

Africa says it's time to deliver

There were several calls at the Africa Summit to hold participants at the G8 summit to account for promises made to the continent

Jean-Jacques Cornish

A veteran of 20 African summits, Hassan Sunmonu, secretary general of the Organisation of African Trade Union Unity, this week declared that the Banjul gathering of the continent's leaders was the best he'd experienced.

He raised eyebrows in the gathering of NGOs where he was a panelist, not the least because his remarks came while foreign ministers — sitting at the African Union (AU) executive council — were still preparing their final drafts for their heads of government.

"You don't need to be the son of a hunter to know where an animal is in the bush," Sunmonu said, quoting an African proverb to support his contention.

"African leaders are sitting down here to see how the African economy can be fast-tracked. They realise that no country can do this alone.

"In this globalised world, they now accept that if we do not integrate our economies, we will be at the mercy of those who have already integrated.

"For years we have been pushing and kicking our government to accept this. Now they have taken it on board and Africa has come of age. Our eyes are open.

"We know that promises made to Africa have not been kept. Our eyes are open."

Sunmonu was basing his optimism on the executive council's acceptance of a rationalisation of the continent's economic groupings.

The AU now recognises only eight of these, namely the Maghreb Arab Union, the Economic Community of West African States (Ecowas), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, Inter-Governmental Authority on Development, the Southern African Development Community, the Economic Community of Central African States, East African Community and the Communauté des Etats sahélo-sahariens — the regional group of Sahel and Saharan states.

The longer-term objective, said Sunmonu, who was sitting in with the foreign ministers, is to have only five groupings and to stop countries holding dual membership of regional economic bodies.

Sunmonu added that there was a strong push for the removal of



Representatives at the recent Africa Summit stressed the need for governments to spend more money on education. Photograph: Paul Botes

restrictions for workers migrating between the regions.

"The Ecowas experience shows that visa restrictions are unnecessary and our fears of people swamping wealthier regions are groundless," he said. "People don't just leave their homes and pour across borders."

Four leading African and international NGOs called on the African leaders to hold the participants at the G8 summit, which meets in Moscow later this month, to account for promises made to Africa.

Specifically they called on the African leaders to:

- Assertively demand deeper and wider debt relief for all African countries that need it during the G8, and failing this to actively consider declaring a moratorium on debt repayments and, if necessary, repudiation of these debts.

- Fully implement the commitments by African governments on education for all and a common African position on universal access to medical treatment.

- Seek agreement on multilateral trade rules that meet the interests of the people of Africa and resist the economic partnership agreements in their current form.

Charles Mutasa, the executive director of the African Forum and Network on Debt and Development, said: "Although the debt cancellation deal agreed last year was a significant step, the delivery of the deal is not fast enough and does not cover all the countries that should benefit from it.

"Debt continues to tear down schools, hospitals and clinics in a way that is more devastating than war.

"Is our generation going to be more than a series of broken promises? How we live is far removed from how we ought to live."

Amboka Wameyo, the Africa advocacy adviser of World Vision, said the full amount of finance available since the Gleneagles G8 Summit for poor countries to fight poverty is much less than that announced by the G8. Four-fifths of that increase amounts to a one-off debt cancellation for Nigeria and Iraq.

"African leaders are sitting down here to see how the African economy can be fast-tracked"

"If G8 leaders meeting this year do not live up to Gleneagles pledges, 15-million children affected by HIV/Aids will have no hope of surviving beyond the age of 18," said Wameyo. "Leaders must show their commitment to these children urgently or lose their relevance and legitimacy in the eyes of the public."

Irungu Houghton of Oxfam noted that: "While G8 leaders continue to congratulate themselves on their own pledges, one mother dies every minute and a child dies needlessly every three seconds due to the lack of serious delivery of those promises. At the same time, African governments must keep their own promises to tackle corruption head-on and increase spending on education and health."

The Education for All Campaign Network in Gambia urged AU members to take seriously the African G8 commitments on schooling for everyone.

"Civil organisations have done a lot of advocacy on these commitments, now it is time for action," they said.

"We know education is one of the tools that could eradicate poverty. For African integration to move forward, the education agenda must be

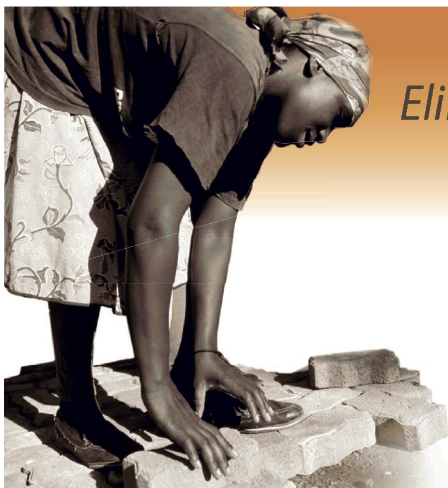
high on the AU agenda."

The media foundation of West Africa and several other press watchdog organisations condemned a decision by the national organisers of the events connected to the summit to ban a forum on freedom of expression.

"We view the Gambian government's action as a declaration of its hostility to human rights. It is also a violation of the Constitutive Act of the AU. It is unacceptable for the Gambian authorities to attempt to subject an NGO forum, particularly one aimed at discussing an issue as fundamental as the right to freedom of expression, to governmental approval," said a Media Foundation for West Africa statement.

The United Nations news agency Irin reports that local journalists wanted to remind summit participants of the murder of prominent Gambian journalist Deyda Hydara 18 months ago.

The Gambia Press Union urged the summit to press the Gambian government to allow a private investigation from abroad into the murder. Hydara was shot dead in his car about 15 minutes after leaving the offices of the *The Point* newspaper on December 16 2004.



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