

A fresh chapter is opening in Africa's history

After two centuries of injustice, a new continent is emerging

Editorial

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A [larger](#) | [smaller](#)

It is 60 years since Africa began to emerge from the shadow of colonialism. For much of the intervening time, this paper has charted the continent's battles with poverty, famine, pestilence, corruption, drought, Aids and war. It was only right that the developed world focused on some of its poorest inhabitants. And it was right that richer countries came to the aid of those less fortunate. But the story of Africa's despond took root and crowded out other news. At times, and over the years, it seemed as though there was no other news from Africa.

We framed post-colonial Africa with the same narrative for decades – this was a continent that was, to European eyes, gamely but mostly failing to come to terms with its new-found independence.

We watched, appalled, as unimaginable horrors unfolded in Biafra, Uganda and Angola. Later still, genocide in Rwanda and Congo seemed to eclipse all that had gone before. All the while, a long list of corrupt and venal despots turned their rule into virtual kleptocracies and stole their children's futures.

The TV coverage of the Ethiopian famine and the subsequent Live Aid concerts of the 1980s drew attention to the corrosive and deadly poverty visited on post-colonial Africa. The response from the west was impressive – massive injections of aid and an explosion in the number of non-government organisations dedicated to improving the lives of millions of Africans. In this story, Africans were the victims and we were on hand to help.

This image has been hard to shake. Last year, at an event organised by ONE, the musician and campaigner [Bob Geldof](#), in typically forthright fashion, lashed out at western media for being locked in a timewarp – a vision of Africa rooted in the mid 1980s. He pointed out that a whole new Africa was taking shape, where capitalism, consumerism and technology were the engines of a new, dynamic continent. It was one that Europe – if only to capitalise on a whole new generation of African consumers – should wake up to or it would miss out. Africa, he insisted, could be Europe's economic saviour if it found the ways and means to open new trade routes with the continent and do business with its growing army of consumers.

Last week, [Bono](#), at another event organised by ONE in Johannesburg, sat and listened to African activists, entrepreneurs, students and business leaders. Here was a new set of 21st-century African storytellers. These were not victims. Their stories were ones of confidence, action, self-assertion, impatience, innovation, determination – and success. At the end of the afternoon, Bono, when asked what had made the biggest impression on him, said: "We have to start telling these stories, and if we can't tell these stories, then at least let's get out of the way of these stories."

The African story has changed. Here are some new headlines: the African economy is predicted to grow at an average rate of more than 7% over the next two decades – faster than [China](#).

- 100 African companies have revenues greater than \$1bn.
- The combined GDP of the largest 11 African countries will be bigger than Russia's or China's by 2050.
- Africa has 60% of the world's total amount of uncultivated arable land.
- The rate of return on foreign investment in Africa is greater than in any other developing region.

Six of the 10 most rapidly expanding economies in the world over the past decade were in sub-

Saharan Africa: Angola, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Mozambique and Chad, countries we have stalked for decades in search of war, famine and corruption. But their stories are changing.

With this acceleration in growth comes an improvement in living conditions. In the past decade, the poverty rate and child mortality have declined, primary school enrolment has increased and more Africans have access to clean water. Clearly, many of the countries still face serious challenges and there is still an urgent need for aid in the short term. But the narrative is changing and while we have been busy telling one African story, they have been busier writing another.

Part of the new wealth has been driven by the rise in commodity prices. Africa has the largest reserve of untapped mineral wealth of any continent. But retail, telecoms, banking and technological industries are all surging forward, too. Where the west once came to the aid of Africa, it is now China, and increasingly India, which is investing in the continent. China has poured in billions of dollars – but at a price. Its massive investment in infrastructure is in return for access to the continent's minerals, to help drive its own manufacturing boom.

China stands accused by some of conducting a new colonial war, ripping the mineral heart out of Africa. But many Africans don't see it that way and are grateful for the huge amount of money that will help lead their own economic recovery – roads, bridges, schools, hospitals. China's investment is changing the face of Africa and there are now 1 million Chinese living and working on the continent. The west is not best placed to lecture Africa on what is in its best interests. Africans are well able to judge the pitfalls and benefits for themselves and decide accordingly. But, given all our collective histories, it makes sense to try to ensure that this new race to Africa is not simply a 21st-century pirate raid.

Africa has been beset by corruption, but corruption doesn't only reside south of the equator. How many western oil companies have used slush funds to pay off officials in developing countries? A precious natural resource is spirited away with little or no benefit accruing to the ordinary citizen. Corruption, wherever it is, and however it is visited on Africa, is unconscionable.

Which is why transparency and fairness in the way these extraction deals are conducted are vital. For this reason, ONE, with the global grassroots Publish What You Pay coalition, has been in the vanguard, highlighting the dangers. It lobbied the White House and forced an amendment to the landmark Dodd-Frank finance reform bill last year. The Cardin-Lugar amendment received bipartisan support. This is an attempt to force real transparency in the extractive industries and in the exploitation of minerals. It makes it legally binding for all companies registered on the New York Stock Exchange to reveal the details of their extraction deals with African countries. In turn, this empowers civic societies with the information they need to hold their governments to account. Sudanese entrepreneur Mo Ibrahim has said that the Cardin-Lugar amendment is more important to Africa than the debt relief of the last decade.

The issue of transparency will be debated this week at the G20. Nicolas Sarkozy has already signalled his support and we welcome the news we report in today's paper that the UK government will support a similar EU initiative. The UK government is right to support legally binding measures to ensure that companies based in the UK publish their payments in all countries they operate in.

Africa has only just begun to recover from two centuries of injustice. We can now play a role in ensuring that it is protected from another egregious raid on its natural resources. If Africans can benefit from the mineral wealth lying beneath their soil, and if civic societies can keep their governments' vision honest, then those resources will pay for all their futures.

Europe and the UK have been slow to adjust to the rise of an Africa powered by economic growth and a burgeoning consumer boom. The African lions are finding their voice. A new generation of men and women has the ambition and imagination to reshape the continent in their own image – confident, assertive, successful, bold and proud. Just ask Hosni Mubarak. This is their story, not ours. As Ory Okolloh, Google's policy manager in Africa, said in Johannesburg last week, there is a new train leaving the station in Africa – and we had better climb on board or it will leave without us.

The story of Africa is changing. And we will be spreading the news.

