

'We Have To Deliver' On Africa's Development, Says NEPAD Chief



Ibrahim Assane Mayaki, chief executive officer of the NEPAD Secretariat: "NEPAD, as a programme, is still very relevant to the development challenges that the continent is facing."

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In 2001, a summit of African leaders adopted the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) as the continent's overall plan for long-term economic, social and political development. The chief executive officer of the Secretariat of NEPAD is **Ibrahim Assane Mayaki**, a former prime minister of Niger, who actively took up his post in April 2009. In this exclusive interview with *Africa Renewal*, Mr. Mayaki discusses NEPAD's progress so far — and the challenges that lie ahead for the African Union's development program.

You attended the September 2009 meeting of the Group of 20 (G-20) in Pittsburg, which was called to further respond to the global economic crisis. Were any of Africa's specific concerns addressed?

One of Africa's priorities is agriculture. That priority is widely accepted by the international community, because agriculture is seen as the main entry point for poverty reduction. For quite a long time, that was not the case. But given that the majority of African populations live in rural areas and their main activity is agriculture, most experts and non-experts have come to the conclusion that if we want to boost their revenues, we should go for agricultural development.

That was reaffirmed in Pittsburg. One of the conclusions there was to give a mandate to the World Bank to establish a multi-donor trust fund specifically dedicated to the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program (CAADP), which was conceived by NEPAD and adopted by the African Union. Pittsburg also reaffirmed the commitment of the Group of Eight (G-8) meeting at L'Aquila [Italy, in July], establishing a mechanism for financing agriculture. In L'Aquila, the targeted volume of resources was \$20 bn. So the commitments are there. Now the challenge is to channel the resources for the implementation of CAADP.

Before the current economic crisis, Africa was hit by a sharp rise in food prices. There were protests, and considerable suffering. Was that a wake-up call for African governments, to put more of their own resources into agriculture and the food sector?

African heads of state had already decided to fix a target of 10 per cent of public resource allocation to the sector. To tell the truth, that target has not been very well attained. Most countries, which are close to the target, have quite good political stability and have been managed well by democratically elected governments. Generally, a sound agricultural policy is produced by good government systems and politically stable institutions.

When we look at the food riots, which took place in the last two years, what do the police reports say? They say that most of the people who participated in these riots were under 20, unemployed, from rural areas and did not belong to any political party or trade union. This youth — and 50 per cent of our population is under 20 — is the key factor which will determine the future of our economies, our political institutions and our government systems. The issue is very simple: Either African governments tackle that youth employment issue through agriculture and rural development, and stabilize their institutions. Or they don't, and then they will be sitting on a political bomb.

NEPAD argues that good political governance is vital for Africa's development more generally. And one of the means developed by NEPAD to improve governance is the African Peer Review Mechanism. How is the APRM doing?

The APRM is quite an original approach. It is based on the voluntary participation of governments that decide to open themselves to a review by their peers. Transparency is a key element for the credibility of the exercise. You see more and more countries deciding to volunteer. Institutionally, the APRM has a secretariat that is different from the NEPAD Secretariat, and is constituted by a panel of independent personalities. The challenge is: How do we use the conclusions and recommendations of the review exercises? Normally, the countries are the ones who are supposed to implement the recommendations. But we know that they need support in terms of capacity. It is the main constraint to implementation. I think we could work on capacity development issues, and gather the resources and partners to tackle that dimension.

Would it be correct to say that when you talk about countries' capacities for implementing the peer review recommendations, it's not just the capacities of governments, but also of civil society, parliaments, the media and so on?

Absolutely. You can have the best public institutions, but if you don't have sound citizenship, then your probability of developing in a democratic way is very limited. The roles of civil society organizations and the private sector are key for building the overall institutions.

Building up Africa's physical infrastructure — roads, power systems, harbors, and communications networks — is one of NEPAD's priorities. But infrastructure is a very expensive undertaking. How has the current world financial crisis affected NEPAD's plans for attracting more investment for infrastructure?

The financial crisis has transformed itself into an economic crisis. It has had an impact on resource allocation to the African continent. Given that infrastructure projects need quite important amounts of resources, we'll evidently face challenges in that sector.

But I think it is an opportunity also to better mobilize our domestic resources. Some countries have been good at it, some of us, not really. Africa has domestic resources, which are now going to Europe, the US and so on. I'll just give two figures. The food import bill of Africa is around \$40 bn. If we had sound agriculture policies and invested just some of that amount, we could even be exporting food. Capital flight out of Africa is around \$30 bn. Out of that \$30 bn, almost \$20 bn is the consequence of corruption. So we must look more thoroughly at mobilizing the domestic resources that we do have.

We often hear arguments in Africa by civil society groups, academics and others that NEPAD is a fine-sounding plan, but we don't see much evidence of it on the ground. Why does NEPAD seem to be moving so slowly?

NEPAD, as a program, is still very relevant to the development challenges that the continent is facing. It is a comprehensive program, based on two main values. One is the value of ownership that we have to design by ourselves our own development programs. The second dimension is to foster economic integration as a way of developing at a faster pace. These two dimensions inspire the sectoral priorities that are being designed. We worked closely with the African Union Commission to create the CAADP. In science and technology, we have created networks of excellence throughout the continent. In our information and technology department, we have launched the e-schools initiative,

which is working quite well. We have supported the department of social affairs of the African Union Commission with our advice on health polices. So a lot has been done.

Between the birth of NEPAD in 2001 and now, I would say this has been an experimental process. And like all experimental processes, you have had ups and downs. Certainly, we have not communicated sufficiently on the ups, and we let other people communicate on the downs. But from that good experimental process, let us build a new NEPAD. We are going to be transforming into the NEPAD Planning and Coordinating Agency, with the main objective of facilitating implementation of key projects derived from the continental policies designed by the African Union Commission.

The international community has supported NEPAD since its inception. But when the integration decision was taken [to bring NEPAD more closely into the structures of the African Union], there was a certain period of uncertainty on what was exactly going to happen, structurally and functionally. So it was understandable that the international community would wait to see what was going to happen. Now that support has to be reinvigorated. The integration is good for two reasons. The first one is that it will erase the overlaps, which existed before, and the contradictions. And second, it will send a positive signal to the international community on how to deal with each of us, the African Union Commission and the NEPAD agency.

As for the African countries, it is our job to demonstrate to them what we can do. We have to tell them what our role is, what the roadmap on which we want to work is and how we cooperate with the regional economic communities. And then they will see what we are able to deliver. The challenge we face as an institution is a crucial one. Now we have really to deliver very concretely on the ground. It's on the basis of our delivery that we have to be judged.

Early on, NEPAD was identified with several of its more prominent advocates, who worked closely with the G-8 donor countries. But some of those presidents are no longer in office. With NEPAD now being integrated more closely into the African Union, do you see a new stage of trying to build broader political responsibility for NEPAD within Africa?

The push given by those leaders was absolutely essential. Otherwise NEPAD would not have been seen as important as it is. Now we are in a phase of opening up to broader ownership, so it becomes owned by the 53 countries of the African Union. This means we have to communicate on that, we have to be present more widely and we have to deliver very concretely in all the regions.

There seems to be an interesting parallel process under way with Africa's international partners. NEPAD initially focused on interacting with the G-8. But now the main international economic forum will be the G-20, a wider group that includes some of the emerging economies, China, India, Brazil and so on. What's the significance of that for Africa?

We can sense what is going to happen, but we don't really know what is going to happen. Effectively, the shift from the G-8 to the G-20 is the result of the increasing weight of the emerging economies, which have a direct impact on any global decisions. The existence of the G-20 is a positive structural adaptation to a new reality. In that new reality, Africa clearly has to think in a very wise and intelligent manner. Our role should not be minimized within that new process. And we should try to use the members that we have within the G-20 to really speak in the name of Africa.

NEPAD is present, with the African Union, at the meetings of the G-20. We make sure that the messages, which are conveyed, are in coherence with NEPAD. What we are seeing on the African side is a more coherent and single African voice. As you know, in Copenhagen [the international climate change conference] Africa will have a single voice, a unique coordinator of the African Group, a unique negotiation strategy. In the times to come, Africa will function more and more with such a single voice.

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