



United Nations
Economic Commission for Africa

***Africa's Development Agenda: Lessons from the
Adebayo Adedeji Years and Policy Options for the 21st
Century***

**Memorial Symposium in Honour of Prof. Adebayo Adedeji,
former Executive Secretary of ECA**

Date: 7th July 2018

Venue: Lagos, Nigeria

Brief Concept Note

Introduction:

Adebayo Adedeji was one of the most towering intellectual figures and development practitioners in Africa in the late 20th Century. He served as Executive Secretary of ECA for sixteen years (1975- 1991); the longest tenure in that position by any executive secretary. Under his leadership, ECA assumed not only regional but global prominence initiating and leading several Pan-African projects and working closely with the then Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in promoting regional integration, and the social and economic development of the Continent. Some of the historic economic initiatives that took place with ECA's intervention under him include the famous Lagos Plan of Action and the Final Act of Lagos of 1980, the Abuja Treaty establishing the African Economic Community (AEC) of 1991, the African Charter on Popular Participation in Development and Transformation popularly known as the Arusha Declaration of 1990 and the African Alternative Framework to the Structural Adjustment Programme for socio-economic recovery and transformation (AAF-SAP). Adedeji's philosophy of development privileges a self-reliant inward looking approach of domestic resource mobilisation, improved productive capacity, infrastructure provision and upgrading, human capital development and collective economic action by African States through the promotion of regional economic integration. As Adedeji noted;

"As I have said and written many a time before, the two pillars around which the structural transformation of the African economy must be built are the principles of self-reliance and of self-sustainment. The achievement of an increasing measure of self-reliance will bring about (i) the internalization of the forces of demand which determine the direction of development and economic growth and the patterns of output; (ii) increasing substitution of indigenous factor inputs for expatriate factor inputs; and (iii) increasing mass participation in the development process accompanied by a more equitable distribution of the social product"¹.

Promoting structural transformation in Africa will therefore require profound and fundamental changes in policy, strategy and instrumentalization in the agriculture, industry and services sectors and institutional organisation.

In his commitment to regional integration, Adedeji played a key role in the formation of regional economic communities like ECOWAS, COMESA, and ECCAS. As Adedeji himself puts it, "I've spent a quarter of a century of my life promoting economic cooperation. I was a leader of the team in the establishment of ECOWAS. I was very optimistic when I came to the ECA that I would be able to do similar things elsewhere in Africa. So we started the PTA and COMESA, then in Central Africa. I've gone through it. It has been disappointing that these have not achieved much"². Adekeye Adebajo draws a parallel between Adedeji and Raul Prebisch in their leadership of ECA and ECLAC³ respectively in their quest at promoting regional economic integration. According to him, "While Adedeji was widely regarded as the

¹ . See, Jeggan Senghor, *Adebayo Adedeji: Towards a Dynamic African Economy: Selected Speeches and Lectures- 1975- 1986*. (New York: Routledge Publishers, 2013) p.11.

² . See, Africa Recovery, Vol. 2-3, 2002, p. 16.

³ . ECLAC- United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.

intellectual ‘Father of African Integration’, Prebisch was the intellectual ‘Father of Latin American Integration’. Both men challenged Western-dominated conventional wisdom and won the support of their respective regions through their courageous policy battles with more powerful adversaries”.

Even in retirement, Adedeji continued to serve the Continent. He was the Chairperson of the APRM Panel of Eminent Persons, served on the Committee that reviewed the ECOWAS Treaty in 1992, chaired the Committee established by the Heads of State and Government of the African Union to audit the integration efforts of the AU in 2007, and served in many other capacities.

Adedeji as an intellectual can be best described as a “rebel” with a cause, who challenged dominant wisdom and orthodoxies, deconstructed dominant thinking and proposed alternative policy options even if those policies seemed unpopular in global development circles and wrestled out of the policy domain. His ideas, values, beliefs and philosophy of development remain relevant today, as they were yesterday.

In memory of this outstanding and illustrious son of the Continent, the ECA and the Adedeji family are organising a symposium in his honour on the 7th July 2018 in Lagos, Nigeria. The symposium will reflect on his ideas and notions of development, their relevance in contemporary era, the trajectory and current context of Africa’s development, and the challenges, opportunities and prospects for the structural transformation of African economies and the Continent.

Objectives of the Symposium:

The main objective of the symposium is to celebrate the life and times of Prof. Adebayo Adedeji by reflecting on his ideas, views, and perspectives on Africa’s development and situate them in the past, present and future of Africa’s development agenda and prospects.

As an apostle of regional integration, the launch of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) in Kigali, Rwanda on 21st March 2018 and its signing by 44 African countries no doubt introduces a new dynamic in the regional integration process of the Continent consistent with Adedeji’s views on Africa’s integration project. The creation of an expanded market of over one billion people and a combined gross domestic product of more than \$3.4 trillion, will expectedly have positive impact on productivity, economic growth, social progress and development in Africa. The AfCFTA can be situated in the trajectory of major economic initiatives from the Lagos Plan of Action and the Final Act of Lagos and the regional integration efforts which Adebayo Adedeji championed.

Broadly outlined, the objectives of the symposium are;

1. To reflect on the development paradigm, efforts and contributions of Adebayo Adedeji to Africa’s quest for regional integration and the structural transformation of the Continent;

2. To examine Africa's development trajectory, the key policy initiatives and agendas, their failures, challenges, opportunities and prospects including the AfCFTA;
3. To reflect on the context of development including institutions, governance and the social space, which Adedeji engaged both in theory and practice;
4. To map policy alternatives for Africa's economic and social development and how Africa's economic transformation can be accelerated;

Participation:

The symposium will attract diverse but high level personalities including former and serving political leaders, distinguished scholars and development practitioners, private sector operators, and civil society actors. The symposium will also be attended by those who worked closely with and related with Prof. Adedeji during his professional life. Participation will only be by invitation.

Output:

The main output of the symposium will be the proceedings of the meeting, which will summarise the presentations made, main issues discussed and the key policy recommendations emanating from the symposium. The proceedings will be published by ECA.

Outcome:

The main outcome of the meeting is a robust intellectual and policy exchange amongst some of Africa's leading scholars, practitioners and political leaders on how Africa's development process can be accelerated. Key policy recommendations will be a major outcome of the symposium.

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