortium for Africa and Business Action for Africa. It gave support to the creation of the UN Peacebuilding Commission and to the UN decisions to commence discussions on an international Arms Trade Treaty later in 2005.

As discussed in the first section of this new report, *Still Our Common Interest*, Africa has made extraordinary progress in the past five years. From 2003 to 2008, the continent sustained average annual growth rates of 6%. Foreign investment and exports quadrupled. This was largely driven by African governments’ efforts to make it easier to do business in their countries supported by increased African and international investment in infrastructure - as well as record levels of demand for African goods. This demand for Africa’s natural resources, particularly from emerging economies, has transformed the continent’s relationships with the outside world. Relief for debt valued at \$100 billion and a 46% increase in aid to Africa since 2004 have helped African countries increase their spending on health, education and other social sectors. Governance has improved in many countries, and though some existing conflicts remain intractable, there have been no major new conflicts on the continent.

As a result of this progress, many commentators are predicting great things for Africa. Growing external demand for Africa’s goods and its growth as a market for goods from elsewhere could see Africa becoming the next major emerging market, with increased political power to match.

However, this progress has not been enough to put sub-Saharan Africa on track to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Despite the massive progress made by some countries in reducing poverty, sub-Saharan Africa as a whole will not achieve any of the MDGs on time and the vast majority of Africans have yet to benefit from the economic success of recent years. Economic growth and trade have been damaged by the global economic crisis. Climate change and rising food prices will make poverty reduction more challenging in many parts of the continent.

At the centre of this new report is an ‘audit’ of action against all of the recommendations made by the 2005 report on governance, peace and security, investing in people, growth, trade, aid and reform of international organisations.

There has been substantial progress in some areas. In addition to the steps taken by African governments to improve the investment climate, a substantial increase in investment in infrastructure has contributed to Africa’s growth. Progress has been made towards an international Arms Trade Treaty. Ever growing donor support for the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisations (GAVI) means that this year the 300 millionth child will be immunised with a GAVI-supported vaccine. African governments’ commitment alongside strong donor support has enabled access to the anti-retroviral treatments for HIV/AIDS to grow from 14% in 2005 to 43% in 2008. More children go to primary school and more get to sleep under a bed net that can protect them from malaria than ever before. Africa is very close to eradicating polio.

But there are also a few areas where progress has been disappointing. International trade reform is perhaps the area of least progress with no movement towards an agreement in the Doha Development Agenda, on the removal of agricultural subsidies or on trade agreements between the EU and African countries. The Commission called for the amount of arable land under irrigation to be increased by 50% by 2010 – it has grown by just 0.9%. Investment in higher and technical education has not increased – contributing to a continuing shortage of trained teachers, doctors and other key professionals.

Progress on most recommendations has been mixed. Advances in expanding enrolment in and closing the gap between girls and boys going to primary school, for example, have been tempered by a relative lack of progress in improving the quality of basic education, completion rates and enrolment in post-primary education. Africa still accounts for the majority of new HIV infections. Expanded support to sexual and reproductive health services masks an ongoing underinvestment in reproductive health, contributing to the lack of progress in reducing child and maternal mortality. Despite the fact that African governments have made it easier than ever before to do business in their countries, there is still a lot to do to attract investment – including a massive need for better infrastructure.

We were clear in *Our Common Interest* that our recommendations represented a package, and that failure to make progress in some areas risked undermining progress in others. Because they have not been fully followed though, many of the recommendations we made in 2005 remain relevant. At the same time, we recognise that the world of 2010 is not the same as the world of 2005, and that Africa must also address new challenges which include climate change and the continuing impact of the global downturn on its economies. We have therefore also updated some of our recommendations to respond to this changing reality, and these are set out in the final section of this new Report.

It is our clear view that Africa's potential, which has become increasingly evident over the past five years, is enormous. We continue to believe, as we believed in 2005, that it is in our common interest that Africa should realise that potential by ensuring that the gains of growth are shared by all and that the lives of those currently living in poverty are transformed. Hence the title of this new report: *Still Our Common Interest*. It remains our conviction that, with shared political will by African governments and by the international community, significant progress towards the MDGs can be achieved by 2015.