

# Matching Reputation with Action

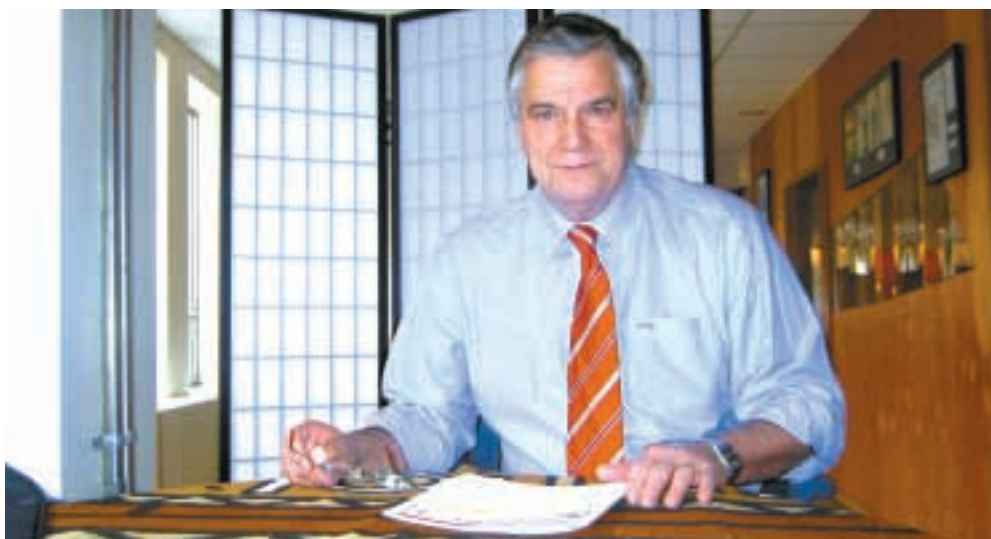
Lucien Bradet aims to put Africa back on the business map

By Peter Schneider

Lucien Bradet, president of the Canadian Council on Africa, an advocacy group which was founded in the wake of the 2002 Kananaskis summit to bring Canadian investment to Africa, and to increase Canadian knowledge of the 53 countries on the continent, is talking about the upcoming Burkina Faso Economic Days he has helped to coordinate. He says, "It's a challenge. Burkina Faso is not a big country, but it's big this year because they will be holding the 10<sup>th</sup> Summit of the Francophonie in November. The Prime Minister of Burkina Faso is going to be meeting senior people from both the political and non-political spheres. What we've done with the ambassador is to work closely to develop a program that has both a political aspect and an economic aspect."

The Oct. 17 and 18 meetings will explore issues such as mining and international trade, "especially regarding the agricultural sector and subsidies that exist, mainly in the Western world, which are not helping countries in Africa," Mr. Bradet says. "We're in the recruiting mode, and it's not easy to find Canadian companies that want to sit for a day with a small country and discuss issues of economic value. It's definitely the biggest mission that I've seen from Africa in many, many years. We're looking at a delegation of up to 100 people, including the Prime Minister and six cabinet ministers. The first day will address economic development, and on the second day there will also be a meeting of the Francophonie, where the Prime Minister will espouse his views on the Francophonie worldwide, and the aspirations of his country as host of the Summit. All of the African ambassadors have been invited, and also representatives from countries involved in the Francophonie. I think we will have a real success on our hands."

Mr. Bradet observes that African businesspeople require smoother access to potential Canadian partners and investors, and that this is an ongoing frustration. "I must hear on a weekly basis that visa applications and immigration regulations are a problem," he says. "Our major concern is that we want to increase Canada's commercial relationship with African countries. We have to make life a little easier for them. We've developed a trade arrangement



PHOTOGRAPH BY PETER SCHNEIDER, EMBASSY

Canada Council on Africa president Lucien Bradet: "The briefing we prepared for MPs and Senators is unique—I think our reputation is still very high in Africa, but the actions are not there."

with the least-developed countries; we've agreed to allow any export from Africa into Canada free of tariffs. At the same time, if we don't coordinate policies such as this with immigration, then we're not optimizing it."

In addition to facilitating trade missions and conferences, the Council acts as a source of expertise for non-governmental and official bodies. "We assisted with the consultations undertaken by Finance Minister Goodale in preparation for the Blair commission on Africa in Calgary and Montreal two weeks ago," Mr. Bradet notes. One of the chief objectives of the Blair commission is to promote the expansion of small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) in Africa. "At those events, we had representatives from small and medium enterprises. The issue was raised. We've seen a high level of interest from Minister Goodale, because of his participation in the Blair commission, but also because of his personal interest in Africa. I think SMEs are going to be part and parcel of the Blair commission. Unfortunately, these people are not often at the table because they don't have the resources. You still see big companies at the table because they can afford doing that kind of work. The basic question of the Blair commission is two-fold: what can we do to help Africa develop, and what must Africa

do in order to develop?"

Addressing the increasing popularity of microcredit schemes in Africa as a tool for basic economic development, Mr. Bradet says, "It's a concept that Mr. Martin was pushing in his report last June, saying we have to do more in developing the formal economy in Africa. The informal economy exists, but that's not the one that will help in terms of exports and developments. In that vein, I think cooperative systems, which after all were very popular in Canada when we developed our economy, and are still very popular, have a role to play. The co-op system, and microcredit, are things we are very aware of. Many of our members are very active in that business."

Mr. Bradet says he has a short list of urgent priorities. "From the Council's point of view there are three things. First, make the Canadian Investment Fund for Africa operative, sooner rather than later. Second, ensure that the upcoming foreign policy review be clear about a vision for Africa: it cannot be an afterthought, it cannot be an annex. It has to be a main chapter with all of the tools of the Canadian government in use. The third would be a much higher level of satisfaction among our members with CIDA, allowing Canadians to be a stronger partner in achieving development objectives."

## Canada is in accord with Africa on many fronts

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on the important relationship Africa has with Canada. "Time and again, Canada has taken the position favourable to development in African countries." Canada has been very supportive of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) since it was endorsed at the United Nations in 2002, and has also pledged billions of dollars as part of a Canada Fund for Africa. "Canada is a country which greatly contributes to the G8, who has taken a position which favours Africa since [the 2002 G8 summit meeting in] Kananaskis, and that has now made \$550 million available for NEPAD," she says.

Canada also supports African countries on an international level. Mrs. Bonkougou Yaméogo explains that when cotton-producing countries in Africa such as Burkina Faso, Mali,

and Chad brought forth a complaint to the World Trade Organization in May, 2003 concerning subsidies that certain other cotton-producing countries (like the United States, Greece, Spain and China) were practicing, Canada supported the African countries. "At the WTO meeting in Cancun [September 2003], Canada allied itself along with the position of the African countries and it has found that this [subsidizing] was just," she says. In turn, Burkina Faso supports Canadian initiatives on the world stage, for instance, the move at the United Nations to ban anti-personnel land mines. "My country was the first African country to sign the accord banning anti-personnel landmines when Canada proposed it," the ambassador states proudly.

As well as politicians and business people, regular Africans are attracted to and encouraged by the amicable relationship with

Canada. "Canada is interesting for us Africans," she explains, "because for most Africans, Canada represents an alternative. Many of our students come to study in Canada. We think that we share a sense of fighting to have a better world, a world that is more balanced, where we put questions concerning the environment at the centre of our focus, and it is for this reason that more and more African countries turn towards Canada." Mrs. Bonkougou Yaméogo notes that while Canada is a G8 country, its political and social beliefs are often more on par with those held by certain African countries than other G8 nations. She says that Canada shares with "African countries like mine a different vision of the world that is not conflicted, that is not concerned with one war or one leadership, but that is researching solutions to problems that affect the world."

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