

# The cautious optimist

According to our Survey, Sub-Saharan Africa is the region most optimistic about tackling the global challenges we all face. But can this optimism be turned into opportunity? We meet Donald Kaberuka, President of the African Development Bank, who gives us his first-hand regional perspective.



Donald Kaberuka in the AfDB headquarters, Tunis © Mark Leary

Donald Kaberuka, President of the African Development Bank (AfDB) and Chair of the Global Agenda Council on Africa, has heard the same cliché as everyone else. Africa is the continent with the troubled past and the vast potential for development, if only its leaders could find a way of responsibly tapping its phenomenal resources. It's become a familiar narrative for the region that is now being courted by international partners as a place of growth and prosperity, but Kaberuka insists that beyond the cliché there is evidence of real change.

He points to the results from the latest Survey on the Global Agenda, which found that Sub-Saharan Africa is comparatively the world's most optimistic region when it comes to tackling the challenges the world faces in 2014. And while he's not about to be swept away by a groundswell of good feeling, he shares the optimism: "It's not my job to debate whether the glass is half-empty or half-full – figuring out how to fill the glass, that's my task."

"It's where we came from," he says of the region's positivity. "We went to the bottom and now we have the chance to come back up. The Survey found that poverty, unemployment and youth unemployment

are the most pressing challenges for our region to tackle and that's precisely what we intend to do."

Under Kaberuka's leadership, the Global Agenda Council on Africa has identified six key focus points, ranging from building human capacity through education, entrepreneurship and talent mobility, to managing the emerging China-Africa dialogue. Focused, measurable and (it's hoped) achievable, they provide a carefully considered structure that takes Africa's development away from vague sentiment and anchors it firmly in reality.

But this is a job bigger than any one institution and Kaberuka says the key to success is in building lasting alliances between organisations. The Council on Africa has aligned itself with Kaberuka's own AfDB, as well as the African Union Commission (AUC) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), which together represent the continent's three major regional organisations. Drawing these organisations together and promoting his agenda of pragmatic progress wherever he goes, Kaberuka works tirelessly to overcome the cliché. And under no circumstances will he fall foul to complacency. ►

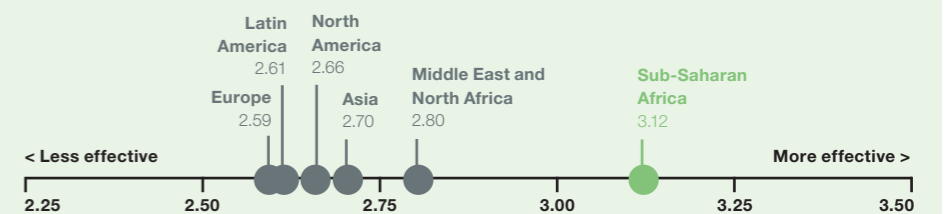
## How effectively are key sectors addressing global challenges?



1.00 = Not at all effectively 2.00 = Not very effectively 3.00 = Somewhat effectively  
4.00 = Very effectively 5.00 = Extremely effectively

Source: Survey on the Global Agenda 2013

## According to different regions, how effectively are world institutions identifying global challenges?



1.00 = Not at all effectively 2.00 = Not very effectively 3.00 = Somewhat effectively  
4.00 = Very effectively 5.00 = Extremely effectively

Source: Survey on the Global Agenda 2013





Donald Kaberuka in the AfDB headquarters, Tunis © Mark Leary

“Much remains to be done,” he concedes. “Whether it’s issues around institutions, around better management of natural resources, around better democratic institutions, around expanding our economies and moving up the value chain... In other words, I focus on what makes this momentum sustainable.”

### Focus on the future

Born in Rwanda in 1951 and educated in Tanzania and Britain, Kaberuka served as his homeland’s Minister of Finance and Planning from 1997–2005. He leads the team credited with laying the foundations for Africa’s economic transformation and he says his own optimism is rooted in looking to the future, as embodied in the mobile-phone-wielding young people like those who fuelled the Arab Spring.

“The young people, who are now the majority of Africans, they know what is needed, they are better connected,” he says, adding that this connectivity will place pressure on leaders to build “institutions that can deliver for the people, institutions that are clean, institutions that are accountable.”

There’s clearly an appetite for these changes among young people. The Survey found that 18–29-year-olds are more concerned than older age groups about a lack of values in leadership, and Kaberuka says that in Africa, as elsewhere, young people must come first. Half of Africa’s 1 billion people are 17 or younger and the AfDB predicts the active population between the ages of 15 and 64 will triple between 2005 and 2060. That could mean higher productivity and faster growth, but only if young people get the training and support they need. He also notes that half of these young people are women and girls, and many of them are key agricultural producers and agribusiness entrepreneurs. He singles out countries like South Africa, Rwanda and Kenya for “the way they have been reaching out to women.”

“In terms of mobile finance, using mobile technology to bank the unbanked, to ensure that rural women can access market prices, Kenya’s been fantastic,” he says.

And Kaberuka himself has been taking advantage of new technologies – he started tweeting last year as @donaldkaberuka, a move that was greeted with interest by critics who have called on the bank to be more transparent and responsive.

“I see an incredible conversation between me and African young people,” he says. “Through Twitter, they can talk to me directly.”

### Making a difference

Open and avuncular, his Twitter persona reflects the motivations of a man eager to look beyond Africa’s own shores to both import and export expertise. “We can learn from each other, all of us,” he says, noting that he admires the example set by Asian countries that invested in education. Meanwhile Africa is presented as a model for Western nations faced with swallowing the bitter pill of structural reform, a process Kaberuka knows only too well from the measures the IMF once required of failing African states.

“They were very, very difficult,” he says. “But, looking back at the 1980s and 1990s, especially the 80s, which is called ‘the lost decade’... without those structural reforms in the 90s, I think the continent would not have fared as well.”

It looks like those decades of pain set Africa’s leaders in good stead. The Survey revealed that respondents all around

the world feel governments are not working together effectively to address the top 10 global trends we face in 2014. But once again Sub-Saharan Africa emerged as the most optimistic region, with respondents putting the greatest faith in their leaders to work together productively.

With these solid foundations in place, it’s Kaberuka’s aim that Africa’s natural resources should be used to build her own future. New energy reserves are being discovered in countries like Mozambique, Tanzania and Uganda, opening up great opportunity but also calling for careful, responsible management.

“In the past, countries had oil and gas, but the result was white elephants, the resources curse and excess debt,” Kaberuka says. “The transformation of natural wealth and inherited wealth into created wealth is the issue of the moment. And we have to do much better – we have to use the oil and gas to develop education, to develop training, to develop the human capital.”

“I come back to young people, because that’s what the continent is about.” ■

# Expert opinion

Sub-Saharan Africa emerged as the region most optimistic about tackling the challenges we all face, but how did other regions and stakeholders shape up?



## Government

Around the world, respondents are unanimous that businesses are not working well together to tackle global challenges. **Elizabeth Littlefield**, President of the Overseas Private Investment Corporation, and Member of the Global Agenda Council on Social Innovation, says the only way to improve the situation is by taking a long-term view.

“If incentives for business and government continue to be skewed toward short-term outcomes, we’re never going to get the right decisions to solve the world’s problems. Corporations must be driven to become forces for good in the world, and this can only happen by taking a long-term view. For example, transforming the global economy over the next 20 years to a lower carbon economy that creates jobs and opportunities in a more equal and inclusive way would be an incredibly powerful thing for the world, but it requires patience and a clear realignment of incentives.”



## Europe

Europe is the region most pessimistic about the challenges the world faces, rating international organisations and national governments not very effective.

**Robin Niblett**, Director of Chatham House, and Member of the Global Agenda Council on Europe, explains that the continent still has a long way to go.

“The rise in Spanish and Italian exports is good news, as is the gradual re-balancing of wage levels and emerging country investor interest in Europe. But extensive structural reforms still need to be delivered in areas like banking, education and labour markets, and these will take time to work through. Populist parties that want to derail the reform process could gain influence if EU countries cannot start to show sustainable rates of growth, at 1.5% and above, by the beginning of next year.”



## Media

Respondents in the developed world say the media is not very effective in monitoring global challenges, but respondents in the developing world feel the media is doing a better job. **Trevor Ncube**, Deputy Executive Chairman of Mail & Guardian, and Chair of the Global Agenda Council on Informed Societies, says that in some parts of the world the importance of media has been lost.

“Journalists must make sense of the clutter in a world of too much information. That happens all over the world, but I feel the West has lost a sense of media’s importance in a democracy – we live in a connected world, but we’re connected on social media with people who agree with us.”