

# Archbishop Njongo Ndungane: Address at the African Monitor Breakfast meeting

**Archbishop Njongo Ndungane: Address at the African Monitor Breakfast meeting (WEF) on Unlocking the African Moment, Cape Town, South Africa, 5 May 2011**

Good morning ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to this breakfast meeting and I am glad that you can take time to be with us.

African Monitor of which I am its Founder and President, has adopted as its theme for the next three years: "Unlocking the African moment: A grassroots focussed agenda". In doing so, we have been influenced by the context in which we find ourselves, which seem to indicate that the next century belongs to Africa. The latest economic projections for instance, indicate that Africa will bounce back over the next few years and that there will be significant growth. Former South African President Thabo Mbeki, recently referred to "an Africa Star rising fast", arguing that the continent has had a productivity revolution and is entering a new era of hope. These and many other indicators have given a lot of us a conviction that Africa is on the brink of a major development breakthrough – that it is time to 'unleash the African Moment'. Policy makers, civil society and other stakeholders all over are convinced of this being "Africa's time to shine".

As African Monitor we share in this optimism of a continent in ascendency and we certainly know that the African Moment will only come about if we make a paradigm shift on our development models. It is our view that "the African moment will materialise when a continent wide movement – similar to that seen during the struggle for liberation – involving political leaders, business and the citizenry at large engages in collective effort to ensure that every African has a source of income, a roof over their heads, access to quality education and health care, and has the capabilities and means to pursue their dreams in a peaceful environment" (African Monitor concept note). At African Monitor we are, therefore, proposing that we have an agenda for a people-centred movement to enable Africa to rapidly achieve its development potential. This entails building a coalition of the willing and directing our advocacy strategies towards development with a human face. The challenge for us today is to think creatively about the future. As an African proverb goes, "Tomorrow belongs to the people who prepare for it today".

Let me begin by saying that our observation is that a lot of the talk about what would constitute Africa's moment, whilst quite relevant, is not so much people focused but is rather largely based on the usual and exciting macro-economic projections. As African Monitor – a grassroots focused advocacy entity, we have therefore been motivated by these current waves of indicators that the continent is about to achieve a development breakthrough; that something is about to give in and allow the continent to experience its full potential. Even further, we have a conviction that there is something that needs to be done in order to ensure that this does not constitute a false alarm; but that the continent indeed realises its moment.

We recognise that wealth creation and economic growth are essential tools for sustainable development. What we are proposing is that development of any kind – economic, social and cultural – has to be people focussed. The goal of development must be to enable people to enjoy their potential to be fully human. Bringing the corrective balance of human realities and contextual groundedness into all our policy-making is essential for our planet's long term well-being, without which humanity will not survive. Human-focussed economics argues that creation can well supply enough for our needs, though certainly not for our greed, if we are ready to be faithful stewards not only for today, but for tomorrow. In our policy formulations we must cater for present requirements without destroying the prospects of future generations.

And when it comes to development policies, alongside all the statistics of hunger and need, and the totals of dollars spent, it must be remembered that what matters most is that the neediest individuals urgently find tangible, sustainable solutions. Though this is often the hardest thing to quantify, it is the only thing that truly counts. Whilst it is informative and credible to measure progress through the condition of our economies and the strength of our currencies, we must also not neglect to concentrate on how well each of our countries takes care of its people. For the state of a nation is not just how strong the economy is doing, or how strong the currency is. The state of a nation is about how well the people are doing. Are they able to live with dignity, able to feed their children, able to meet their basic needs, able to access and create employment, education, health care? Remember, the wealth of a nation is indeed measured by the health of its people. Only when we achieve this can humanity dare claim to be truly civilised.

Current policies that exacerbate the inequalities between rich and poor, across most nations of the world, and between regions of the planet, are dangerously destabilising – in economic terms, in social terms, in human terms. Development programmes are most effective and sustainable when intended recipients are fully included

– respected, heard, involved – at every stage from inception and planning to delivery, and when adequate attention is paid to the realities on the ground. Policies that propagate conflicts, confrontation as well as marginalization have a sell-by date beyond which people will revolt with dire consequences to political and economic stability.

In short, what needs to be done to unlock the African moment is firstly, that development is built on the perspectives and realities of the grassroots. The African grassroots communities should be mobilised to participate in their own development as change agents and development programmes should base themselves on the aspirations of the people. There should be efforts made to understand the grassroots – who they are and why they matter; what their realities are that need to be taken into account and built upon? The testimonies that were given in the five countries where we undertook Poverty Hearings people said that “we don’t want handouts, we have brains and hands. Give us the capacity to eke out our existence” People on the ground have dreams and they want assistance to realise these dreams.

In order to work with the grassroots, there is need to fully understand them. Generally, there is lack of sufficient knowledge base on the grassroots sector – as shown by some policies. There are three definite categories of grassroots: 1) there are rural and largely women depending on land and engaged in smallholder agriculture. 2), there are the urban and educated but unemployed, or semi-educated and 3) there are the Youth. These form the majority of the population in most if not all African countries. They are not idle or passive. They are active, resilient, and have largely sustained themselves through community knowledge and social networks for generations. They matter from an economic, social and political perspective. Recent events in North Africa have shown us that we cannot ignore the needs of young people, who can be impatient when their aspirations are not met.

It is important to note that the overwhelming majority of the African grassroots people, 61%, is rural, engaged in subsistence agriculture. Women’s critical role in agricultural production, and especially in subsistence agriculture, as well as in livestock raising and food processing are notable. For example, estimates of women’s contribution to the production of food crops range from 70% in Benin to 80% in the DRC, while their proportion of the economically active labour force in agriculture ranges from 48% in Burkina Faso to 73% in the Congo. We, therefore, need to ask ourselves what social infrastructure do these rural masses need to achieve development? What economic infrastructure do they need to achieve development? What human capital do they need to achieve development? and, who will provide the investment resources to address these development needs?

What this says is that there is need to invest! invest! invest!: in social infrastructure; in economic infrastructure; and, in people. It would seem that for wealth creation to be meaningful, we need to integrate the rural grassroots economy in the national economy! In so doing, we must bear in mind that the so called ‘Informal’ is not ‘inferior’ or ‘undesirable’. Informal is just one of Africa’s lived realities for the overwhelming majority that needs to be acknowledged, better understood and appropriately and sufficiently invested in. In fact, it is what makes African formal economies tick and “surge” and without it these economies would flounder. The grassroots people are “the tellers and cashiers of Africa’s wealth”. It is everyone’s business to ensure that the majority of African populations are not left behind. There is need to build a dynamic relationship between the state, business and the citizen; to define a common goal that puts people first and to determine what that entails in reality. As the African proverb says, “If you walk close enough to a river, you can hear the crab cough”. In similar vein, government ought to be close to their citizens in order to create space for the realisation of their dreams.

Secondly, addressing the aspirations of young people is key to unlocking Africa’s moment. Youth are dynamic, energetic and creative. Africa’s population of 1 billion is expected to double by 2050. The continent’s demographic advantage in which 63% of Africa’s population is under the age of 24 is an asset. This advantage of being the ‘youngest and most energetic’ continent should be tapped and created as an opportunity to realise the African moment. Already we have reached an effective critical mass of educated and semi-educated youth. Young people in Africa want opportunities to make a decent and enjoyable living. They have a different focus. They have ideas for development of products, services that work for them and have the potential to contribute to the economy as workers and as entrepreneurs. “The youth are a gauge for what is required in the future”. They want to shape their own future. Through technological connection, they have freed themselves from the constraints of geography and are beginning to overcome time. “Africa’s virtual future is freeing itself from its physical constraints – connectivity is happening in Africa despite its having only 4% of the world’s electricity. It is spreading fast, whether or not factories are built or youth find jobs. New cultures are being formed online and on the street.

Thirdly, for the African moment to be realised, governments need to find ways to bring about material change for the grassroots. The moral function of the State is the coordination of resources at its disposal for the wellbeing of its citizens. Governments should create the necessary environment to enable other stakeholders such as business to make effective contributions in the development agenda. This means in the first instance that the dominant paradigm that influences policy formulation and implementation should be reviewed. This implies a review of how governments currently relate to citizens, how systems and policies operate and how the future is nurtured. Governments should create the much needed balance between wealth creation and people’s aspirations. Governments need to ask themselves what structural/organic linkages should be established between the rural areas, the national and the global economy which would assist the development of the former?

What should be done to establish these linkages? Who will provide the investment resources to build these linkages?

I would like to conclude by inviting you to support this agenda of unlocking the African moment. Africa is a continent with a future that is full of hope. As one of my favourite Nigerian proverbs goes - "The pillar of the world is HOPE". At the Heart of our development towards progress in the future are the people who have the energy and ability to be in control of their own destiny. The hope continues in the Opportunities that we have to use the vision and aspirations of these people, together with our natural resources to create long lasting sustainable development interventions that will improve the lives of our people.

The future for Africa is NOW and the future for Africa is HERE! I thank you.