

Saluting a Development Pioneer - Tribute to Adebayo Adedeji at 80

Statement by Mr. Abdoulie Janneh, UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of ECA

at

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I am delighted to be in Ijebu-Ode for this high-level Policy and Strategy Seminar organized by the African Centre for Development and Strategic Studies (ACDESS). The topics that have been discussed and the broad range of participants have both underscored the importance of this seminar and guaranteed a rich, high quality debate.

For me, however, this seminar has a greater significance because it is taking place on the eve of the 80th birthday celebrations of Professor Adebayo Adedeji, a pioneering development scholar, a man of towering intellect with a dogged passion for the socio-economic transformation of Africa as so fully demonstrated by his brilliant, wide-ranging discourse made earlier today.

As a successor of Professor Adedeji at the Economic Commission for Africa, I can confidently assert that our Institution continues to benefit from his legacy and contribution. The United Nations Intellectual History Project with which Professor Adedeji is closely associated titled its briefing note on the Commission as "*Economic Commission for Africa: Fighting to be Heard*". This may well be true as a general statement of fact but there can be no doubt that ECA's voice was heard loud and clear under Professor Adedeji's leadership.

This is evident not only from his personal profile but also because of the central message emanating from ECA activities at the time about the importance of self-reliance and African ownership of its development agenda. It is not that we were not heard but rather that our interlocutors were not listening or were second guessing Africa's policy prescriptions as was the case with the Lagos Plan of Action issued by the OAU and ECA but almost immediately countered by the notorious Berg Report of the World Bank.

A central theme of ECA's knowledge and advocacy activities over the past five years has been to build on the tradition that Professor Adedeji helped to instill, which is always to underscore the importance of self-belief and to stress that economic development should be about improving the human condition. We are also committed to highlighting positive developments in Africa rather than joining the ever-ready chorus of 'afro-pessimists'. This message has gained momentum and is being reinforced by the collective economic performance of the continent since the turn of the new Millennium which averaged 6% before the global economic and financial crisis.

Indeed, Africa has shown relative resilience during the global economic and financial crisis and it was the second fastest growing region of the world with an average GDP growth rate of 2.7% in 2009 and with growth rates in 2010 and 2011 expected to be around 5% per annum. The G20 picked up on this trend and identified Africa as a potential global growth pole and destination for inward investment at its last meeting in Seoul, Korea. Global research firms like McKinsey and Boston Consulting which hitherto would have given short shrift to Africa's prospects have also written positive reports about Africa's economic outlook.

Despite these positive indications, we must nevertheless admit that Africa still has a long road to travel with regard to sustainable development especially as it relates to appropriate economic development and governance frameworks and regional integration.

Africa's Economic Challenges

Despite recent laudable growth, Africa continues to face economic challenges related to inadequate growth rates, limited productive capacities and incoherent strategies for long-term development.

Current growth rates are not enough to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by the target date of 2015 and are well below the rate of 10% need to transform an economy within a generation as was the case in several East Asian countries. Moreover, growth in Africa has been jobless. This is partly due to lack of attention to employment generating investments and also, as Professor Adedeji pointed out in his statement at the 50th anniversary celebration of ECA, a fixation with economic growth which led to a neglect of issues of equity.

Another critical challenge is that too much of Africa's growth is coming from the export of natural resources and commodities with very little value addition. It is important to scale up productive capacity and increase the use of science, technology and innovation to transform the structure of the African economy. What we have now in many of our countries including some of the larger economies is a manufacturing sector that contributes less than 10% to Gross Domestic Product and in some cases less than 5%.

Another equally troubling dimension of Africa's economic challenge is the incoherence of strategies especially a mismatch between short-term aims and long-term objectives and lack of linkages and coordination across sectors. As such, in many instances, we give priority to achieving short-term balances over long-run development and we produce commodities and natural resources without any beneficiation or value adding processes.

This is partly due to the dismantling of planning frameworks, which are thankfully now being re-introduced. But it is also attributable to mind-sets fixated on approaching economics and development solely from the perspective of quantifiable

attributable to mind-sets fixated on approaching economics and development solely from the perspective of quantifiable indicators. This approach has been criticized by Nobel Laureates such as Hayek, Leontiff, Coase and most recently Paul Krugman who said at the outbreak of the current economic crisis that the macroeconomic policy practiced in the last thirty years was "spectacularly useless at best, and positively harmful at worst".

By and large, ECA has tried to bring a different perspective to bear on strategies for African development. This is certainly what we tried to do under Professor Adedeji's leadership, with the Monrovia Strategy, the Lagos Plan of Action, the African Priority Programme for Economic Recovery and the African Alternative Framework to Structural Adjustment Programmes. Yet, it could be said that we lost the battle of ideas in the 1980s because rather than implement policies drawn up within the continent, most if not all African countries chose to implement Washington Consensus policies. We were however vindicated over time mainly due to poor performance of African economies in the lost decades of 1980s and 1990s.

More telling perhaps, is that following the poor results of SAP, the international community recognized but did not acknowledge ECA's key contribution to international development discourse. Indeed, we could be said to have won the war of ideas about African development in the sense that several of the policy prescriptions in the Lagos Plan of Action, APPER and the African Alternative Framework such as the desirability of African ownership of its development agenda; the importance of consultation and popular participation; the key role of institutions; environmental sustainability; the gender dimension and the key role of debt relief and partnerships have now become staple fare.

The problem today is that in addition to capacity constraints there is little or no coherence in the integration of all these elements and the more economically related policies into holistic national development plans. Moreover, there is some cacophony and discord arising from rather too many development frameworks as such as NEPAD, MDGs, PRSPs, Brussels Plan of Action (for LDCs), Medium Expenditure Frameworks and the like. Finding the right way through this maze requires more strategic governance at national and regional levels, the issues to which I now turn.

Governing for Development

Governance used to be a controversial word because it originally entered development discourse as 'good governance', which was no more than a mask for further conditionalities imposed by donor governments and agencies. This approach was also limited in the sense that it tended to focus on institutional forms which were deemed necessary to complete the Washington Consensus without taking account of varying stages of development and the importance of other institutional arrangements for development.

It is reassuring however that Africa has now taken ownership of its governance agenda especially through the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), a flagship initiative of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). The APRM is unique in many ways and reflects African ownership and takes a comprehensive view of what governance should concern us in Africa. Given this orientation, it is not surprising that Professor Adedeji has been closely associated with this mechanism including serving as Chairperson of the APRM Panel of Eminent Persons until very recently.

In spite of the more comprehensive governance approach introduced in NEPAD and APRM, the more conventional approach still limits the discourse on governance to elections, anti-corruption, transparency, rule of law and free flow of information which are by themselves very important elements for building democratic states. Governance, however, is also about promoting shared values and the purposeful promotion of national development in a socially legitimate and inclusive manner. This is a very broad topic but I wish to highlight the issues of state capacity and partnerships.

Irrespective of different views on the proper role of the government in an economy, a state should have the capacity to successfully undertake tasks that have been identified by social and political processes as properly belonging in the realm of public policy. This issue is also important because the initial limited state capacity has been compounded by the brain drain and the flight of quality from many national institutions to international organizations or the private sector. And, yet, the scale of our development challenge is such that state structures need to be able to act competently in order to quicken the pace of development.

Indeed, African states need the capacity to envision development programmes and plans and to implement them. Moreover, they also need to be able to interact with the private sector and civil society organizations in a mutually beneficial manner to promote societal transformation. The building of state capacity is yet another area in which Adebayo Adedeji has made a mark not only at ECA but prior to that as Director of the Institute of Administration at the then University of Ife and as Federal Commissioner of Economic Development of Nigeria.

A closely related issue of topical interest is whether Africa has the capacity to manage its relations with its partners. This is not the place to take-up those who think ODA is bad because it is sometimes misused but there are legitimate concerns about what aid means for domestic ownership of development policy. In other words, might it be true that the policy space available to African countries is necessarily constrained by the donor-recipient relationship? Another equally important question relates to how best to maximize the impact of aid, especially now that the Chinese are applying such assistance directly to projects which limits leakages and whose outcomes are more visible.

Ultimately, however, Africa's long-term development is dependent on the integration of its small and fragmented economies. Just imagine the immense political, social and economic boost that Africa will get from an integrated network of first-rate infrastructure and a single market without trade barriers, and different policy and currency regimes. This is a vision that I share with Professor Adedeji whose efforts in helping to establish the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and other African Regional Economic Communities has been well documented elsewhere. The bright future that we envisage for Africa is critically dependent on regional integration.

Let me end on this note by saluting Professor Adedeji on his manifold achievements across virtually every sector of importance to African development and for attaining the grand old age of 80 years. I join friends and family in wishing you, Sir, a very happy 80th birthday and extend also our best wishes for your continued good health and personal well-being.

I also extend sincere appreciation to the staff of ACDESS, participants and all others who have contributed to the success of this seminar.

I wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. Thank you.

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