

# ***Africa Policy Outlook 2001***

By Africa Action

---

By the end of the year 2000, a peace treaty between Ethiopia and Eritrea, peaceful transfers of power after elections in Senegal and Ghana, and continued growth of public debate about the future in almost every African country were among signs of advance in a year that was more than usually short of good news. Economic growth in sub-Saharan Africa was estimated to climb to 2.7 percent for the year, up from 2.1 percent in 1999. Per capita income in the region south of the Sahara rose by an estimated two tenths of one percent. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) announced debt reduction packages of \$34 billion for 22 countries, including 18 in Africa.

But the debt relief packages, slow in coming and even slower in implementation, provided no sustainable exit from the continent's overwhelming debt burden. The aggregate economic growth increase, primarily due to rising income for oil-producing countries and to a limited economic recovery in South Africa, was not widely shared. The conflict zone that extended from Angola in the southwest through the Congo to Sudan in the northeast was still a humanitarian disaster area of enormous proportions. In December, the Food and Agriculture Organization estimated that 28 million Africans were at risk of severe food shortages, due both to war and to renewed drought in eastern Africa.

## **HIV/AIDS**

Over every other issue loomed the exponentially growing HIV/AIDS pandemic, which cost an estimated 2.4 million African lives during the year. The continent registered 3.8 million new infections

in 2000, a slight decrease from the 4 million in 1999. But virtually every international agency, including the IMF and the World Bank, acknowledged during the year that the unprecedented humanitarian disaster - the most deadly epidemic in human history - would also have escalating pervasive negative effects on economies and governments.

The World AIDS conference in Durban, South Africa in July and the African Development Forum in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in December were the highlights of much increased public attention to the pandemic during the year, both globally and within Africa. News reports stressed not only the overwhelmingly disproportionate effect of AIDS on Africa, but also the failure of the international community to respond with more than token action. Drug companies were targeted by activists and exposed by the media for blocking efforts to provide affordable treatment drugs to combat the effects of AIDS. The 'Statement of Concern on Women and HIV/AIDS' issued at the conference drew particular attention to the significance of gender inequalities defined by class, generation, race, ethnicity and political power.

An African summit meeting on the issue is scheduled for Nigeria in April, and a special UN Assembly on HIV/AIDS for June. But whether there is real progress during the year will depend on the answers to practical questions such as the following:

(1) to what extent other African countries emulate Senegal and Uganda in putting into effect comprehensive AIDS prevention programs,



***Africa Action***  
50 Years of Activism for Africa

(2) whether wealthy countries and multilateral agencies come anywhere near increasing finance on HIV/AIDS to the \$3 billion a year estimated to be needed for prevention and \$4.5 billion a year more for treatment (current funding levels are probably less than 10% of this for prevention, and almost none for treatment), and

(3) whether drug companies and the international community can be pressured to respond to the demand to 'reduce the prices of [AIDSrelated] drugs to a level commensurate with their production costs' (African Development Forum, AIDS Consensus and Plan, December 2000). [Initial indications are that the Bush administration will instead be reversing concessions on this issue made by the Clinton administration - see (1) below.]

## Debt

At year's end the debt burden also remains a pervasive obstacle to Africa's capacity to deal with other issues, despite additional relief won from creditors. The \$34 billion package announced under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative included \$25 billion for 18 African countries, almost half the outstanding debt owed by those countries. Nigeria, one of the African countries not eligible under HIPC, also gained a rescheduling package from creditors saving it \$1 billion in payments this year - on its debt of some \$30 billion. Even the HIPC relief, however, will only be implemented over a period of years, still leaves out 15 African countries formally included in the program, and goes with long lists of new conditions countries must implement to get the relief. The creditors' announcements of progress have satisfied neither debtor countries nor activists

engaged on the issue, because their programs do not provide sustainable solutions.

While a few countries, notably Mozambique and Uganda, have received substantial enough reductions to have a significant effect, the issue will continue to loom large on the African agenda in 2001. A continent-wide meeting of debt cancellation activists in Dakar in December called not only for cancellation of illegitimate debts, but also for reparations from rich countries for damage to Africa. Worldwide the demand is rising for a new mechanism to deal with the debt. Thus in September UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan called for 'immediate suspension' of all debt payments by HIPC countries and others that should be added to the list, and for an independent body - not controlled by creditor countries - to consider new mechanisms to address the debt. Among other venues, the annual G-7 meeting of rich countries in Genoa, Italy in July will be the target of debt cancellation activists.

## Economy

For 2001, international agencies rate Africa's economic prospects as modestly better than last year. However, their forecasts stressed that almost all African countries remained highly vulnerable to changes in primary commodity prices. As a result, growth will be largely concentrated in oil-producing countries, which are expected to benefit from high prices through 2002. But export prices of most primary commodities, such as coffee and other agricultural products, are expected to remain depressed.

The debate over economic policies will continue in the coming year, as the World Bank and its allies continue to preach the virtues of market openness and critics denounce the lack of structural change that could lead to sustainable



**Africa Action**

50 Years of Activism for Africa

[www.africaaction.org](http://www.africaaction.org)

human development on the continent. The creditors' 'Washington Consensus' on economic policy is now generally accompanied by an expressed commitment to poverty reduction as well as growth. Some measures - such as demanding greater efficiency and anti-corruption measures from African governments - win support across the political spectrum. But African civil society is strongly critical of the standard packages imposed by creditors, even when the label is changed from 'structural adjustment' to 'poverty reduction.' Other observers note that even when particular measures are justified, imposing them from outside without democratic consent runs a high risk of counterproductive micro-management.

The World Bank, as well as developing countries, now regularly stresses that high trade barriers by rich countries hurt developing countries. So far, however, measures to reduce these barriers, whether the U.S. Africa Growth and Opportunity Act passed last year, or the current 'Everything but Arms' initiative now being debated by the European Union, seem to offer more than they deliver. 2001 will be a critical year to see whether such initiatives deliver more than token benefits to a few African countries.

## **Conflict Zones**

Ongoing open warfare in Africa showed pronounced differences between regions in 2000, as in the previous year, although the effects impacted the entire continent. Fragile cease-fires punctuated by episodes of violence, rather than open war, prevailed in earlier conflict zones in West Africa. A peace treaty between Ethiopia and Eritrea was finally signed at the end of the year, and deployment of UN observers began. As in 1999, the largest interlinked set of unresolved conflicts included Angola in west central Africa; the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the

heart of the continent, Burundi and Rwanda in the Great Lakes region, tying in not only to eastern Congo but also to Uganda and to Sudan; and the perennial war in Sudan itself.

The death of Congolese President Laurent Kabila in January removed one of the most stubborn blocks to implementation of a peace settlement in that country. However, the odds against significant advance towards peace remained high, unless both Congo's neighbors involved in the war and the international community more broadly engage actively in much more serious efforts to reconcile their own interests as well as to engage Congolese civil society and provide support for Congolese efforts to establish a government representative of their interests.

In other conflicts, the use of natural resources to buy weapons will continue on the agenda in 2001. Year-end reports on conflict in Angola and Sierra Leone pinpointed the role of the exchange of diamonds for weapons. It was unclear, however, how far talk about 'conflict diamonds' would go towards more effective measures for implementing sanctions to reduce the flow of arms in Angola, Sierra Leone and neighboring countries. Moreover, the peace plans in both these countries remain unimplemented. In Sudan, increased oil revenues to the Sudanese regime - now providing 20 percent of the government budget - have further reduced the chances for steps towards peace. International condemnation of the regime and of the Canadian oil company Talisman, the lead producer, will likely continue to grow during the year.

## **Democracy and Human Rights**

For the coming year, as in other recent years, the prospects for further democratization of African countries present a very mixed picture. While the majority of African countries claim legitimacy as a



result of competitive elections, and independent press and civil society organizations in most countries continue to advance, the opportunities for participation and free expression continue to be widely limited by entrenched hierarchical and repressive structures. In several countries, notably Cote d'Ivoire and Zimbabwe, the failure to advance further with democratic change may prove the catalyst for further civil strife.

Elections in Senegal in March, Mauritius in September, and Ghana in December each resulted in peaceful transfers of power. In Cote d'Ivoire, a popular revolt ousted army leader General Guei, but neither the Presidential elections which precipitated the ouster nor subsequent parliamentary elections, boycotted by a major opposition party because of the exclusion of their leading candidates, seemed likely to lead to stability in the coming year. In Zimbabwe the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) won 57 of 120 contested seats (30 are appointed by government) against President Robert Mugabe's incumbent ZANU (PF), bringing a strong opposition voice to Parliament. The multi-faceted conflict over economic decline, involvement in the war in the Congo, unresolved land reform issues, and human rights abuses by the Mugabe government will continue in 2001 to be a threat to southern African stability.

Elsewhere, two key African countries seen as hopeful by many faced significant challenges in the coming year. In Mozambique, a widely cited model for post-conflict democratic reconciliation, the assassination of investigative journalist Carlos Cardoso and the death of 80 prisoners by suffocation in northern Mozambique raised questions about the will of the government to maintain accountability and preserve peace. And giant Nigeria managed another year of civilian rule but fundamental issues still remained unaddressed, including regional and ethnic inequalities, and in particular the fair distribution

of oil wealth. And in Africa's other 'giant,' South Africa, the lines are being sharply drawn over government economic policy and its response to the AIDS pandemic.

(1) Kaiser Daily HIV/AIDS Report  
<http://report.kff.org/hiv aids>

