



LIONEL ZINSOU

Chairman of PAI Partners

Christopher DICKEY, Paris Bureau Chief and Middle East Regional Editor for *Newsweek Magazine*

Lionel?

Lionel ZINSOU, Chairman of PAI Partners

I am smiling because I am very pleased to have found a way to oppose Jean-Michel and have a totally different opinion. Again, foreign minds have an incorrect perception of Africa. Jean-Michel is thinking as someone who knows Africa very well from a foreign point of view. I would say many, many decision makers outside of Africa look at Africa as if everything was new, as if Africa has been discovered as a new continent, a new frontier, a continent of hope, a continent of growth, a continent where multinational companies will find a market, a continent with surpluses to recycle in OECD countries. South Africa will probably make a gesture to help Europe in the Euro crisis, like the other BRICS and so on and so forth.

None of those problems of governance evoked by Jean-Michel are new. The demographic jump, this sort of a discovery of the demographic wave - let us be serious. When we became independent in 1960, there were 2 million people. We have always been 1% of the population of Africa. In Benin today, there are 10 million people. We have to cope with feeding, educating and taking care of 10 million. Today, we are 1% of a 1-billion Africa. We used to be 1% of a 200-million Africa, which was an empty Africa. When you have 30 million square kilometres of surface and 200 million people, you are in an empty continent.

We are not full yet, but we will be full when my daughter here is my age, but for the time being, we are half-empty. We had to cope with going from 2 billion to 10 billion. The way we were governed under colonial rule was such that we had very good schools and hospitals. Colonisation brought us progress, except that we had no children in the schools. In the independent Benin in 1960, we had 200,000 children in school. Now we have 5 million. We had to go from here to there, and we did.

Yes, Africa is very badly governed, except that Africa coped with that. We had a very good hospital because colonisation is about progress of medicine, but we had one. We had an excellent education system, except that the first university was in Dhaka, which is 2,000 kilometres away, and so on. We did that, so it is not the first experience of a demographic wave.

Now we have coped with the wars of independence and found a reasonable balance in our societies. The north of Africa has been devastated by colonial wars, which was less the case in West Africa, for instance. The east of Africa has been devastated. Kenya is left as an independent in the most difficult situation, like Nigeria, rebuilt to be ungovernable and having been ungovernable, and we fixed that. If you go to Nigeria now, you will see that not everything is peaceful - not the north with religion, not the south with oil wealth sharing, but you will find a Nigeria where you have elections, where the rule of law has progressed, where in economic terms, it is organised for growth and in terms of hope for tomorrow's development, there is a totally new picture.

Jean-Michel, resolving those problems is what we have done every year for the last 50 years. It is absolutely not new. It is new in the way people look at Africa, but Africa does not need to be told how to resolve the problems. We need to look at urbanisation and the fact that we have to build the cities of tomorrow. Again Cotonou had 100,000 inhabitants



50 years ago. Today it has a modest 1 million, but we had to go from 100,000 to 1 million and yes, when my daughter is my age, Cotonou will probably be 3 million. We have learned a bit and we have learned from the mistakes made.