



Africa and the Group-8

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1. Introduction

The Group of Eight (G-8) G-8 is an international forum for the Governments of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (USA). The collective significance of these countries lie in the fact that, although they constitute about 14% of the world population, they represent about 65% of the world economy and the majority of global military power including almost all of the world's active nuclear weapons. In 2007 for instance, the combined G8 military spending was US\$850 billion which accounts for 72% of the world's total military expenditure.

The G8 holds its meetings annually, attended by among other leaders, the President of the European Commission (EC) and the rotating Presidency of the Council of the European Union (EU). Recently, and arguably, as a response to changes in the balance of forces within the international sphere which has seen the emergence of countries of the South as key global players, France and the UK have successfully advocated for the inclusion of five (5) developing countries namely, Brazil, the People's Republic of China (PRC), India, Mexico, and South Africa.¹ This initiative is known as Outreach Five and it allows the G8 to engage with these countries during its annual summits.

The responsibility of hosting the G8 rotates through the member States and the holder of the Presidency sets the agenda, hosts the Summit for that year and determines which ministerial meetings will take place. Germany currently holds the Presidency of the G8 and June 2008 will see the baton passing to Japan until June 2009 when Italy will assume this responsibility. It was in this context, whereby the host country sets the agenda that Africa began to feature prominently on the agenda of the G8, at least in the past five years.² From the Genoa Summit in 2001 right up to the 2007 Heiligendam Summit, the issues and challenges confronting Africa have been the subject of the G8 and various commitments have been made about the role and contributions of the G8 towards ameliorating some of the African challenges. This brief provides an overview of the G8 engagement with Africa by highlighting the commitments made thus far and the extent to which these have been met.

2. An overview of G8-Africa Engagement

The commitment from the G8 to its African partners has been long standing, emerging primarily in the late 1990s. For instance, the Cologne (Germany) Summit in 1999 launched the Highly Indebted Poor Countries' (HIPC) initiative.

The HIPC was meant to assist poor countries deal with their debt challenges, and most of these countries are based in Africa and this initiative, has helped these countries increase their social

¹ The G8, Wikipedia Online Encyclopaedia. Sourced from: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/G8>. On 2008/03/01

² Germany Presidency of the G8, Summit Theme Africa, G8 Summit 2007. Sourced from: www.g-8.de/content/EN/statischeSeiten/G8/zeittafel-gipfelthema-afrika. On 2008/03/02



spending.³ This was followed by the Okinawa (Japan) Summit in 2000 which was the first G8 Summit to invite African leaders where a direct process of interaction between this group and its African counterparts took place. In 2001, the Genoa (Italy) Summit further progress was made when the Summit adopted the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) as a programme around which support to Africa should be undertaken. Furthermore, it was the Genoa Summit that unveiled the Global Fund for AIDS, TB and Malaria, these being social ills that are prevalent in Africa. Subsequently, the 2002 Kananiskis (Canada) Summit launched the G8 Africa Action Plan which primarily inaugurated the new partnership between the G8 and Africa through which the group made a pledge that no country in the developing world, especially in Africa, should fail to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) because of lack of finance.⁴

Further work and commitments were made during the 2003 Evian (France) Summit where a new G8/Africa Action Plan focussed on enhancing Africa's peace support operations capacity was adopted and the Africa Partnership Forum for Dialogue between Africa and development partners was created to facilitate engagement beyond the G8. The following year, the Sea Island (USA) Summit committed itself to other measures aimed at fighting diseases such as AIDS and polio and to enhance the role of the private sector in development initiatives.

The most comprehensive commitments made by the G8 towards Africa were what came out of the Gleneagles (UK) Summit in 2005. Although the Gleneagles Summit reaffirmed some of the past commitments made by the G8 towards Africa, it was regarded as decisive because it renewed their commitment to tackle Africa's challenges, these efforts being represented through the UK Commission for Africa as one example. Some of the key commitments made in Gleneagles include:

- **Peace and Security:** the G8 committed to contribute to enhancing Africa's capacity to deal with peace issues on the continent by among other things, support towards the creation of the African Stand-by Force and strengthen the institutional capacity of the African Union (AU) to deal with conflicts.
- **Promoting Good Governance:** The G8 pledged to support NEPAD programmes such as the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). It also pledged to contribute to curbing corruption and encourage transparency in public institutions, through institutional capacity building at national levels as well as supporting the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative.
- **Investing in people:** undertake initiatives that would help curb the spread of communicable diseases such as malaria, AIDS in Africa. For instance, with regards to AIDS the Gleneagles Summit pledged to launch a 'package for HIV prevention, treatment and care, with the aim of getting as close as possible to universal access to treatment for all those who need it by 2010'.⁵ The group also pledged to support Africa's efforts to ensure that by 2015 all children

³ G8 Gleneagles, Africa, 2005.

⁴ G8 Gleneagles, Africa, 2005.

⁵ G8 Gleneagles, Africa, 2005.



have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education and have access to basic health care.

- **Promoting Growth:** Under this theme, a number of commitments were made by the G8 including the fact that they would play their role to ensure a balanced conclusion of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) DOHA round in order 'to make trade work for Africa'; strengthen their support for Africa's agriculture sector which they recognised as the most important sector in Africa. They also pledged to improve the utilisation of their preferred schemes to ensure that, among other things, rules (particularly rules of origin) are transparent and do not preclude eligible developing countries from taking advantage of those schemes.
- **Financing for Development:** The G8 pledged to increase Official Development Assistance (ODA) to Africa up to US\$25 billion a year by 2010, which would mean doubling aid to Africa compared to 2004. They also committed to a 100% debt cancellation of outstanding debts of eligible HIPC to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the African Development Bank (ADB) and other institutions. Loans to developing and poor countries will be conditional upon these countries' commitment to democratic, accountable and transparent government.⁶

Subsequent G8 Annual Summits have served, by and large to reaffirm the already existing commitments while offering some elementary additional areas of work and support towards Africa. For instance, the St Petersburg (Russia) Summit in 2006 made a further pledge for the G8 to work with African countries to scale up malaria control interventions and to reduce the burden of the disease to meet the Abuja target of achieving 50% reduction in malaria related deaths by 2010. In the same vein, the 2007 Heilegendamm Summit adopted the 'Growth and Responsibility in Africa' Declaration which among other things, commits the G8 to work with African Regional Economic Communities (RECs) as the bedrock for African trade and integration. The 2007 Summit also reaffirmed its support for the Infrastructure Consortium for Africa (ICA) in order to address the issue of infrastructure shortages in Africa.⁷ The 2007 Declaration also committed the G8 to contribute to improving energy security in Africa and to pay particular attention to energy efficiency and the use of domestic renewable energy resources.⁸

3. Progress and Achievements

Often it has not been easy to trace the extent to which developed countries, in this case the G8, have been able to fulfil their commitments toward Africa. This has been the case because until very recently, there has not been a single institution that provides a composite and comprehensive source of information on progress in meeting the pledges made.

However, efforts by African civil society such as Africa Monitor led by the former Archbishop of Cape Town Ndungane, international Non-Governmental Organisations such as Oxfam are beginning to assist in the collation of such composite information. On the other hand, the G8 itself has created

⁶ G8 Gleneagles, Africa, 2005.

⁷ G8 2007 Summit, Growth and Responsibility in Africa: Summit Declaration, Heilegendamm.

⁸ G8 2007 Summit, Growth and Responsibility in Africa: Summit Declaration, Heilegendamm.



what is called the 'G8 Africa Personal Representatives Forum' which among other things, provide joint progress reports every two years on the status of the commitments made.

The 2007 G8 Africa Personal Representatives' Joint Progress Report highlighted some of the areas that work has been done in fulfilment of the commitments made towards Africa. The Progress Report highlighted, inter alia the following:

- *Democratisation*: the G8 has increased its assistance to the AU and regional bodies with the aim of strengthening the capacities of legislative institutions. In this regard, the report noted that the G8 provided support to the electoral process in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in 2006;
- *Transparency and good governance*: the report noted that more than 40 African countries signed the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNAC) which came into effect in 2005 and the G8 members have supported these States in their endeavours to implement the Convention. Also, the G8 has supported the implementation of the EITI (in full) which is aimed at ensuring equitable and transparent revenue management in the oil, gas, and mining sectors.⁹
- *Peace and security*: the G8 has focussed its support towards the establishment of the African Stand-by Force and the G8 members are supporting African peace and security efforts either in their individual capacity or through other structures such as the EU. For example, the EU has set up the African Peace Facility which in 2007 had provided 300 million euros for peace support operations in Africa. With regards to infrastructure development in Africa, the G8 has increased its resources and financial contributions towards the Infrastructure Consortium in Africa (ICA).¹⁰ In the area of debt relief, recorded progress includes the cancellation of debt to eighteen (18) African countries.¹¹

4. Gaps and Challenges

Despite recorded progress in some of the commitments made by the G8 towards Africa, various observers have noted that the G8 is still lagging behind in meeting some of its own pledges. For instance, with regards to debt cancellation, although about 18 African countries have benefited from this initiative, the debt was cut by just under 65%, which is far below a full cancellation.¹² The objective outcome of debt cancellation is that it allows for funds to be re-directed to other important initiatives such as investments in people, in areas of education and health care.

An example that is often quoted is that of Ghana, which used debt cancellation to make education free, and Malawi which is using the proceeds to train 4000 additional teachers each year.¹³ These

⁹ The 2007 G8 Africa Personal Representatives' Joint Progress Report, Heilengdamm Summit.

¹⁰ The 2007 G8 Africa Personal Representatives' Joint Progress Report, Heilengdamm Summit.

¹¹ Africa Action Talking Points on the G8 and Africa, June 5, 2007.

¹² Africa Action Talking Points on the G8 and Africa, June 5, 2007.

¹³ The World is Still Waiting: Broken G8 Promises are Costing Millions of Lives, Oxfam Briefing Paper No 103.



examples speak to the need for the G8 to accelerate its debt cancellation commitments so that developing countries, those in Africa in particular, can reap the benefits.

There are also gaps in terms of commitments made towards aid to Africa. Oxfam has argued that without including debt relief, aid to Africa barely increased in 2006 and remains at about US\$21.5 billion. However, to be on track to reach the US\$50 billion mark by 2010 (which is part of the G8 Gleneagles 2005 Summit) annual increases of 19% are needed and aid levels should have been at least US\$26 billion by now.¹⁴

Furthermore, with regards to increasing trade and investments in Africa, more work is still required from the G8 to meet its own commitments. A view that the best way for the G8 to achieve this commitment would be through ensuring that there is a better and fair trade deal for Africa. However, the G8 member states have been criticised for using their muscle to push for greater liberalisation and access to African markets while continuing to protect their own markets from competition from African exports. Examples such as that of cotton farmers in Mali who still have to compete with subsidies of USA (a G8 member) cotton farmers, is often cited as a case of on-going unfair trade relations. Some of the G8 member States who are also members of the EU have been pushing African countries to enter into Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) which are intended to, among other things, replace the preferential treatment arrangements.¹⁵ It was also observed that the G8 2007 Summit failed to make concrete pronouncements on the stalled WTO DOHA Development Round neither were they able to commit to concrete pro-development commitments towards fair trade.

In the area of health-care, as already noted above, the G8 had committed to support African countries tackle the scourge of AIDS, malaria and other communicable diseases. In this regard, when it hosted the G8 Summit in 2007, Germany put HIV and AIDS on the agenda for the Summit. During this Summit, the G8 pledged US\$60 billion towards combating HIV, TB and Malaria on the continent. On the contrary it has been observed that the US\$60 billion is not new, save for the USA's commitment to increase its spending on HIV from US\$15 billion to US\$30 billion. Further, this commitment covers only about US\$12 billion of the required US\$15 billion to combat these three deadly diseases in Africa.¹⁶ Another critique was that, no time-frame was given for the disbursement of these funds, thus making it difficult to effectively monitor progress.

Previously, the G8 had committed itself to ensure universal access to prevention, treatment, and care by 2010. However, this can only be achieved if the G8 supports free basic health services and treatment which will entail an increase in long-term aid. Also, for this goal to be realised African States should be empowered to strengthen their public health care facilities, have access to affordable medicines which mainly mean generic drugs.

However, access to such generic drugs, which may be more affordable, is made difficult by existing intellectual property rules including those within the WTO Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual

¹⁴ The World is Still Waiting: Broken G8 Promises are Costing Millions of Lives, Oxfam Briefing Paper No 103.

¹⁵ The World is Still Waiting: Broken G8 Promises are Costing Millions of Lives, Oxfam Briefing Paper No 103.

¹⁶ Ndungane, N. 2007, Response to the G8 Summit Declaration, African Monitor, 11 June 2007.



Property Rights (TRIPS).¹⁷ However, pressure from international campaigns for the review of the TRIPS have allowed poor countries various safeguards and flexibilities to protect their public health and ensure that rules do not prevent them from obtaining generic medicines. Some G8 countries have gone around this WTO process to negotiate bilateral agreements between themselves and developing countries in which they, among other things, call for the tighter implementation of intellectual property rights, thus negatively impacting on access to resources such as generic medicines.

5. Conclusion

The next summit of the G8 will be hosted by the Government of Japan and it has promised to put Africa on the agenda. It is also hoped that, Japan will be able to link its Presidency of the G8 with its commitments made in the context of the Tokyo International Conference on African Development IV (TICAD IV) which serves as a policy forum between this country and Africa. While it must welcomed that Africa will be on Japan's Presidency agenda; the interactions between Africa and the G8 must be enhanced to move beyond what is now likely to be a customary inclusion of Africa as an agenda item. What is coming out is that, although progress is being made, but it is not up to the level that is required and at times fall shorts of the G8's own commitments.

Although creative steps have been taken to try and monitor progress, such as the reports from the G8 Africa Personal Representatives, much more still needs to be done to exert pressure on the G8 to meet its commitments. Among other things, commitments made must give clearly defined time-frames and the G8 member States must also be able to maintain the same momentum when they engage on African issues in other forums such as the EU or at bilateral levels. The changing nature of international relations has also allowed Parliamentarians to play a role in matters of world politics. As such, African Parliamentarians should also be able to device ways of engaging with their counterparts from the G8 member States and other developed countries, on how they can hold their own Governments to account on commitments they have made towards Africa.

¹⁷ The World is Still Waiting: Broken G8 Promises are Costing Millions of Lives, Oxfam Briefing Paper No 103.