

NOTES FOR CANADA-AFRICA PLENARY

3/10/2009

- want to thank organizers for opportunity to participate in this session, and congratulate CCA on this timely and important initiative:
 - has pushed many of us outside of our usual “comfort zones”, which I think is essential to asking hard questions of ourselves and of each other, and to making better policy
- also want to say that one of the privileges of being an academic is the ability to be a little bit impolite with impunity, so I will take advantage of this privilege to be a little bit impolite about Canadian policies in Africa (and then be even more impolite by running out...!)
- In my brief remarks, will focus largely on the pattern of what we as a country have done in the past in relation to Africa, as a basis for doing better going forward
 - Want to make one basic distinction at the outset, and then focus on three broad points
 - I need to begin by drawing a clear distinction between the roles many individual *Canadians*, and the organizations of which they are a part have played in relation to Africa, and our *collective role*, as embodied in government policies and public commentary and debates
 - There are a large number of Cdns, some well known, some not, who have demonstrated a consistently high level of interest, commitment, and knowledge in relation to Africa
 - They come from various sectors of Canadian society: public service, civil society, the private sector, the diaspora and indeed academia
 - They may disagree, sometimes quite profoundly, on the best way forward for our relations with Africa, but their commitment is not

in question: they're in it for the long haul and are the most robust basis for a renewed relationship

- On the other hand, there is our collective record and approach, as reflected over time in government policies and dominant public debates:

- It is this second face of Canada in Africa that is the focus of my remarks – and here the record is, frankly, considerably more uneven

- let me turn, then, to my three broad points:

1) the way we have thought and talked about Africa in this country has often been as much if not more *about us* than about a serious engagement with the people, challenges, and opportunities of the continent

- I have argued, in fact, that “Africa” has often become, in effect, the basis for a kind of serial morality tale about our collective selves and the kind of country we are, or should be, in the world

- I don't think this self-referential quality is terribly surprising or even all that unusual, though I do think this tendency may be particularly strong in this country and in this policy domain

- my point here is that it has had some damaging consequences in policy terms:

- has fed into a rhetorical impulse to exaggerate our own importance and virtue (what Kim Nossal has called the 'ear candy' impulse)

- it has fed into a persistent gap between what we *claim* to be committed to doing, and what we are *actually* willing and able to do in our relations with Africa
- it has led to an excessive preoccupation with *initiatives*, and an parallel inattention to the *effects and results* of those initiatives

- and it has tended to work *against* a serious, sustained, and self-critical analysis of the structural conditions that have helped to entrench Africa's global marginality – and our own role in relation to those conditions, be they in the context of aid policies, trade and investment policies, or immigration and recruitment policies

2) this feeds into my second broad point:

if we look at the overall record of Canadian policies in relation to Africa over time, and especially over the past couple of decades, a striking feature is their *inconstancy*, or “consistent inconsistency”

- again, there is a danger of overstating this point: there is, to be sure, much about the Canadian presence on the continent that persists, regardless of the latest twists and turns of policy making and public pronouncements (an example being the fulfillment of the Gleneagles commitment to double aid to the continent)
- nevertheless, there has been a corrosive pattern of “moments” of high profile initiative and leadership, with inadequate follow through or even effective reversals
- This critique extends beyond any particular government:
- For example, the previous Liberal gov't presided over the deepest cuts in the history of the aid programme, disproportionately affecting Africa, and then not only substantially reinvested in the aid programme but led the G8 in the formulation of the AAP
- We can cite other, more recent egs:
- Follow leadership on AAP with announced shift of focus at the 2007 Summit to Latin America
- Announcement of 14 “enhanced partnership countries” in Africa 2005, cut in half 4 years later

- More routinely, re-evaluate thematic priorities on a regular basis in ways that complicate aid policy-making and undermine effectiveness
 - Indeed, in response to the widespread skepticism regarding development assistance, and the charge we sometimes here that it has “failed”, my rather glib response is that despite its challenges and weaknesses, we can’t really say the aid programme has failed not only because of its undeniable achievements, but also because in truth we’ve never really tried to make it work!
 - Develop a reputation and identity as “the world’s principal proponent of the R2P in the first half of the decade, with clear though very challenging implications for our Africa policy, and then simply stop talking about it in the second half of the decade
 - Could go on... but the point is that it would be hard not to take this inconstancy as evidence of a certain lack of seriousness of purpose
 - Also means that valuable programmes and relationships are often disrupted, and that we often lack the knowledge and resource base – human and material – to respond to breaking challenges in a timely and substantial way (speaks to the costs of eroding our diplomatic presence on the continent...)
- 3) third point, which is clear from the design of this conference and the range of issues we have engaged, is that Canada has an increasingly *multi-dimensional* relationship with Africa:
- we need to develop a policy approach that takes better account of the *inter-relationships* between these dimensions, and is more comprehensive
 - best example of this is probably our role in the extractive sector:
 - as we were reminded yesterday, this is an area in which the role of Canadians in Africa is truly important, by any standard

- obviously there can be important benefits associated with these projects, but as Moses Kiggundu noted yesterday there are also a variety of concerns and controversies that surround them:
- what are there distributional effects? How broadly based or concentrated are their benefits? What are there environmental and security implications, broadly understood?
- In short, there are potential complementarities, but also potential contradictions between our extractive industry investments and our social development and security commitments and objectives in various parts of Africa
- *We should be* a world leader in researching these interconnections, supporting the governance and regulatory regimes that would maximize the social benefits associated with such investments, developing CSR regimes that mitigate potentially destabilizing effects and raising standards in the sector as a whole
- this is hard, complex, and often controversial work requiring long-term commitments and relationships, with African governments and communities and among different 'stakeholders' in Canada
- would require involvement from our diplomats, our aid programme, and various other 'stakeholders'
- there are some hopeful beginnings in this area, but frankly the government's very slow and limited response to the Advisory Group report of the National Roundtables on Corporate Social Responsibility suggests there is much more to be done
- This is but one example of the more sophisticated and sustained approach we should be striving for in any new blueprint for the relationship