

DÉBAT

Thierry de Montbrial, fondateur et président de l'Ifri et de la WPC

What I will do now is take two or three questions from the floor. Who would like to intervene? Aminata Touré.

Aminata Touré, femme politique sénégalaise, ancienne Première ministre

Thank you very much, Mr. President. We congratulate you on all the achievements. As you said, it is not an easy task, considering your starting point and where you reached. It is an example for everybody to say that you can reverse fate. I think Rwanda is an example.

My question to you, Mr. President, is, as you know, the continent is a very young place – 70% of the population is below the age of 35, I think that is the same in almost all of our countries – what is your take on job creation, which is the bottom line? I mean, any single decision-maker in the continent really has that concern at the top of the list. So, how do you see it? How to go about it? Many things have been tried – vocational training, keeping them at school, etc. – but still.

I am from a place in the continent where we are also dealing with the same issues as in Mozambique. Our neighboring country – thank God, not in Senegal – but Mali is in trouble, as we all know. You know, Senegal and Mali used to be one country at some point. We do know that youth unemployment fuels insecurity. So, I would really like to see your views; to hear from you on how you see the prospect in the long-term for the African continent. As an opportunity also, of course, because it is presented to us as a burden – I do not believe so – but what do you think government should be strategically focusing on to deal with that issue? That is one question.

The second is, what made you decide to invest in women? We know that, in Africa, patriarchy is very strong, very ingrained in the culture. So, at the origin, why did you take a bet on women? Obviously, it brought you luck, but I would like to hear where you took it from. It could inspire many of your colleagues, maybe.

Paul Kagame, président de la République du Rwanda

I will put it simply. It sounds like a joke, but it is real; it started with my mother. I lost my father when I was still very young. In fact, when my family went into exile, I was close to four years old. My father was the first to escape as he was in danger. Well, all of us were in danger, but the biggest danger was to my father, so my father escaped; he went to Burundi, then Congo. I left with my mother and, later on, I lost my father when I was about 15.



Throughout my life, therefore, you can see our mother – we are six children in the family – looked after us. We lived, grew up and became who we are thanks to our mother. That is the mother we saw every day, toiling, doing everything for us – she even organized our escape and looked after us in very difficult conditions, almost single-handedly. From that time of childhood, you might think it was simple.

Then, as you grow up, you realize what is wrong. When we talk about equality between nations or equality between this and that, why not start with equality between just human beings, men and women, so that everyone has their rights? They may do different things and have different roles at different times, but the rights are the same. You can see that, for me, this is something that rubbed directly into my thinking and my being as well. There is no question about it – that is what happened.

Now, on the bigger question – maybe sometimes we blame ourselves, all of us. Sometimes we are quick to deal with symptoms of a problem and forget about dealing with the root cause of the problem. The fact that our continent is young is an opportunity. It is a big opportunity, but depending on how it is managed, it can be a very serious problem, as we have also seen.

Skills that enable people to get jobs is definitely key – it is very important – but there are many other things and the problem must be looked at holistically. You just cannot wish that jobs are created from nowhere. There is a starting point. How you create jobs is the starting point both in time, but also in what action you carry out. It is sitting right in the middle of how the history, the politics, the social economic dynamics of a country will definitely, as you said, create these differences between one country and another. It depends on where you started from.

Creating jobs can come in many ways. Let us take the example of a partnership, say between Africa and other continents, or say with Europe. This partnership should be looked at largely in terms of these questions that should be answered, that will benefit Africa as well as Europe, for example.

Now, the investments that must come – let us say from Europe, richer than Africa – where do these investments go? Well, where should they go? This comes almost to my earlier point, where I said that together we should determine these investment destinations and where we put the investments, bearing in mind the problem we are trying to solve, and solve it from the root rather than from the point it becomes just a symptom of the problem.

Education is automatic, skills, health and of course, governance. How do we govern ourselves, to allow these things to work, and to work to the extent that somebody can tell that there are results of these investments and the way we work together as partners, and therefore, that we see the other end? It works like that. If you ignore one step and, say, you have got so much, you put it out there, you do it in a very scattered manner, then yes, you will do so much, but you will get so little out of it. We must always bear in mind the end state – what we are driving towards, what we are making the current investments for, how we are doing it, the point we are touching, the many things that must come together holistically to give us the sort of results we want.

Thierry de Montbrial

Thank you very much. I think I can take another question before concluding. Do you want to intervene, Tidiane?

Cheikh Tidiane Gadio, vice-président de l'Assemblée nationale du Sénégal, président de l'Institut Panafricain de Stratégies, Paix-Sécurité-Gouvernance

Thank you. Mr. President, I was in your country just four or five days ago and I was so impressed by the discipline. People being so clean, the country, the whole city of Kigali. I met your mayor – the mayor of Kigali – and some young Rwandans and we had some excellent discussions. I was so proud of your country and your leadership. Mr. President, the driver who took me back to the airport, as usual, in terms of protocol – because I was Foreign Minister for years – I tried to give him a tip and the man was lecturing me on the fact that he does not need a tip, he was doing his job. Then the protocol lady told me exactly the same thing. I was really impressed with the Rwandan people; you made your people understand what all Africans should be doing.

Now, I have also noticed that pan-Africanism is a reality in Rwanda. Your people believe in themselves, but they believe in Africa and African unity is the only way for us. You have done a wonderful job with ZLECA – ZLECA or Zlecaf. Mr. President, you should also be congratulated for Mozambique. Personally, I have been struggling, fighting to explain to our leaders what Professor Cheikh Anta Diop explained to Africans – “Security precedes development” – and, Mr. President, no one can understand why the African leaders, to this day, do not come to terms with something. We have to fight terrorism. These people do not come to Africa for religious reasons – we all know it. They came to take their share of Africa because they believe Africa is to be shared by superpowers and everything. They came there as entrepreneurs not only of violence, but they are economic criminals. They are interested in our natural resources, our mines, our forests, our water, in everything, and they want to build Islamic caliphates in Africa. They have the plan.

President Déby, may God bless his soul, used to discuss those issues and I thought you too truly understood that security precedes development. So, why are our leaders not getting together? We have the means to fight back. We have the means to organize an African response to those challenges. Unfortunately, as you see what is going on in the Sahel region, it is getting worse by the day and these people are getting stronger and are getting our youth to help them, to work with them. Mr. President, when are we going to have the summit on terrorism in Africa; and when are we going to build a global and correlated African response? I do not want to be too long, but frankly, congratulations, God bless you, and we all count on you and some of the African leaders to make the right move for African security, African development, and African unity. Thank you.

Thierry de Montbrial

Since Minister Gadio is putting a crown on your head, I would suggest, in your answer, to focus on the Sahel issue and to comment on what the Africans themselves, and which Africans, could and should do, possibly with our support – obviously European, French and whoever. I suggest that you concentrate on this aspect of the question.

Paul Kagame

I will not take very long because on one hand, it is a complicated question, but on the other, it is also not so complicated. On the issue you raise, I think the leaders Minister Gadio is speaking to – starting with me – are listening. In fact, there is an answer in the question he asked. He first provided an answer of what should be done and then asked why maybe we are not doing it. We should just be doing what he is saying. We have to realize all of these challenges and problems and that they are not insurmountable. We can really address them.

We have to work together. We have to bear in mind, starting with priorities, what you have to address. I think what he says is well understood by everyone. I understand it. Other leaders understand it. I think many times we are in conferences and we are articulating this, as he was doing. The question is, when do we start doing what we know we ought to be doing and meeting the challenges we fully understand? That is beyond my understanding. I cannot articulate what needs to be done in that case better than anyone. That is why I say it is simple and also difficult to answer because everyone understands it and they say, “We have this responsibility and we know the challenge”, but I cannot understand why we do not work together to address it, or even individually in our countries, then later on work together and get things right. They can be put right and other continents, other people, have achieved certain levels that we can also achieve when humanly possible.

It is difficult to answer why we are not able to do it when we understand it, but it is also easy to say, “If we did that, then we would have solved the problem”. Between us and the partners, we have to keep raising our voices and making the argument that we can certainly do better. There is a lot that goes on between our partners, from whichever part of the world. A lot happens, but a fraction of it could deliver in that direction. We can change the course by investing in each other, investing in certain ways, in education, digitization, business, investments, etc.

For example, it is only recently that we tried to put together an African Continental Free Trade area which, if it worked and it should work, is one of the largest, if not the largest, free trade areas in the world. Why can we not make it work? Just begin from the point where our countries invest in each other and trade with each other, have the freedom of movement across borders. We have the same models and the same problems; we can find solutions. Africa is endowed with incredibly enormous resources, so how can this be a problem? It should be a solution. I cannot touch exactly why it does not happen when everybody understands it.

Thierry de Montbrial

There is one more question from Masood Ahmed.

Masood Ahmed, président du Center for Global Development, ancien directeur du département Moyen-Orient et Asie centrale du FMI

Thank you, Mr. President. The issue of the rivalry between the United States and China has come up a lot today. That rivalry plays out in Africa. I wanted to get your reaction to that, both to the role of China and to how that rivalry is impacting economic prospects in the region. Thank you.

Paul Kagame

I wish Africa knew how to exploit the rivalry rather than be the victim of the rivalry. I wish we could raise ourselves to that level, but without necessarily fueling the rivalry that in the end actually hurts us. We should be discovering ways to be on the positive side of this rivalry because this question keeps coming up every day. I was travelling in Europe once and, at that time, the leader of the European country had travelled with hundreds of business people and government officials to China.

Then, when I had a conference with the journalists in that country, they asked me, “What do you do with China? Why is China interested in Africa? Why is Africa doing so much with China?”. I could not help but ask at one point, as I remembered that the leader of that country and about 200 people had gone to China, “Why did your Head of State and so large a delegation go to China? That is where they are now”. I said, “If there is anything wrong with China, why did they go there? Therefore, you go to China, you want to do business with China, but you are questioning why Africa is doing business with China or China is doing business with Africa”. I could not understand.

But it stems from, of course, partly that question you raised. The rivalry is there. There is nothing we need to start ourselves, and there is nothing we can do to stop it. It happens in spite of the fact that we did not want it not to happen at all – but it does. So, I think we should also concentrate on ourselves to do the best we can with the partnerships we have at any given time; and we should be free to partner with anyone who has something to offer that we may not find elsewhere.

We are now in a situation where the Cold War has more or less come back. We thought we had left it behind us and the situation was getting better. There is freedom, capital is moving wherever it wants and people moving wherever they want, etc. However, as we know, the powers will decide what to do together or against each other. So, we have got to figure out, as a continent, how not to become victims of people who disagree and may be lucky and benefit from when they have agreed. We must build our base, our foundation, so that we are not crushed under the weight of these big powers when they have something to quarrel about.

It seems, by the way, that the nature of things in the world has turned out to be that if there is no trouble anywhere, if the world is stable, we must create some trouble to make it unstable. There seems to be this thing that keeps coming up. It seems the world does not want stability. That is why, even when we have it, we try to undermine it. The common thread here is that Africa is suffering the most. We need to figure out a way not to suffer every time powers over which we have no control quarrel and disagree.

Thierry de Montbrial

Well, Mr. President, we have to unfortunately wind up now but I think that in a few minutes, and it is not only a matter of having covered topics, we have had a flavor of the way you think. You think objectively about issues and how to solve them; and how to be able to solve them, because it is not only a matter of identifying the solutions, it is a matter of being able to deliver them. So, thank you very much. This was a very useful and sometimes moving discussion – when you talk about your mother – and I wish you the best and for your country, for Africa, the way you look at the future of Africa.



Again, Mr. President, thank you very much.

Paul Kagame

Thank you.