

Creating Confidence In Africa

More cross-sectoral coordination, better knowledge of NEPAD still required

By Peter Schneider

At a specially-convened roundtable meeting sponsored by the Canadian Council on Africa Feb. 14, K.Y. Amoako, Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), who is also one of the 17 members of the Blair Commission on Africa, met with 20 key players representing Canadian interests and African nations. The informal briefing took place the day prior to his scheduled appearance before the Senate foreign affairs committee's special hearing on African issues. As such, this breakfast session provided insight into Mr. Amoako's vision of the enormous challenges still facing the countries of Africa in 2005, a year that is viewed as being crucial to the continent's long-term prospects for economic growth. The discussion at the meeting also made clear that private and public sector interests require more coordination and that increased knowledge of the NEPAD framework that was created to assist African development is required, particularly among African politicians and legislators.

Providing the early-morning working group with a sobering bit of news before he began his presentation, Mr. Amoako said, "The world's Africa policy is at a crossroads. At the World Bank session last Friday, all the scenarios presented under the newly-appointed president indicate that Africa is mostly absent from the discussions."

Mr. Amoako assured the room that Canada remains "extremely influential" in the sphere of African development, telling the assembled that he was in Ottawa to meet with Canadian government officials in advance of the final meeting of the Blair commission, scheduled to gather in London on Feb. 24. The commission's report will be tabled in March, to allow time for feedback and discussion before the G-8 Summit in July. He emphasized the emerging results of the peer review mechanism which is the backbone of NEPAD, the economic development strategy adopted in 2001. A set of 'report cards' will be forthcoming in June. Mr. Amoako promised to illustrate OECD member countries' commitments and African countries' economic performance under NEPAD. He said it was time to explore the relationships between aid, trade, and debt relief as drivers of African renewal.

Acknowledging the presence of several private sector representatives in the room, Mr. Amoako said, "When we talk about meeting the Millennium Development Goals, we tend to focus too much on aid flows, and not enough on the private sector." He noted that five highly productive meetings have taken place between



PHOTOGRAPH BY TOM HILLMAN, EMBASSY

CC Africa Chair Lucien Bradet (left) with UN Undersecretary-General K.Y. Amoako at the Canadian Council for Africa roundtable on Feb. 14. "Streamlining and rationalizing institutions, all within the framework of NEPAD, I think is going to be important."

finance ministers from African countries and their counterparts in trade ministries, with the aim of stimulating private sector involvement in Africa. "This is a huge development," he said. "Jobs are created by the private sector, not by aid." An increased focus on small-and-medium enterprise (SMEs) and on "pulling together" the efforts of the most generous donor countries, including Norway, the Netherlands, and the U.S., in order to evaluate and share best practices, are high on UNECA's list of priorities.

Mr. Amoako teased the gathering of diplomats and development experts with the news that the forthcoming report of the Blair commission will be "ambitious and innovative, with an acknowledgement of the need for improved infrastructure, finally. We cannot talk about growth without addressing the need for billions of dollars of infrastructure financing, to tie into the NEPAD framework," he noted. There will also be a lot of material in the finalized report on the subject of aid flows, and the HIV/AIDS epidemic, specifically the disease's impact on capacity building and long term governance.

"We need to have some success stories in order to build confidence," the veteran African diplomat conceded. "The Blair commission report will propose a governance structure for investment. I did spend some time looking at

the Latin American experience and the Inter-American Development Bank. Some lessons can come from that. The private sector is not involved with NEPAD thus far." This opened the roundtable to a lively discussion of pertinent issues facing the private sector in Africa.

Representing the mining company Placer Dome, former Canadian High Commissioner to Tanzania Patricia Marsden-Dole noted one of the recurring concerns of the private sector regarding African development: "Big investors are not part of the aid policy business," she said.

Brian Pagan, of the Canada Fund for Africa, the host organization sponsoring Mr. Amoako's visit to Ottawa, said, "The challenge is broader; it extends to civil society, and to the political level in each country. We need to get awareness of what NEPAD is into all political levels—to educate the parliamentarians in each country. That would re-energize NEPAD."

Mr. Amoako observed, "A big part of recent discussions has been how to get Overseas Direct Assistance (ODA) to the private sector. The OECD push, to set aside 7 per cent of their GDP for ODA, is good, but it is hard to get [that money] funneled to the private sector."

Concerns were then expressed by CC Africa's Vice-President, Chris Roberts, that more money funneled to African governments would not

enter the private sector, but grow bureaucracies.

Brian Pagan said, "The key here is to create momentum. Remember that Africa receives only one per cent of global Foreign Direct Investment, and of that, 90 per cent goes to two countries, South Africa and Nigeria."

Raising the issue of long-term aid dependence, Ms. Marsden-Dole wanted to know, "What is the duration of high-level funding?," echoing the fears of some economists who project that an era of increased dependence on foreign aid in Africa will displace genuine growth.

Mr. Amoako said, "The counterargument is that we need a big push. In the short run, we need it from ODA." He indicated that this will probably last for a decade, "between now and 2015, then aid flows can begin to recede. Ten more years, and then the private sector has to kick in." He added, "Our three biggest obstacles [to growth] are conflict, HIV, and malaria. Peer review is a solution if we make it work well. In Ghana, for example, there is a national institution which reviews the government performance every four months and holds regular hearings with civil society. Remember, NEPAD's overarching goal is poverty reduction. It is the framework. Unfortunately, "poverty reduction framework" doesn't sound like a private sector opportunity."

Summing up his agenda for the months ahead, Mr. Amoako pledged to work on streamlining Africa's web of regional economic arrangements. Currently, there are five significant regional trading blocs active on the continent, a situation that can be confusing. "The five regional blocs have to come together, there is too much multiplicity and overlap, and we need to unravel that," he said. Another priority will be "forcing trade and finance ministers into dialogue. We must create a coherence of national trade policies."

Speaking with *Embassy* after the meeting adjourned, Mr. Amoako said, "There is a consensus, by and large, on what we need to do. Next, we must face the implementation, and to make it happen. That's where I think the commission for Africa will do the most good: implementation, implementation, implementation. Adding the private sector is critical. As we heard this morning, you can't create jobs in Africa without the private sector. It's about employment and poverty reduction. And if you look at all the facts, both the African private sector and foreign investment are going to be critical. There are opportunities for investments in Africa. The image issue doesn't help — conflict, HIV — but there's another dimension to Africa, and I think that this type of approach, that's proactive, is the way to go."



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