

An evaluation of the G8's commitment to the Kananaskis pledges

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Introduction

The G8 Africa Action Plan (G8AAP), proudly proclaimed by the leaders of the world's major market democracies at their annual Group of Eight (G8) summit held at Kananaskis, Canada, in June 2002, heralded an innovative and ambitious approach to transform the one region that the modernization of the past half century, and the rapid globalization of the previous decade, had largely left behind. With its 132 specific, concrete, future-oriented commitments, the Plan represented by far the greatest attention and collective commitment to Africa by the G8 since the inception of its annual summit at Rambouillet, France, in November 1975. The Plan was extraordinarily comprehensive and ambitious, for it included the traditional poverty reduction instruments of official development assistance (ODA) and debt relief, as well as important attention to trade liberalization, foreign direct investment (FDI), the confidence required for capital repatriation, good governance and conflict prevention (Kirton and Stefanova 2004). It was innovative, in its inclusion of support for a process of African-designed and -delivered peer review, in the G8's first serious attention paid to gender, in its emphasis on eliminating deadly conflict and in encouraging good governance as the key to poverty reduction.

Perhaps more important, the G8AAP offered a potential breakthrough in its new spirit of equal partnership between the G8 and the new vanguard democracies of Africa itself. The Plan was not the top-down imposition of a G8-constructed initiative, but a bottom-up response — and an overwhelmingly supportive response — to the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) brought to the same G8 leaders a year earlier at Genoa by the major, largely democratic leaders from Africa — Thabo Mbeki of South Africa, Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria, Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal, Abdelaziz Bouteflika of Algeria and Hosni Mubarak of Egypt. The first four of those African leaders returned to Kananaskis a year later, to participate for the first time in G8 history as equals with the G8 leaders in a session on Africa, held on the Summit's final day. As the Summit concluded, these African leaders and United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan from Ghana pronounced from the mountaintops of Kananaskis that they were pleased with what the G8 and they together had done.

Has the G8AAP made any difference? In particular, has it made a difference of the sort that the democratic leaders of the G8 and Africa together desired when they constructed and combined their respective plans 18 months ago? To provide a comprehensive and authoritative answer to these questions, it would be necessary to undertake several component analytical tasks. The first would be to assess whether the African agenda chosen, the particular principles and norms affirmed, and the specific commitments made in the two plans and in their fusion constituted an appropriate strategy for securing the intended goals, and if these goals were what Africans themselves really wanted and needed. The second task would be to determine if, a year and a half after Kananaskis, the G8 leaders had complied with the spirit of the promises and the letter of the commitments they made in the Plan. The third would be to assess whether the G8's African partners had lived up to their promises, which were necessary both to transmit and transform the promises at the Canadian mountaintop into real change on the African ground, and to ensure that the G8 had lived up to its promises, which were heavily conditional upon the Africans keeping theirs. The fourth task would be to assess whether other stakeholders in and outside Africa, including other countries, international organizations, political actors, civil society and the business community, had responded in the intended and in supportive ways. The fifth would be to evaluate whether the G8AAP at Kananaskis, as reinforced and adjusted by the G8 leaders at their Evian Summit in June 1–3, 2003, remained valid, in the light of new knowledge and changed conditions in the world today.

This paper concentrates on the critical second stage of this process — examining whether the G8 countries have kept the specific commitments they made in their G8AAP at Kananaskis. It also considers part of the fifth stage, by assessing whether the G8's commitments at Evian were supportive reinforcements, implementing extensions or appropriate adjustments of the Plan, and whether the relevant Evian commitments themselves had been complied with, by the time responsibility for chairing and hosting the G8 passed from the France to the United States on January 1, 2004. This narrow focus provides an essential foundation for the larger assessment task that

is required. It is intended to assist the G8 and African leaders in monitoring whether the G8 is on track, and what lessons might be learned, as a basis for any mid-course corrections or additional action at forthcoming summits that should come. Because the G8AAP was so ambitious and wide ranging, and because the tasks of eliminating conflict, installing good governance and reducing poverty in Africa will take much longer than the 18 months since Kananaskis to achieve, it is arguably premature to focus too heavily at this time on the on-the-ground changes and the resulting outcomes in Africa itself. It is, nonetheless, timely to examine closely whether the G8 countries have at least begun to undertake the instrumental, implementing actions they so boldly and impressively committed themselves to in June 2002.

This paper thus begins, in Part 1, by exploring the collective, “decisional” commitments, contained in the Kananaskis Summit’s G8AAP, with some contextual consideration of the G8’s action in regard to Africa in earlier years, and to the commitments in NEPAD that the African leaders brought. Part 2 examines the compliance of G8 members with their priority commitments in the Plan, both at the six-month mark when the G8 chair passed from Canada to France and at the one-year mark when France’s 2003 Evian Summit began. Part 3 addresses the African-related commitments made at the Evian Summit and their relationship to those of Kananaskis the year before. Part 4 reviews the compliance record of the G8 with the Evian commitments, both overall and in regard to Africa itself. Part 5 offers some conclusions about what this record of G8 commitment and compliance might mean for the prospects and path of catalyzing useful action on and for Africa at — and after — the U.S.-hosted Summit at Sea Island, Georgia, on June 8–10, 2004.

This analysis concludes that the G8’s 2002 Kananaskis Summit, infused by the spirit of solidarity bred by the events of September 11, 2001, produced a uniquely high number of innovative and ambitious commitments to Africa. However, G8 members complied poorly with these Africa-related commitments during the following year, in part due to the distractions and divisions among the G8 arising from the war with Iraq in the spring of 2003. The 2003 Evian Summit made far fewer and far less ambitious commitments to Africa, although they remained substantial and reinforcing. Seven months later, G8 members were complying with their Evian commitments to a moderately high degree, in part because the divisions over Iraq had begun to fade. This re-emerging spirit of G8 unity, and the United States’s record of making and keeping Africa-related commitments at G8 summits, suggests there is value in trying to catalyze action on those parts of the G8 Africa Action Plan that are closest to the themes of security, prosperity and freedom that President George W. Bush has chosen as a focus for the G8 Summit he will host in June 2004.

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