

# Africans must share the burden

Momentum builds up to revitalise continent, writes **Graeme Addison**

SHARED responsibility for African leadership is the key to practical progress on the continent, and powerful momentum is building up for joint action by governments, business and civil society.

This theme emerged at the Eskom African Business Leaders Forum held in Sandton this week, attended by hundreds of delegates and media representatives from all over Africa.

Everest Ekong, publisher of *Business in Africa* magazine and organiser of the event, said he was delighted by "renewed energy and vigour" on the issue of leadership.

"The present marks a great opportunity for Africa to move from the transition period into a period where we become a lot more confident and dedicated to growth," said Ekong in an interview.

"Transition was marked by civil conflict, war, apartheid and natural disasters, which seriously impeded Africa.

"Now, with emerging democracies and the growth of cross-border business, we are seeing a hunger for practical solutions. There is momentum for change."

Of the more than 400 registered participants at the forum, about three-quarters were chief executives of banking, retail, manufacturing, tourism and public sector organisations from many African countries, while 11 African government ministers also attended.

Speakers included two former heads of state, former President F W

de Klerk of South Africa and former President Sir Ketumile Masire of Botswana.

On the leadership of President Thabo Mbeki, De Klerk said Mbeki was "quite right" to emphasise that the second decade of democracy must focus on economic and social transformation.

If the young democracy were to succeed, all South Africans must benefit, and both the private and public sectors had to become more representative than they were now.

The opening speech was given by

**'In general, leadership constitutes the weakest link in the development management continuum'**

Reuel Khoza, chairman of Eskom, the major sponsor of the forum. Other sponsors were MTN, Honeywell and the National Ports Authority.

Ekong said governments, business and civil society in Africa had to identify where their challenges lay and what kinds of interventions would be needed to overcome them.

"An umbrella such as Nepad [the New Partnership for Africa's Development] is not an immaculate conception, but it does have the genetic code to start tackling the issue of poverty," said Ekong.

"It begins the process of unlocking

prosperity, starting from the grass-roots.

"The main thrust of the conference is the need to be more urgent and seek more sustainable measures in a short period to turn the wheel for Africa," he added.

"While Africa can do a lot for itself, it is also going to need a kind of Marshall Plan in the form of support from the rest of the world, just as, in the four-year period following World War Two, Europe was set on its feet again."

The need for shared leadership across the continent, and support from the rest of the world, recurred in speeches and floor discussions, over lunches and at the golf day that concluded the three-day event.

A leading Kenyan businessman and industrialist, Chris Kirubi, gave a hard-hitting speech calling leadership the "missing link" in Africa today.

Africa, he said, faced challenges such as poverty, conflict, education, HIV/Aids, corruption, massive capital flight, declining primary exports, loss of skills, lack of access to clean water and proper sanitation, lack of proper medical care and health facilities, lack of basic infrastructure such as roads, telecommunication, energy, and more.

"The list can go on and on. Why Africa? What is the missing link? What do we need to solve all these problems?"

"In general, leadership constitutes the weakest link in the development management continuum at the na-

tional and, by extension, the regional level as well," said Kirubi. "Sharing the leadership space and ensuring close consultations among political, business and civil-society leaders and other segments of society will offer opportunities for the discovery of internal and organic solutions to our national and regional problems."

Kirubi strongly criticised African leaders in general for their evasive stance on HIV/Aids.

"The disease, just as it attacks the immune system of the human body, has reached a point that it is vigorously attacking the immune systems of our societies as a whole," Kirubi said.

"Numbers of those infected and dying are increasing, and the trauma continues.

"Recent information indicates that it is now vigorously attacking the youth, the very essence of our future. We therefore have to work aggressively towards prevention and behaviour change, ensure the provision of affordable drugs, and promote the search for a vaccine."

He conceded that attitudes were changing as debate opened up and governments generally acknowledged the need for drastic action.