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## FAILED CONTINENT OR FLOURISHING CONTINENT? TWO SCENARIOS ON THE FUTURE OF AFRICA

Africa has again loomed large on the international agenda. It is the subject of pop concerts, international conference and extensive media attention.

What is the possible future of the continent?

Here are two scenarios on the future of Africa. I call them “Failed Continent” and “Flourishing Continent”. Economic development is a key factor in both.



### The “Failed Continent”

The “Failed Continent” scenario comes from the concern over “failed states”. Some African governments cannot handle their legal and political responsibilities as national actors in the international system. Africa’s situation is so grim that it could become the first “failed continent”. In 1990 in Sub-Saharan Africa there were 227 million people living on less than US\$1 per day; 313 million in 2001; and an expected 340 million in 2015. Africa is the world’s only continent that is going backwards.

There is also the continuing impact of European colonialism. This led to the division of traditional tribal areas into colonies and then their post-colonial mergers into nation-states. But the new countries do not necessarily match traditional ethnic lines. Africans are often “tribal” (and pre-modern), rather than “national” (and modern). Additionally, there is much corruption by African leaders, who see ruling the country as an opportunity to make money rather than as a noble duty.

African countries have gone from colonialism to “neo-colonialism”, which means that many major business decisions are not made by national politicians but by transnational financial interests. Meanwhile African products are shut out of European and American markets by protectionist tariffs.

Finally, there is concern that health and environment problems will continue to get worse. Africa is in a particularly disease-prone part of the world. Western medical research caters for the elite, wealthy Western sick - the “worried well” - who can pay for their healthcare costs. Disease such as HIV/AIDS and malaria are damaging Africa. Climate change may be taking place in

parts of Africa, where people are being forced off their traditional lands and onto the lands of adjoining peoples (“environmental refugees”).

That is a bleak scenario – and pretty much the standard view of Africa.

### ✓ The “Flourishing Continent”

But it is also possible to devise a scenario of a “Flourishing Continent”. Trends are not destiny. Don’t try to pick winners - or losers. For example, if we had to speculate in 1945 on which of two countries - Japan and the Philippines - would be an economic super power in 40 years, most people would have picked the Philippines. It was pro-US, it had plenty of natural resources and its people spoke English. Meanwhile Japan had just lost a war against the US, most of the population did not speak English, and it had few natural resources. But it was Japan that made it as a super power.

Africa has plenty of resources. It is becoming increasingly important in the global search for oil and minerals (the US imports as much oil from Africa as it does from the Middle East). There is sufficient water for agriculture

There are also advantages of starting late in technology. Countries can leapfrog over earlier stages of development (for example, skipping over the era of copper telephone cables and going straight to mobiles). The 2005 Club of Rome Conference received a report on a basic US\$100 personal computer that will be made widely available across Africa. New information technology will enable people to learn more easily and cheaply

Europe did not begin its economic development in unison. The development started in a few countries (with Britain in 1750) and then gradually spread out (and it is still spreading in Eastern Europe). Therefore, economic growth in Africa could begin in a few countries and then gradually spread out.

Another historical lesson comes from “Christianity and the rise of capitalism”: Protestantism provided the cultural basis for capitalism. The Christian church is growing rapidly in Africa (strictly speaking the next Archbishop of Canterbury ought – on sheer numbers – to come from Africa). Christianity could again provide the cultural basis for capitalism.

Eventually Africa may become a major manufacturer. No country can remain as the world’s low-cost producer forever (not even China). Eventually that status will go to Africa. Meanwhile, Africa is already part of the international free trade system



Finally, “outsiders” have not given up hope with Africa. Among those assisting Africa are some non-governmental organizations (such as World Vision and Oxfam), and the “Live 8” concerts. There are also the professional organizations, such as the London-based Commonwealth Partnership for Technology Management (CPTM)

In short, we are so accustomed to bad news coming out of Africa that we can easily overlook signs of progress.

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