Commission for Africa
Consultation in
London Borough of Southwark

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Southwark’s African Community and the Commission for Africa

The Commission for Africa was established by the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, in January 2004 to assess UK and international policy on Africa, to examine where this policy has worked and where it has failed, to look at what has worked in the past, and how it will work in the future. The Commission will report in Spring 2005, and in preparation for this report, a consultation was launched in July 2004 with African residents and groups in and around Southwark.

Secretary of State for International Development, Hilary Benn MP, spoke at a meeting on 24th February 2005 in Southwark Town Hall, which was attended by 94 people from 14 African countries.

This report is

• A summary of the views expressed at the Africa Commission consultation meeting at Southwark Town Hall
• an analysis of the written feedback received from the African Community in Southwark in response to the questionnaire issued by the Government’s Commission for Africa.

Key recommendations from the Diaspora at the meeting on 24th February 2005:

• Remittances. There should be recognition of and support for the huge value of remittances from Africans working in the UK back to their families, villages and communities of origin in Africa. In particular there should be an exercise to estimate how much the African Diaspora contribute back to Africa and consideration of how government could support such remittances by tax rebates, matching funds etc.

• A secondment programme. Many Africans who have made their home in the UK nevertheless want the opportunity to return for specific limited periods to help their country of origin. It is difficult for individuals on their own to organise such secondments. The government, working with VSO and other NGO’s, should consult on establish and support a programme of placements and secondments for the African Diaspora to undertake work back in their country or continent of origin. Such a programme could involve those who are professionally qualified for example as teachers or doctors, those who have played a role in our democratic processes such as in local government, as well as those who are not professionally qualified and could also focus on those who were born here but whose parents came here from Africa.
• **Diaspora community network programme.** A great many members of the African Diaspora who are involved in community projects in the UK, such as youth groups and tenants associations, also set up community projects in their community/country of origin. Examples include The Needy Children of Sierra Leone, established by Abraham Williams who is chair of the Gloucester Grove tenants association, and the Accra Community Development Project established in Ghana by Maria Williams, a longstanding resident and community activist on the North Peckham Estate. These African Diaspora are able to draw on their experience of community organisations in the UK and make a great contribution to community development in their country of origin. But there is no central place where they can go to seek matching funds and advice. It was proposed that DFID should establish a Diaspora unit and one of its responsibilities should be to assist the Diaspora in establishing community projects.

• **The wisdom and experience of the African Diaspora.** Though they have made their home in the UK, and many have become UK citizens, the African Diaspora remain deeply committed to their communities and country of origin. They also remain closely in touch with the reality on the ground in those communities and are able to openly and transparently explain what is really going on. They therefore provide a great resource for the UK government to draw on in formulating and evaluating their policy of support for Africa. Though the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Department for International Development have officials designated for each country in Africa and those such officials attempt to work closely with the Diaspora from that country as well as with the country itself, there is no central co-ordinated focus for the African Diaspora to feed their views and wisdom to the UK government. It was proposed that there should be established a joint FCO/DFID unit dedicated to working with and drawing of the views and support of the African Diaspora.
Who responded to the Commission’s request for evidence?

The feedback came from individuals and 32 groups. These groups included:

Africa HIV Policy Network
African Children and Families Support
African Youth Development
Alliance for African Assistance
Arise and Shine Evangelical Ministries
Body and Soul
Bonaboto Union
CAP UK
Celestial Church of Christ
Centre for Multi-Cultural Development and Integration
Centre for Women’s Career Development and Success
Everlasting Arms Ministries
Faith Chapel
Farassa
Health First (NHS)
Ivorian Democratic Party (UK branch)
JK Computers
Komo Development Union
Movement of Peace, Democracy and Development
Neouesator Community Organisation
Parenting Support and Advice Network
Sierra Leone Refugee Welfare Association
Somali Relief Society
South London African Cultural and Education Project
South London African Women’s Organisation
South London Congolese Association
Status Quo Sierra Leone
STWA
The Educational Alliance Africa
The House of Praise
The Needy Children Association
Uganda Aids Action Fund

Number of forms received: 116
Where do the respondents come from originally?

The respondents are from 14 different countries, across the continent.
What are Africa’s Biggest Problems? Southwark Diaspora respond

The importance of better Governance:

A quarter of respondents, when writing that better governance was needed, also noted that corruption amongst governments is an issue about which they are concerned. This is a theme that was repeated throughout the feedback, as many were also concerned that the UK and EU governments were not doing enough to ensure that money given was spent at grassroots level. Worries were expressed very often through the feedback that funding intended for projects on the ground was instead being absorbed and misspent by governments and officials.
The need for Conflict Resolution:

Most respondents wanted more international action on conflicts, feeling that developed countries stayed out of conflicts until they began to affect them. Faster action was suggested by many.

Priority to be given to HIV and disease:

Many respondents linked this to education, in that better education could prevent the spread of diseases. They suggested that simple measures, coupled with a small number of resources could stop HIV spreading, yet the infrastructure to provide this was not in place.

The need for better Education:
This was cited as a key factor in reducing all other problems in Africa. It linked into an issue that many respondents raised, that of helping Africa help itself. They argued that if Africans were equipped with the education they needed, that would be able to help themselves. Some respondents noted that this was how UK and EU policy should orientate itself, and not around a ‘parent-child’ relationship with Africa.

A focus on Economy, Debt and Trade:

A significant minority of respondents, when citing trade as a problem facing Africa, raised the issue of multinational corporations coming to Africa to exploit its resources, such as oil and labour, not contributing to the local economy, and even damaging it. This links into the issue of corruption, as there was a feeling that these companies were allowed to prosper by governments that receive money from them.

Many respondents wanted Africa to start being seen as an equal trading partner, and not as something that exists to be exploited or pitied. They wanted the gradual opening of markets to African produce to allow Africa to make money out of its rich natural resources.

How can the UK, EU and G8 play a role in helping Africa?

- 48% of respondents were happy with the UK effort, although everyone acknowledged that more could always be done.
ON THE WHOLE THEY NEED TO DO MORE IN ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE AND TO ADDRESS THE CAUSES OF THE REFUGEE PROBLEM.

What do you think the UK Government has got right/wrong in its policy towards Africa?

**Right:** Encouraging African leaders to adopt democracy, improve a education health and work towards economic development of the Africa.

**The UK Government is not proactive enough.**
 IT DOES NOT HAVE TO WAIT FOR THE PRESS TO BRING AFRICAN PLIGHT TO THE OPEN EY ACTION IS TAKEN

- 12% suggested that the best way for other to help Africa was to give Africa the means to help itself, for example debt relief. 18% cited debt relief as a positive action that has helped Africans.

What do you think the UK Government has got right/wrong in its policy towards Africa?

Helping Africa with aid is good. If on the other hand you don’t encourage Africans to be self-reliant and independent your help will not be sustainable. Give them the tools to provide for themselves in future - education, economic opportunity, enterprise.

Please help Africa to rebuild itself.

Get right in Debt Relief
43% wanted the UK and EU to do more to prevent corruption, ensure that leaders were democratically elected and were spending money in a way that benefited their populations.
• 15% raised concerns about EU trade policy, especially in relation to the Common Agricultural Policy and the arms trade. There were issues over subsidies for farmers and particular industries.

Unfair trade policies have seen Africa, the continent with the most resources (wealth) being reduced to begging.

EU & G8 should not supply arms to African countries. Despite continuous effort some countries continue to do so.

They need also to address their policies on agricultural trade, financial support.

What do you think other EU and G8 members have got right/wrong in their policy towards Africa?
The EU and the G8 need to improve their trade policies towards Africa (fairness in pricing & trade barriers)

• 14% suggested that developed countries should act more altruistically, and stop exploiting African countries for their resources or linking aid to trade and contracts etc

• 11% were concerned that the UK and EU concentrated solely on former colonies or Commonwealth countries. This 11% were exclusively from the former French colonies.

The UK Government ignores The French African countries.
• 20% were unable to answer these questions as they did not have enough information, did not know, or were unsure what the EU and UK have done for Africa.

• 71% of respondents saw the media’s representation of Africa and of Africans as poor. They thought that Africa is only shown in the media when there is a disaster, or a famine, or a flood. It was noted that Africa’s achievements are rarely celebrated, and that from this, British people get a distorted view of the continent as a

How do the media and the UK public view Africa?

![Graph showing media representation of Africa](image)

- Poor/biased/negative: 82%
- Gave a poor view of asylum seekers: 15%
- Good/positive: 12%
- Not enough coverage: 11%
dark, dangerous and backwards place. Whilst it was recognised that media coverage of disasters is incredible important in mobilising aid, donations and support, it was also noted that it would be good to see some normal stories coming out of Africa from African journalists.

Poor media representation. Most people in the UK still see Africa as a 'dark' undeveloped place, thanks to the poor and biased media representation of events happening in Africa.

The media is much interested in reporting African disasters. They do not seem interested in highlighting the unfair trade practices affecting Africa.

What do you think should be the right balance?

How do you feel about the UK media representation and public perceptions of Africa?

How do you feel about the UK media representation and public perceptions of Africa? The UK media reports on Africa in most cases are negative and its reports have portary negative public perceptions of Africa.
• 13% thought that the media was unfair in linking Africans with asylum seekers. They thought that the media linked people coming from Africa with asylum seekers.
What do you think should be the single biggest priority for the Commission for Africa and why?

I think the Commission for Africa should think in terms of support for health and community regeneration to make the environment suitable for living and to help improve and reduce the level of STI & HIV ravaging Africa now.

Biggest single priority – more trade – for our commodities, i.e. more trade with E.U. will create more jobs in every sector.

Fair trade is priority number one because it impacts on all other areas of life. It is
This report has been submitted to the Commission for Africa by Harriet Harman MP. She would like to thank all the organisations and individuals in Southwark who took the time to make their views known on this important issue.