

The Regional Conference on Brain Drain and Capacity Building in Africa

Addis Ababa
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**Statement
by
Lalla Ben Barka
Deputy Executive Secretary
Economic Commission for Africa**

Mr. Samuel Nyambi, UNDP Representative and Chairman,
Honourable Genet Zewdie, Minister of Education of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia,
Madam Dioro Ndiaye, Deputy Director of the International Organisation for Migration,
Mr. Sibry Tapsoba, Regional Director of the International Development Research Center,
Representatives of Governments and Intergovernmental Organisations,
Representatives of Non-Governmental and Regional Organisations,
Distinguished Participants, Experts and Representatives of Higher Education Institutions,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour and privilege for me to welcome you to the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa to participate in this Conference, the theme of which, I believe, profoundly affects our countries, institutions and people. I would like to take this opportunity to express my deepest appreciation to the Government and people of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia for their support, to our partners the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) who have collaborated with us in sponsoring and organising this Conference. The need to reverse the brain drain as well as build and effectively utilise capacities has become major challenges for African development in the 21st century and this conference is indeed timely.

Mr. Chairman,

There is now consensus among African governments and development partners that poverty reduction is the main objective of development on the continent. The reasons for the focus on poverty are well known: some 80 percent of Low Human Development Countries are in Africa. Four out of every 10 Africans live in conditions of absolute poverty while five out of every ten Sub Saharan Africans live in conditions of poverty.

Over the last three decades, Africa's economic growth has been low and often inconsistent. A number of factors explain the poor performance. These include external factors such as a huge debt overhang and the effect of global financial crises on the market for Africa's commodities, as well as domestic factors such as the high rate of population growth, political instability, armed conflicts, and diseases. In addition, the HIV/AIDS pandemic is threatening to reverse hard-won development gains in the region. Against this backdrop, it has become imperative to ask the question: can Africa claim the 21st century?

Mr.
Distinguished participants,

Chairman,

ECA's last *Economic Report on Africa 1999* takes an optimistic view of Africa's economic prospects. The *Report* concludes that in spite of this bleak scenario, significant progress has been achieved, as there is now increasing recognition of the limitations with past approaches. Indeed, Africa is experiencing its own Renaissance, in the sense of a rebirth of thinking and according to the *Report*, Africa can claim the 21st Century by forging consensus and support around an African-driven development agenda.

What is of particular concern to us at the ECA is Africa's marginalization in an era of economic globalisation. A closer examination of the underlying factors indicates that Africa's economic poor performance and social decline are rooted, among other things, in structural weaknesses. The problem is further aggravated by the under utilisation of the capacities available. In every African country, there is the paradox of high rates of unemployment and under-employment among school leavers, including university graduates--even scientists and engineers. This has often resulted in a wave of migration of the highly educated and highly skilled to Europe and North America.

Let me run you through some of the statistics to underscore the magnitude of the problem we face. Africa lost 60,000 professionals (doctors, university lecturers, engineers, etc.) between 1985 and 1990. The emigration of doctors and other experts from Africa is the most striking illustration of this problem. According to the 1993 UNDP Human Development Report, there are more than 21,000 Nigerian doctors practising in the United States alone while Nigeria's health system suffers from an acute lack of medical personnel; 60 per cent of all Ghanaian doctors trained locally in the 1980s had left the country, while in Sudan, 17 per cent of doctors and dentists, 20 per cent of university lecturers, 30 per cent of engineers in 1978 alone had gone to work abroad.

I would also like to bring to your attention the reverse side of the brain drain. Let us consider the following recent example. The Inter-Press Service (IPS) of 17 January 2000 published an article indicating that some 100,000 expatriates working across the continent cost some US 4 billion dollars annually.

Africa's under utilisation of its indigenous capacities is most evident in the low level of development in the area of science and technology. The latest information on indicators of scientific development indicates that Africa's share of investment in R&D is only 0.5%, and 0.8% in scientific publications.

Monsieur
Distingués invités,

le

Président,

Pendant longtemps on a parlé de réduire voire stopper la fuite des cerveaux en Afrique mais on a surtout refléchi aux stratégies visant à retenir les cerveaux. Cependant, il faut reconnaître que non seulement la fuite n'a pas été réduite mais elle s'est plutôt accrue. Il est évident que les stratégies visant à retenir les cerveaux par la création de conditions attrayantes pour nos formes et nos diplômes n'ont pas marché. En effet dans la plupart des cas, les systèmes et les institutions pouvant permettre aux cerveaux de s'épanouir ou simplement de pouvoir travailler n'ont pas offert ces conditions minimales. S'il est important que les efforts visant à créer des conditions de retention demeurent une priorité pour les états africains, on sait par ailleurs que cela prendra encore un certain temps. Nous devrons donc penser et mettre en oeuvre des stratégies de coopération avec les autres partenaires que sont les africains se trouvant au Nord.

Je voudrais ici souligner l'exemple des émigrés non intellectuels qui ont réussi leur coopération avec les pays africains bien mieux que ne l'ont fait les émigrés intellectuels. Dans bien des pays les investissements que font ceux que l'on appelle communément les travailleurs émigrés, sont considérables et bien souvent ils investissent dans des secteurs qui ne sont pas forcement de leur compétence tels que la santé et l'éducation. Les cas sont multipliés et leur aide est multiforme. Alors je pose la question de savoir pourquoi la coopération, l'échange avec les émigrés intellectuels semble si peu développés. Il y a là un potentiel que nous devrons explorer ensemble et aujourd'hui, pendant cette conférence. Car encore une fois il sera difficile de ramener les cerveaux si certaines conditions ne sont pas réunies ces conditions ne sont pas seulement financières comme on pourrait le croire facilement mais aussi d'exercice de leur compétence et de leur épanouissement intellectuel.

Monsieur le Président,

En regardant la tendance actuelle il y a de quoi être alarmé sur la situation de fuite des cerveaux et au delà des constats, des mesures doivent être prises rapidement. En effet les 1ères générations post

independence ont pour beaucoup étudier en Europe avec des bourses offertes par les pays européens. Très souvent les formations ont été guidées par ces dons de bourses et ne répondaient pas toujours aux besoins de développement définis par nos états. Ces générations ont souvent du signer des engagements les obligeant à retourner dans leurs pays à la fin de leurs études. La majorité est revenue mais une grande partie comme nous l'avons vue est repartie au bout de quelques années. Aujourd'hui nos étudiants sont de plus en plus inscrits dans les universités d'Amérique du Nord et les études sont souvent payées par les parents directement ou par des institutitons internationales. Nous ne sommes plus à la période post independence où la notion de l'état et de l'appartenance à une nation était forte et ancrée dans notre système éducatif. Ceux-là qui vont faire des études de leur choix, en se référant surtout aux opportunités d'un marché de l'emploi étranger, risquent de ne pas revenir.

Monsieur le Président, devant cette situation alarmante il est impératif de créer des ponts entre nos pays et les partenaires africains installés au Nord. Il existe en Afrique des dizaines d'institutions chargées du renforcement des capacités en Afrique, institutions internationales et régionales telles que la Fondation pour le Renforcement des Capacités en Afrique, ACBF à Hararé, le nouvel Institut International de l'UNESCO pour le renforcement des capacités en Afrique, IICBA à Addis-Abeba, des réseaux régionaux de recherche dans les secteurs clé de l'éducation, ROCARE et ERNEA à Bamako et Gaborone, de l'économie, AERC à Nairobi, des institutions de formation telles que l'IDEP à Dakar, IFORD à Yaoundé et tant d'autres. Nous ne devons pas reinventer la roue et pendant cette conférence nous devrons refléchir et identifier les meilleurs moyens d'établir ces ponts au niveaux régional et national afin que le continent puisse bénéficier de la force intellectuelle que représente la diaspora.

Mr.
Distinguished participants,

Chairman,

I believe African communities in the Diaspora represent a significant source of capital for Africa and an important source of investment capital for productive use in Africa through effective use of electronic-commerce, exchange of expertise by making use of Information and Communication Technologies and distance learning.

ECA has long recognised that Africa cannot benefit from the phenomenon of globalisation unless it develops and takes full advantage of existing opportunities to adopt and utilise science and technology. In this regard, ECA can assist its member States in the development of their science and technology policies by organising national policy dialogues and workshops. ECA can also play a role in identifying appropriate expertise through the African Regional Conference on Science and Technology, the Global Commission on Science and Technology, and its own Conference of Ministers.

As we begin this millennium, learning would be the key to rapid progress and Africa needs to tap into the global system of information technology. In this regard, the African Information Society Initiative (AISI), an action framework to build information and communication infrastructure in Africa has undertaken key activities since 1996 including policy awareness campaign on the Initiative, organization of policy workshops on connectivity and use of information and communication technologies for development, Internet training workshops, advisory services on the elaboration of national information and communication plans, and projects on telecentres.

ECA recently took a giant step by convening the African Development Forum (ADF), which is an initiative led by the Commission to position an African-driven development agenda that reflects a consensus among major partners and that leads to specific programs for country implementation. The first Forum was held in October 1999 in Addis Ababa under the theme of *The challenge to Africa of globalization and the Information Age*.

ECA is also collaborating with the IDRC to develop a project on the African Consultancy Capacity Building Initiative whose main objective is to establish a virtual network by linking African professionals

abroad with their counterparts in Africa in order to promote synergies and foster a sense of intellectual community.

Mr
Distinguished Participants,

Chairman,

These are but a few of ECA's programmes on capacity building in support of Africa's development. In the next three days, you will be addressing issues that are topical in the debate on the brain drain at different levels and sectors. We must put our heads together and forge a new approach drain into brain gain and I certainly look forward to your recommendations.

to building and strengthening the critical capacities Africa needs. This should not be another conference but a true commitment from all of us to turn brain

I thank you for your attention and wish you fruitful deliberations.