

# QA

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

— *with the Executive Secretary* —



We are pleased to present the 18<sup>th</sup> edition in the series of Question & Answers with ECA's Executive Secretary. In this edition, the ES takes a journey through the last few years and discusses some of ECA's major achievements. We look forward to receiving ideas from staff members about issues that could be discussed in future Q&A series. Please write to [eca-hr.bulletin@un.org](mailto:eca-hr.bulletin@un.org).

**Q1: ES, on 21 August 2022 you announced your departure from ECA as the United Nations Under Secretary-General and Executive Secretary. Walk us through your journey of the last five years.**

ES: I recall my arrival five years ago to take up this role. It is fair to say that nothing prepares you for the task that lies ahead in doing this job. But let me start by saying that it has been an immense privilege to have led this institution, which I firmly believe is the continent's premier economic and development think tank.

In many ways I think this is great book -ender. In August of 2017 when I joined there were a number of conversations underway at the ECA. Questions of substance and form. Today I think we have evolved in those conversations and in our actions. But we must continue to interrogate who we are, what we do, and how we serve our member states for only then can we continue to grow. Let me recall a few of those.

My tenure at the ECA began with a deep dive into the African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement. First it was a trip to Nigeria to pay tribute to the father of the AfCFTA and possibly the ECA as well, Prof Adebayo Adedeji. My pilgrimage and my privilege but also my assignment really began there. With testimonies from childhood heroes of mine such as President Yakubu Gowon, I realized the assignment I had been given. I also understood what a long-term vision for ECA could look like and I made a commitment to carry this through. But there was also history from KY Amoako whose commitment to the continent's development and to ECA stayed and was a source of great support. The Transformation Leadership Panel provided a good space to discuss the African agenda unhindered. And of course, Carlos Lopes who never allowed you to be complacent. And finally seeing Prime Minister Hamdok on the other side and being able, as ECA, to really help and support made the work all the more rewarding. Ethiopia our host country's transformation also provided hope for the region and ECA and we worked more together. It has been a tenure where we have built on past achievements and laid the groundwork for new ones. It has been a privilege even in tough times to have the opportunity to serve so many member states realize their ambitions and support our dream for a prosperous Africa.

**Our engagement with the private sector has deepened.** While member states and trade ministers worked tirelessly on the AfCFTA there was a sense that the private sector was still sitting on the margins of the debate. As ECA we took the view that the African private sector needed this agreement, the youth, and the diversification and the transformation agendas all needed this and could not succeed without it. Our meeting with the private sector in Nigeria demonstrated

the importance for private sector ownership. Today we all agree the AfCFTA is Africa's growth blueprint with the private sector at the centre. This led to the ECA's first business conference on the side-lines of the AU Summit and also the business conferences during AfCFTA events. Today ECA has launched the AfCFTA Business Index to continue working to ensure this signature program for the continent delivers its promise. We have built and strengthened relationships with AfCFTA Secretariat, big private sector in Africa, our health initiative with the Dangote foundation to OCP Group and beyond, working with Corporate Council on Africa, Ant Financials, Equity Bank and our collaboration with the telecom companies during COVID. Today we are working to launch Team Africa Energy a consortium of African private sector energy players.

The Secretary General (SG) launched the first ever Memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the African Union Commission (AUC) and the United Nations on the development theme in 2017 with the AU chair. Today between Agenda 2063, Our Common agenda, and the SDGs there is seamless unity of objective. With the reform of the regional collaborative platforms chaired by the Deputy Secretary General (DSG) and the AUC Deputy Chairperson we have brought the MOU to life. The UN family led by ECA and UNDP is supporting the African Union agenda. This collaboration manifests itself in our work on Illicit Financial Flows, trade, the digital strategy, health, energy, COP27, urbanization, agriculture, gender, migration, transport and even the nexus between peace, development and security where we are producing joint reports and advocating together for the African Position. Working with the African Development Bank as the premier financing institution on the continent we have moved the agenda in many ways. The SG and DSG reforms have helped us put form and content to these relationships and we see the results. An interesting and proud book ender for me on this as well was all the debate five years ago around the role and usefulness of the Regional Economic Commissions that has waned as ECA and other commissions became anchors for the multilateral conversations at the regional level when the crisis broke. The resident coordinator system has given an anchor to the ECA on the ground and helped strengthened our impact. We also built a stronger relation with the Permanent Representatives in Addis Ababa, with the highlight being our retreat to Seychelles which helped build stronger understanding between our work, the AU, and the UN in New York. Today our regular briefings only build on this.

A fourth appropriate book-ender is our work on the macro-economy and growth of African countries and our relationship with institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, The World Bank and the G20. The visit of the IMF Managing Director, Ms Lagarde, to the ECA in December 2017 was historic in many respects as it opened a space for contestation and dialogue between the ECA and the IMF. We began small, working with Djibouti on the macro-model. Today and thanks to the commitment of Ms Georgieva, the new Managing Director, the collaboration deepened thanks in large part to our joint work the teams of the IMF, the World Bank, **and** our strong collaboration with AFREXIMBANK, we were able to secure the Special Drawing Rights and procure vaccines. Today we are working on a new global financial architecture which ECA, even during Adebayo's times had called for. We just changed the approach, but the objective remains. A more represented Africa. But we have also brought in the Youth so they can challenge us all. A robust Young Economists Network program should provide the kind of debate in country of macro programs so that across the continent we do in fact have homegrown programs debated and endorsed by citizens with ECA and others supporting with implementation advise.

Most of all the internal ECA reforms have been a strong tool for all the other changes. The democratization of knowledge production and discussion. We have gone from conversations on who attended what meeting to all staff having access to the SLT+P3 meetings and now recently SLT plus all. This opening up of the academic debate is most likely the strongest and most rewarding for me. The institution has a chance to show case its best but also to learn collectively and challenge. We know what each of us is doing and this has helped shape all of ECA messages on advocacy. This is the only way you build a robust Think Tank. Appreciating and recognizing talent has also helped to move the debate on staff recognition I believe, a sore point a few years back. Today with the talent drive underway we are implementing a full-scale process of getting the talent needed and knowing the talent we have. With SROs as Centres of Excellence, the debate between the periphery and the centre has diminished. And finally, with the Accountability Performance and Program Review we have a transparent objective way to assess performance. Our work on the centres is bearing fruit as we can focus on what matters most for Africa and we can set the agenda.

A final and important book-ender has been our work on the inside to bring more transparency to decision making and more inclusion. This has helped improved our overall performance on Human Resource Management, financial management and even on legal cases and audits. I reflect on the first management retreat and the last one and see the space, time and effort covered to build a team with common purpose and objectives. The efforts all directors are making to have UBUNTU meetings and retreats. The work done on the HR front to build a team, the work and effort put up to get from printing less documents to paperless meetings, the improvements on the campus from the flowers to the benches all these little changes that say we are building a people centered team. The collective spirit with which we moved to join the green legacy program, our support to the child heart center. The Safety and Security Services drills and sports days the work of the clinic during COVID and beyond. And yes, the discussions on sexual harassment have decreased as, building on the SG's directive, we worked on a zero-tolerance sexual harassment environment. This is

one of my biggest achievements and as we build on gender parity, transparency of contracting procedures and address the individual contract issues, I hope we can also improve on this very important dimension of our work.

But we did not always have good times, and this is also a book ender. As many of our member States are going through multiple crisis, we continue to pray for peace and more inclusive societies. We lost staff in crisis, in plane crashes and to COVID-19 and we came together again as one to support each other and help as we continue to do and must do in the future.

Overall it has been a very rewarding five years working with some of the most dedicated staff and member states and global partners. I thank you everyone for the immense privilege.

**Q2: ES, as you mentioned in 2018, the Commission embarked on reforms designed to refocus ECA's work programmes to make them more responsive to the transformative agenda of the continent. Looking back now, what have been some of your most significant achievements?**

**ES:** Thank you for this question. My tenure started with a really high run of the AfCFTA with President Issoufou of Niger just to get it over the bar. We were trying to take the continent along with us, trying to convince the world and ourselves that Africa could get to the finish line on this agenda. Together, we contributed to the ratification of the AfCFTA and that gave us the impetus to believe that, with some push, the impossible could be made possible. But soon after we got into crisis. I do not think we can talk of my achievements. They are sincerely collective. We worked hard and as I said we woke up early and went to bed very late to get from ideas to action.

However, to be successful we needed the member states with us and most importantly as our board. The Board of the ECA are the Finance, Development Ministers and Central Bank Governors of the Continent. I think starting with our first conference of Ministers in Addis and the difficulties faced in getting that through today we can confidently say our role as convenor is well established and our Conference of Ministers from Addis Abeba to Morocco to Senegal and back have been very successful and delivered the messages we needed. Thanks to the support of all these Governments.

Building on this relation the meetings of the African Finance, Development Ministers and Central Bank Governors is now an institution where we collectively think, formulate, innovate, advocate and implement the African agenda. This platform has clearly demonstrated Africa's ability to organize and to advocate for itself. More importantly the peer exchanges have helped countries learn and accelerate change on several fronts.

The African Regional Forum for Sustainable Development has also become an important stop and ECA and the Africa message are stronger and better at the High Level Political Forum.

At the time of my arrival, African countries were faced with the urgent need to identify sustainable policy options to expand their fiscal base, moving away from dependence on extractive sector exports towards more sustainable, diversified and inclusive trade and industry base, translating wealth creation into meaningful jobs given the population growth rates. It was clear that we needed to change the course of the conversations on Africa's development both within the institution and externally.

Together with the ECA Senior Leadership Team, we took a step back to take stock of what we as ECA had achieved as we celebrated ECA@60. A few things were clear: We needed to deepen engagement with non-traditional partners such as the private sector as the engine for driving production and productivity growth, and as a provider of alternative means of financing development. We also needed to change the way we engaged with international financial institutions. We had to move from engaging from a research perspective to being at the same table with IFIs to actively contribute to the direction of the global discourse on Africa's development. Finally, it was important to make ECA more accessible to our ministers in a manner that would allow us to quickly build consensus on critical issues as they emerged.

Five years on, it is a growing, more relevant ECA that stands in its stead. I leave knowing that there are amazing people who are already leading on so much of what we have established as we devolved a lot of work to technical teams out of necessity but also to reward and celebrate staff.

And we have made so much possible.

Continuing with trade, through the hard work of the ECA teams and other stakeholders, we are moving the needle on regional integration. Forty-three (43) countries have ratified the AfCFTA, with forty-six having finalised their offers on goods and forty-seven on their offers on services. The ECA team has worked with 24 countries to finalise their national AfCFTA strategies. and 7 countries have now adopted their national AfCFTA strategies. This is an achievement that we should be proud of given the potential transformational impact of unlocking trade on the continent, once we start the

implementation of the national strategies. Let me add that we also helped EAC and ECOWAS to develop regional AfCFTA strategies and are in course to finalising the same for ECCAS. The formulation and implementation of regional AfCFTA strategies will facilitate the emergence of competitive regional value chains, boosting intra-regional trade.

We saw some of the off-shoots of our work on the AfCFTA when the Covid-19 hit our countries. The principles underpinning our work on the AfCFTA-anchored Pharma Initiative supported the development of the African Medical Supplies Platform, the first pooled procurement platform of its kind, which ensured African countries access to much-needed vaccines to respond to the crisis.

Working closely with African Finance Ministers, we successfully advocated for the release of USD 650 billion in Special Drawing Rights. Our member States received USD 33.7 billion of this and we had the G20 endorse the Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI) - which delivered an additional USD 13 billion of liquidity to our countries. These were rare moments where we formed a collective force for good both at the continental and global level and ECA was at the centre of it to deliver tangible solutions. We must continue to harness the power of our collective voice!

The Liquidity and Sustainability Facility was born out of the need for Africa to find more liquidity to finance its recovery and transform the continued threat of the pandemic into an accelerator of growth and global prosperity.

The pandemic also led to the development of the Africa Communication and Information Platform for Health and Economic Action (ACIP), a mobile-based tool for two-way information and communication between citizens and governments, furnishing national and regional COVID task forces with user-friendly-generated survey data and actionable health and economic insights.

The ECA Price Watch Centre for Africa, launched as part of efforts to improve availability of price data, was a first-of-its-kind continental tool that offers a unique view of price variations in African countries, regional economic communities and at continental level, informing policy decisions and action.

The unintended consequence of the Ukraine/Russia conflict was the unprecedented increase in commodity and energy prices mainly due to supply side disruptions. To support our member States manage this fallout, together with African Export-Import Bank (Afreximbank), the African Union Commission (AUC) and the AfCFTA Secretariat, we developed a digital business-to-business (B2B) and business-to-government (B2G) exchange platform known as the African Trade Exchange (ATEX) to provide buyers and member States with quality products from verified suppliers in a more efficient way, and at average cost, thereby improving cross-border trade.

The African Centre for Statistics has done a remarkable job on the area of data. Over the last few years, we have reduced the number of SDG indicators for which data is unavailable. We contributed to the establishment of the Africa Knowledge Management Hub on COVID-19 and Africa COVID-19 Dashboard. Our work on censuses has led to the design of new methodologies that have cut down the time taken for our member States to undertake their census, leading to 33 countries who are now in the process of or have finalized their national censuses.

On digitalisation, the Digital Center of Excellence was established to support our member States improve data management, facilitate access to digital identity, expand e-commerce, and mainstream the Internet of Things in Africa's business processes and beyond. Working with the AUC, we developed the first continental AU Digital Transformation Strategy 2020-2025 and Africa Digital ID Blueprint. Moving to implementation, we worked with the Government of the Republic of Congo and partners to set up an Artificial Intelligence Research Center for Africa to build capacity, conduct research, and leverage the innovation potential of young people for entrepreneurship and job creation. The Cyber Security Centre established in Togo, in partnership with the Government, will promote coordinated cybersecurity approaches in Africa and contribute to the continent's digital advancement. A few days ago, Ethiopia launched the pilot phase of its National ID Program with the support of ECA. The magnitude of the impact of this initiative is immense – digital ID provides an opportunity for women, for minorities, and for populations at risk to gain access to financial tools and payment systems.

Climate challenges remain one of the major crises we continue to face. At ECA, we have been advocating for a just transition, for the continent to benefit from the regulatory role its resources like the peatlands of the Congo Basin play in managing global temperatures. We are leading the advocacy for gas as a just-transition fuel for Africa and continue to work to on the research side on the scale of the impact. Africa needs all the financial resources it can get. And so, our teams are working with key partners to establish an African Carbon Registry that could mobilize over USD 15 billion per annum and generate 30 million jobs.

On the financing side, we have worked with Angola to develop a sovereign local bond market and raise local currency funds for the development of the country's economy, leading to the issuance of its 10-year Kwanza bonds and a decline in the cost of borrowing. Our work on excise tax for the government of Ethiopia resulted in a 135% increase in excise

tax revenue. Under the SDG7 Bond Initiative launched by ECA, South Africa was able to finalise the bond issuance of its first \$210 million in a ground-breaking green energy programme deal. These are tangible results that we can be proud of.

But there are many more to add.

These include the work with Ethiopia on the formulation of a national Spatial Development Framework; the African Girls Coding Camp; engagement with universities across the continent on land policy; our new initiative on supporting African cities to measure their gross domestic product (GDP) as a vital economic well-being indicator; supporting the African Union Commission to develop key performance indicators for the Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM) so that we can begin to move towards implementation of the Yamoussoukro Decision (YD) ; working with countries to develop national road safety action plans, and the battery precursor initiative with the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zambia, a follow-up action to the DRC Africa Business Forum we co-organised in November 2021, to name a few.

At the subregional level, we achieved the endorsement of the Douala Consensus on economic diversification and industrialization in Central Africa that is also leading to the creation of a Special Economic Zone for Timber in Cameroon.

In West Africa, we adopted the ECOWAS Vision 2050 and are working with countries on the development of the five-year implementation plan. Moreover, we are working on budgeting frameworks sensitive to demographic dividend (BSDD). With our Resident Coordinators in West Africa, we developed Covid-19 country responses and secured DSSI for countries totaling US\$947 million in additional liquidity

In East Africa, we are supporting deeper regional integration by working with the East African Community (EAC) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) to design regional AfCFTA strategies. We are working with South Sudan and Somalia on the WTO Accession process, undertaking market access studies for Rwanda, working with Djibouti on a national development plan, and with Somalia on a Public Private Partnership framework. A lot of work is also ongoing on the Northern Corridor to enhance capacities in logistics and transportation for waterways and lakes in the sub-region.

In Southern Africa, we supported the development of the SADC Vision 2050 and the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP 2020-2030), the policy blueprint for development in Southern Africa. We supported Eswatini in the development of a financing model for micro, small and medium-scale enterprises (MSMEs), established a MSME digital platform for creating a network and community of technology and innovation learning for MSMEs, and increasing access to technologies to enhance the agility, productivity and competitiveness of MSMEs. We are also working with the governments of Zambia and Zimbabwe on the establishment of the “Common Agro-Industrial Park Initiative between Zambia and Zimbabwe” and with the SADC Secretariat to revive the “SADC National Planning Entities (NPEs) Platform”.

In North Africa, we developed a road map to implement a national mechanism of migrants' skills recognition and we are working with the governments of Sudan and Egypt to strengthen cooperation between Sudanese Tax Chamber (STC) and the Egyptian Tax Authority.

Through IDEP we have continued to see a 100% annual increase in the number of public officials trained to effectively implement policies for economic growth and structural transformation, with an even increasing proportion being women. At least 60% of our trained public officials attest to applying the knowledge gained concretely and this is a testament to the value that our member States place on the knowledge we generate. I am immensely proud of the establishment of the ECA Young Economist Network (YEN), who, I hope will help the continent and policy makers find the right economic policies and solutions to address many of the continued complex challenges facing Africa.

**Q3: From the programme support perspective, we have also made some major improvements. Can you share with us some of the notable progress we have accomplished?**

**ES:** Thank you for this timely question. Indeed, our success is not only on the programme front. Many colleagues have been working on the support side to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of our operations.

Let me start with progress on the budget and finance side. I am very proud of the improvement on the overall improved budget utilisation. Of course, this would not have been possible without the support of the SLT and the Budget Unit working closely with divisions/SROs/IDEP. We have also been able to:

- Improve responses (both quality and timeliness) to ACABQ questions during annual proposed programme budgets, which led to approval of proposed budget and receiving the annual allotment without reductions, even during the wider UN reforms - our regular financial management meetings helped all directors, sections heads,

Programme Management Officers (PMOs) and other staff know their status in terms of programme delivery against targets. This has led the Commission to be more disciplined and to improve performance by the year-end.

- Secure an additional US\$14.8 million which went toward upgrades such as staff security, IT infrastructure, renovating the conference centres and the ECA compound;
- Improve timely delivery of ECA's strategic priorities through our comprehensive, transparent, and concise budget performance reports presented at the APPRM;
- Mobilise US\$ 2 million to set up two new clinics in the Tigray region, where UN staff operate without adequate provision for emergencies and unforeseen hazards. This is so important because we need to show the duty of care from the UN common system.
- Increase RPTC resources to address global issues and achieve good performance in the targeted thematic areas and in resource allocation and performance management. RPTC increased from US\$6.9 million in 2018-2019 to US\$7.9 million in 2022. We expect RPTC resources to reach US\$ 8.5 million in 2023 if approved by the General Assembly. African member States will directly benefit from this upward allocation of RPTC resource trend.
- Design a smarter and faster resource re-allocation methodology to address emerging unforeseen issues such as Covid-19.
- Establish non-traditional partnerships with private sector organizations, philanthropic institutions, and regional development banks; between 2017 and August 2022, we entered into 74 agreements with partners to deliver on Africa's priorities with a value of over US\$ 70 million and mobilised over US\$50 million in extrabudgetary resources (Annex I).

We should all be proud of the accomplishments of our Publication and Conference Management Team. Over the last few years we have been able to initiate the renovation project of UNCC-AA/hybrid conferencing solutions, developed the business case and operational plan for the Africa Hall Visitors' centre, institute the Policy Framework on Multilingualism, and fully operate conferences under the PaperSmart initiative.

We have been able to improve accessibility for people living with disability and make progress on the implementation of the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy (UNDIS). Through the work of the UNDIS Task Force, we have increased the momentum towards implementation across the UNDIS indicators (based on progress indicators set by the Executive Office of the Secretary General); developed an Inspira course on "Disability Inclusion: Building and Inclusive and Accessible United Nations" (LMS-6982-1 in English and LMS-6982-1 in French) that is mandatory for all ECA staff; developed an action plan on the UN Disability-Inclusive Communication Guidelines; and developed a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) covering the full cycle of accessibility support for Persons with Disabilities during upcoming compound renovations.

On Supply Chain Management, the team has worked hard to achieve remarkable improvement in the efficiency, timeliness and quality of services delivered across all areas of the supply chain – procurement, property management, shipping and contract management – in support of the ECA programme of work. A key area of success that deserves particular mention is procurement, which has become more strategic and grown in complexity and magnitude over the last 5 years, but where ECA has also witnessed some of its most significant achievements in terms of the sheer volume of transactions executed. For example, hundreds of high value and high impact contracts for the procurement of various goods and services were successfully delivered during the period. The finalisation of the contract for the main works and other ancillary works of the landmark Africa Hall renovation project, valued at over USD50 million, is one such feat that we have accomplished.

I would like to commend much of the progress that we have seen with the Safety and Security Services Team. Over the last five years, ECA Safety and Security Service has greatly advanced and improved through new and innovative approaches. Internally, the team management has succeeded in ensuring zero conflict, high levels of engagement, client orientation and teamwork. We have worked to ensure that the welfare of staff remains a high priority and have improved facilities and equipment. I am proud of their constant engagement through monthly internal Townhall meetings and Friday open house discussions and the development of the first SSS Magazine in 2021, being the first of such in the United Nations Safety and Security Service internationally. As many of you will have seen, we have greatly improved our external security services, strived for consistency in the application of security procedures and completely digitalised our Pass and ID and visitor management procedures. There are many more innovations in the pipeline, and I commend the entire SSS team for these efforts.

At the Commission-wide level, the institution of the Assessment of Programme Performance Review meetings has significantly contributed to improved programme performance and budget utilisation and for this I must commend the effort and steadfastness of the SPORD team. They have really driven this process as a centre piece for the organisation.

Together with the Human Resource team and hiring managers, we have moved our gender parity numbers from 31% in December 2017 to 44% in August 2022 at the professional and above category (Annex II). This would not have been possible without some of the strict measures we had to introduce, which sometimes we had to adjust to, but which were needed to get us to where we are today.

Finally, the institution of our Enterprise Risk Management Plan, including the treatment and response plans, are additional measures that have been introduced to ensure that our internal and external risk exposures are minimised.

**Q4: Finally, ES, as you leave us, what are some of your key takeaways? What advice would you give to your successor?**

**ES:** It will be presumptuous of me to give advice. What I can offer as I benefitted from others before me is support. As I said earlier, five years with ECA has been an immense privilege. To have worked with the incredible professionals that I met at ECA, our partners in civil society, government, other UN agencies, the private sector and the youth in these challenging times of crises for Africa has been rewarding on many levels. I learned a lot and I am sure I will continue to learn from this experience.

As I leave, I am very cognisant that we are still a far way away from the 10 percent growth needed to achieve a prosperous Africa, one that delivers jobs, healthcare and a good education for all. Recent and ongoing crises are compounded by volatility in Africa's political space, rise in global geopolitical tensions and a continued threat of macroeconomic instability. We still have a lot of work to do. But as I have shown above, ECA has been able to demonstrate that we can both generate ideas and deliver concrete actions.

So, I conclude by a conviction I now have in Africa, we can make the impossible achievable with knowledge and persistence of conviction. I wish the ECA all the best.

## Annex I

### Partnership and resource mobilization



## Annex II

### Progress towards gender parity at the professional category

