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Challenges to the UN, past and present

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Book review David Hannay*

A peacekeeper in Africa: learning from UN interventions in other people's wars

Alan Doss

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Africa is no stranger to UN peacekeeping. Away back in the 1960s, the UN's Congo operation was one of the first large multifaceted peacekeeping ventures the Organization was required to undertake. While it helped avoid the Congo being balkanized a short time after it became independent, that operation confronted the UN with a number of choices that it was ill-equipped to handle; and it left the Organization bruised and bereft of its Secretary-General, Dag Hammarskjold, often regarded as the most outstanding person to have held that office.

In the 1980s and 1990s, as the Cold War wound down and eventually came to an end, the UN had some remarkable African success stories – most notably in Namibia, brought to independence after decades of South African rule, and in Mozambique where a long and bloody civil war was ended and peaceful elections were held. The relatively peaceful ending of the apartheid regime in South Africa healed a running sore that infected the whole Organization, and lifted the prospect of a bloodbath in that country which the UN would not possibly have been able to handle. But it also suffered some disasters – the premature collapse of the peacekeeping operation in Somalia and the inability to prevent or to check the genocide in Rwanda being the most prominent among them. That patchy record continues to this day, with eventually successful operations in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire, but messy and so far unresolved disputes in South Sudan, Somalia, the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), now the longest and most costly, in both blood and treasure, of all the UN's peacekeeping operations worldwide. Anyone who believes that, when the COVID-19 tsunami has abated with its dire immediate health and economic consequences, there will not be continuing and very possibly increased demands for UN peacekeeping in Africa, is succumbing to a bad case of promoting hope over experience.

So, who better to cast light on present-day UN peacekeeping in Africa than Alan Doss who served in two UN peacekeeping operations (Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire) and headed up two others as the Secretary-General's Special Representative (SRSG) (Liberia and DRC). His book takes the reader deep into the political and bureaucratic intricacies of four quite different peacekeeping operations – two of which (Sierra Leone and Liberia) can reasonably be categorized as successes and two (Côte d'Ivoire – in the period described – and DRC) as well short of that. He leads us through the day-to-day grind of running large, complex peacekeeping operations, the endless travel and the equally endless series of meetings. And through the tensions within the UN itself, with the tricky relationship between operations in the field and headquarters in New York (including that most flighty and unpredictable of masters, the UN Security Council – ever ready to paper over the cracks in its own ranks with contradictory and obscure mandate provisions); and the tensions between the SRSG and the host government. If the narrative does sometimes get a bit lost in a Sargasso Sea of acronyms, that is not Doss's fault, it is how the UN is.

What are some of the main lessons which Doss draws from his many years of experience and devoted service? He clearly is a strong supporter of the efforts made by Kofi Annan when he was Secretary-General to forge what he called a "One UN" approach on the ground. Nothing has weakened and discredited the UN over the years

Alan Doss

* Lord David Hannay was British Ambassador to the UN (1990–1995) and a member of Kofi Annan's High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change (2003–2004).

more than the way its individual agencies (UNDP, UNHCR, WFP, WHO – and I could go on for several more lines) feuded with each other and manoeuvred in the interstices of their different mandates and management structures, and allowed themselves to be played off against each other by their host governments. Peacebuilding in a country damaged by years of conflict is hard enough, without piling onto it these petty bureaucratic rivalries. I am sure Doss would have been pleased to hear that when I was in Monrovia on an inter-parliamentary visit in March 2020 (just before the lockdown in both London and Monrovia), not only did I see the UN headquarters emblazoned with a huge sign of "One UN", but we were also given a briefing that brought together all the main UN agencies operating in Liberia. He would also no doubt have been heartened by the evidence we found of Liberia's democratic institutions operating in a lively and effective way.

Doss also argues, convincingly in my view, that the UN's incremental approach to the original deployment of peacekeeping missions with troops, police advisers and civilian staff arriving in dribs and drabs, often long after the Security Council authorization of an operation, leaves far too much space for spoilers to get to work – and they thrive in the vacuums created by an under-resourced peacekeeping mission. Far better to achieve a rapid and full deployment of all elements and then gradually reduce the deployment as conditions on the ground permit. Impossible to achieve? Difficult certainly, but the problems to be overcome are organizational and not political.

It is clear that Doss struggles with the potential contradictions between successful peacekeeping and meting out justice to those accused of war crimes during the period of hostilities. He admits to having been unnecessarily concerned over the extraction from Nigeria and arrest of Charles Taylor, former president of Liberia, since found guilty of committing war crimes in Sierra Leone.

This did not destabilize the Sierra Leone mission, as he feared it might, nor the peacekeeping operation in Liberia. He wrestles with the same conundrum in DRC, not just over dealing with Congolese warlords but also with the Lord's Resistance Army which had spilled over the border from Uganda. There probably is no one-size-fits-all solution to this tension. But a world without an operationally effective International Criminal Court would not only be a less just one, but a less secure one too.

Perhaps the most interesting insight from Doss's account is the extent to which the host government, whose inability or lack of will to handle its own internal and external security has necessitated the deployment of peacekeepers in the first place, is often a part – and in both Côte d'Ivoire and DRC a very big part – of the problem facing the SRSG in carrying out his mandate successfully (and of course that was even more tragically true in Rwanda during the run-up to the genocide there). The best way of addressing this problem is for the Security Council to give the Secretary-General and his SRSG a really clear and tough mandate, imposing obligations on the host government. Unfortunately there are members of the Security Council who invariably shy away from doing that on the grounds that this would represent an unacceptable intrusion into the sovereignty of the host country. But surely the need for a peacekeeping operation is such an intrusion in the first place, so why not increase its chances of success by imposing clear obligations on the host government and holding that government to account over their implementation?

It is a pity that Doss never served in one of the hybrid missions where the UN works alongside the African Union (as in Somalia, the Sahel and South Sudan). His insights would have been invaluable. These hybrid operations are likely to become more numerous, particularly if the African Union shows itself capable of carrying out more extensive responsibilities in the field of peace and security. No doubt the organizational and bureaucratic complexities of such hybrid operations are even greater than straightforward UN missions. And the need to settle the issue of financing some of the African Union's peacekeeping costs out of UN assessed contributions is one that has for long been crying out for a solution. As one who, both when I was at the UN in the 1990s and as a member of Kofi Annan's High Level Panel in 2003–2004, pressed on the UN the need to regard regional organizations (and in Africa, sub-regional organizations such as ECOWAS) as peacekeeping partners and not as rivals to be kept at arm's length, I warmly welcome the progress made in cooperation in recent years. But the process clearly still has a long way to go.

In all, Alan Doss's book is essential reading for anyone embarking on service in a peacekeeping operation in Africa; and also for academic commentators and students who should find much food for reflection in it. But it deserves a wider audience than that, since it bears witness to the remarkable tenacity, resilience and devotion to duty required by anyone seeking a career in peacekeeping. And it should remind us of how grateful the citizens of the UN's Member States should be that people of Doss's calibre are ready to serve.

Political map of Africa by region*

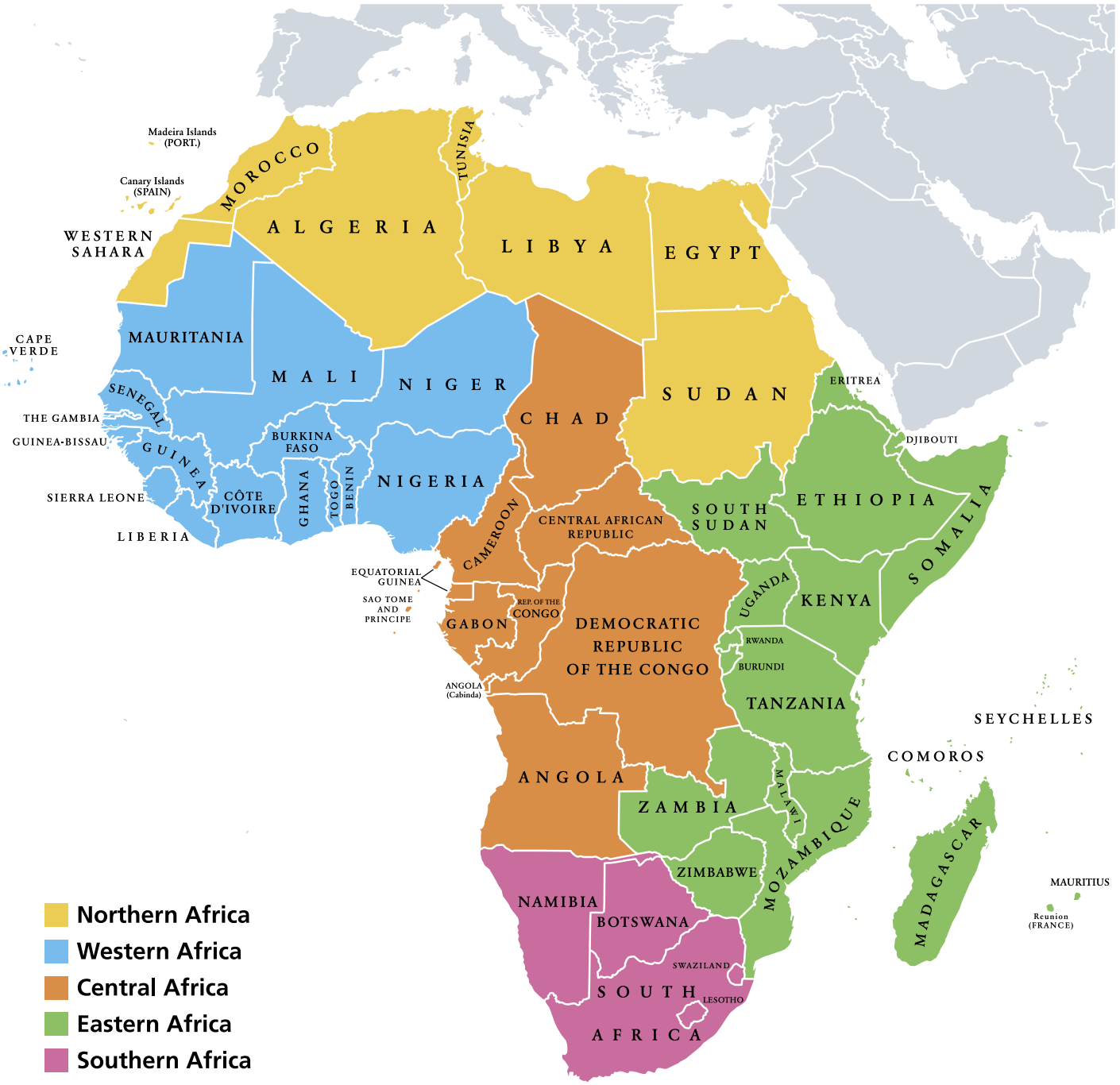

Image: © Adobe Stock

* United Nations geoscheme.

UN-EU cooperation in African peacekeeping

Nicholas Westcott*

Alan Doss's book *A peacekeeper in Africa* provides an ideal opportunity to reflect on the past 20 years of efforts to help resolve African conflicts through international intervention. His insights ring true from my own experience of cooperating with UN missions, primarily on behalf of the EU, in four very different crises – Côte d'Ivoire, Somalia, Mali and South Sudan.

In his review of Alan's book, David Hannay points out that a growing number of UN peacekeeping missions are hybrid ones, pursued in cooperation with other international organizations, including the African Union (AU), European Union (EU) and African regional bodies. The four crises explored below highlight the challenges, but also the potential for success, that this form of mission brings.

My involvement in Côte d'Ivoire began in 2008 as Britain's (non-resident) Ambassador to the country (while also British High Commissioner to Ghana and resident in Accra). During regular visits to Abidjan I met with the UN SRSG, Choi Young-jin, as well as Ivorian ministers, politicians, journalists and other resident diplomats. The EU was heavily engaged with the UN in preparing and observing the 2010 elections, for which it provided a monitoring mission alongside UNOCI's parallel tabulation of the results. Free elections seemed the only way to clear the political logjam caused by the frozen 10-year conflict. But it was equally clear that some political forces had no wish for that logjam break as they were doing very nicely just the way things were. President Gbagbo's Diplomatic Adviser warned me explicitly beforehand that if Gbagbo lost "there would be a war".

And so there was – launched by Gbagbo himself to stymie the election result. It was the UN mission that enabled the true results to be known and eventually, with additional support from France's *Opération Licorne,* to be respected. I found myself, during the stand-off in December 2010, in the curious position of being declared *persona non grata* by Gbagbo, still inhabiting the Presidential palace, while being simultaneously welcomed by the newly-elected President Ouattara, holed up under UN protection at the Golf Hotel. UNOCI's protection of the Chairman of the Electoral Commission as well as of the President-elect helped ensure that Gbagbo could not ride roughshod over the democratic process. But it also required ECOWAS and the AU to endorse the real election outcome, which they did, and the Security Council to remain solidly behind the SRSG. Without both of these, Gbagbo may have clung on and the civil war continued indefinitely. What Côte d'Ivoire demonstrated was that, though a UN mission may appear futile for a while, it can eventually prove invaluable if local or international circumstances change, and if the international community is of one mind. This was true also in Somalia.

In early 2011, I transferred from Accra to Brussels to become Managing Director for Africa in the EU's newly created External Action Service. It was evident from the start that the closest cooperation with the UN was essential to achieve peaceful outcomes in any of Africa's trouble-spots, and that needed a clear interlocutor on the EU side. Coordinating the EU Member States, mobilizing the EU's formidable financial resources, and liaising closely with the UN, AU and US enabled a far more effective collective effort. Hervé Ladsous, the Head of DPKO, and Ramtane Lamamra, AU Commissioner for Peace and Security, were my key interlocutors – both people who believed action could and should be taken in the right circumstances to resolve conflict situations. Under President Obama, with Johnny Carson and Linda Thomas-Greenfield at the State Department, there was also consistent support from the US for UN action in Africa.

Somalia was one of the most complex crises. Nearly 20 years of civil conflict – at times close to anarchy – between warring clans, and Al-Shabaab had by 2011 reached a stage where the AU had put in place the AMISOM mission, made up entirely of African troops but supported jointly by the EU, who funded salaries through the African Peace Facility, and the UN, who provided logistical support and training. In addition, the SRSG, (Augustine Mahiga and then Nick Kay) ran a large political mission (UNSOM) and the EU a small training mission (EUTM) for the nascent Somali national army. Both, through OCHA and ECHO, cooperated on a major humanitarian operation. All but the humanitarians were effectively confined in 2011 to Mogadishu, and then only part of that. AMISOM's successful campaign in 2011–2012 transformed the situation, and the EU's anti-piracy Operation Atalanta made a decisive difference in stopping the resource flow from piracy into criminal and political activity. A striking unity of purpose among the neighbouring States of the Horn (not always the case), created a window of opportunity in 2012–2013 for Somali politicians to begin a political process that led to the federal structure existing today.

Somalia's troubles are by no means over. The moment passed and other regional actors, including from the Gulf, with different political agendas, became involved. The transition to a stable and secure political structure, able to deal with the threat from Al-Shabaab, has yet to be completed. But the close cooperation of the AU, EU, UN, IGAD and neighbouring countries in those years enabled a structure to be put in place which provides the possibility of future stability.

In Mali, sadly, instability continues. The delicate political balancing act that President Touré (ATT) had maintained for years fell spectacularly apart in 2011 and, supported by weapons and fighters fleeing Libya after the fall of Gaddafi, jihadists swept south in 2012 and were poised to take Bamako before a French military intervention stopped them. At emergency summits, the idea of deploying the long-planned African Stand-by Force was proposed, but differences between ECOWAS and the AU, and the lack of available African soldiers or international funding, meant that everyone turned once again to the UN. The EU was willing to provide another EUTM and a capacity-building mission (EUCAP) for Mali's own battered armed forces, but there was no enthusiasm to fund another AMISOM.

The fate of MINUSMA, which has had one of the highest casualty rates of any UN peacekeeping operation, demonstrates that UN missions can neither enforce a peace nor find political solutions where local politicians are incapable of doing so. There is effectively no peace to keep. They risk becoming instead either a buffer for the government or a prop for an unstable, and ultimately unsustainable, status quo. ATT's laissez-faire approach to the political problem of northern Mali had comprehensively failed, but all efforts since then, first led by Algeria and then by the UN and others, to get President Keita (IBK) to negotiate a political solution, have led nowhere, leaving MINUSMA with an almost impossible mandate and no exit strategy.

The search for an African solution to the instability in the Sahel continues, now through the 5 000-strong force put together by the G5 Sahel. The EU are providing substantial support, but operationally it is still far from being able to replace the 15 000-strong MINUSMA or even the 5 000 French troops of *Opération Barkhane*. Talking to jihadists has always been a difficult, even dangerous, exercise unless backed by convincing force. But in Mali as in the Middle East, defeating them militarily will avail little without political action to include those who had felt excluded. The UN, AU and EU therefore need to continue pressing for and supporting local efforts to achieve that.

In South Sudan, UNMISS is another mission with a thankless task. Its presence saved thousands of lives when the political truce between Salva Kiir and Riek Machar broke down in 2013 and indiscriminate fighting broke out in Juba. The breakdown in central authority since then has created an anarchic situation that will take many years to resolve.

What was lacking until recently was a coherent, consistent and united effort by neighbouring countries to force the parties into serious negotiations. Several deals were proclaimed that merely papered over the cracks, leaving the situation on the ground unchanged. The dramatic changes last year in Khartoum may have helped create a new momentum, and the latest deal looks more like sticking than its predecessors, though the COVID-induced oil price fall has greatly reduced the money available to lubricate the deal. All of which puts UNMISS in the "hang on and hope" bracket of UN missions. The EU, along with its Member States, the UK and Norway, has tried to work with the AU, UN and US to pressure the political rivals into making a sincere and sustainable deal, but the real influence rests with the neighbours.

In one respect, however, South Sudan marked an important shift: the level of Chinese involvement. Back in 2012–2013, there was an active EU-China dialogue on the Sudans, as China recognized that its interests in both countries were not so far different from those of the rest of the international community – to re-establish peace and restart economic activity. At one stage, Chinese companies were estimated to be losing US$1 million a week from the closure of the main oil pipeline. So it was no coincidence that China provided more troops to UNMISS than any other peacekeeping force. It still prefers to pursue its diplomacy independently of others, which has limited its influence, though as its long-proclaimed policy of non-interference begins to wither, it is possible its role in African peace efforts will grow.

But, as Alan Doss's book illustrates all too well, nothing is certain. We will just have to wait and see.

Nick (far right) in discussion with AMISOM Force Commander Lt. Gen. Andrew Gutti, flanked by AMISOM soldier, and Alex Rondos (EUSR for Somalia), Mogadishu, 2012

Acronyms

AMISOM	African Union Mission in Somalia
AU	African Union
DPKO	UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations
ECHO	European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EUCAP	European Union Capacity Building Mission
EUTM	EU Military Training
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
MINUSMA	UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
OCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
SRSG	UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General
UNMISS	UN Mission in South Sudan
UNOCI	UN Operation in Côte d'Ivoire
UNSOM	UN Assistance Mission in Somalia

* Director, Royal African Society.

Reflections on the UN's role in African conflicts

Peter Simkin*

Throughout my UN career I have been fortunate to be accompanied by my wife, Diana, who set up dozens of homes in conflict or post-conflict countries. She has shared many experiences, dangers and delights: trying to reconcile Serb and Albanian communities in the Presevo Valley on the Kosovo border, and warring tribes in the Pamir mountains of Tajikistan; dodging rock-hurling *campesinos* in a succession of Bolivian revolutions; and, the most difficult assignment of all, coordinating UNITA demobilization centres in war-torn Angola. We also share a love for Africa.

In most of these conflict situations the UN's main challenge was ***to negotiate access and impartial supervision for humanitarian aid*** to all needy non-combatants. But there is no clear-cut definition of the status of UN humanitarian agencies under the International Humanitarian Law codified in the 1949 Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocols. National sovereignty has to be respected by the UN. Recipient governments, where one is recognized, take title to humanitarian commodities at the point of entry and have the overall responsibility for the execution of humanitarian assistance programmes. In some complex emergencies, particularly in Ethiopia and Mozambique, the UN relied on the International Committee of the Red Cross or *Médecins sans frontières* for famine assessments and delivery of relief, because they were less constrained by security rules and obligations to the host government.

In November 1974, I was transferred from Malawi to Ethiopia as Head of the World Food Programme (WFP) team. The first night after I arrived in Addis Ababa all hell broke loose. The Emperor had been arrested after a military coup the previous August and replaced by the Provisional Military Administration Council (PMAC), soon to be known as the much-feared *Dergue*. That night its Chairman, Aman Andom, a respected Eritrean general, was deposed by a group of hard-line communist officers led by Lt. Mengistu Haile Mariam. Aman refused to sign the PMAC's order for the summary execution of 80 of the Emperor's ministers and administrators. Instead he simply added his own name to the list. That evening Andom and his entire household were blown to smithereens and all the imperial prisoners were machine-gunned in the exercise yard of the old prison. The massacres led to decades of civil war, not only in Eritrea, but throughout the varied ethnic groups of the Ethiopian empire. All this took place at a time of one of Ethiopia's worst famines.

WFP worked closely with the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission headed by Ato Shimelis Adugna, a former imperial minister. Over the next four years he became a close personal friend and our go-between with Mengistu's murderously unpredictable regime. Thousands of perceived "enemies of the people" were rounded up, imprisoned and randomly executed. Each morning at our UN staff meetings, we exchanged reports on the numbers of bodies we had seen in the streets with cardboard *enemy of the people* notices nailed into their chests. Battles raged in Eritrea, Tigray, the Ogaden and elsewhere, yet Shimelis managed to obtain the Dergue's permission for humanitarian agencies to travel and deliver relief to millions of needy people. He even obtained a permit for me to fly to war-torn Eritrea and when I reported back to him that the Dergue's generals were diverting famine relief wheat-flour for army rations, Shimelis courageously warned Mengistu that this could jeopardize future WFP relief shipments. Elsewhere, when WFP staff travelled north in Wollo and Tigray provinces, we had a system of warning TPLF rebels about our planned monitoring trips in vehicles conspicuously flying large UN flags. Thousands of hectares of barren, over-grazed, mountain slopes were terraced and reforested using WFP food for work. Technical soil and water conservation supervision was provided by government and rebel extension workers. TPLF even issued receipts for WFP food!

Fifteen years after we left Ethiopia on transfer by WFP to Bolivia, the Soviet-backed military regime of Mengistu Haile Mariam ended. After an estimated one million deaths, the Ethiopian army (the largest in Africa) imploded. TPLF and Eritrean forces rapidly reached the outskirts of Addis Ababa and further bloodshed was only avoided by American negotiators. Mengistu was given sanctuary in Zimbabwe.

My next conflict posting was to Mozambique in 1990 as the UNDP Resident Representative and UN Special Coordinator for Emergency Relief Operations. Mozambicans had suffered first from a brutally fought independence struggle against the Portuguese, and then an even crueller civil war between the communist FRELIMO government and the RENAMO rebels backed by Rhodesia and South Africa. Although this was not an intertribal conflict, it was a particularly vicious one. Atrocities were answered by atrocities in a mindless cycle of mayhem and destruction. RENAMO forced children to kill their parents and commit acts which were so abhorrent that they could thereafter be ordered to murder without the inconvenience of having qualms of conscience. Both sides used child-soldiers to go first into battle, because trained soldiers often hesitated before opening fire on children. I have experienced nothing more terrifying than a 12-year old Mozambican "soldier" pointing an AK47 through my car window. I gently pushed the muzzle away from my head and offered the child a Coca Cola.

At the height of this conflict, President Samora Machel was killed in a plane crash. He was replaced by the more moderate Joaquin Chissano, who allowed RENAMO to open a small liaison delegation in Maputo. I had regular meetings with

President Chissano and the Prime Minister and, occasionally, with RENAMO delegates. Two years of low-key contacts with the highly suspicious RENAMO leadership became more urgent when in 1992 the rains failed for a third successive year. A conference to discuss the famine was called by the San Egidio community in Rome. In addition to UN agencies, it was attended by senior FRELIMO government and RENAMO rebel delegates. I had just returned from a week-long assessment mission of all the drought-stricken provinces and, in my imperfect Portuguese, passionately warned the delegates that hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of their fellow Mozambicans faced starvation and death. The negotiations lasted late into the night. At about midnight the RENAMO delegation walked out, but the San Egidio's negotiator, Father Zuppi, chased after them and persuaded them to return. No more coffee or food was served and we announced that the doors would be locked, until a compromise was reached. At 5 a.m. both sides signed a document agreeing to hold weekly meetings in UNDP's Maputo office to plan and arrange deliveries of humanitarian aid to all needy communities.

These meetings led to a gradual de-escalation of the civil war, the demining and repair of roads and bridges with UNDP funding, and unimpeded access for humanitarian aid. Finally, on 2 October 1992, a peace agreement was signed by FRELIMO and RENAMO ending almost two decades of civil war. Since then the peace has held despite sporadic RENAMO attacks, rigged elections and that curse of all wars: "the winner-takes-all". FRELIMO party officials still occupy most provincial governorships and senior government posts.

Nevertheless, civil society has surprisingly healed from the traumas of war. Years later, our sons built Nkwichi, an eco-tourism lodge and wilderness conservation area, on the Mozambican shores of Lake Malawi, employing over 40 local staff, many of whom had fought with either FRELIMO or RENAMO. I have never sensed any residual animosity over the war-time horrors they must have endured.

I returned to Ethiopia with UNDP as the Resident Representative and UN Resident Coordinator at the end of 1992. The new post-war government was led by the brilliant Meles Zenawi, the ex-rebel TPLF commander. In my first meeting with him, he said he was ideologically distrustful of foreign experts and asked me to terminate the contracts of over 50 expatriate specialists. He also said his government thought there were too many Amharas working for the UN in Ethiopia. He insisted that all UNDP-funded programmes through UN specialized agencies should become nationally executed by central government ministries. Thus the main advantage of the UN system's international expertise and impartiality in this ethnically divided country was greatly diminished.

Although I was unable to build the same close personal relationship with the Ethiopian Government that I had had with President Chissano in Mozambique, Meles did request UNDP support and technical assistance to plan and implement Ethiopia's first democratic election. I had hoped that the election and Eritrean independence referendum would prove that sustainable peace could be achieved after a clear TPLF military victory. Perhaps it is never quite so straightforward.

A crucial turning point for the UN came in 2003 when Al Qaeda bombed the UN mission headquarters in Bagdad. It was a murderous reminder that Al Qaeda and its Al Shabaab jihadist allies in the Horn of Africa no longer respected the UN's neutrality. The UN has consequently been forced to tighten security standards and impose prohibitive travel restrictions in conflict areas. But in Africa this has been done at a high cost to the Organization's relevance. Someday the Somali government may be forced to allow the UN to negotiate directly with Al Shabaab rebels as it has in the Yemeni and Syrian conflicts. In an ideal world, an independent UN mediation role should be clarified and strengthened under the International Humanitarian Law of the Geneva Conventions.

Until these fundamental constraints are resolved, the UN's unique role as the world's mediator will remain elusive.

Peter interviewed by a local newspaper, Mozambique, 1990

Acronyms

FRELIMO	Mozambique Liberation Front
RENAMO	Mozambique National Resistance
TPLF	Tigray People's Liberation Front
UNITA	National Union for the Total Independence of Angola

* Peter has worked with several UN agencies, notably WFP at country level and in HQ in Rome as Chief of Staffing and Training and as Area Director for Southern Africa. He was UNDP Resident Representative in Mozambique and Ethiopia. After formal retirement, he was assigned by the UN Department for Humanitarian Affairs to Angola as Director of a Joint Commission tasked with demining and the civic education of demobilized UNITA combatants. This was followed by a series of UNDP assignments, one of the most enjoyable being the setting up of a World Bank/EU post-conflict programme in southern Serbia. Peter and his wife Diana live in Kenya. Their joint family memoir *To travel hopefully* is on Amazon.

Africa – Glimmers of hope through the haze of COVID-19? [1]

Alan Roe*

Early assessments of the impacts of COVID-19 on African economies are worryingly pessimistic. The April 2020 issue of the World Bank's *Africa Pulse,* for example, foresees a decline of growth rates to between *minus* 2.1% and *minus* 5.1% in 2020 – the first regional recession in 25 years – with many component causes. These include the output losses due to trade disruptions, reduced foreign direct investment (FDI) and official aid (ODA), and lower levels of remittances, on top of the negative direct effects of the pandemic on health. These factors combined seem likely to contribute to the reversal of recent progress on poverty reduction. The UNDP already anticipates the first decline in its Human Development Index (HDI) since this was introduced 30 years ago. A UNU-WIDER study suggests a 20% increase in the numbers of people in extreme poverty, including 80 million people in Africa.

My own research pre-COVID had been on the extractive industries (metals as well as oil and gas). That research had built on the proposition articulated, among others, by Mark Malloch-Brown (former Deputy Secretary-General of the UN) that "the *resource curse* is too often a catch-all to dismiss any positive impacts that commodities might have on economic development". The research demonstrated among other things that in the decades after 1996, many low income (LIC) and low-middle income countries (MIC) had become significantly *more dependent* on their extractive sectors: in many cases metals, or oil and gas, had become these countries' dominant source of FDI and their largest single source of government revenues. A major multi-authored book published in 2018 [2] did not disavow the resource curse propositions, but rather sought to stand them on their head by asking: Why do the often huge extractive investments in many LICs and MICs so often fail to produce the broader, sustained development in these countries that one might expect? Implicit in this question was our opinion, shared for example by the Africa Progress Panel (2013), that "if managed properly, extractive industries can help to drive broad-based socioeconomic development". This was and remains an important challenge to the more common view that *manufacturing industry* must invariably be the driver to transform Africa's traditional agricultural economies, an opinion held by generations of African specialists but rarely realized in practice in 50 years of post-colonial experience!

This relatively upbeat position in our 2018 book now bumps right up against COVID-19. The World Bank (2020) study concludes that the three largest African economies, all significantly dependent on extractive industries – namely Nigeria, South Africa and Angola – will be particularly badly affected. More generally, growth could fall by up to 7 percentage points in *oil-exporting* countries and by more than 8 percentage points in *metals exporters* because of COVID. The non-extractive-dependent countries of Africa seem likely to fare somewhat better. So the new question that now emerges is whether these COVID-related shocks herald a major change of prospects for the extractive-dependent countries of Africa or merely a blip disturbing a longer run and more positive trend. It is too early to answer this question definitively, but a few developments that serve to dilute the prevailing pessimism are outlined below.

Natural gas in Mozambique and Tanzania

In a number of papers written beginning in 2012, we spelled out the possible beneficial economic impacts of the huge natural gas discoveries found off-shore in these two low income African economies in 2010. By then both countries had already seen big increases from 1996 in their dependence on the exports of extractives (to over 70% of total exports in the case of Mozambique to 37% in the case of Tanzania). But the huge new gas finds and the anticipated large exports of liquefied natural gas (LNG) that were expected to follow seemed certain to raise this level of dependency even higher.

In a 2013 study on just one set of gas concessions in Tanzania (those held by the BG Group/Ophir partnership), it was shown that the necessary investment in just the final year of construction of their LNG plants would be US$5 billion: seven times Tanzania's previously highest annual FDI flow. The expected impacts on both export earnings and government revenues were also historically unprecedented in Tanzania.

In Mozambique, the anticipated impacts of the new gas discoveries in its part of the Rovuma basin were even more dramatic. In a UNU-WIDER paper published in 2018, we referenced IMF projections of 2016, that suggested that Mozambique's average annual growth rate of real GDP between 2021 and 2025 could reach 24%; that the share of the LNG projects in total nominal output of Mozambique could exceed 50% by the mid-2020s; and that by the late 2020s, the fiscal revenues from the gas projects could account for more than 50% of total fiscal revenues.

In short, in both Tanzania and Mozambique the new gas was assessed as a huge and wholly unprecedented opportunity for the countries.

But even before COVID-19 intervened there was "many a slip twixt cup and lip", as analysed in depth in two earlier papers [3]. For example, these showed firstly that in both countries the start dates for final investment decisions (FID) and construction by the investors had proved far too optimistic: start dates would be delayed at least 4–5 years. Secondly, Mozambique succumbed to a temptation, familiar

to new oil and gas countries, of borrowing excessively and imprudently in anticipation of the huge revenues to come. So even before COVID-19, that country was newly saddled with unsustainable debt levels and quickly forced to adopt a major fiscal retrenchment. Thirdly, in Tanzania a series of political interventions in commercial decisions seemed likely to delay or deter important investments related both to the gas itself and to some parallel investments important to building a more diversified economy.

However, the more recent news is not all bad and there are several developments combined that suggest that the huge opportunities described in the earlier papers could indeed materialize, albeit later than expected: COVID in this context at least may just be a blip. Here are a few of these positives.

1. Notwithstanding the COVID difficulties, the first of the two huge Mozambique gas projects was confirmed as recently as June 2020. Soon after the US major Anadarko's final investment decision on its US$20 billion LNG plant in Mozambique's Offshore Area 1 (in June 2019), the oil major Total announced its acquisition of Anadarko's interests in that project. Then in June 2020, a Bloomberg announcement reported a signing of agreements for an initial US$15 billion of financing – at a time when other LNG projects including in the US were on hold – for a project now estimated as costing US$23 billion – the largest ever private investment in Africa. It is now expected that production will begin in 2024 and will realize over US$38 billion of revenue for the Mozambique government over its lifetime.

2. Before end-2019, ENI and ExxonMobil had already sanctioned Mozambique's even larger offshore Coral South floating LNG project in Offshore Area 4. Reports in June 2020 suggest that this will still go ahead although the FID will now not occur until 2021.

3. By contrast, progress in commercializing Tanzania's own huge off-shore gas resources has been much delayed by difficulties that all the international companies (e.g. Shell/Ophir, ExxonMobil, Equinor) have faced in reaching framework agreements with the government: most recently the need to review Production Sharing Agreements (PSAs). So first export production will now probably appear only some 3–5 years after Mozambique's, and also require a higher price to break even. But there is some positive news. In particular, new *near-shore* natural gas projects in South-East Tanzania based at Mnazi Bay, and operated by Wentworth Resources in partnership with Maurel et Prom, have gone ahead relatively smoothly. This new gas now enables Tanzania to generate significantly more electric power more cheaply – not least at the new Kinyerezi generators near Dar es Salaam – by phasing out much diesel, heavy fuel oil or jet fuel. Gas already accounts for over 50% of power generation; fiscal subsidies for more expensive imported fuels have reduced significantly; and there has been a large increase in the proportion of the Tanzanian population with access to power (now 37% versus only 23% in 2013): a promising result for Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 7 ("affordable, sustainable and reliable energy for all"). All the recent evidence indicates that these gains can continue and grow further – COVID-19 notwithstanding.

The global energy transition which is the context for these glimmers of African hope is also encouraging provided that the current halt in the global growth dynamics established prior to 2020 are not fundamentally damaged by COVID. Expert analysis of the global energy transition (e.g. by BP and the International Energy Authority – IEA) routinely show an increase in the share of renewables as an energy source (e.g. from 5% to over 30% of the total globally by 2040). But they also show both an increasing share (e.g. to 26%) and a very large *absolute* increase in the use of natural gas. The fast growth expected in Asia is central to these findings, with China in particular seeing natural gas prioritized as a critical complement to its world-leading initiatives on renewables as it phases down its high traditional dependence on coal. But China is presently import-dependent in terms of natural gas, and so the new African supplies are expected to find a large available Asian market if they can remain competitive.

None of these glimmers of hope should be interpreted as "easy wins" that will translate automatically into assured improvements in Africa's long-term economic and social prospects – especially given the short-term negative pressures from the pandemic. But they are clearly significant *opportunities* – some of a once-in-a-lifetime magnitude. In both our 2018 book and in a forthcoming monograph focused more on climate change and low income countries, Tony Addison and I seek to spell out quite a lot of detail about how those opportunities might best be grasped.

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A century of African connections

Michael Askwith*

In December 2020, my family will commemorate 100 years of continuous connection with Africa. In December 1920 my maternal grandfather, Jock Noad, sailed from London to Mombasa with his wife and my mother Pat, then aged 1, to take up a position as an Assistant Engineer with the Public Works Department in Kenya. He was later involved in road, bridge and railway construction in both Kenya and Uganda, being awarded an OBE in 1938.

In 1936 my father Tom Askwith was posted to Kenya with the Kenya Administration, serving in several postings throughout the country as District Officer and District Commissioner. He married my mother, Jock's daughter Pat, in 1939. He later served as Commissioner for Community Development and Rehabilitation during the 1950s, trying to assist Kenya to emerge from the Mau Mau rebellion through community development programmes, addressing the problems of unemployment, women and youth through self-help schemes. Interestingly, BAFUNCS' former President, Richard Jolly, carried out his national service as a conscientious objector, serving as a young Community Development Assistant in his department. My father was a co-founder of the first multiracial club in Nairobi, the United Kenya Club, when multiracial contacts were not the flavour of the month.

I was born in the UK, going out to Kenya in 1946 as a baby, while my two siblings were born in Nairobi. My brother and I went to school in Gilgil near Nakuru until 1959 prior to secondary school in the UK. As a youngster, I remember visiting community development projects with my father in a vehicle donated to his department by UNICEF, my first contact with the UN. After school and university in the UK, I joined UNDP in 1968 as a UNA volunteer junior professional officer. Thanks to a good grounding in French, I was fortunate to be posted to a francophone country, firstly in Algeria, and then in Chad, where because of the small size of its office I was involved in wide-ranging programming work.

These solid foundations and good mentoring and support by outstanding UNDP resident representatives enabled me subsequently to serve with UNDP in a variety of country assignments, of which five in Africa. These included as Deputy Resident Representative in the People's Republic of Congo (Brazzaville) (1981–1983), and in Mauritania (1985–1987); then again in Congo as UN Resident Coordinator/ UNDP Resident Representative (1987–1989). I later served as Head of the new UNDP liaison office in Eritrea and representative of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs (1991–1993) in order to develop a new UNDP programme there prior to its independence, and finally as RR/RC in Equatorial Guinea (1994–1996).

These assignments enabled me to gain invaluable experience in project planning and monitoring, and later in the overall management of UNDP operations and interagency coordination. These complemented experience gained in other regions, as well as in three UNDP headquarters assignments.

After taking early retirement from UNDP in 2000, I was able to build on all these experiences to carry out

Congo (Brazzaville), 1989

With President Isaias Afewerki of Eritrea, 1993

consultancy missions with the UN as well as with NGOs, the EU and bilateral organizations. These involved support in strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation in about 40 countries, including 12 countries in Africa. They focused on the formulation and monitoring/evaluation of UNDP country programmes in three countries (Mozambique, Niger, Rwanda); on broader interagency UN development assistance frameworks in 12 countries (Equatorial Guinea, Kenya, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, and the Union of Comores); and on two country projects (a UNV project in Mali and a BESO (now VSO) project consortium in Tanzania). One of the trips to Mozambique provided an opportunity to climb Mount Kilimanjaro.

Working in all these countries has been an amazing privilege. Among my most significant endeavours I have enjoyed the opportunities to be part of the UN system and be involved in critical events and processes in the development of each of these countries. In Chad, learning key "engine room" programming and drafting skills; in the Congo, promoting effective UN system management and coordination in all project activities; in Mauritania, supporting the country's efforts to address the mid-1980s drought crisis; in Eritrea**,** facilitating the 1993 independence referendum process, including as a UN Observer, opening one of the first UN "integrated offices", developing a first UN system country strategy, and facilitating a major UN appeal for a programme for the repatriation and reintegration of Eritrean refugees; and finally, in Equatorial Guinea, coordinating the organization, in conjunction with other donors, of a first democratic electoral process, and promoting strategies for sustainable human development.

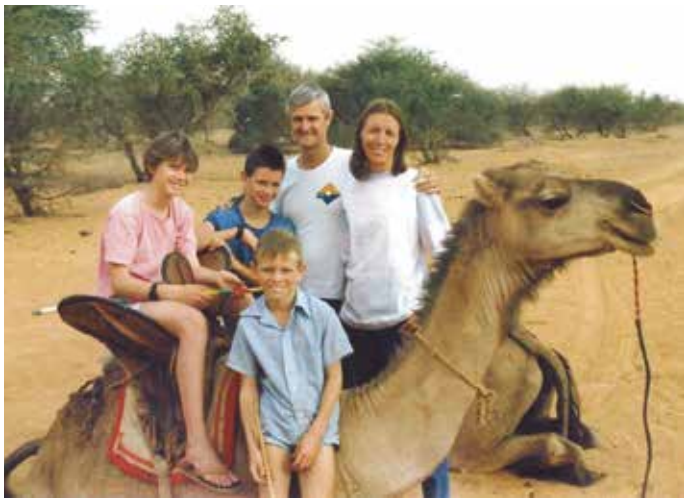
In all these assignments, I was proud to be part of broader UN system efforts to provide effective multilateral cooperation in economic and social development, humanitarian support and democratic governance, as well as in strengthening interagency cooperation among the UN's rich network of specialized agencies and organizations. The memories of wonderful colleagues and good times together definitely make it all worthwhile.

My wife Celia, faced with the challenges of frequent moves, adapting to new countries, cultures and languages, entertaining a wide variety of visitors, and bringing up a family, was the unsung hero. She also taught English to Congolese students and former Eritrean fighters. The opportunities for our four children to live and go to school in some of them, as well as visit exotic places, provided valuable international exposure for them.

In the 12 African countries where consultancies were carried out, I enjoyed applying lessons learned in the design, implementation, coordination and monitoring of UN assistance, in training local staff and in drafting in English, French and Spanish. Such missions required much travel; countless meetings with government, UN, donor and NGO staff; extensive research, statistics and analysis of past UN performance, as well as drafting skills and a lot of midnight oil! The hours spent tapping out comprehensive reports, their annexes and power point presentations in a wide variety of hotels, were both rewarding and challenging.

Looking back during the lockdown period, I can only be thankful for many opportunities to continue my family's connections with Africa, including serving as Chairman for 16 years of Pembrokians (UK), my Kenya school's old boys association, and as a Trustee of a small education and community development NGO project near Nakuru, Kenya. These have included periodic visits to Kenya, with stays in the successor house to that built in 1947 by my grandfather in Karen, near Nairobi, still lived in by my mother's half-sister and husband over 70 years later, and many years working with NGOs in Kenya.

With son Robin, nephew Max and guides on the summit of Mt Kilimanjaro, 2006



Combining business with pleasure, with children Karen, Myron and Robin, Mauritania, 1987

* Michael is well known to Members of BAFUNCS due to his indefatigable devotion to the UNCRP project (see Newsletter No.77, p.27).

Shades of development – Three Africa postings

Frederick Lyons

Frederick worked for UNDP for 37 years. He began his career in Bolivia in 1971 as a Junior Professional Officer and subsequently worked in 10 different countries in all the world's regions, as well as having two postings in New York. If asked, he would love to start all over again and would return to UNDP tomorrow. Vividly personal accounts of his rich experiences in three African countries follow (Burkina Faso, Benin and Kenya).

***L'heure de la révolution a sonné*:* drought, revolution and violence, Burkina Faso, 1985–1987**

The invitation had come at short notice: Comrade Fidel Castro Ruz had the honour to invite the UNDP Resident Representative to meet a delegation from the Republic of Burkina Faso at the Palace of the Revolution. The Resident Representative was not available that evening, so I went instead and joined the queue of diplomats and officials at the antechamber to the hall, striking with its black marble floor and forest of giant ferns. Our line slowly filed past the Chief of Protocol and, one by one, we were greeted by Fidel and by his guest Captain Thomas Sankara, the young and charismatic new leader of the recently-renamed Republic of Burkina Faso, the erstwhile Upper Volta. Both wore military fatigues, radiating confidence and revolutionary bonhomie.

This was not one of the rather staid occasions where one met ageing revolutionaries and their memories, the men and women who had ridden with Sandino, or survivors of the Arbenz regime, or of other more recent Cuban adventures in Central or Latin America. Those were the past while that evening, Africa was the present, maybe even the future. Cuba, fresh from a series of military involvements in Angola, Ethiopia and Mozambique, and ready to cooperate with other African countries with its medical personnel and engineers, saw rapid change in Burkina Faso as a further opportunity to help and spread its message of scientific socialism and Marxist development across the continent. The atmosphere was optimistic, noisy, even electric; Fidel joked and introduced Thomas Sankara and the Burkinabé delegation. As the waiters served the mojitos, it was all smiles, laughter and promises of cooperation. The young and enthusiastic delegation left the following day for Paris and Ouagadougou armed, like so many I had met in our four years in Cuba, with the fraternal blessings of their older and vastly more experienced brother-in-arms and with the courage and self-belief to deal with the vast problems of poverty and drought back home.

Things moved fast from there, and strangely. A few weeks later that winter, a telex came in announcing that UNDP was reinforcing the staffing of its offices in the Sahel to support governments coping with the impacts of the 1983–1984 drought, and would be creating new office teams in the region. Back home for lunch, I mentioned this to my wife Robyn, who was quite convinced that Roger, then in Cyprus and due for reassignment, would surely be among the new resident representatives to be chosen. Why not join him? Since all the talk about our reassignment for the previous three months had been about Ecuador, this seemed somewhat unlikely. Telepathy sometimes works. Returning to the office and walking into the reception, a phone was thrust into my hand; "Roger Guarda, calling you from Nicosia" ... I was in Ouagadougou six weeks later as Roger's deputy, and Robyn and the family joined us in the early summer.

The drought had destroyed the crops and the livestock on which the population depended, and created further tensions between the nomadic groups to the north and the more sedentary populations to the south of the country. Although the rains had returned, huge problems remained. A committed and enthusiastic Government mobilized the population with a nationwide Participatory Rural Assessment, targeting communities, identifying their priorities and responding to them with accelerated local investments in water supply, health centres, village shops, labour-intensive public works, handicraft development, small-scale well-building and water storage for agricultural projects.

Donors were urged to contribute to more eye-catching projects, and particularly an extension to the Abidjan-Ouagadougou railway towards Niamey; and road-repair and building programmes were agreed, to improve access to the remote areas of the north and help improve resilience and food supply among the remote populations on the Mali and Niger borders. Country-wide health and literacy programmes, and programmes in support of women's groups were launched and actively pursued, as were political programmes based on the Cuban-inspired committees for the defence of the revolution. It reminded me of a conversation 10 years earlier, months after the revolution in Laos, with the new Minister of Planning. After he had outlined a long list of priorities, I asked him to give me and my colleagues a sense of what might be his Government's top priorities; "they are all our first priority", he said.

* It's time for the revolution.

Gana Diagne, the FAO Representative, was an expert on locust biology and management, and had worked previously at the regional locust centre in Mali. Occasionally, we visited agricultural projects together, stopping in isolated villages to discuss crops, livestock or other issues with the villagers. In the flat, dry landscape, Gana would point to growing clusters of locusts, and talk anxiously about the gradual return of this plague, after 20 years of relative calm. In the early 1960s, UNDP had funded a major locust-control project under its Global Programme; running from the Arabian peninsula all the way across the Sahel to Senegal, it had effectively controlled the growth of locust swarms with aerial surveillance and spraying, training and the creation of national locust-control institutions for the benefit of some of the world's poorest farmers and nomadic livestock herders. As we bounced our way along the endless dirt and stone roads, a cassette of Malian kora music blaring into the heat, he would complain about the region's governments, unable or unwilling to focus on the longer term, failing to maintain their desperately limited infrastructure and becoming ever more dependent on external assistance.

Thomas Sankara was everywhere, leading, motivating, speaking, usually a smiling presence. He pushed his Ministers hard, and made confrontational speeches at the UN General Assembly and the OAU. For relaxation, he could be heard leading his band at the Officers' Club, playing the guitar. All this work involved large measures of propaganda and agitprop, meetings in villages, speeches in the local football stadium with the *Petits chanteurs au poing levé*,* with slogans and chants : *Le fantochisme,* à bas!; *La patrie ou la mort, nous vaincrons* ; *Les parents pourris, à bas!*; *Gloire au peuple, pouvoir au peuple*; or the Christ-like *Peuple du Burkina, lève-toi et marche*.* Emulating Fidel Castro, Sankara took to giving four-hour speeches of hectoring, crowd-moving drama, sometimes in the unlikeliest of places. A three-hour speech comes to mind, in the torrid heat of a classroom at a newly-opened school. Roger and I, together with other NGO representatives and officials absorbed the message, each of us stuck in one-piece primary school desks. At the end, I had to be prised out of the furniture, supported out of the classroom. Ah, development ...

Much was achieved in three years: irrigation and water storage improved; schools and health centres built; vaccination and literacy campaigns delivered, often at great personal cost to government workers and to UN colleagues. In the brief time we were in Ouagadougou, two of our community development specialists suffered severe heatstroke working in 50° temperatures out towards Ouahigouya, and had to be fetched at the Ouagadougou morgue where they had been laid out in extremis on the marble slabs to cool their body temperature rapidly.

Tragically, two of our Yugoslav roadbuilding engineers, personal friends with whom we had spent a night in their roadbuilder's cabin just a week before, were killed on the road they had just completed between Dori and Djibo. With the driver apparently dazzled by the setting sun, their car drifted off the dry, loose dirt surface in a curve.

I was asked to go up to Dori to bring back the bodies of the two experts, and flew up in a chartered army transport plane in the dust of the late dry-season Harmattan. Nothing could be seen below, while to the south, the first rainclouds were piling up, lightning already flashing in the distance. In Dori, with Josephine Ouedraogo, Minister of Rehabilitation, we were able to say a few heartfelt words in memory of our friends as forms were completed, the bodies identified and welded into their caskets for transport. Presently night was falling, the afternoon's storm was almost upon us, a huge vortex of dust now spiralling into the raincloud a few miles south of the airstrip. The cars that had accompanied us lined up along the runway, their lights providing a faint guide as we took off into the wind and the dark. I sat alone in the cargo hold next to the caskets, strapped under their nylon net, lit up by the lightning and tropical rain flashing through the single window. As the plane was hurled about the sky, I found myself thinking of our UNDP and UNFPA friends Michael and Helen Caspari who just five years before had died in a plane caught in a violent tropical storm as they returned from a field trip up-country in Tanzania.

Although the government managed to keep the economy on an even keel and run a multitude of development campaigns, political tensions were rising both in and outside the country. Few of Burkina's neighbours approved of Thomas Sankara's politics, with the exception of Ghana, and around Christmas 1985 Mali and Burkina fought briefly over a disputed border area. The establishment of the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution in the villages was often met with hostility by the traditional chiefs, while the security police was becoming increasingly active. Opponents to the regime were fleeing, or on occasion disappearing. One of our staff was dragged away from a demonstration in Ouagadougou, taken to the *Sécurité* headquarters and beaten up. That day, having been unable to discover his precise whereabouts from Foreign Affairs or the police, I went to the *Sécurité* headquarters. Vincent Sigué, the *Sécurité* Chief, was just leaving for lunch. After a brief and somewhat tense discussion in the courtyard under the midday sun, Sigué agreed to release our colleague to me. I was sent to the back of the building where, in a whitewashed room with meat hooks around the walls, our colleague fell into my arms. He was crying, his face grey with exhaustion and fear.

* Young singers with raised fists; Down with puppet regimes!; Fatherland or death, we shall prevail; Down with rotten parents!; Glory to the people, power to the people; People of Burkina, rise up and march.

Events came to a head on 15 October 1987 when, after days of rumours that Thomas Sankara and Sigué had decided to reinforce the security apparatus and that this was being strongly opposed by their comrades, shooting broke out at the *Conseil de l'entente*, the Government headquarters. Robyn, driving to the cathedral with Beatrice, our younger daughter, stopped and turned for home when Beatrice asked her "what all those armed soldiers were doing in a ditch". At the office, we organized a convoy with UN flags to go and find the UN experts stuck in the government buildings nearby. In those more innocent times, UN security plans were in their infancy, and in case of an extended crisis, our instructions were that families living in the western suburbs of Ouagadougou should drive west to Abidjan, and those to the east should drive east to Lomé … We went into lockdown at home while the shooting continued into the evening. In the morning, in the silence that followed, I went over to the nearby *Avenue de l'indépendance*, where two or three men were standing at a street corner. Thomas Sankara had been buried there, in a shallow grave. I bowed my head and paid my respects. A good and idealistic man had died, and a revolution that had started with such high hopes had failed. His comrade-turned-enemy, "le Beau Blaise" Compaoré, was to rule Burkina Faso for the next 27 years.

East of Grand Popo, Benin, 1987–1989

We drove down to Cotonou, our next assignment, and my first as Resident Representative. Two weeks after the coup and the assassination of Thomas Sankara, our best efforts to travel by plane were stymied by Air Afrique's refusal to land in Ouagadougou. Twice, friends took us to the airport to say farewell, and twice we watched as the Airbus circled the airport 10 000 metres above us and flew on. So we loaded family, dog and two new puppies in the Peugeot and drove down through Togo's national park to Lomé, turned left at the coast, and were at the border the following evening just in time for the sunset ceremony of salute to the flags of Togo and Benin. To our right, the sea; palms waved in the warm, moist breeze, and as we waited, on the other side of the customs post a UNDP Land Cruiser drew up, followed by the container truck that had transported our worldly possessions from Ouagadougou down to Cotonou, now returning to Burkina Faso. Briefly, caught in the limbo between duty stations, with children and dogs and luggage in the car, we felt homesick. Then, out of the Land Cruiser stepped Robert England, at that time Head of UNDP Budget, amiable as ever, smiling broadly as if to welcome us to our new duty station ... as he started back for New York after a brief inspection trip to the office in Cotonou.

Briefing time, getting-to-know time; it was always hectic, always among the best moments in this most fascinating of jobs, and remained so even 20 years later, arriving in Sri Lanka, my last duty station after 37 years with UNDP. But in the meantime, as I went to the office on the first day, my arm and hand were swollen, my head was throbbing. I had cut my hand on a packing case in Ouagadougou just before we left. The UN doctor was called and there, in my office, trousers around my ankles, with the Secretary-General looking benignly down from his portrait, his Representative received a large injection of antibiotics in the backside. I was ready for my briefings.

Project after project team came to the office, others I visited up-country. What always made the process so gripping was the sheer enthusiasm and commitment of the teams, their anxiety to share what they were doing, to ensure that the new Representative got a grip on the primordial importance of their particular, their beloved project for the future of the country. And so it was that on the first day, Gunther, a no-nonsense, relentlessly serious urban sanitation expert, announced that he would be presenting a slide show of his project's mission and achievements. Moments later, a giant human turd lit up the meeting room wall, followed by a succession of photographs of urban latrines in different styles, technologies and colours, built and decorated by local communities. The project had been adopted and adapted by communities in Cotonou and Porto Novo and was proving highly successful. But not rapidly enough; months later, the wife of one of the office drivers going about her daily needs in the fresh air was bitten by a snake in the dark, and died on the way to the hospital. We made sure that all staff could receive an advance to build latrines in their own homes, but as so often, the solution only followed a tragedy.

Further visits followed, with detailed reviews of our ambitious programme with FAO in and around Cotonou. I was driving back to the office through the sandy, potholed streets in the early evening heat, the sun shining through the haze and dust of the city centre, when we came up to a roundabout in the middle of which stood a large bronze statue of Todor Zhivkov, the Secretary-General of the Bulgarian Communist Party, an unsolicited gift from the fraternal people of Bulgaria to their Beninese brethren. He looked incongruous in his military greatcoat, bundled up against the cold and wind of an Eastern European military campaign *circa* December 1944, and I thought of all the redundant revolutionary bronze statuary littered around developing countries, suggesting in its bombastic way a more hopeful future of virile authoritarianism and assured prosperity, one day to be parachuted in from somewhere east of the Iron Curtain.

None of this had come to pass in Benin; they got the virile authoritarianism, but after years of attempted coups, mercenary attacks, failed economic collectivization programmes, the large banner hanging across the road exiting the square came as a glum counterpoint to Bronze Todor's message*: Peuple béninois, tu es ton propre sauveur!*,*

* People of Benin, you are your own Savior.

it screamed at the passing mobylettes, fruit vendors and international aid personnel. It was sadly true; nobody, least of all the Government, was going to save the Beninese people.

By the end of the 1980s, many African governments that had started out with revolutionary ideals had given up pretending that they were going to save their people. Infrastructure had collapsed or was in terminal decline, health centres stood empty, medical staff drawing their salaries but otherwise engaged in more profitable activities, while educational systems were hopelessly ill-suited for the task of training a new generation. The Government of Benin took a laissez-faire view of all this, as the World Bank and other donors sought allies in the ministries, the Church, or what was left of civil society to bring a measure of intellectual and financial rigour to the country.

President Mathieu Kérékou had largely stopped playing the role of revolutionary leader, and watched the slow decline from his presidential palace; a bluff military man of great personal charm and quiet irony, he took little part in the decision-making process; rather, he burnished his traditional chieftain's skills, letting it be known that, like any traditional Beninese politician, he had an excellent grasp of rainmaking, while his witchcraft was of post-doctoral standard. In short, he let his Ministers get on with whatever preoccupied them at that particular moment. Some, like the Minister of Agriculture, still played out an aggressively revolutionary role; his Ministry was entirely painted in a bright phosphorescent yellow with blood-red trimmings, with a frieze of machine guns and corn cobs in black. Messages went out to farmers and communities in staccato orders, and the life of the FAO Representative, a determined and committed colleague, was on occasion made a misery.

Other Ministers played more easy-going roles, some as Marxist café intellectuals or academics, lawyers or traders. From time to time they would suddenly be called by the President, together with the diplomatic corps and 20 000 citizens of Cotonou, to the football stadium. There, a brief firebrand speech by President Kérékou, often attacking the United States, might be followed by a courteous and witty reply from the US Ambassador expressing the hope of warmer relations to come. An opening display would be laid on by the army, *Le défi du petit soldat débrouillard**. Two teams of fully-armed soldiers in blindfold had to get out of their uniforms while running down the pitch, about-turn at the opposite end and, still blindfolded, pick up their clothes and weapons, and return fully dressed to their starting point. The noise, the enthusiasm, the laughter of both crowd and President were indescribable. What this did for military morale one can scarcely imagine. But the entertainment wasn't over yet, with guests expected to watch two full football games before being released into the early evening. Up north, driving through vast and unkempt cashew plantations established by a state corporation in the early years of the revolution, one could see the telephone masts of an early rural telephony project set up by ITU with DANIDA and UNDP support. This small investment, designed to test the feasibility of improving rural communications in areas with limited transport, proved a huge success. Market women, health workers, the administration, farmers, immediately grasped the value of this new tool, the precursor of the extraordinarily nimble mobile telephony networks that only 15 years later covered the continent, driven by massive private investment. And still further north, 600 km from Cotonou, a large rural development project, working under the auspices of the regional government in Natitingou, was bringing new tools and technologies to farmers, helping improve agricultural production on small landholdings. A fine project but, like so many, one we were unable to scale up because of the lack of commitment to further investment by the Government.

New concerns were emerging, among them HIV/AIDs, which had begun to make major inroads into Africa. The subject was difficult to address with senior civil servants in the Ministry of Health and elsewhere, many of whom were devoutly religious. Nevertheless, we were able to convince the Minister of Health to host a seminar on the subject at the local Sheraton Hotel which, to my delighted surprise, was well attended on the day. The diplomatic corps had turned out in force. Large piles of printed materials lay in wait on tables for ministry staff and others, and two large boxes of condoms had been provided, with encouragements to participants to help themselves. As the Minister was making his introduction, the Ambassador of North Korea walked into the room and sat down. An hour later, the introductory session was ending; the Ambassador rose, turned towards the boxes, helped himself to one of them, and walked out. Someone had been convinced.

And yet; in this rather leaden, sometimes disheartening atmosphere, things were changing. A new structural adjustment programme was under negotiation with the World Bank; our Administrator, Bill Draper, had sent all his representatives a letter instructing them to make contact with the private sector in 110 countries and look at ways we could work together in future. In Benin, this was far from obvious at the outset, as the Government had virtually eliminated the private sector except for the urban and village markets. I expected some hostility from the Minister of Planning when I went to present the Administrator's robust, forthright message; but when it came after a moment's silence, his reaction was quite the contrary: "Thank goodness someone's got an idea of what to do" he said, smiling. Business training programmes and investment

* The challenge of the smart little soldier.

loans for new business creation followed, with large support from the World Bank.

In this new policy environment, UNDP started paying increased attention to civil society, to the potential for NGO and civic action. We began to work with women's groups, environmental groups, a church community association and of course, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Thinking longer-term with the Minister of Education, we brought a UNESCO educational planning expert to Cotonou to look into educational reform. The upshot was a major investment programme for girls' education which, with the active support of the US Ambassador, resulted in a USAID grant of US$60 million, its first financial support for Benin in a long time. And shortly thereafter, Mathieu Kérékou, in keeping with his nickname *le caméléon*, led Benin in a remarkable return to democracy, gradually leading the way together with Ghana and Senegal towards greater freedom and prosperity in the region.

Before leaving for my next assignment in New York, our farewell party took place on the beach at Grand Popo on a swelteringly hot day. Cooled by the breeze, with clouds banking up just inland, René Dossa, an ex-Minister and friend who had helped me understand the subterranean complexities of Beninese politics over the last two years, served lobster and champagne under the shade of a marquee. Speeches followed, gifts; when we mentioned the coming rain, René reassured us: he had paid the rainmaker in his village to keep the rain away. Finally the party came to an end, instructions were given to stop the music, to fold up the camp. We crossed the lagoon in a motor boat to meet the rainmaker, René's family and villagers for tea; and then, as we started to drive away, the heavens opened; the rain fell, in one of the finest and best-timed Beninese rainmaking arrangements I had yet seen.

Nearly 30 years later, a footnote: I was reading *Le Monde* one afternoon and came across the following obituary; «*Le Général Président Mathieu Kérékou est mort mercredi 14 octobre aux environs de 13h30, pr*écise *son successeur Thomas Boni Yayi dans un communiqué, une disparition précédée d'une grosse pluie bienveillante et rafraichissante*».*

Challenges of governance and lost opportunities, Kenya, 1995–2000

The recent coronavirus lockdown had me dreaming more vividly than usual, often of open spaces and movement, of urgent action and decisions frustrated by external forces unknown. One dream in particular seems to have followed days and weeks of reminiscence and note-taking about our departure from Mexico and the five years that followed in Kenya.

In this particular dream, I am called away from my theatre seat where I am watching a new play with a friend, by a colleague bringing me an articulated porcelain lobster and informing me that I need to travel urgently to a capital city somewhere in the Southern Hemisphere. I understand that the distance to be travelled is great, but need to get ready and shave before I go. I shave in a rush, make a catastrophic mess of it, say goodbye to Robyn, and realize that I cannot possibly turn up at the airline check-in desk looking like a sacrificial victim. Cut – to dawn and a panicked awakening.

Seen from retirement, much of this seems like a metaphorical reworking of the six moves we made as a family in those 15 years from 1981 to 1995, sometimes at very short notice. They always involved leaving friends and new interests behind (the dream lobster brings to mind Mexican Surrealism, or my continuing interest in crafts of every kind, particularly ceramics). Each move and constant travel in-country and internationally involved some kind of disruption, general uprooting and risk to family and self.
And so to Kenya, one of the dazzling human, rock and mineral, animal and landscape jewels of East Africa: on a clear morning, taking off for the north from Wilson Airport, one could see the glaciers gleaming on Kilimanjaro and Mount Kenya. As the plane gained height, the forests of the Escarpment, the Western Rift, the Cherangani Hills and the looming mass of Mount Elgon came into view; then, beyond the Matthews Range on the right, Lake Turkana and the Sudanese and Ethiopian borders; in all a grandiose, volcanic, tortured landscape.

Compared to most of its neighbours, the country beneath us had remained generally peaceful since independence. But history had left its mark, with extensive land-seizures before and after independence, occasional eruptions of violence, the stoking up of ethnic tensions by politicians, and generalized corruption. The latter had metastasized into most of the country's institutions, and often into the international organizations based in Nairobi and across the country.

As a rule, the various communities remained essentially separate, with little common ground aside from the purely economic. The old British community led its life on the land, often but not always wealthy, and often in a quietly eccentric way; "haraka, haraka with the gin and tonic, Ezekiel", "I keep the tortoise eggs in my brassiere to help them hatch"; "I fly down from Nakuru and lunch at the Muthaiga Club whenever I need to stock up on dogfood" … National Museums of

* The President, General Mathieu Kérékou, died on Wednesday 14 October around 13h30, according to a press release by his successor Thomas Boni Yayi; his passing followed a benevolent and refreshing heavy shower.

Kenya and its very united and impressive staff were the glorious exception to a rather sad rule.

On arrival in Nairobi, it was striking to see the powerful array of high-tech global research institutions whose work on agroforestry, livestock and the practical application of know-how about insects extended deep into Kenyan farming communities; and then the sheer number, the constellation of UN agencies, from UNEP and UN-Habitat and their global reach, to regional humanitarian organizations and national representation offices. At once a rich technological and financial resource for the Kenyan authorities, but often a source of intense confusion for all, from their instantly forgettable acronyms, to working in silos; to inter-agency fights for influence, resources, or individual agency privileges.

Infinitely more worrying were the intercommunal conflicts over land and resources in the Rift Valley, made sharper by political tensions with the ruling political party and set against increasingly erratic weather patterns, resulting in large-scale flooding and drought. Shortly after my arrival, and hoping to build on the work of my predecessor, David Whaley, I raised the Rift Valley conflicts with the Minister of the Presidency, hoping to discuss longer-term solutions than the immediate water/shelter/food/medical help the communities had received. The Minister's answer was to take me on a plane and helicopter trip from North-East Kenya where we saw the impact of drought on the many livestock herding communities there; to the Aberdares, with serious landholding problems; to Tot, in the Rift Valley, facing serious problems of access to water; and on to Lake Victoria, where recent elections had resulted in violent riots.

During our trip, the Minister repeatedly suggested that the problems we had seen were so varied in nature that they weren't amenable to a single solution, or perhaps any solution. My sense was that they might be approached using community peacebuilding and development techniques as part of a wider governance improvement programme. Indeed, as I discovered subsequently, the National Museums of Kenya had a remarkable team of anthropologists and social scientists working on precisely these topics, with the practical experience to help communities reach agreement. That their services were not called upon suggested that central government had more or less given up on finding solutions to these problems, and sometimes it was tempting to believe that there were individuals in government interested in maintaining high levels of intercommunal tension.

I made little headway with my proposals. Kenya has generally been less at war with itself than its neighbours, in what has long been a very rough neighbourhood (Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan, Uganda, or Rwanda and Burundi), and can often look like a paragon of peace and prosperity. Nor was it ever forgotten that, at independence in 1965, Kenya's GNP per capita had been higher than that of Malaysia and other East Asian countries. But comparisons of this sort never seemed to be of much help to the Kenyans themselves.

Nairobi, with its good communications, was central to humanitarian operations across the sub-region following the Rwandan genocide, or over the longer term, supplying South Sudan up the long truck route north through Lodwar and Lokichogio. During my five years in Kenya, the UN system there also had to deal with a string of natural disasters in-country, as drought followed flood and livelihoods were put at risk on a very large scale. The UN system responded well and rapidly, under constant pressure, particularly as a result of security issues and fraud.

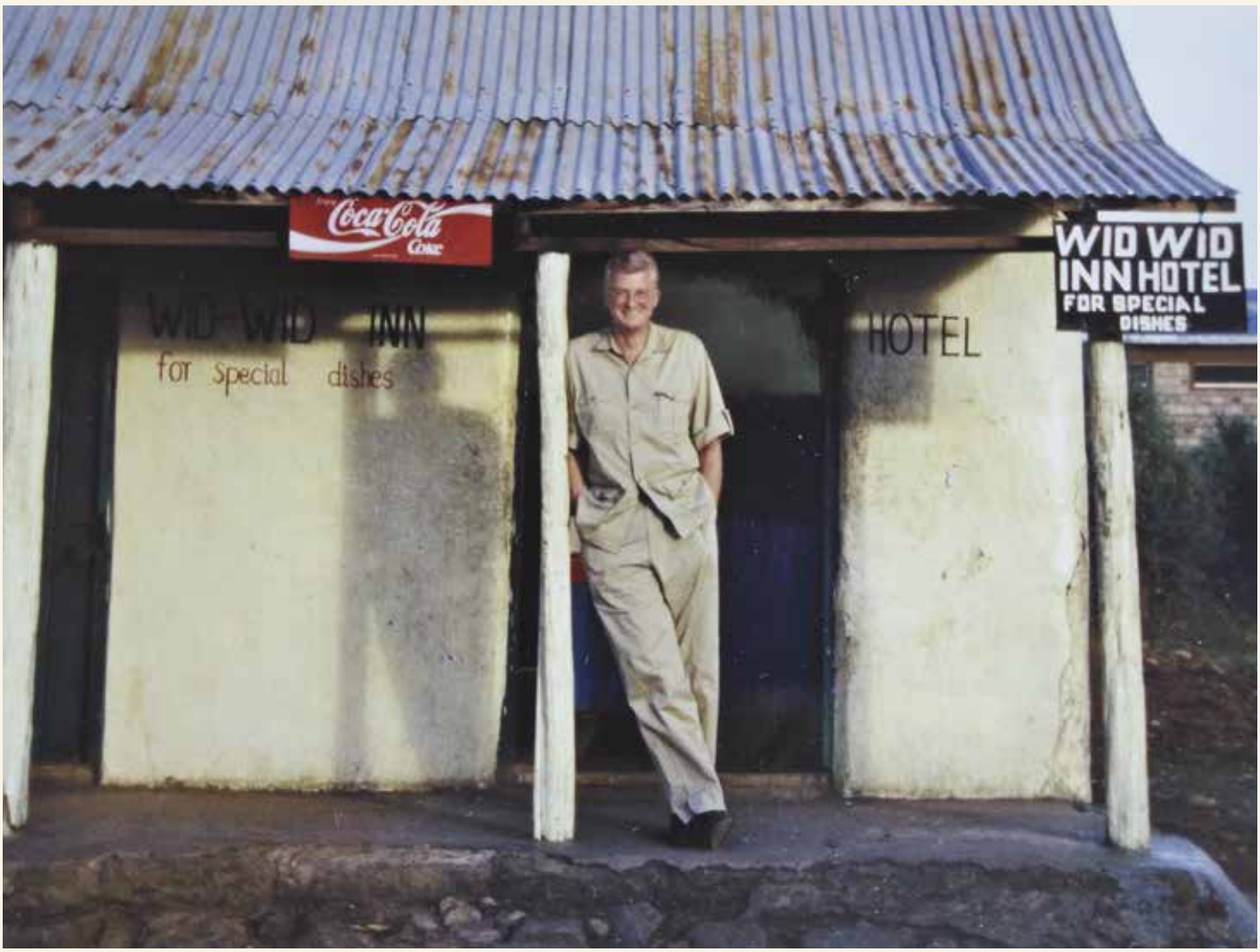
One morning, observing a WFP operation in Wajir in response to immense floods covering much of the North-East, we saw the military demanding that the WFP flight load the town's supply of empty beer bottles for return to Nairobi, a precondition for their purchase of new supplies. Donor patience was wearing thin after repeated government requests for additional humanitarian assistance, and I wrote to the President to outline the problems Kenya and its partners would face should endemic corruption continue. I was summoned to the Presidency, where Daniel Arap Moi and I discussed the matter. He was friendly, courteous, and took the necessary action to stop the constant incidents; for the time being, at least.

When not in emergency mode, our programmes covered a whole gamut of development initiatives, from environmental programmes with local authorities and NGOs including Wangari Maathai's Green Belt Movement, with NGOs dealing with microfinancing or female genital mutilation; to craft design and marketing, small enterprise, and advisory services to central government; probably dispersing our assistance across too broad a front to be truly effective in the medium term. One difficulty was that the UNDP Administrator, Gus Speth, had announced that UNDP should henceforth focus on sustainable human development, working on the environment and poverty in an integrated way. But we lacked the solid technical guidelines, trained teams in our offices or the financial firepower to turn these aims rapidly into a new programme.

Meanwhile, looming over all this activity was the grim reality of HIV/AIDS, ravaging communities, shattering fragile local economies in Kenya, and denied in a conspiracy of silence. Travelling along the shores of Lake Victoria, one of the most severely affected areas, we visited communities where only the old and the very young were left to work in the fields; classrooms were empty, people went hungry. The disease was rampant in the slums of Nairobi and other Kenyan towns, and spreading along the major transport routes from the coast to Uganda and beyond. Four UNDP colleagues in the office died of the illness over five years, three of them highly trained programme officers, two of them women. A sense of sadness was always present.

Efforts by the donor community to encourage government action were scattershot and limited to the Ministry of Health in the face of presidential denial and silence among religious groups and village leaders. It was only after much explanation and pleading, and a successful HIV/AIDS conference in Nairobi led by Peter Piot of UNAIDS, that things started to move. The British High Commissioner, the World Bank Representative and I were invited to speak, together with Daniel Arap Moi, at a public meeting in Kisumu on Lake Victoria. The following day, I was asked to speak after the President at a further meeting in Kabarnet, on his home ground, among his people. He spoke simply and movingly of the pain and harm that AIDS was causing to people, and of what needed to be done. There was hope.

But even as we promoted improved governance for the Kenyan government and other institutions, the UNDP office was facing practical problems of its own related to financial loss and staff misconduct. A number of our staff had to be dismissed. There were disagreements with headquarters concerning the appropriate action. By the summer of 1999, I was ready to leave UNDP, worn down by these administrative struggles. But with almost 30 years invested in UNDP and with so many friends and colleagues around the world, I just couldn't do it. In spite of everything, the work remained fascinating.



Frederick dressed for dinner, Baragoi, northern Kenya, 1999

Fundraising for Africa and starting UN reforms at country level

Patricia de Mowbray*

While working for the UN from 1991 to 2008, when I reached retirement age, I was honoured to have three different roles/assignments in Africa.

The first was as Senior Economist at UNDP/HQ Africa (1991–2000), where I was one of a team tasked to improve aid coordination, capacity building, debt relief, poverty reduction and resource mobilization. This involved travelling to several countries in Sub-Saharan Africa to work for/with resident coordinators/representatives (RC/RRs) and high-level officials/ ministers to facilitate their writing, and co-signing with UNDP, of multiyear development programmes that the country's government could present at Work Bank-led consultative groups or UNDP-supported round-table meetings, in order to mobilize funding

Specific examples include Angola's rehabilitation after the civil war, and Zimbabwe's Poverty Alleviation Action Plan. The Zimbabwe country office also asked me to be deputy RR while the incumbent was on a special assignment. Another task was to write papers including a proposal on debt relief to be presented at the Copenhagen World Summit for Social Development. I also spent some time at UN/HQ in New York, to facilitate access to the UN General Assembly for representatives of African countries that I supported to draft resolutions on debt relief.

The second was as RC/RR from 2000 to 2005 in Cameroon. Shortly after I arrived, the country became eligible for debt relief under the Highly Indebted Poor Income Country (HIPIC) Initiative, and the UN was asked to be one of the five donors who participated in the Committee tasked with approving projects to be funded by debt relief. There were also national workshops on how to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015 in Cameroon's 10 provinces.

Other activities included follow-up to UN summits (e.g. the 1992 Rio Earth Summit for Environment and Development, and the Fourth World Conference on Women). The fight against the HIV/AIDS pandemic triggered joint programming. The UN country team consisted of heads of the regional offices of several agencies and programmes.

There was no dedicated UN House, although various building options were explored. It was challenging because so many resident agencies had regional offices. Several non-resident agencies needed support not only operationally but also substantively, e.g.: the establishment of the regional office of UNHCR; hosting a project for the World Tourism Organization to help Cameroon develop ecotourism; facilitating UN-Habitat missions in the provinces; and supporting the government after the UNHCR office was closed. As Resident Coordinator, it was necessary to participate in meetings of the Cameroon-Nigerian Mixed Commission led by the UNSG's Special Representative to implement the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling on the return of the (oil-rich) Bakassi region to Cameroon. Operational and substantive support was also given to visitors such as the heads of UNAIDS and of the UN University based in Japan, and to heads of UN departments (e.g. from the Department of Political Affairs during Cameroon's preparations for presidential elections). The RC facilitated dialogue between Government, the donor community and civil society: Canada, Japan and the UK provided funding to UNDP to procure transparent ballot boxes that were distributed by the Government throughout the country's 10 provinces. Perhaps the highlights for the UN country team were Secretary-General Kofi Annan's three visits to Cameroon (Africa Summit hosted by Cameroon and two visits to oversee progress in implementing the ICJ ruling).

The third, from 2005 to 2008, was as RC/RR for the island nation of Cape Verde that was preparing to progress to being a middle-income country (MIC) in 2008. Six UN agencies (UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, WFP as well as FAO and WHO) were resident. Cape Verde already had a UN House. With UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, WFP, the priority was to complete the process of forming a Joint Office (JO) by January 2006, with one common country programme, one budget/business process, one representative and one office.

Tourism, the future of Cape Verde

By 2008, the JO (the first of its kind) had achieved: (i) reduced costs (overhead and transactional); (ii) significant additional funding from Luxembourg for one programme; and (iii) Cape Verde's wish to go further in UN reforms involving all UN agencies (resident and non-resident), by starting to pilot *Delivering as One* (DaO), as one of the first eight countries worldwide.

Like the Joint Office, DaO required: one programme; one budget framework that included one fund to ensure funds were available to deliver the programme; one office and one leader; and communication as one entity. Cape Verde's One Programme for 2008–2010 had five areas to focus the UN System's comparative advantage to tackle the country's key vulnerabilities as it graduated to MIC in 2008, and aimed to attain the MDGs by 2015: (i) issues of security; (ii) economic and financial vulnerabilities; (iii) health challenges; (iv) cultural and demographic challenges; (v) social and geographical challenges.

It would be both naive and presumptuous, 12 years after retiring, to draw conclusions and make recommendations without empirical evidence, but time in Cameroon and Cape Verde suggests certain *sine qua non* factors for UN coherence in the countries where I served.

Both in Cameroon and Cape Verde, the governments were in the driver's seat and welcomed increased access to what the UN System had to offer in expertise, facilitation and support, given its neutrality, multidisciplinary approach and huge universality of presence in the world, bringing lessons learned from far and wide. Both countries were facing huge development challenges at that time (e.g. Cameroon with HIV/AIDs and increasing urban poverty; and Cape Verde graduating to MIC and becoming stop-off point in trafficking, given its position in the Atlantic between South America and the African mainland and beyond (see *Map* on p.10).

The leadership, ownership and commitment of the Cape Verde Government to the vision for development of their country, and to do what was needed to get the desired results, were pivotal to UN coherence. On the supply side, for UN support to be optimized and reforms to run smoothly and successfully, the commitment and cooperation of agencies (resident and non-resident) were a *sine qua non*, not only at country level, but also at the regional and headquarters levels. Given that the RC, appointed by the SG, was assigned at the highest political level (prime minister in both countries), there was a move in the JO, in the first instance, to having focal points responsible at the technical level.

The visibility of the mandate and results of individual UN agencies were vital in both Cameroon and Cape Verde. As Head of the UN Information Centre in Cameroon and Representative of JO/Leader of DaO in Cape Verde, my diary prioritized the dates of UN "World" days that highlighted the mandates of individual agencies, as well as events to present their annual reports and/or policy documents.

There was an openness and willingness both between UN agencies and between the UN System and governments to be cooperative and to work in solidarity to find solutions. Within the UN System itself, this permeated down to staff members at all levels especially when offices were reprofiled and job fairs had to be held. All of this was facilitated by high-level visits from headquarters (SG visits in the case of Cameroon; in the case of Cape Verde, from the UN Development Group office that coordinated reform with agencies at headquarters level). All concerned were committed, communicated clearly and constantly, and did all they could to ensure consistency and continuity. Although I must confess regular social get-togethers eating delicious local food and dancing to wonderful music in both Cameroon and Cape Verde enabled all UN staff at every level to bond and relax from any anxieties arising from changes.

I am deeply grateful for the time I served in the UN and hugely honoured and privileged to see how much governments in the many African countries I worked in greatly appreciated the special value-added the UN can bring, as well as how the UN agencies (resident and non-resident) when working well together can demonstrate that "the whole is indeed greater than the sum of its parts".

Hillside terraces, Cape Verde

Salt pans, a significant traditional commodity, Cape Verde

* Before joining the UN, Patricia spent most of her career as an international adviser and consultant in the field of economics and finance, specializing in global risks, exports and investments. Her excellent knowledge of several key languages (including Portuguese) facilitated her many and diverse assignments, during the course of which she visited or worked in 19 countries in all of Africa's regions.

Book review Bill Jackson

Earlier than you thought?

Plotting to stop the British slave trade, James Bruce and his secret mission to Africa

by Jane Aptekar Reeve

AuthorHouse, Bloomington IN, 2019, ISBN 978-1-7283-96248

Now another from the able ranks of BAFUNCS members: Jane Reeve of the Oxford Region has delivered a work of scholarship, although this time on a topic unconnected with the UN. As "opuses" go, it is *magnum*: it runs to 590 pages excluding appendices, is generously illustrated and fully referenced and footnoted, with an extensive bibliography.

Plotting has as its central character, if not in all respects hero, a Scot named James Bruce; of whom Jane says that his "covert role in achieving the abolition of the African slave trade has never (extraordinarily) been publicly noticed or honoured". If like this reviewer you associate abolition with the dates of 1807 and 1833, although acknowledging that Wilberforce, Quakers and others were the chief pioneers in the field before, you may yet be surprised to learn that Bruce was born in 1730 and died in 1794, and that his covert activity took place mainly in Algeria and Ethiopia from 1762 onward – an earlier concern about slavery than you may have thought?

Jane is clear that "Bruce was posted to Africa by his government to observe trading in African slaves"; it was "Britain's Parliament in London that sent Bruce on his mission". His cover was at first as George III's Consul in Algiers, and then as a traveller and explorer of antiquities in Tunisia, Ethiopia, Egypt, Sudan and Syria. The couple of years in Algeria consisted of consular duties against the background chaos of the Barbary coast, with the corsairs, cheating merchants and competing national and local interests of the time. The sub-text throughout is about slavery (including of European victims), practised mostly *sub rosa*, with all the subterfuge and subjection you might expect. But it is indeed a sub-text, with the direct thread not always fully evident – after all, espionage is by definition covert.

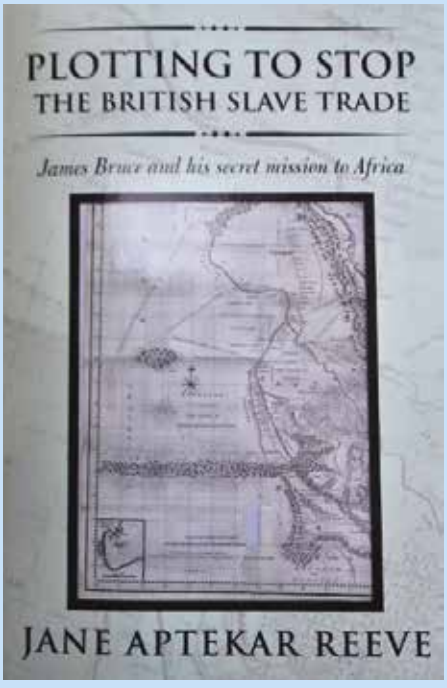
Bruce's subsequent few years were spent travelling; in particular in 1770, searching for the geographical and historical Holy Grail of the time, the source of the Nile. Here is where Jane knows of what she speaks, having been assigned to Addis Ababa in her work with UN (ECOSOC) and having gone to some lengths to visit the out-of-the-way Gish Abbey which Bruce documented as the source. He and his companion and *amanuensis* Balugani noted and sketched the ancient remains, the people and the fauna and flora of the area – *Brucea antidysenterica* is named after him, doubtless from experience all too empirical!

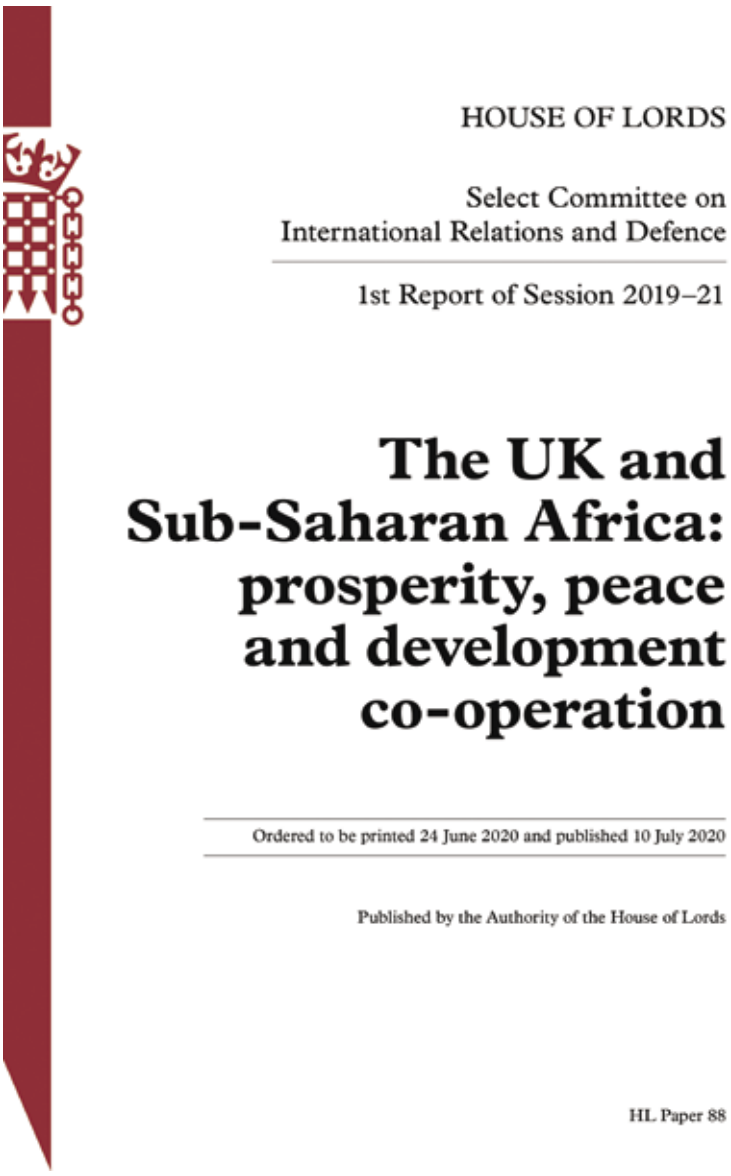
Along the way he disclosed the shamefulness of the practice of catching, trading and using black slaves, widespread in eastern as in western Africa. Indeed Bruce's opinion was that "Muslim slave-trading practices were never as prone to inhumanity as the western brand". During his time away and on his return to Britain in 1774 "arguments, derogatory insinuations and wild rumours" were launched against the "Abyssinian traveller". "We have seen Bruce" says Jane "depicted as a plain scholar, a suitor, an emperor of shepherds' pastures, a showy aristocrat, a plagiarising artist, a comic Scottish butcher, and a very far traveller in intellectual as well as physical realms".

This fascinating book is replete with detail: Bruce is comprehensively placed into context socially, educationally and politically in the early chapters, and there are interesting digressions throughout.

Plotting is a challenging read, but well worthwhile. Jane's research has taken years and been meticulous and exhaustive. Bruce helped bring about the situation in which "Tolerance of 'an irregular trade' was becoming unacceptable".

James Bruce as mature writer (painting by David Martin)





The UK and Sub-Saharan Africa: prosperity, peace and development co-operation

Readers may also be interested in a report of the Select Committee on International Relations and Defence published on 10 July 2020 by the House of Lords. There is a substantial section devoted to UN peacekeeping (pp.128-133). (https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld5801/ldselect/ldintrel/88/88.pdf)

Africa and the UN in stamps

Bill Jackson

Membership of the UN and the Specialized Agencies was – and remains – for many newly independent or restored nations a living and proud expression of their statehood. And nowhere more so than in Africa. Little else symbolizes the fact more simply, effectively – or inexpensively – than postage stamps.

To accompany the African theme to this issue of the Newsletter, the selection shown here illustrates *inter alia* various stages in the UN's history: from celebration of admission to membership (Dahomey – now part of Benin, Côte d'Ivoire and Madagascar); the death of Dag Hammarskjold (Congo, now DRC); the UN's 25th anniversary (Botswana) and the UN building (Guinea); to the Blue Helmets (Ethiopia); and the award of the Nobel Prize to the UN in 2001, featuring Kofi Annan and President John Kufuor (Ghana) at the ceremony. Most of the Funds and the Specialized Agencies of the UN system are also featured.