

Jean-Pierre Madjirangue\*

# The Africa-Europe Civil Society Forum: A New Instrument of Cooperation between North and South

**W**ithin the context of the Euro-African Summit of Heads of State, held in Cairo April 3-4, the European Commission and the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe, in cooperation with representatives of European and African civil society, organised an Africa-Europe Civil Society Forum (Lisbon, Portuguese Presidency of the EU, March 31 - April 1).

This exercise was the result of many months of regional preparation and culminated in a final Declaration, which was presented - backed by OAU and EU Presidents in office - to the Heads of State during the Cairo Summit.

## SPECIAL ATTENTION

Special attention was placed on the reinforcement of national and regional capacities for well-being and cit-

society in the North is to serve as a resonance box to the initiatives proposed by the Africans themselves and provide them a dimension of European support.

Also noteworthy, is civil society's commitment towards the search for solutions within the domains of poverty eradication, development of social well-being linked to the economic realm and to globalisation, individual and democratic rights, rule of law, and adequate management of public affairs.

Thus, for an efficient implementation of the resolutions adopted from the processes, a follow-up group, made up by representatives of African and European civil society was implemented for the main purpose of translating the recom-



Africa-Europe Civil Society Forum, Lisbon, March 2000

eration, elaborated an action plan over three years (2001-2003).

agents, but also, and especially, enables this society to play a counter-weight role in democratisation processes. To achieve this, the Africa-

The Forum, thus, provides actions to improve, first of all, the living conditions of the populations in order to support actions for lasting human development: more specifically, actions within the realms of poverty eradication, conflict prevention and management, and adequate governance: inclusion of the young and of women; food safety; the fight against corruption, as well as the fight against sexually transmitted diseases.

In order to enable organizations of African and European society to better play their role, training of the supervisory grades of civil society is envisioned, this within a framework of decentralised cooperation. The foreseen activities, thus enable African and Eu-

# Lessons for Poor Nations

Anthony Stoppard

**W**hile many more have joined the ranks of the least developed countries (LDC), Botswana is the only country to save the community of nations from being a road of one-way traffic into poverty and marginalisation.

In 30 years, it's the only country to graduate from LDC status to developing status.

How has it done this? For one, it has practiced good political and economic governance long before it became a buzzword.

"The country has always been led by economists who prized political and economic stability. Botswana was a democracy that never experimented with socialism since day one," says Africa Institute for Policy Analysis and Economic Integration (AIPAEl) executive director, Lula Gebreyesus.

## THREAT OF AIDS

Now, HIV/AIDS threatens to undercut the gains. UNAIDS says Botswana has the highest rate of the epidemic in the world.

"AIDS is reversing the positive social indicators of which we have been so very proud. AIDS is laying waste a genera-

tion of workers," says President Festus Mogae.

"There is nothing that represents a bigger threat to our lives than HIV/AIDS," says Rev. Mpho Moruakgomo. It's estimated that one in three Botswana is HIV-positive.

A former British colony, Botswana has been independent since 1966. Its three presidents since have all served in the country's finance or economic planning ministries, giving them a solid grounding macro-economic management.

While the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) has been in power since independence, each election has been contested by as many as 15 political parties. Botswana is generally considered to have a remarkably good human rights and press freedom record, although two recent incidents have blotted its record.

## BLOTS

Convicted South African murderer, Mariette Bosch, was executed in April with unseemly haste despite an international outcry - the country's television chief, Chris Bishop, resigned soon after, claiming his story on the incident had been spiked.

In the second incident, the Botswana government also

withdrew all state advertising from "The Guardian," the country's oldest independent newspaper, after it reported on the alleged abuse of power by cabinet ministers.

Despite these incidents, media freedom does not seem to be in terminal danger. Newspapers regularly carry scathing editorials about the cabinet.

Gebreyesus is also enthusiastic about Botswana's economic policies. "The government invests in Botswana. Any country that invests in itself attracts other investors," she says. "They have put their money into human resource development, transport and telecommunication infrastructure."

"Where it lacked capacity it was not ashamed to bring in skills from other countries to ensure proper leadership and management of government departments and institutions," she adds.

## SUCCESS STORY

Over 30 years ago, Botswana started out as one of the poorest countries in the world. Today, it has a growing free market economy - with 26 months worth of foreign reserves, one of the highest in the world. Most of its income is

generated from the sale of precious stones - it's the largest exporter of gemstone diamonds in the world and this makes up 45 per cent of gross domestic product.

The country also exports beef and has healthy tourism and manufacturing industries. The tourism industry is boosted by the fact that the country is home to the Okavango Delta, the world's largest inland delta and a wildlife paradise. The nearby Chobe National Park has the world's biggest elephant population.

Vehicle production for export is an important manufacturing industry. Like many other Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries, income and custom taxes are also an important source of revenue.

As a whole, the economy's GDP is growing at around 7 percent a year, according to 1999 estimates - among the highest on the continent. However, specific sectors, like telecommunications and air and rail transport, have recorded double-digit growth, according to government figures.

Despite this, the World Fact Book estimates that in 1999, just under half the country's 1.5 million people lived below the

poverty line and unemployment is between 20 and 40 percent of the working population.

The Botswana government has spelt out its vision for the country in the year 2016. It includes plans for heavy investments in education, information technology and telecommunications, infrastructure, housing, social security and protection of the environment.

## KEY INITIATIVES

Two key development initiatives already underway are a water pipeline from the north to the south of the country - the country regularly suffers from droughts - and the Trans-Kalahari road that will link the Botswana towns of Gaborone and Francistown, with the port of Walvis Bay in neighbouring Namibia.

Gebreyesus warns that the spread of HIV and AIDS may slow down Botswana's economic growth, but is confident that the country will escape the fallout from the political and security crises in neighbouring Zimbabwe.

"Botswana has and will remain stable for a long time. It has been leading economic growth in the region for 15 years and will most likely continue to do so."