

14 October 2021

AFRICA'S BLUEPRINT TO BUILD BACK BETTER



Peter Burdin is the BBC's former Africa Bureau Chief. He has thirty-five years' experience as a senior editorial leader in the BBC's International News operation and has worked extensively in Africa, the Middle East, Europe, the Indian sub-continent and Asia from where he has covered numerous major international news stories. He has won several Sony Awards for his news and documentary programmes, including the war in Bosnia, the Tiananmen Square protests, South Africa's first democratic elections and the funeral of President Nelson Mandela. Peter is currently an Advisor to BBC Africa and is lecturing in International Journalism at universities in the UK and Africa.



Mahen Kundasamy was High Commissioner of Mauritius to the UK from 2005 to 2015 and prior thereto High Commissioner of Mauritius to South Africa. Currently living in London, Mahen was Director for Government Affairs for Sub-Saharan Africa at Citigroup for two years following which from 2016 to 2018 he was Deputy Chief of Staff for Strategy at the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (JMEC) for the implementation of the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan. During his extensive career of over 25 years, he has built a formidable senior African-relations track record within both the public and private sectors.

"Africa is the youngest, fastest-growing continent on the planet. Its future is bright."

With these words Ambassador Partnership's Mahen Kundasamy, Mauritius' former High Commissioner to South Africa and the UK sums up his optimism for a continent that he's spent many years serving as a diplomat and observing its leaders at close quarters.

He was part of the discussions that led to the creation of the African Union's Agenda 2063 blueprint for sustainable development and economic growth of the continent under the theme "The Africa We Want". It envisages a future Africa which creates a world-class infrastructure, doubles intra-Africa trade, and encourages a skills, science and technology revolution to help eradicate extreme poverty.

In addition to plans for green growth and blue economy, Agenda 2063 will also promote the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), a continent-wide free trade area of 1.3 billion people in a single market worth more than \$3 Trillion.

Mahen points out this will establish the largest free trade area in the world which will be extremely beneficial and will lift millions of Africans out of extreme poverty:

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“The scope of the AfCFTA is large. The agreement will reduce tariffs among member countries and will cover policy areas such as trade facilitation and services as well as convergence of regulatory measures. It will significantly reshape markets and economies across the region and boost output in the services, manufacturing and natural resources sectors”.

He also believes that it will set in train a range of other developments that go beyond economic matters:

“If successfully implemented Africa will be able to take greater responsibility for its own security be it in respect to terrorism, climate change, economic volatility, energy insecurity or a health pandemic.”

And this is where the African Union’s Agenda 2063 becomes a crucial player in its key theme to build “The Africa We Want”. As the document states it seeks to “create an integrated, prosperous and powerful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the global arena”, and Mahen believes that sits at the heart of Africa’s transformation:

“Agenda 2063 is in essence a manifestation and affirmation to pursue the fundamental principle of Pan-Africanism for the expansion of Africa’s capacity for its citizens to pursue a better future through self-reliance.”

“This Pan-African vision is deeply historically rooted. Africa still carries centuries old historical scars and these scars run deep amongst many of the current political leaders. They felt a deep sense of purpose that this was the moment to set a strategic road map to realign Africa and assert its role both internally and internationally.”

“In many ways the negative economic and political impact of Covid19 on African countries has brought a sense of urgency and dynamism as it has exposed how dependent Africa is on global supply chains. There is now the realisation amongst some African leaders that an accelerated implementation process of the AfCFTA can serve as a framework for a sustainable economic recovery from the pandemic.”

“The AfCFTA will usher in the kinds of reforms necessary to enhance long-term growth, reduce poverty and broaden economic inclusion.”

Mahen believes that there are clearly some challenges to achieving this vision, not least the reality that Africa is a vast and diverse continent, inhabited by numerous ethnic and linguistic groups which may hamper convergence. There are also, he believes, the challenges of a lack of institutional capacity and the human and financial resources to drive the implementation responsibilities that the Agenda 2063 strategy entails.

He is encouraged, however, by early signs of integration that he’s witnessed in East Africa:

“We have already seen clear benefits at regional level where the case of Rwanda, Kenya and Uganda highlights the positive impacts of free trade coupled with the free movement of people on cross-border trade. By rationalising administrative procedures for work permits and entry visas, these countries have increased cross-border trade with each other by 50%.”

Having worked closely on Peace and Security issues within the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and having experienced at close quarters how, in a uniquely African approach, leaders including President Nelson Mandela and his own Prime Minister Dr Navin Ramgoolam addressed these challenges, he is immensely confident that inspirational and transformative African leaders will continue to have the toughness, vigour and energy to face and deliver African solutions to some seemingly intractable issues.

“President Nelson Mandela is the person that has inspired me the most during my posting in South Africa. I felt very honoured and privileged to have had the opportunity to present my credentials to such an extraordinary and awe-inspiring leader at the State House in Pretoria. I remember fondly the many SADC Summits where his wisdom, guidance and advice were instrumental in finding a collective way forward on some critical issues.”

“In particular President Mandela’s tremendous efforts, resolve and unique mediation skills and patience in trying to resolve the terrible conflict in Angola. All these efforts eventually lead to the foundation of a Government of National Unity after four decades of conflict.”

Mahen was also closely involved in helping the implementation process of the Peace Agreement in South Sudan when he was Deputy Chief of Staff for Strategy for President Festus Mogae who was Chair of the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission:

“Having experienced at close quarters the capacity of African leaders to resolve the most intractable and challenging issues, I have no doubt that Africa does have the determination and political skills to face up to any current and future challenges without losing its focus of the big picture which is to meet most, if not all, of the strategic objectives of Agenda 2063.”

Mahen continues to play a key role in the future direction of the continent and he concludes that “Africa’s future is bright – not just for Africans, but for the entire world.”

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