

Written evidence from APPG for Africa

Introducing the APPG for Africa

- I. This submission has been prepared by Henrietta Bailey of the Royal African Society on behalf of the members of the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Africa. The Royal African Society provides the secretariat to the APPG.
- II. The APPG for Africa was established in 2009 and exists to facilitate mutually beneficial relationships between Africa and the UK and works to further understanding within UK parliament of contemporary African and Pan-African matters. The APPG creates space for parliamentarians to engage in dialogue with African diaspora, civil society, institutions, thought leaders and private sector to promote African led-development agendas and challenge outdated stereotypes through positive relationships between the UK and African countries. With a membership of over 200 parliamentarians from across-parties and houses, it is one of the largest and most active APPGs in UK parliament. The group is chaired by Chi Onwurah MP & Lord David Chidgey.

Executive summary

- III. This submission draws on recent policy reports and independent inquiries of the APPG for Africa as well as reflections from an parliamentarians, civil society, academics and officials that we have engaged with at various meetings.
- IV. Reflecting on the terms of reference- the key points the group wish to make to members of the committee are:
 - It is difficult to make a well informed assessment of the Government’s new “Strategic Approach to Africa” as, apart from the former PM’s speech in Cape Town in August 2018, it has not been communicated in any detail in public. We welcome the narrative of the strategic approach of building relations that are “win/win” and of mutual benefit and the top five broad themes of the strategy, although unsure how they were selected, on the surface seem fair. However, we have drawn attention to some areas within those that may need deeper consideration if we are to build mutually beneficial relations.
 - In particular, if we are to have win-win relations with African countries, we need to ensure any trade agreements made post-Brexit between the UK and African states respect African priorities as well as our own, in particular the desire and ability of Africa countries to industrialise.
 - Further, African countries are likely to seek easier access to the UK for people. Our recent report found that African visitors to the UK are twice as likely to be refused a visa than applicants from any other part of the world. As such, many Africans and companies working in Africa are deciding to take their business elsewhere, often to other European countries, with diplomatic and economic consequences for the UK.¹

The need for a strategy

- V. The APPG for Africa was consulted informally on the development of a new strategy by Guy Warrington from the FCO Africa Strategy Team in October 2015 who were

working on a review of HMG's work on Africa, with a view to possibly working up a Strategy on Africa. This was of great interest to members who had long advocated for more engagement with African countries and pan-African initiatives. Since then the APPG has met 6 monthly with either the Minister for Africa and FCO Director Africa for updates on the FCO's work in this regard and meeting at least annually with each.

- VI. From these regular meetings, especially more recently, the APPG members have been left with the strong impression that the "New Africa Strategy" seems to be less a comprehensive 'strategy' than an outline of some broad policy themes where the UK would like to focus more with regards to Africa. From what we understand there is no internal documents outlining a strategy, and the lack of a public reference point, other than the PM's speech, limits its impact on African perceptions that the UK is de-prioritising the continent.
- VII. When the APPG Chairs and Officers requested something in writing back in November 2018- we were sent 10 bullet points entitled "The UK's New Approach to Sub-Saharan Africa" from the Africa Unit at the FCO.ⁱⁱ Unfortunately, this lacked any detail as to what the new strategy was, its motivation, how it would work with the private sector, its interaction with ODA and across departments or any timeframes or costings.
- VIII. A clear strategy is essential if the UK is to combat the impression that we are neglecting Africa, and effectively increase our engagement with and influence on the continent. Broadly speaking we welcome the emphasis on "win win" partnerships and strongly believe that this is the correct and only direction for the UK to take to recapture interest and relevance with African states. We also recognise that many other investment partners in Africa, including China, use a similar rhetoric and are active in engaging African Governments. To stand out as a valuable partner, the UK needs deliver real mutuality in our partnerships and consult African stakeholders on the strategy in its design and ongoing implementation. What we do know about the strategy is outlined below along with brief reflections raising concerns over where the UK may need to do more to ensure we are building the foundations of mutually beneficial relations.

Five "strategic shifts" have been mentioned as part of the new approach:

A) Climate Change & Sustaining Natural Resources

British companies and their subsidiaries have in some cases caused environmental damage in African countries, often through the exploitation of natural resources. The UK Government should work in consultation with African governments to strengthen legislation to better enable companies to be held to account by affected communities in British and overseas courts. The Government should prioritise working with relevant authorities to ensure clean up and compensation are properly delivered. We need to continue supporting African efforts to mitigate climate change and to transition to more renewable and sustainable energy sources, including through micro-grids. Africa has significant, renewable energy resources and huge energy needs.

B) Inclusive growth & trade with focus on private sector

If the UK does leave the EU, the Government should prioritise continuity of trading terms with African countries in the short term. Longer term, the Government should critically

reflect on the lessons of the EU's Economic Partnership Agreements with Africa as outlined in our 2017 report.ⁱⁱⁱ

Any future trade agreements with between the UK and African countries should be built on mutual ambition and must allow real policy space for African countries to industrialise and build value adding supply chains between African countries. Further, future trade agreements must be constructed in such a way as to strengthen Africa's regional integration ambitions and the African Continental Free Trade Area.

To complement any new trading agreements, there should be renewed support for DFID's work in these countries to strengthen technical expertise within responsible departments and strengthen parliamentary and civil society oversight of trade agreements.

Finally, we welcome the intentions to strengthen financial centres and markets through partnering with the City of London. There is also some support for this from the AU Commission but with more emphasis on growing the financial markets abilities to invest in pan-African infrastructure projects. Equally our African partners routinely recognise that inclusive growth as a concept is undermined by the continued illicit financial flows out of Africa to the UK and elsewhere. As the report by the UN Economic Commission for Africa led by Thabo Mbeki found- Africa is a net creditor to the world and as such more needs to be done to work with Governments to strengthen their institutions to stop flows and to help recover identified stolen assets that are in the UK.^{iv} Not addressing this issue undermines all diplomatic efforts.

C) Security & stability

There is some concern that the Government may prioritise working with Governments and new security partners over human rights, for example, the ongoing funding from the UK for Libyan detention centres where migrants are routinely tortured is not something we should tolerate or continue funding.

D) Demography

Access to family planning and contraceptives services are essential for the empowerment of women and girls and we are aware of DFID's excellent work in this area. We are hopeful that a future cross-department strategy will protect and expand on this work. But the real solution to Africa's demographic dilemma is economic.

E) The Sahel

We welcome plans to open more consulates within the region but would like to see these also act as Visa Application Centres to make travel between countries in the region and the UK more accessible.

In addition, there are three key ambitions-

- The UK will host a major Africa investment summit which has been delayed from 2019 to 2020-

We are awaiting further details as to which stakeholders, officials and businesses will be involved and are concerned the planning and sharing of details are being left too late.

- the UK to become the largest G7 investor in Africa including via CDC by 2022- We welcome this increased investment but would like to see the strategy do more to ensure more local content, quality job creation and skills transfer when working with the private

sector and CDC. We would also like to see the CDC working together with other investors on larger and longer term inter-country transport and infrastructure projects that connect countries and strengthen regional supply chains and industry.

- £3.5 billion from UK Government to be spent in Africa by 2022-

We would like more details as to whether this will count as ODA, what this will be spent on and who will be spending it.

Coordination on Africa within Government – Visa problems

- I. On how the various government departments would work together we have been told that the Joint Africa Unit and the Inter-Ministerial Group will ensure that the FCO, DFID and DIT work together in a ‘fusion’ approach to ensure that both trade promotion and economic development happened in parallel. We requested an organigram in November 2018 but have yet to see one.
- II. We do however feel there is one key area of concern where the FCO and Home Office need to work more closely together or risk doing irreversible damage to UK-Africa relations and therefore the UK’s influence and relevance in Africa.
- III. Home Office statistics show that African visitors to the UK are twice as likely to be refused a visa than applicants from any other part of the world. After a 6 month inquiry looking into the issue we found the UK visit visa system is inaccessible to many Africans, under resourced, unaccountable and widely perceived as biased or even discriminating against Africans. Overall, the impact is that many Africans and companies working in Africa are deciding to carry out their business elsewhere, often in other European cities with economic consequences for the UK.
- IV. The report found the visas system is undermining government funded initiatives from other departments that are designed to build bridges between the UK and African countries and heard numerous cases where African diplomats and senior officials have been denied entry –which the former Immigration Minister, Rt. Hon. Caroline Nokes MP told us she regretted. The invasive nature of the information required is embarrassing and sometimes taken to be demeaning – a point raised with the APPG in person by a senior official at the African Union.
- V. British Ambassadors and High Commissions now have very limited power to intervene in visa cases, although we have found on occasions where there has been FCO intervention the situation has been resolved more quickly. As such we are calling for support for greater input from High Commissions and Embassies into the decision making process as a matter of course, with additional streamlined processes set up to simplify the process for VIPs.
- VI. Further, it is imperative that any reform to the visa system be undertaken in consultation across Whitehall to ensure a reformed system no longer undermines government spending and initiatives in other departments. The UK cannot be an outward- looking nation or ‘open for business’ without improving the systems that allow access to people. UKVI’s treatment of Africans is entirely at odds with the narrative of a post-Brexit “Global Britain”, which risks being an empty slogan if changes are not made. Trade with Africa and other emerging markets is going to be

even more crucial to us economically than it was before, and we cannot afford the handicap the visa system currently imposes.

- VII. In order to understand where UKVI is relied upon by other departments to deliver their objectives and identify what reforms are needed to allow strategic cross-department collaboration, we support an appointment of a Senior Responsible Officer as recommended by the Independent Chief Inspector for Borders and Immigration in January 2019 and we think the FCO need to recognise the gravity of this issue and support this recommendation with the Home Office.

Conclusion

- VIII. The UK has a great opportunity as it changes its status in the world to engage more actively and constructively in Africa. But the success of this will depend on Africans seeing clearly that it is genuinely a higher political priority for us. Actions will weigh more than words. And we cannot claim to be a ‘global Britain’ if we continue to exclude too many people with a genuine need and desire to visit.

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ⁱ The APPG for Africa, APPG for Malawi & APPG for Diaspora, Development and Migration (2019) *Visa Problems for African Visitors to the UK*. Available at <http://bit.ly/VisaRefusals>

ⁱⁱ FCO Africa Unit (2018) *The UK's New Approach to Sub-Saharan Africa*. Available here <http://www.royalafricansociety.org/document/overview-hmg-new-africa-strategy-november-2018>

ⁱⁱⁱ The APPG for Africa (2017) *The future of UK-Africa trade and development relations post Brexit*. Available at <http://www.royalafricansociety.org/sites/default/files/reports/APPG%20Africa-%20The%20future%20of%20Africa-UK%20relations%20post%20Brexit-%20Feb%202017.pdf>

^{iv} UNECA High-level Commission on Illicit Financial Flows from Africa (2015) *Stop it! Track it! Get it!: Illicit Financial Flows*. Available here <https://www.uneca.org/publications/illicit-financial-flows>