
The International Finance Corporation has recently issued its annual assessment of how easy or difficult it is to do business around the world. Africa comes out as the hardest, but it is beginning to change. Martin Plaut reports.

In the past there has really only been one way to describe the climate towards business almost anywhere in Africa - **distinctly hostile**. Mountains of forms to fill in, complex, sometimes **contradictory regulations** and bored, uninterested **civil servants**. But, says one of the authors of this report, Sylvia Solf, **change is on the way**:

Sylvia Solf: 'Over the past three years this **trend has been reversing** and this year, two thirds of the reforms globally have been taking place in developing countries and in Africa more than half of the countries of the continent have reformed. This is really a very new development and it's a very exciting development.'

Regulations are being **scrapped**. **One stop shops** at which businesses can be registered are being set up. Many forms can now be accessed online. **At the frontline** of these reforms is the island of Mauritius, which is already as easy to operate in as many developed countries. Rwanda, Liberia and Burkina Faso have also made real progress to improve the climate for business.

But many other African nations, among them some of the poorest countries on earth, like Chad, Congo Brazzaville and Swaziland, have made no moves in this direction. Some, like Tanzania, have even gone backwards. **Extracting bribes** from businessmen **to get round the obstacles** may be one reason why some of the continent's leaders have failed **to take the path of reform**.

Martin Plaut, BBC News

Vocabulary and definitions

distinctly hostile	clearly unfavourable and therefore difficult
contradictory regulations	rules which say very different things, making it impossible to follow, or observe all of them
civil servants	people who work for the government
change is on the way	the situation will be different soon
trend has been reversing	the way things used to be has been changing recently
one stop shops	a one stop shop is where you are able to do everything in one place
at the frontline	here, the country which is making most of the changes
extracting bribes	getting money illegally in exchange for assistance or help
to get round the obstacles	to find a way of overcoming difficulties
to take the path of reform	to support and introduce the changes

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