

# A vision of an integrated Africa

— Maged Abdelaziz and Ibrahim Mayaki

**U**nder-Secretary-General Maged Abdelaziz, special adviser to the UN secretary-general and head of the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa (OSAA) and Dr. Ibrahim Assane Mayaki, chief executive officer of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) agency, lead institutions that are helping shape Africa's socioeconomic and political transformation. In a rare joint interview with *Africa Renewal*'s Kingsley Ighobor and André-Michel Essoungou—during the UN NEPAD Africa Week activities last October in New York—Mr. Abdelaziz and Dr. Mayaki discussed critical issues surrounding Africa's economic development.

**The president of the UN General Assembly recently referred to NEPAD as a success story. When people say NEPAD is a success, what comes to your mind?**

**Ibrahim Mayaki:** If we look at the last 12 years, which have been years of positive transformation for Africa, NEPAD has played a critical role of providing a blueprint for strategic thinking, and that has allowed transformation to take place. In 2000, coming after years of structural adjustment, our capacity to prioritize and think strategically was erased at country and regional levels. So NEPAD as a programme filled that vacuum, helping the countries in the region to better set their priorities and strategize.

Important projects are now being framed. I always give the example of the 4,500 kms Algiers-Lagos Trans-Saharan Highway, which, with only 80 kms remaining, is slated for completion in 2014. In agriculture, there have also been national investments and private sector plans. In biotechnology, we have trained more than 400 regulators to help African countries design biotechnology policies. When the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa was created, there was a motivation to see NEPAD programmes implemented, and forging a partnership between OSAA and NEPAD was a critical strategic element. The stronger OSAA is, the stronger our capacity will be to achieve our objectives.

**As head of OSAA, how do you assess NEPAD?**

**Maged Abdelaziz:** NEPAD was established in 2001 after the adoption of the MDGs [Millennium Development Goals] in 2000. It was a very positive sign when the AU and African countries began working diligently to achieve the MDGs. NEPAD is not only about development, it is also about governance and it is about peace and security as well. The successes of NEPAD's integrated approach are commendable. The nexus between peace and security, development, human rights and good governance is very important. The UN decided in 2003 to establish OSAA to support NEPAD. Also, the secretary-general reappointed a special adviser to oversee the last period of the MDGs, and, together with NEPAD, work on the post-2015 development agenda to help shape sustainable development goals. So I would consider NEPAD a great success and I would like to congratulate Dr. Mayaki.

**Dr. Mayaki just said that NEPAD's success is inextricably linked to OSAA's success. How does OSAA define its success?**

**Abdelaziz:** Our success in OSAA is to [promote] NEPAD at the international level. The analytical work that we do, the advocacy that we undertake, the outreach that we do with the international donors, the World Bank, the IMF, other institutions, are all aimed to accomplish this goal.

## GOOD GOVERNANCE

Dr. Mayaki, left, and Mr. Abdelaziz during the interview. 

There is also the regional level—what the ECA [Economic Commission for Africa] and the African Development Bank, in conjunction with the African Union, do. And that's why we have an Africa Week at the UN, when Dr. Mayaki and others come to speak to member states, the diaspora, the NGOs, youth organizations, women and so on. This is because the African agenda has become a people-centred agenda, not only a government-centred agenda.

**There are many bodies—ECA, NEPAD, OSAA—involved in pursuing Africa's development agenda. How difficult is it coordinating among these bodies?**

**Abdelaziz:** This is a question that is often asked. Our mandate to support NEPAD is three-pronged. We are three entities supporting NEPAD. OSAA is 67% of that support and the remainder is shared between the UN Department of Public Information and the ECA. It's necessary that we have good coordination. There are some activities that we cannot do. For



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example, we do not have operational activities in Africa because [of our mandate], and we are situated in New York. Because the ECA is much more mobile, it can move along with NEPAD and the AfDB to meet its goals.

**How can Africa accelerate its integration process?**

**Mayaki:** The main motivation for regional integration is economic. If you take a sector like energy, the optimal solutions are not at the national level but at the regional. In many development sectors, which are critical, the optimal solutions are regional. Now, political leaders in civil society and the private sector understand this. It has helped push forward the values of the AU. NEPAD has a responsibility to liaise with the regional economic communities to enhance their capacity. By increasing the capacity to plan, to monitor, to evaluate and to create coherence at the regional level, we increase the regional integration process. The second issue has to do with peace and security. As you know, the AU

has an early warning system within its peace and security council and standby forces. That was nonexistent 20 years ago. This [arrangement] is helping prevent and manage conflicts. It has a rapid reaction capacity when a conflict emerges. You saw it in the case of Mali, in the role played by ECOWAS with AU support, and in the troops that went into Mali with the support of the UN Security Council.

**OSAA usually supports the work of the regional economic communities. Is it part of the same thinking?**

**Abdelaziz:** Exactly! This is part of the belief that African integration starts at the [bottom] level. Regional integration has to start at the subregional level, where the importance of the economic communities comes into play. There are some deadlines that have already been agreed to by the AU but are subject to review. These include an agreement that by 2017 all customs barriers in the subregions will be lifted to increase subregional trade, and by 2023 these customs barriers should be lifted for

the whole continent. By 2027 we will begin considering an African common currency. So there is a plan tied to time frames, and the UN is very supportive of this.

**The Programme for Infrastructure Development for Africa (PIDA) has an ambitious plan to revamp Africa's infrastructure. About 51 programmes have been identified for implementation. How do you finance these projects?**

**Mayaki:** In order to boost intra-African trade, we need to improve infrastructure. That's why we designed PIDA as a 30-year strategy, focusing on regional trans-boundary projects. The good thing about PIDA is that it was designed from the bottom up. The priorities are consensual. That highway of 4,500 kms from Algiers to Lagos would not have been possible without the political and technical support of each of the affected countries. Ten years ago a private sector operator who wanted to discuss a regional project with two governments would be lacking a rational framework. PIDA is that rational



framework. Out of these 51 programmes, we have worked on some 250 specific projects so far, and out of these projects, we have picked 16 which we are going to discuss in Dakar [Senegal] in December at the Dakar Financing Summit on Infrastructure. The objective of this summit is to create a dialogue between policy makers, heads of government and private sector operators. Financing will develop from public-private partnerships.

### **Is the 4,500 km road from Algiers to Lagos financed with public money?**

**Mayaki:** Yes, only public money. That shows that public money can do a lot of good things. But if we want to improve, we will need private sector money. Absolutely.

### **How critical are these projects for Africa?**

**Abdelaziz:** As the UN sees it, AU priorities are shifting. You can't industrialize without the infrastructure, namely electricity, roads, transport and the necessary infrastructure to support this development. Industrialization has its own economic and social ground rules. The economic ground rule is not to rely solely on extractive industries and selling raw materials for cheap prices. The social ground rule is to provide opportunities for employment for the young generation and to encourage women to go into business in the industrial sector.

### **You often talk about a critical link between peace and development. What does that mean in the case of Africa?**

**Abdelaziz:** Let me start by saying that the peace and security climate in Africa is improving. The number of peacekeeping missions is declining, conflicts are fewer now than before. Still, there are some unstable areas that are scaring away investors. Political stability in areas like Darfur is going to help in development. So this kind of nexus is very important; it creates the necessary climate for development. That's why the UN secretary-general and the president of the World Bank went to the Great Lakes region earlier this year and the World Bank committed \$1 billion for development activities to help stabilize [the region].

### **You [Mayaki] said at Harvard University the other day that Africa is taking a risk**

### **by not addressing youth unemployment. How frightening is this trend?**

**Mayaki:** Very frightening because we have 70% of our population under 25 years of age. Young people are very impatient for results. You can't tell them, 'Wait for 50, 40, 30, 20 years.' You need to include them when designing policy—this is what Ambassador Abdelaziz is calling for.

Secondly, in anything you do, you need to prioritize job creation for the youth. Whether it's an energy policy, education policy, transport policy or anything you do, you must mainstream that because if you don't create jobs, you destabilize your social and political systems. If you are building a road, think about job creation for the youth. You are building a hospital—think about job creation for the youth. You are setting up job training centres—think about job creation for the youth.

### **There are fewer wars in Africa now than before, at a time when the continent has some of the world's fastest-growing economies. Is that a coincidence?**

**Abdelaziz:** There is nothing on this front that is a coincidence. Having fewer

conflicts is a contributing factor to economic growth. But it's not the only factor, because African countries are now formulating many more rational economic, fiscal, financial and trade policies that are producing better growth rates. But we also have to worry about some other negative indicators. If a country is growing at 7.8%, for example, the question has to be "Which sector is driving this growth?" Growth has to come from sectors that will allow Africa to achieve the desired results in integration and realize the African renaissance. This is where commodity-based industrialization and value addition come to mind.

### **Regarding youth unemployment, some reports state that Africa needs to create as many as 10 million jobs a year to catch up with population growth. Are there job creation best practices in any part of Africa?**

**Mayaki:** Most of the best practices are linked to policies on rural transformation. In Mali, for example, with roughly 20 million inhabitants, the demographic growth rate is 3.2% and 75% of the population is under 25. So every year in Mali,



Construction work on the Orile light rail terminal, part of a private-public enterprise to build a mass transit system

you have 300,000 youths between 18 and 25 years coming onto the employment market. The government cannot hire them in the civil service because of economic constraints. Your industry is small industry, so how are you going to create jobs?

It is mainly by tapping into agricultural development, because most young people are in rural areas. If you don't transform the rural economy and create wealth there, you run into major problems because they will come and ruralize the cities, and then they will destabilize all your systems. Creation of wealth in rural areas is a best practice. We have a programme, which is called Rural Futures, that deals with this issue.

### **Are there countries that are doing well in this regard?**

**Mayaki:** There are countries starting to do well. In East Africa there are many countries.

**Abdelaziz:** Kenya, Tanzania—in East Africa. There are also some good examples with women issues. The parliament in Rwanda is comprised of 62% women. The

chair of the parliament is a woman and women-run businesses are increasing. So there is positive movement in this regard.

### **The post-2015 development agenda is considered an opportunity for Africa to present a unified and compelling case. What is OSAA doing along this line?**

**Abdelaziz:** We supported the drafting of a common African position on the post-2015 development agenda. This draft is under consideration by the African group, and we participated in the discussion. There is a meeting of Africa's ministers of economy and finance in November. I'm travelling to Addis Ababa to take part in shaping the African common position on the post-2015 development agenda.

This also comes within the strategic framework of the AU for the years 2014 to 2017, which concentrates more on industrialization, regional integration and infrastructure. There is also the preparatory process for the Africa 2063 [50 years from 2013] document. OSAA is part of all the negotiating processes. We are providing our perspectives on where the MDGs will go and how a post-2015 agenda could accelerate in a much more operational and monitored way.

### **From your experience, how would a post-2015 development agenda be different from the current MDGs?**

**Abdelaziz:** The MDGs are a set of principles that were not accompanied by a work plan with time frames. The principles simply stated that the MDGs were going to be implemented in 15 years. That's why you find variances in implementation and variances in the success of the MDGs.

On a post-2015 development agenda, there is a [desire] at the country level to put this into an action plan that should have time frames and progress reports that are to be reviewed so that when we come to 2030—after another 15 years—we can see what is tangible that has been implemented.

### **One recent statistic states that Africa lost nearly \$900 billion between 1970 and 2008 due to illicit financial flows. Does the continent need a policy to deal with this issue?**

**Mayaki:** The AU has created a panel headed by former [South African] president Thabo Mbeki. The panel will formulate a report

and finalize it by March 2014. The interesting thing about illicit financial flows is that [indigenous] corruption accounts for between 5% and 10%. Illicit financial flows derived from commercial transactions are around 60%.

It means that in many African countries, you will find a corporation that has been working there for the last 25 years, but if you look at the books you'll see that they declare that they are not making any profit, but they are still there, for 25 years. There is the issue of a lack of capacity to look at taxation, transparent banking and the rest. You see that in many African countries today, governments are really looking at mutually negotiated contracts. But are they looking at how much taxes are being paid?

### **How do you see Africa in 20 years?**

**Mayaki:** In 20 years growth will be sustained but it will be more inclusive, with high rates of youth employment, higher democratization process, fewer conflicts, and an active AU peace and security [mechanism] that reduces and manages conflicts. So 20 years from now we'll be much better globally because the youth of today will influence policies that are being designed.

### **The AU advised countries to commit 10% of their budgets to agriculture so that by 2015 agriculture can grow by 6%, but very few countries have complied. So why should anyone be optimistic?**

**Mayaki:** The number of countries that have committed 10%, according to our tracking methodology, is around 20, which is less than half of all the countries. But numbers are increasing significantly. Today the world order raises a kind of global pessimism, but in Africa there is growing optimism. I'm convinced that the demographic dividends of our youth will really help concretize that optimism.

**Abdelaziz:** I would share the optimism of Dr. Mayaki. I just want to add that I wish that in 20 years Africa is at an integrated stage, with a unified currency, no customs duties between countries, joint projects on industrialization, functioning democracies, better human rights and governance situations, and fewer peace and security issues. I dream of an Africa that could be another European Union in about 30 to 40 years. 🇳🇬



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