

Ozward Boateng

# Building the Africa we want

**Ozward Boateng**, one of the world's most famous fashion designers, and founder of Made in Africa, argues passionately for the establishment of more transport corridors to link the continent's disparate economies and thus accelerate Africa's growth.

Next year will mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Organisation of African Unity, the father of the African Union. It was created to promote the unity and solidarity of African states and act as a collective voice for the continent, end colonialism and support economic growth.

By 2002, much criticised, it had to be replaced by the African Union. In truth, by then much had been achieved: the end of apartheid, the establishment of the African Development Bank and the promise of pan-Africanism had been kept alive.

But unity is not a concept that can be developed by philosophy or political will alone. It is not the meeting of states and leaders but the movement, social and economic, of its peoples. Unity has no meaning unless it is the ability of the coal miner in Botswana to power a plant in Angola or the farmer in Uganda to export fruit to those short of food in Northern Kenya.

It is often said that Africa is blessed with 60% of the world's uncultivated arable land but this will only be a blessing once the land is actually cultivated and the produce from that land can be transported to its markets.

It matters not that Lake Kivu in Rwanda is host to a gas supply that could eventually double the amount of electricity in the region or the famed Inga hydro project of the Congo could power Southern Africa, if the distribution infrastructure is not available.



It was railways that opened up the prairies of North America and the Steppes along the Trans Siberian Railway, uniting the US and federating the Russians, and bringing grain to feed their conurbations and coal to power their industrial growth. It is this that inspired China, the latest superpower, to implement a \$250bn domestic rail investment.

It was this that inspired Made In Africa, the vehicle for African growth that I founded with the Ugandan Prince Hassan Kimbugwe and the barrister Chris Cleverly, to organise the Whitehall conference on African Growth Corridors with DFID, at which I spoke with David Miliband (the then UK Foreign Minister) and Mo Ibrahim, the Celtel billionaire and philanthropist, in 2009.

## Deplorable intra-African trade

Growth Corridors are the key to the master planning of an efficient economic ecosystem of the continent. They are geographical corridors of cross-sector commercial activity along transport routes that extend beyond administrative borders, thereby increasing interregional activity.

They have tremendous potential to optimise economic activity by following the connectivity and integrating the value chains of economic activities joining supply chain from farm to city creating exponential growth.



## Lack of adequate infrastructure is a huge impediment, so Made In Africa has made infrastructure its tenet for advocacy

Presently lack of adequate transportation can add as much as 60% to the ex-farmgate cost of African agricultural products. In practical terms this means the farmgate price of palm oil in Sierra Leone is higher than the world market price! Intra-African trade remains highly external in its orientation. This lamentable feature of Africa's trade means that trade between African states stands at only 10% compared to 60% in Europe.

Of course it is not only lack of infrastructure that has created this state of affairs: restrictive customs procedures, administrative and technical barriers and lack of trade finance play their part.

But on a continent where 13 countries still lack a functioning railway system, lack of adequate infrastructure – let alone state of the art such as China is laying down – is a



Examples of what is needed: A new Chinese-built road from Brazzaville to Point Noire in Congo (left) and upgraded Camrail in Cameroon.

# \$250bn

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huge impediment. And so Made In Africa has made infrastructure its tenet for advocacy.

There are three proposed corridors for growth: First, the North-South Corridor, which would link eight countries in eastern and southern Africa. There would be further interlinks to other corridors including the Trans-Kalahari, Beira, Lobito, Dar es Salaam and Nacala corridors.

Second, the Beira corridor, which is essentially a 100km-wide channel for enterprise development and movement of goods from the interior of the Southern Africa region to the port of Beira on the Indian Ocean.

And finally, the Northern Corridor, comprising the transport facilities and infrastructure linking land-locked countries of East and Central Africa: Burundi, DRC, Rwanda and Uganda to the port of Mombasa in Kenya. The corridor also serves Northern Tanzania, Southern Sudan and Ethiopia.

## An essential fourth corridor

In particular, we proposed (in what we had called the Tipping Point Initiative in our

paper for the UK government) the opening up of a fourth Growth Corridor, the Western Corridor (a.k.a Trans Saharan Railway).

This would geographically balance the proposed developments which were predominantly eastward and south. It would also unlock the agricultural potential of the Sahel and the vast mineral deposits of northern Nigeria and Niger. The route would go from the rapidly expanding oil port of Ghana, to Kumasi, Sokode in Togo to Benin, on to Abuja and Kano in Nigeria, Ndjamena in Niger then across the Sahara to Libya and onto Misrata on the Mediterranean coast. Of course, the conflicts around the Arab Spring and the subsequent turmoil throughout the region has put this plan on hold.

This is a pity because long-term peace can only come with long-term solutions. Africa's history is characterised by the deployment of defence budgets and charitable aid, neither of which has worked: at best they have been a bandage on endemic trauma.

Regional integration through a coherent infrastructure strategy is the key to peace, as Western Europe discovered after the Second World War. Once countries and people share interests and assets in common, it is much harder for them to go to war with each other. They have a mutual desire for the other's survival as their economic wellbeing becomes balanced with the other's.

Consequently, this wellbeing and economic gain extends across the globe, as peace enables the industrialised nations to invest in Africa's growth rather than only in extractive resource activity, the sale of arms or in the Aid charade of consultants and quick fixes.

## Virtuous cycle

Virtuous behaviour creates more virtuous behaviour; it's not rocket science. But although the principle is simple, the work required at every level is substantial. It requires that we as Africans must all work to change how we see Africa, in order for it to fulfil its potential.

We formed the Made In Africa Foundation last year with a donation from an African business, Atlantic Energy, and an African entrepreneur, Kola Aluko, to develop master plans that would develop the Africa that Africans deserve. We are beginning with a grant for New Kampala, 160-acre site in the centre of Uganda's capital city.

The process, a PPP, with the government has been long but ultimately rewarding and the plan will design a city based on our highest expectations with consideration for energy, clean water, sewage and transportation. After a lengthy procurement process, Atkins, the architects of Dubai's Burj Al Arab, were selected to design the largest planned urban renewal development in East Africa: a Future City.

Reality is a combination of what is there, what we think is there and what could be there. It is almost impossible for humans to describe what is actually there: there is too much information for them to digest, too much opportunity for omissions, too great a reliance on perception. It requires the impossibility of perfect knowledge.

It is also insufficient for us to make – except in emergencies and perhaps for day-to-day interaction – decisions based only on what we think is there: what we think is an exegetic analysis. It is still too laden with prejudice, too inward looking to be useful in creating anything much more than inertia.

It is wiser to concentrate our vision of Africa, instead, on what could be there. To change the continent, we must overlay our perception of it with its potentials and possibilities. To create an Africa of clean water, homes worthy of the name and lights that never grow dim, we must choose amongst those alternative futures of Africa, the most positive. This is leadership – to strive for the best.

To choose, without fear or compromise, from those Africas which could exist, those that would be best for all of its people, for its environment and for the globe. Why would you build anything less? ■