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TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW OF
ADEBAYO ADEDEJI

BY

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THOMAS G. WEISS: This is 6 March, Tom Weiss interviewing Adebayo Adedeji in the UNDP (UN Development Programme) offices in snowy New York, at 6:00 p.m. Nigerian time, about 11:00 a.m. New York time. Bayo, good morning.

ADEBAYO ADEDEJI: Good morning, Tom.

TGW: In your autobiography, you noted that you were an only child for a while, but that you were raised in large part by your grandmother. I wondered if you could just tell us a little bit about that early life, and how you think that early life eventually contributed to the person you became, and the ideas that you now hold dear.

AA: I don't know what linkages and connections one can establish, but one thing was clear. Not only was I the only child, my mother was the only child. Therefore, for my grandmother, I was like a second child, as it were. She was very loving, and at the same time very stern. She didn't want anything of me other than shining scholastic work. So even as a little kid, I would go to school from 8:00 to 2:00 and then after go for special coaching sessions. I would eat my lunch in the place for coaching. The result was that I had only four years of primary education before I went to secondary school. I skipped two or three years of primary education before I went to secondary school. I knew as much mathematics at twelve as sixteen year olds. And, thereafter, I developed the habit of spending more time reading as a kind of sport. It was hard work.

But in terms of the outside world, she always insisted that it was a very competitive and unfair world. Therefore, one had to be the best. One is not assured of anything, but at least one should be the best so that one can have an even chance with others.

The world, then, in which I was born, was affected by two major events. The first was the Great Depression. I was born in 1930; 1929–1932 were the years of depression. It affected, in a way, the fortunes of the family. And then I myself grew up in the World War II years. I knew a little more about the economics of export commodities because that was what my parents specialized in—producing. They produced mainly cocoa and kola nuts. I also knew about how wrong [Adolf] Hitler was in World War II. We were not taught what Hitler did. We were taught to believe that he was the devil incarnate, and we had all sorts of schools songs and plays that demonized Hitler. Don't forget that Nigeria was then a British colony.

And of course, at the end of the war in 1945, already in secondary school, we were exposed to postwar development, particularly to the nascent nationalist struggle for independence for Nigeria. That coincided with a really very exciting period in the history of the country, when the founders of new Nigeria, like Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe and Chief Obafemi Awolowo were demanding and agitating for “self-government now.” We used to subscribe, with our little pocket money, to all the newspapers which were, of course, banned by the principal of our school who thought that the newspapers were too nationalistic and politically left-wing. But we would buy the newspapers and read them, nevertheless. And before the principal came—he used to teach us Greek and the classics—before he came we put excerpts from the editorials on the black board, testing whether he, too, was reading what was banned. Of course, he showed he had read it because he used to be very angry with us.

As for the world, we were well exposed. Indeed, it was opened up for us particularly through the radio, thanks to BBC Overseas Service. And as Nigeria approached independence,

the 1950s and early 1960s were the period of rapid development for the country. The postwar years were the period of rapid development for the country itself.

TGW: In your schooling, could you tell us about whether this was private or public, and what the walk was like to school? But I was also interested in whether, in relationship to the Great Depression, or in relation to the Second World War and its termination, whether either the League of Nations or the United Nations figured in the curriculum. When did you first become aware of these experiments in international cooperation?

AA: We knew about Abyssinia. The “diminutive” emperor who defied the League of Nations was a hero to us all because of what the Italians did to his country. We followed world developments every day. We had ten, fifteen, thirty minutes listening to the BBC (British Broadcasting Company) every morning and evening on progress on the war, with commentaries from the principal of our school. We were thus kept abreast of developments that were happening, and the personalities involved, and, of course, naturally the heroic deeds of [Winston] Churchill, [Franklin] Roosevelt, and the Allied Forces. We celebrated the end of the war—victory in Europe and victory in Japan.

TGW: But, for example, the founding of the United Nations, or San Francisco, or the Bretton Woods institutions? Did they come in, or was there just relief that the war was over?

AA: The founding of the UN, yes. But the World Bank and the IMF (International Monetary Fund) no. I left secondary school, Ijebu-Ode Grammar School, in December 1949, so I am talking up to 1949. But on the founding of the UN, if I remember correctly, we were given the day off. That was almost always welcome to school children. After the founding of the UN, there were very high expectations. We were convinced that the organization would accelerate the

decolonization process. There was however fear that the UN might go the way of the League of Nations and sacrifice the interests of Africa as the League sacrificed the interest of Ethiopia. This was all part of what we were taught in school.

TGW: You mentioned becoming aware of the nationalist movement. What kinds of criticism, per se, entered into schoolyard discussions? Or was this just considered as that's the way things were? Were you, as boys in school, aware of what was going on, or how this may have had an impact on the family, or aspirations? Or was this much later?

AA: We were involved to a large extent. We attended political rallies in spite of the severity of the punishment should we be caught. Don't forget, the principal of my school, Reverend S.R.S. Nicholas, was half-British, and half-Ghanaian. So he was very pro-British. He didn't want us to get involved in politics. In fact, I remember when there was the case of an attempted assassination of the then-nationalist leader, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, he told us that in an assassination story there are two asses. And, of course, if you put two asses together, and then add n-a-t-i-o-n, you get the word "assassination." But he was not teaching us how to spell the word but was simply ridiculing the great nationalist and political leader who was American-trained. So he was anti-nationalist. But the environment was so exciting that any boy of our generation had no alternative but to inform himself about the struggle for independence. When Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe published his assassination story, we collectively bought two copies, which were clandestinely circulated, particularly among the senior boys.

TGW: You mentioned listening to the BBC and becoming aware of the world outside of Nigeria. When did the thought first dawn on you that maybe your career was not only going to be in Nigeria, but that you might like to go elsewhere? To work elsewhere? If not, to think

internationally, at least that there was a large world out there that you might want to become a player in?

AA: I never gave it a thought. Let me tell you, I left school and went to the only tertiary institution then in existence, University College, Ibadan—it was then a college of London University—and from there I proceeded to Britain on government scholarship to read for a degree in economics. When I finished, I was offered an assistant lectureship, a kind of graduate research assistant at Ibadan. At that same time, the government wanted to attract young men and women like myself to the civil service. Of course, as I had gone on scholarship, I felt morally bound to work for the civil service for some time. I was still in the civil service when in September, 1960 I was admitted to the Littauer Center, now the John F. Kennedy School of Government. Three years after Harvard, I left the civil service for university teaching. While at Harvard, I paid several visits to the UN at its headquarters in New York and in one of my graduate courses—economic development taught by Professor Kenneth Galbraith—I became familiar with different ideas on development postulated by UN and its senior officials.

But it was not until 1966 that I had my first direct encounter with the organization. The UN had become engulfed in a serious financial crisis because of the Congo War. The Congo is still a problem today. The Soviets refused to pay their contribution for meeting the cost of UN troops in the Congo. Remember that the then-Secretary-General, Dag Hammarskjold, died in a plane crash in the pursuit of the UN Congo policy. The General Assembly decided to set up a committee of fourteen experts drawn from the different parts of the globe to look into the finances of the UN. Our then permanent representative to the UN used to be my boss. Chief S. O. Adebo must have submitted my name.

In order to prepare myself for the assignment, I had to read all that I could about the finances of the United Nations. Although I am a development economist with special interest in public finance, UN finances constituted a special area of its own. The assignment lasted for about three to four months. And that was my first real exposure and contact with the UN.

TGW: I am going to go backwards here for a minute, simply because there were a couple of events that seemed interesting to us. I presume that you lived in fear of your father, the way that I lived in fear of mine. So we were curious about the anecdote that you went on a hunger strike in order to insist that you be able to go to the school and follow the course of studies that you wanted to go on. How did you have the courage to do so? And did this indicate a willingness to go against the grain that would be useful later?

AA: Well, it was pride, Tom, it was really pride. You see, my father wanted me to go to the then Eton of Nigeria—King's College, Lagos. To be eligible for admission to King's College, you must be fifteen or sixteen years of age. You must have completed six to eight years of primary education. My primary school teacher, Mr. Olatunji Dosunmu, because of the way I had been brought up, thought that it would be a waste of my talents to keep me in primary school for six years or more. He therefore persuaded the school headmaster to allow me to sit the entrance examination to Ijebu-Ode Grammar School in 1943 when I was only twelve years old and in standard four. Unlike King's College, Lagos, Ijebu-Ode Grammar School had no minimum age requirement for admission. But it was the only secondary school in the whole of Ijebu Province. Gaining admission to it was therefore extremely competitive. Every year, some 3,000 to 4,000 boys competed for just 100 places. So, usually people would take the entrance examination several times, year in year out, before gaining admission, if ever. In those days, the

average age of new entrants was nineteen. Some of the new entrants were men rather than boys, often as old as twenty-four to twenty-six years, and sometimes already married with families of their own.

My grandmother was very hesitant with my primary school decision that I should sit the entrance exam because my father had always wanted me to go to King's College, so that I could study science subjects and mathematics very well and thus be prepared to study medicine in the university. King's College had the best science laboratories in the country in those days. But St. Saviour's School headmaster pleaded with grandma that I should be given the chance. "Trying the exam does not tantamount to being admitted," he argued. Grandma relented and paid the examination fee. So without the knowledge of my father, who was not in Ijebu-Ode when the debate took place but in Ipaja, near Lagos where his cocoa and kola nut plantations were, I took the exam in July 1943.

Months later, early in December 1943, my father had come home for Christmas. The result of the entrance examination to Ijebu-Ode Grammar School was published in mid-December. My schoolmates who saw the result rushed home to congratulate me. Of course, they did that in the presence of my father, who had said nothing while they were around. He didn't say a word. Later he called me and said, "What is that foolish thing about getting into grammar school? Of course, you are going to King's College." I said, "But I have been admitted." He said, "No, no, no. You are going back to your primary school to do your primary five and six. Then two years later, you will go and take your King's College exams."

Here I had become an instant hero in the school, because of all the thirty boys who went for the exam from my school—all in standards six and five—only three of us had succeeded.

Now how could I go back? So I told this to my mother. I said, “I am not going to my primary school again.” To make my point, I went on a hunger strike. Of course, that nearly killed my grandmother when she was told. She tried to plead with my father, to no avail.

Then, without telling anybody, she went to my father’s uncle. My father’s uncle had two boys. One of them was in his twenties. The other was eighteen. They had taken the examinations for five or six years in succession and had failed to secure admission. So my uncle couldn’t hide his joy that this little boy of twelve had taken it and passed. He said, “Adebayo, when you were born, I was carrying you around. Now you are going to the grammar school at twelve. Congratulations!” He was a very good tactician. He started dancing as soon as he saw my father, saying, “Aren’t we very lucky that at least one of our kids has been admitted to Ijebu-Ode Grammar School?” he asked him loudly. In those circumstances, my father had no choice. Then he assured my dad that, “If you have financial problems, I’ll take care of Bayo’s fees until you can take over.” As my father would have none of that, he allowed me rather reluctantly to take my place in the grammar school.

So it was not out of courage, but just out of pride. It would have been humiliating to go back to my primary school after my outstanding success. Of course, I wouldn’t have minded, if I had failed, to wait for King’s College. But now that I had passed, I thought that this was an opportunity that I should not miss.

TGW: When did you reorient your intellectual activities towards the social sciences and away from the sciences and math, and drop gynecology in favor of this dismal science?

AA: Ah yes. Because I had gone to grammar school instead of King’s College, I wanted to prove to my father that the opportunity and facilities for science education were very good.

Fortunately, they were. I studied physics, chemistry, biology, math, and so on. Then I wanted to this time to satisfy my father's ambition for me—to become a doctor. And I wanted to be a gynecologist. Specializing in gynecology was not his idea. That was mine. But being a doctor was his idea, and I thought I should at least meet him half way.

I became interested in gynecology because of Dr. S. L. Manuwa, who was the first Nigerian director-general of medical services during the colonial era. He had the tremendous reputation of being the best gynecologist in the world. Many myths were built around him, because he was considered a genius. One of the myths was that his brain had been bought by his university in Dublin, Ireland, so that when he died his brain would be taken and sent there! He came from my hometown and became my role model. So I wanted badly to be a gynecologist.

Then, something happened. I talked about the economic depression in the 1930s, when I was born. In the late 1940s and 1950s, there were a lot of business activities to revitalize the Nigerian economy. And Nigeria benefited tremendously from the postwar boom. Many indigenous financial institutions were established. My father joined others in establishing the farmers' bank. Of course, he didn't have anything to do with the management of it. But those who were appointed to manage it did it so very badly, and the bank when bankrupt. It was clear after that that whatever his ambition had been for me in terms of medicine would have to wait for two or three years, at least.

You cannot do medicine privately from home. You have to enter a university in England and that cost a lot of money. So I had to think of what else to do, whether to wait or to find an alternative. For me, to find an alternative was very difficult because I had put all my mind on medicine. But first I needed to find a job after graduating from Ijebu-Ode Grammar School in

December 1949—at nineteen years of age. The job that was first offered to me through my uncle I refused to take. It was in the Customs Department and customs officers were generally perceived by the public to be very corrupt. Corruption didn't start yesterday. In fact, when I went for the interview, I had the suspicion that my appointment had been fixed. My interview did not last more than five minutes and the offer of the job was instantly. And here was I, coming from a school where you were taught for six years to uphold a high ethical code. As if to make matters worse, somebody said to me as I was going out of the interviewing room, "In six years, you will be very wealthy." I thought, "These people are trying to send me to jail." So I went home and convinced my uncle's wife to give me transport money to go to Ibadan, from Lagos. I went there to look for another job, a different kind from that of customs department. Fortunately, the colonial government had just established WAISER (West African Institute for Social and Economic Research) and attached it to the University College, Ibadan. WAISER's activities covered Gold Coast (Ghana), Sierra Leone, Gambia, and Nigeria.

NISER (Nigerian Institute for Social and Economic Research) replaced WAISER after independence. The authorities were looking for research assistants to help a Professor W. B. Schwab of Pennsylvania State University, who was coming to do a socioeconomic survey of a medium-sized town in southern Nigeria. So I signed up for that job, and was one of a team of ten research assistants appointed to work under Professor Schwab.

TGW: What was it like working for a combination anthropologist/sociologist/development specialist?

AA: It was my first exposure to the social sciences. In fact, after I signed up for the job, I began to doubt my wisdom. The university asked me if I had studied any social science. I said,

“No.” They said, “OK, you did math.” I said, “Yes.” “Maybe that will be enough for you.”

This was the beginning of my interest in social science. Specifically, I started reading economics.

TGW: This was which year?

AA: 1950. I started studying economics seriously to the extent that two years later, in 1952, I took the General Certificate of Education Examination (GCE) at the advanced level and passed. So, unfortunately, I left the very profitable profession of medicine and gynecology for the dismal science—economics!

TGW: After you finished your degree, you mentioned earlier you went off to London. And I am curious, at that time in the mid-1950s about a couple of major events—Bandung (Asian-African Conference) and Ghanaian independence. What kinds of discussions were going on among students, I presume in a Commonwealth Club or something like that? Were these topics somewhere near the top of the agenda?

AA: Very much so. First of all, independence and pan-Africanism. Secondly, apart from the independence of Nigeria, Ghana was to become independent two years after my going to England in 1957. I went to England in 1955. Then, [Kwame] Nkrumah was everybody’s hero. He was then my hero, because he was pushing the African agenda of independence and pan-Africanism. Bandung was in 1956. And there was in 1958 the first-ever pan-African conference to be held in Africa, in Accra, Ghana—the second to be held in Africa but the sixth in the series since 1900 when the first was held took place in Dar es Salaam. All these were follow-ups to the Manchester Pan-African Congress which George Padmore and W.E.B. DuBois had organized in 1945. All these, including the initiative to establish the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1957 became subjects of discourse in universities in Great Britain.

TGW: How did you get from there to Harvard? And were there any differences in the way students were looking at issues there? I was, in particular, intrigued by what you recall of, for instance, the civil rights movement in the United States and how this entered your consciousness.

AA: I said I was appointed as a graduate assistant at the Ibadan University College, but after obtaining the London University's Bachelor of Science degree in economics (BSc (Econ)) in June 1958. I went into the civil service as a higher civil servant. The opportunity for Harvard came barely one year thereafter. I went to the Littauer Centre for the MPA degree. I went on a Ford Foundation fellowship. Of course, it was a different world from the British university—very, very different. The concerns were overwhelmingly an American view of the geo-political situation. In Britain, you were more concerned with the world, including Britain. In America, you were more concerned with the United States and then the world. That, in a way, was what Harvard was. This was the time that the Cuban leader, Fidel Castro, was a hero in the U.S. Castro was then struggling to lead a revolution in Cuba and he received a lot of support. This was also the time that India and Pakistan constituted the focus of American development cooperation. In fact, Harvard was leading an advisory group in Pakistan. And John Kenneth Galbraith, one of my professors, was going up and down between Cambridge and Islamabad, as he was going between Cambridge, New York, and Washington D.C.

There were a lot of expectations in terms of the development capabilities of the Third World. But, increasingly, even before I left Harvard, there was a kind of revisionism, in terms of the prospects of Asia for development. And at that time, it was felt that Africa, being a *tabula rasa*, was likely to achieve more rapid progress. Gunnar Myrdal had just done his seminal study

on *The Asian Drama*, inquiring into the poverty of Asian countries. Our condition, at that time, was more in terms of development and development of the Third World.

TGW: You mentioned Africa as a *tabula rasa*. Were there any other thoughts? How was Africa looked at in the classroom? Or was it a void in North America?

AA: Well, I cannot talk about North America generally. But at Harvard there was more knowledge about Asia than about Africa. Don't forget, again, Nigeria was on the verge of independence when I went to Harvard. And most African countries became independent in the 1960s, so the consciousness about Africa had not been well-developed. But there was a lot of extrapolation, in a way, that the development problems of India were the same as those of Africa, except that, because the Indians are not Christians, they don't have Protestant ethics, they don't have the spirit of capitalism. That is how Africa became the favorite.

TGW: You mentioned John Kenneth Galbraith, who was also a professor of mine.

AA: Was he? Where?

TGW: I was at Harvard just shortly after you, but as a tin horn freshman. Who else were your mentors, either there or earlier in London, or subsequently in London?

AA: David Bell, Arthur Smithies, Gus Papanek. Quite a number. David Bell, you will recall, became the head of USAID (U.S. Agency for International Development) during the Kennedy presidency and later moved to the Ford Foundation as its president just as Galbraith became the U.S. ambassador to India.

TGW: When did you begin thinking that you wanted to do a PhD, and that serious economic and social science analysis was your career orientation?

AA: You will laugh at this. Before I went to university, after doing my GCE advanced level, waiting for admission to university, I used write “Adebayo Adedeji, GCE done. B.Sc. Econ, MSc, PhD, coming.” I knew that once I decided to do economics, I would not stop until I obtained a PhD, and I was determined to work very hard, regardless of all the difficulties.

TGW: So, you returned to Nigeria before you did your PhD and began teaching? How were students in Nigeria?

AA: I started university teaching in 1958, because even when I was in the civil service I made a deal with the civil service to allow me to teach on a part time basis. There was a lot of understanding, because they knew I wanted very badly to be an academic. So I never regarded myself as being a permanent civil servant. Though I started teaching in 1958, it was not until 1963 that I moved to full time academic career. So many of my students in those days were married with children of their own, so they didn't go to university to run around or mess around. Until after independence in 1960, there was only one university. Competition for admission was very intense. Only a very few people had the means to go abroad. Job opportunities for college graduates, just before and after independence were plentiful relative to the supply and these generations were quite conscious of the fact that they were going to be leaders of the country at independence and afterwards. Consequently, they took themselves very seriously.

TGW: So this was enjoyable?

AA: Very enjoyable.

TGW: So you thought you would just continue?

AA: Teaching, yes.

TGW: And you were at the Institute for Administration. What happened in 1971, then?

AA: Yes, at the Institute of Administration, University of Ife, which was a graduate school. But I also taught undergraduates in the Departments of Economics in both the Universities of Ibadan and Ife. Between 1963 and 1971, I had resisted every effort to make me leave academia, because I really enjoyed academia. We had the military government in January 1966. Then, in April 1966, I was asked to become deputy economic advisor to the military administration of General Aguiyi Ironsi because the then economic adviser was also Nigeria's ambassador to the European Economic Commission (EEC) in Brussels. In this latter capacity, he was Nigeria's negotiator on the relationship between the EEC and the country. Consequently, Dr Okigbo was more often in Brussels than in Lagos.

Typical of Pius, he preferred the latter job, which took him to Brussels, to staying at home as economic advisor. Little wonder that Ironsi soon complained that he never saw enough of his advisor, except when his plane was flying over state house! Therefore, he needed a deputy who would always be available at home. So I was approached. And I said, "No." Of course, a lot of pressure was brought to bear, because the military then had a high profile. It was like saying no to God! And the vice-chancellor gave me a long talk. He said, "This is a great opportunity. In any case, don't risk the university's future." So I reluctantly agreed. But as I refused to leave my post-graduate program in the midst of an academic year, it was agreed that my appointment would commence from 1st August 1966.

In any case, my appointment as a member of the committee of experts on the finances of the UN added to my load of responsibility. That really took me away from my university and from teaching from April to July. The UN assignment ended on 25th of July, and I returned to Nigeria on 27th of July to prepare myself for the new post on the 1st of August. On my return, I

met the invitation by the governor of Western Nigeria to attend an official reception on July 28 in honor of General Aguiyi Ironsi, who was visiting Ibadan. That was my first meeting with Ironsi. He said that unfortunately he would not be in Lagos on the 1st of August because he had to pay visits to Enugu and Kaduna after leaving Ibadan. It would not be until about the 10th of August before he returned to Lagos. But he had a number of assignments he would like to give me. Could I come to see him the following day—one hour before lunch? Apparently, an official luncheon party had been arranged in his honor. So I said, “I have no invitation to your lunch.” The Governor, Lt Colonel Adekunle Fajuyi, intervened and said, “You are now invited.” “OK, I will come,” I responded. The lunch was at 1:00 p.m., and he wanted me to come at 12 noon. But before this conversation between General Ironsi and myself took place, the discussions taking place among the various distinguished and not so distinguished guests were around an imminent coup d’etat.

Since I had only just returned to the country, I simply had to listen and the more I did, the more disturbed I was that another coup was going to take place barely one-half of a year after the first one of January 1966. Apparently, the gossip was not whether or not there would be another coup but when—so virile was Nigeria’s gossip industry. I left the party at about 9 p.m. The following morning, a friend of mine who lived very close to state house rang me and said, “It has happened.” So I said, “That is the end of the second republic.” So because it had happened, I knew there would be no point in keeping my appointment with General Ironsi. So I went to take my class between 11 a.m. and 1.00 p.m. My vice-chancellor, Professor H.A. Oluwasanmi, who was there when I was asked to come for the lunch, had himself been invited originally as one of the guests. So he went for the lunch, and nearly got killed. Fortunately, his driver was very

skillful in making a retreat. Oluwasanmi rushed back, and kept asking as to what might have happened to me because he thought I had been there earlier and have been caught up by the crossfire only to be told that I was in the classroom teaching.

He came looking for me in the classroom. He asked, “What happened? You didn’t keep your appointment.” I told him I had heard early in the morning that there had been some shooting at state house and had therefore concluded that was the coup that was generally discussed at the reception. In the circumstance, I decided not to honor the invitation. Because the Ironsi government had been toppled and Ironsi himself killed, the issue of going to Lagos to serve as the deputy economic adviser to the Federal Military Government was forgotten. In any case, the nation was confronted with a very serious political crisis with its future put in doubt. For days there was no government.

Thereafter, I was offered two other appointments in government which I refused as I preferred to remain in the university. Then you will ask me, why in 1971 I threw in the towel. I didn’t. My colleagues did it on my behalf. You see, I had signed an agreement with the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, as a visiting professor for one or two years in Autumn 1971. Meanwhile, the University of Dar es Salaam had invited me for one term to help develop the postgraduate program in development economics and administration, give final year students one seminar a week, and thirdly, deliver three public lectures. Outside of Nigeria, I had never lived in another African country except visiting for a few days. So, I thought this was an opportunity, at least, to live in Tanzania, which had developed a tremendous reputation with *ujamaa*, socialism, and all that—to see what it was like.

Fortunately, it was very convenient because in those days the academic year in Tanzania began in July, as against Ann Arbor's, which began in September. So I could go a head to Dar es Salaam for six weeks before proceeding with my family to the U.S. at the beginning of September.

But within hours of my returning home early in September 1971, the governor of Western Nigeria, Brigadier Oluwole Rotimi, came to see me. He said that General Ironsi's successor—General Gowon—wanted to see me immediately. I asked, "What for? I hope it is not about another job." The governor then asked me quietly but firmly why I was opposed to the military rule and to working with soldiers. To defend myself against the accusation of being anti-military, I said, "Look, I have signed an agreement with the University of Michigan to serve there as a visiting professor for two years and I am not going to allow anyone to stop me from doing that. It is my first sabbatical leave in eight years." So he said, "Please, why don't you talk to your colleagues? You cannot always be negative to invitations to serve the nation." Of course, at that time, I thought I knew that none of my colleagues would disagree with me. H.A Oluwasanmi, S.A Aluko, Olu Odumosu, Babs Fafunwa, and myself were all of one mind in terms of our not leaving the university for government assignments, particularly military government assignments. But I didn't know what had happened to them in my absence.

So I went to the vice-chancellor. He said, "Adebayo, since you have a two-year sabbatical, why don't you go and do your two years stint with the government?" So I said, "What do you mean? What's wrong with you?" He confessed to having been heavily lobbied and he had promised to do whatever he could to get me to accept to serve as federal minister. The other three colleagues who were present also agreed with Vice Chancellor Oluwasanni.

So, I accepted. But in doing so, I asked Gowon that he must give me in writing a contract for two years so that I would not have to resign my appointment. This was how I became a member of the government. I was sworn into the government on October 20, 1971. And, of course, I spent about four years serving as federal minister (commissioner) for economic development and reconstruction 1971-1975.

TGW: You actually didn't mention Biafra, which at least for outsiders was a really critical event, which some people see as a precursor of the 1990s? What do you recall about it, and how did that affect your own thinking?

AA: Well, I was brought into the cabinet immediately after the civil war to be the minister for postwar reconstruction and development. And my task was to put in place programs, policies and projects that would promote reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction. In other words, the federal government was anxious to integrate the people who had wanted to secede, on the basis of equality, equity, and fraternity, so as to build a new Nigeria, which would be strong and democratic. I believe that the country must draw necessary lessons from its experience and deliberately build itself into a strong nation exploiting fully its diverse talents and culture. Nigeria's five national post-civil war objectives were a united, strong and self-reliant nation, a great and dynamic economy, a just and egalitarian society; a land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens, a free and democratic society.

Although the Igbo, Yoruba and the Hausa-Fulani are the dominant nationalities in the east, west, and north respectively, there are many other nationalities in the different regions. Given the country's heterogeneity, secession would be messy, violent, and counterproductive. The people of Nigeria, given the chance to express their wishes in a free and fair referendum

would no doubt prefer Nigeria to remain as a polity, in spite of its many imperfections. They would vote heavily in favor of the five national objectives.

But that is not to suggest that the Igbo people had no cause to be angry, nor to argue that they did not have their own faults. This also applies *mutatis mutandis* to the other two major nationalities—Hausa-Fulani and Yoruba. The way and manner the departing British colonial power handed over power at the time of independence and its unreasonable refusal to redress the structural imbalance before the hand-over is at the root of persistent political instability in Nigeria, which unfortunately culminated in the thirty-month-long civil war of 1967-1970 and still continues to plague the nation.

The structural imbalance is exacerbated by unbalanced socioeconomic development. The north, which exercises a virtual monopoly of political power, is lagging behind the west and the east in all the indices of human development: education, public health, social overhead capital and industrial development, longevity, access to potable water and electricity and real income expressed in purchasing power parity in US dollars. As if these divisive factors were not enough, there is a lack of mutual trust between and among the three major nationalities and between them and the scores of minority nationalities.

The coup of January 1966 confirmed this lack of mutual trust. It was masterminded and executed by Igbo officers, and all the victims were non-Igbo. The prime minister of Nigeria and the premier of the north were northerners, while the premier of the west was Yoruba. The July 1966 coup masterminded by northern officers was a revenge. In such foul and violent circumstances, the civil war was inevitable.

But, the solution to the problem was not secession. If the Igbos had seceded successfully, the west would have followed suit, probably followed by a number of minority-nationalities. The people of Nigeria would have been engrossed for years and decades in violent combat. So the solution to the problem is to stay within the Nigeria polity and to address the political, social, and economic problems which confronted and still confront the nation. To that extent, therefore, I was in full support of keeping Nigeria one and was opposed to secession.

TGW: During this period of ups and downs in Nigerian politics, or your time at the university, do you recall that the Cold War entered into the equation in any way? Or was it basically domestic politics that dominated your life?

AA: No. At independence in 1960, Nigeria was definitely in the western side of the Cold War—pro-British and pro-American. Indeed, as if to leave the east in no doubt as to which side of the divide Nigeria was on, John F. Kennedy, on assuming the presidency, promised \$80 million to the country in support of the implementation of its first post-independence five-year development plan. And Nigeria was an important member of the British Commonwealth of Nations. Indeed, the country had successfully hosted the first Commonwealth Summit on Rhodesia a few days before the January 1966 coup. However, when the civil war broke out in 1967, we had to depend on the Soviet Union and its allies for arms supply while Biafra was massively helped by the French and Western NGOs. The Americans did nothing, as they left Nigeria heavily in the British sphere of influence, and Britain was divided as to which side to support.

So, the Cold War was very important. We had to sell our cocoa in advance to the Russians. And when, after the war, cocoa prices soared, we offered to pay cash instead of cocoa

but the Russians said, “*Nyet!*” To add further complexity, while the USSR was on the side of the federal government, China lent its support to Biafra.

Why did we ask the Russians to build the iron and steel mill? Gowon was a soldier who carried his rifle with the left hand, and the Bible in the right. He was so eternally grateful to the Soviets for being on our side, that, in spite of all the advice to the contrary, he had to do what the Russians wanted him to do. Is it surprising that, almost thirty years after, we still haven’t got the iron and steel mill operating? So the Cold War was in evidence, although the civil war had nothing to do with ideological differences.

TGW: During your tenure as minister, one of the major concerns was the creation of a West African community. You obviously had something to do with that. I wonder whether you could tell us a little bit about the creation of ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) and, specifically, whether or not events elsewhere—positive events in Europe, the signing of the Treaty of Rome when you were a student, the creation of ASEAN (Association of South-East Asian Nations), or the coming apart of the East African communities—these other examples or ideas about regional efforts entered into your own thinking and the experiment in West Africa.

AA: I must say this, Tom, my commitment to the creation of a West African economic community predated my tenure as minister in Nigeria. For the French-speaking countries, it even predated independence. As far back as October 1945, the Fifth Pan-African Congress held in Manchester, England, recommended the establishment of a West African Economic Union as a means of combating the exploitation of the economic resources of the West African territories and for ensuring the participation of the indigenous people in the industrial development of West Africa. The dismantling, just before independence, of the regional political integration process of

eight countries which France had built in West Africa—*Afrique Occidentale Française* (French West Africa)—in 1958 made regional cooperation imperative for the minuscule French-speaking countries even before their independence in 1960. Senegal, French Sudan (Mali), Upper Volta (Burkina Faso), and Dahomey (Benin) attempted to create the Federation of Mali but the granting of independence separately to each of the eight constituent members of French West Africa was the death knell of the federation.

However, the countries of the disintegrated French West Africa recognized the need to overcome or at least minimize the constraints that fragmentation had imposed on their development through vigorous and relentless promotion of cooperation and integration. In June 1959, seven of them—Ivory Coast, Senegal, Dahomey, Mauritania, Niger, Mali, and Upper Volta—established the West African Customs Union, which was converted in 1966 to West African Customs and Economic Union. Because both failed woefully, the *Communauté économique de l'Afrique de l'Ouest* (CEAO) was formed in 1973.

In the meantime, the Anglophone West African countries of the Gold Coast (Ghana), Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Gambia were granted their independence by the British government separately—in 1957, 1960, 1961, and 1965 respectively. This different timing of independence had a negative impact on the maintenance and sustenance of joint institutions—a common monetary system, a common airline, and common research institutions were disbanded at the insistence of Ghana, which on becoming independent in 1957 refused to be associated with non-independent British colonies. Ghana established its own currency—cedi—its own airline and separate national research institutions. Nigeria *perforce* followed suit in 1960 with a national airline and research institutions, although it kept the pound until 1971 when it established the

naira. Sierra Leone at independence in 1961 opted for the leone as its national currency, while the Gambia came out with dalasu.

One striking feature of the first post-independence decade in West Africa was the perpetuation of the divide between Francophone and Anglophone West Africa—thus perpetuating the colonial legacy and accentuating the dependence of these countries on their former colonial masters. Several attempts to break the barrier ended in failure, although at the purely bilateral level some limited achievements were recorded—e.g., Nigeria-Niger and Senegal-Gambia cooperation. The effort by ECA (Economic Commission for Africa) in 1966 to establish a regional cooperation grouping that would cut across the Anglophone-Francophone divide also came to nothing in spite of several meetings held by the fourteen then-independent countries successively in Niamey, Accra, Dakar, and Monrovia to consider draft articles of association prepared by the ECA Secretariat.

It was this failure to achieve a breakthrough in establishing a sustainable process of regional integration that transcended colonial divide that led the Inter-African Public Administration Seminar—an annual get-together of members of the top echelons of the public services in Africa and the precursor of the African Association for Public Administration and Management (AAPAM)—to devote its eighth annual gathering which took place in Monrovia in November 1969 to the theme. I was asked to present a paper on West African integration. A revised version of the paper was published in the *Journal of Modern African Studies* in mid-1970. Two years after the AAPAM Monrovia Seminar, I became a cabinet minister in the Gowon government, responsible *inter alia* for regional cooperation and development. In 1972, the initiative that culminated in the establishment of the Economic Community for West African

States was launched by Nigeria and Togo. Three years thereafter—on May 28, 1975, to be precise—the treaty establishing ECOWAS was signed in Lagos by the heads of state and government and on June 2, I was on my way to Addis Ababa to take over as the chief executive of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa

Without any doubt, my ministerial appointment provided me with a historic challenge to put my money where my mouth was. It was, indeed, a golden opportunity for translating the hypothesis of pragmatic developmental regionalism in West Africa, propounded in the paper, into reality. And it was a battle royal—Herculean and daunting, as the forces of neocolonialism were more than ever determined to derail the effort. But as the English poet William Blake once said, “Great things are done when men and mountain meet. They are not done by jostling in the street.”

At the time the paper was written and presented in Monrovia in November 1969 and was revised and published in the *Journal of Modern African Studies* in July 1970, I was a purebred academic. Since, as such, I did not have the gift of prophecy, I could not have foreseen that in early 1972 I would be challenged to take all the actions necessary to actualize the proposals put forward therein. But given my long-standing commitment to economic cooperation and integration, I accepted the challenge most enthusiastically. I have always believed that economic cooperation among African States is a *conditio sine qua non* for the achievement of national socioeconomic goals and not an “extra” to be given thought to after the process of national development is well advanced.

The paper on “Prospects of Regional Economic Cooperation in West Africa” *inter alia* noted that the volume of inter-trade within West Africa was very low—3.3 percent of total West

African imports in 1965/66, the multiplicity of national currencies and their non-convertibility inhibited trade. While the countries of the former French West Africa have, as members of the *L'Union monétaire de l'Afrique de l'ouest* (UMAO), a common currency (CFA franc) and a common central bank, the Anglophone countries having disbanded the pre-independence monetary arrangements have separate national currencies which are all non-convertible. In this regard, they were joined by Guinea and Mali, which in the 1960s opted out of the CFA to establish their own national currencies. Liberia, of course, continued its link with the U.S. dollar. And, in addition to the divide brought about by the languages of the colonial powers, West Africa is indigenously multilingual, multiethnic, and multicultural. There is in West Africa no bonding language and culture like the Kiswahili of East Africa.

Yet, West Africa has been the home of some of the most remarkable achievements of early black civilizations with such illustrious empires as Songhay, Mali, Ghana, the Caliphate, Benin, and Oyo. Education and the involvement of the people in governance, even during the colonial rule, was quite advanced in West Africa and agitation for political independence began virtually right from the commencement of the colonial era. West Africans left the colonialists in no doubt that their rule would not last. Because the climate was considered unwholesome for Europeans, West Africa was spared of the additional complication of white settlements, which was the plight of Eastern and Southern Africa. It was not surprising, therefore, that West Africa achieved political independence first.

In the light of the critical appraisal of the experience during the first decade of independence in promoting economic cooperation in West Africa, the following proposals were put forward in the paper: an all-or-nothing approach to economic cooperation should be avoided

as it is unlikely to succeed; pragmatism and prioritization is essential. The priority areas should be: provision of regional road network turning West Africa into a transport region including establishing a regional network of railways and setting up a regional airline which would absorb and replace all existing airlines; provision of other regional infrastructure; setting up a clearing and payments union with a view to facilitating the flow of payments and the growth of intra-regional trade; providing free movement of people and resources within the region; abolition of foreign exchange control; coordinated regional approach to food and agricultural and industrial development, particularly in intermediate and capital goods industry; the need for each participating country in an economic cooperation and integration endeavor to establish mastery over its economy and be at the driver's seat of its economic engineering.

Where members of an economic cooperation entity owe allegiance to outside forces, commitment to cooperation is invariably undermined. Political goodwill between and among the cooperating countries is imperative for success and sustainability. There must be total commitment to regional cooperation at the highest level of governance; the language divide should be removed; each cooperating country should establish within the machinery of its government mechanisms such as a permanent secretariat and an inter-ministerial permanent working party for ensuring implementation and follow-up. Ultimately, each government should establish a ministry for West African economic cooperation and integration to be headed by a cabinet minister whose success or failure as minister would be judged by how much effective cooperation was achieved in the region during his tenure of office.

When it became my responsibility to lead the process of reactivating and re-energizing the economic cooperation and integration process after both Generals Gowon and Eyedema had in

the communiqué issued after the former's state visit to Togo during the month of April 1972 in which they announced their decision to jointly sponsor the initiative—I was clear in my mind what our overarching objectives should be.

The joint sponsorship of the initiative by West Africa's largest and most powerful nation and one of the region's smallest and poorest countries, the one an English-speaking country while the other is a French-speaking country, made it abundantly clear right from the start that our marching order was to establish a community that will transcend linguistic barriers and would indeed include the entire membership of the West African member states. Our first task, therefore, was to establish a meeting of the minds between Nigeria and Togo on all major issues and to agree on a program of work. Accordingly, a joint Nigeria/Togo ministerial consultation took place in June in Lagos under my leadership. There was no difficulty whatsoever in reaching agreement as to the way forward. The ideas contained in the 1969/70 paper became our guiding principles. Accordingly, we embarked on taking our message to every independent West African country to ascertain their reactions to the various propositions and build support for the project.

The Nigeria/Togo joint ministerial delegation was well received in all the twelve countries we visited. Without any exception, we were received by the head of state and government in each country in addition to holding meetings at ministerial and technical levels. In all countries, the responses were positive. All agreed with the fundamental principle that the time had come when economic cooperation in West Africa should transcend the colonial divide. Of course, it was realized that the real task of negotiations still lay ahead.

After these missions, the first-ever conference of West African ministers responsible for economic development and planning and commerce was convened in April 1973. In order to

ensure that the private sector in the different countries was involved in the process, I urged my colleagues to include the representatives of the organized private sector in their respective national delegations. I included the late Chief Henry Fajemirokun, then president of the Nigerian Association of Chambers of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Agriculture (NACCIMA) in mine. The various representatives of the national chambers of commerce took advantage of the Lomé ministerial conference to launch the process that led to the formation of the Federation of West African Chambers of Commerce in 1974.

Not only was it unanimously resolved in Lomé that an Economic Community of West African States should be established, both Nigeria and Togo were mandated to prepare the draft treaty which was to be sent to the various countries for study in preparation for a second ministerial conference which was subsequently held in Monrovia in 1974. It was in Monrovia that it was decided that the summit meeting to sign the treaty should take place during the first half of 1975 in Lagos. That meeting took place on May 28, 1975, when ECOWAS was officially born.

TGW: Was there any support for this, or rather any disagreement about its founding from the Africa-wide groupings—the OAU (Organization of African Unity), or the ECA? Was this seen as somehow diversionary or divisive, or was it seen in a positive light?

AA: There was no opposition to the founding of ECOWAS from OAU and ECA. How could there have been? Both continental organizations are committed to regional cooperation and integration. Indeed, as already indicated, ECA made an unsuccessful attempt at West African integration in the 1960s. But neither organization was directly involved in the 1972-75 process from which ECOWAS emerged. Nigeria and Togo bore the full brunt. When I went to ECA, I

went with the idea that with the ECOWAS's success behind me, I would try to establish similar regional cooperation entities for Eastern and Southern Africa, and for Central Africa. COMESA (Common Market of Eastern and Southern Africa) and the Central African Economic Community (CAEC) were the outcomes of this resolve.

TGW: The NIEO (New International Economic Order) was debated in the middle of the 1970s, and by the time you were minister, the Group of 77 (G-77) was functioning. How did these debates in New York or in Geneva enter into the day-to-day affairs of a cabinet minister in Nigeria who was dealing with reconstruction or regional cooperation? Did any of the ideas percolating in New York or in Geneva land on your plate? We are trying to trace the itinerary of ideas.

AA: For years, the working of the international economic system has been of great concern to African economists and policymakers. We believe that there is need for a change. Don't forget that our countries are primary producers with monocultural production function. Each depends on the export of one or two primary commodities for its export earnings and their prices are subject to booms and busts. Therefore, reconstructing the world economic order has been of primary concern to us for years, featuring regularly in our learned journals and in academic discourse. In many respects, the debates in New York and Geneva are reflections of expressed concerns at the national, regional, and special interest levels. For example, the founding of OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) brought a paradigm shift into the oil sector. Unfortunately, other primary commodities—agricultural and mineral—have not been able to emulate the example of oil.

We were a founding member of what is now known as the ACP Convention (Africa, Caribbean, and the Pacific). The French, when they joined the European Economic Community, wanted to tag on the Francophone countries. Yet for regionalism to take root in West Africa and elsewhere, there is a need to cut the umbilical cord, as it were, between the francophone countries and France. Hence Nigeria led the opposition to the continuation of associate status for Francophone African countries in EEC.

After consulting the then minister for common market, Robert Ouko, a conference of African, Caribbean, and Pacific countries was organized in Lagos, Nigeria, in 1973. The conference decided to negotiate as one body with the EEC. This later led to the Lomé Convention—Lomé I, Lomé II, and Lomé III.

TGW: During this period as cabinet minister, what kinds of interactions did you have with the UN or the Bretton Woods institutions? Did they enter into your daily life? Did resolutions or reports that were emanating from them enter into your—

AA: At the UN, I was once again invited to participate for the second time in the reform of the United Nations—this time the economic and social sectors. This was nine years after the work of the Committee of 14 on the finances of the UN. In 1975, the General Assembly had decided to appoint a Committee of 25 on reforming the economic and social sectors of the United Nations. I was named a member. In fact, Kurt Waldheim wanted me to be its chairman. But at that time I was busy organizing the summit for the establishment of ECOWAS, and at the same time preparing Nigeria's Third National Development Plan, 1975-1980. I couldn't therefore spare the time to be in New York for three, four, or five weeks at a time without jeopardizing or

compromising my work in Nigeria and West Africa. So, I declined to be chairman. But I served on the committee.

It was that committee that made recommendations on strengthening ECOSOC (Economic and Social Council), on decentralization of the UN operational activities to the regional economic commissions, on rationalization of the UN agenda for the economic and social sectors, and on establishing the post of director-general, which has now become the post of deputy-secretary-general.

TGW: You mentioned the third national development plan. When did the idea of planning enter development discourse? And do you still consider that planning has a role to play?

AA: Planning was introduced to colonial Africa by the British government which established the Colonial Development and Welfare Fund (CDWF) immediately after World War II, in 1945, and made the availability of three-to-five-year development plans conditions for accessing the resources of the CDWF. With a Labour government in power in Britain, it was not surprising that planning was encouraged in African countries. A country needed an approved development plan to have access to CDWA. So each colony was required to prepare a ten-year development plan. In fact, the story was told of the then Nigerian governor who was on leave in London when a letter was sent to Lagos asking him to write Nigeria's ten-year development plan. When he was informed of this during his courtesy visit to the colonial office in London, he said "That is no problem. Give me a piece of paper." He wrote a number of projects with rough estimates of costs and said, "This is the development plan."

The 49-50, 65-66 effort was further strengthened by the Kennedy administration in 1961. When Kennedy came to power, the administration announced an \$80 million allocation to

Nigeria, provided the country had an acceptable development plan. A large team of Americans, led by Professor Stolper of the University of Michigan, came to Nigeria to join us in preparing the first post-independence national development plan, 1962 to 1968. Stolper later wrote a book entitled *Planning without Facts*, on the basis of his Nigerian experience.

The World Bank has also insisted on and assisted in writing development plans. In fact, before independence, the ministries for planning and development had been established at the federal and regional levels. After graduating in economics, I worked in development planning. I have spent virtually my entire career preparing, writing development plans and monitoring their implementation and assessing their impact, both as a civil servant, as an academic, and as a minister before and after independence. So the planning culture was not imported from the communists!

TGW: Is planning with facts better than planning without facts?

AA: I must tell you what a very good American friend of mine, Professor Sayre Schatz, professor of economics, Temple University, formerly of NISER in Nigeria once said at a seminar held in Ibadan in the sixties, “It is better to be vaguely right than to be precisely wrong.” If you are going to wait for all the facts, then you will never undertake any planning. And if you don’t plan, you won’t have priorities. To plan is to choose. Until it was abandoned when marketization and privatization became compulsory under the regime of World Bank/IMF Structural Adjustment Program, the planning process had improved considerably. Today we have what they call “rolling plans.” I don’t know which is worse—planlessness or rolling plans. A rolling stone gathers no moss. Rolling plans have encouraged indiscipline and mismanagement.

TGW: Actually, a theme that has characterized much of your later writings came up in relationship to planning, shortly later when you were at ECA in 1977 and wrote: “Most national development plans in Africa assume implicitly an increased degree of external dependence. But development plan after development plan fails to provide any guidance as to when policymakers and planners foresee the beginning of the process of reduction of dependence.” Have you changed your mind?

AA: No. You see, Nigeria’s first post-independence plan, the 1962 to 1968 Development Plan, whose preparation was partly funded by the Americans, was based on the assumption that 50 percent of the resources required to implement it would come from USAID, i.e., \$80 million. The very idea of writing a development plan not based on what you can do at home, but based on the possibility of attracting aid, has two negative impacts. First, you are stymied at home. You can’t move. These countries are not without resources. The resources may not be enough, but it is better to spend and use the resources for what is achievable than to wait for the external resources to augment domestic resources because implementation is invariably delayed as donors do not have much respect for the recipients timetable. Meanwhile, under pressure to fund recurrent expenditure, some of the resources for development are diverted to recurrent expenditure.

External resources, in any case, never go to the priority areas that recipient countries have identified. They go to the areas which the donors have identified as being good and appropriate for the recipient countries. And there are African countries that have assumed that up to 80 to 90 percent of their required development resources will come from outside.

TGW: Before we get to ECA, there were two influences I would like to discuss for a moment, because once you become a senior UN official, I assume that you think that UN reports and UN conferences might be a good idea. But when you were minister, could we just think for a moment about two vehicles we have been trying to lease out and see whether they were important—namely, the impact of reports by major groups of people. I am thinking of the Pearson report (*Partners in Development*) just before you became minister or *Limits to Growth* just as you were becoming minister. Or major gatherings, in this case Stockholm in 1972 (UN Conference on the Human Environment), the World Food Conference—

AA: I led the Nigerian delegations both to Stockholm, for the environment conference and to Bucharest for the World Population Conference.

TGW: So how did the content of these reports influence Nigeria's governmental discussion of policy? Did preparations for the conferences necessitate changing the way you did business? We are trying to tease out how these two things—reports and then conferences—how these have an impact on the way a government like Nigeria's functions.

AA: Let us take the Stockholm conference. Nigeria served on the preparatory committee. I was represented by my permanent secretary on this committee and I served as one of the conference's vice presidents. Not only did we work on the idea of an environment conference, because we have a rapidly degrading environment at home, but we insisted that it must be linked with the problems of development. To that extent, we succeeded, because we have problems of drought and desertification in Nigeria. What we had failed to do, until June 1999, was to take advantage of the conference to establish a Ministry for Environment. It is not that we didn't suggest it, but it is the prerogative of the head of government to create new

ministries. But the need to develop consciousness for the environment if sustainable development is to take place came as a result of that Stockholm conference. Agenda 21 from Rio 1991 (UN Conference on Environment and Development) was built on the foundation of Stockholm.

There is no doubt that in Nigeria we could have done more to internalize all the major decisions of the conference. Unfortunately, the UN had no mechanisms for follow-up on conference decisions.

TGW: So the conference provided a base or a gimmick if you will, to implement a policy that you had been thinking about over time?

AA: Yes, indeed, it provided the basis for action but unfortunately not the resources to take such actions. These conferences have their own uses. You can argue at home, on your own, about the need to take certain actions but if you have a global conference resolution to back you up, that strengthens your hand and your claim for resources.

TGW: How would you distinguish these series of conferences in the 1970s and the 1990s, in particular? We had lots of these global ad hoc conferences. When are they more or less useful in terms of fundamentally altering government policies?

AA: It depends on the subject matter. You see, global conferences are promoted by one, two, or half a dozen countries. The environment conference was promoted by the West for good reasons, because of CO² and climatic change. While these are important reasons they are not in the forefront of the concerns of developing countries where drought, desertification, soil erosion are of immediate threats to food security and food self-sufficiency. Global conferences are also vital for developing global ethics, values and consensuses.

TGW: What about these reports—Pearson, Brandt (*North-South: A Programme for Survival*)?

AA: The Pearson report, *Partners in Development*, has had tremendous impact. So did the Brandt report

TGW: How, precisely?

AA: Pearson came up with the idea that there is a mutuality of interest in foreign aid and international cooperation. It is not just in the interest of the recipients, but also in the interest of the donors. Thus Pearson gave aid and the international development program a new twist in terms of pointing out the mutual interests of the donors and the recipients. I think Ivan L. Head, his countryman and a friend of mine, developed this idea much further in his book, *On a Hinge of History: The Mutual Vulnerability of South and North* (IDRC, Toronto, 1991). In a telling passage, Head argues that the hesitancy of the North to recognize what is real, its conviction that the palliative of foreign aid is an adequate response and the assumption that the North can somehow be shielded from the events in the South are in large part manifestations of arrogance because the North is more capable, more knowledgeable, and more experienced. The nations of the North arrogantly regard themselves as role models for those in the South. “This kind of arrogance,” Head concludes, “assumes that in this single biosphere, in this planetary economy, in this age of satellite communications and intercontinental ballistic missiles, a drawbridge policy and a withdrawal attitude can be effective. To think in those terms is nonsensical. Pearson had earlier argued that debt relief brings economic change in the debtor countries, which will increase their capacity for buying foreign goods and services. It showed that if you relieve debt and you bring about economic change in the debtor countries, it will increase their capacity for buying

foreign goods and services. To that extent, debt reduction will promote employment in industrialized countries.

TGW: *Partners in Development* coined a nice phrase?

AA: It is like *Ahead of the Curve?*, except that I heard that on CNN last night here in New York. Did Richard tell you?

TGW: No.

AA: When I heard CNN announce “Ahead of the Curve,” I thought it was about the first volume of this series. Later, I realized that it was a news flash. I asked Richard whether you had borrowed the phrase from CNN. Yes, *Partners in Development* captured the whole thing. It is really a very nice phrase to describe the relationship between donors and recipients.

TGW: It seems to me that the success of some of these reports is the title: “sustainable development” for Mrs. [Gro] Brundtland; “global governance” for [Sonny] Ramphal and [Ingvar] Carlsson. Is it the quality of ideas or the quality of analysis, or is it really the political effort of a particular moment in time that determines whether these reports are useful? I am thinking, in particular, about Brandt, which, if you look at it, makes a lot of sense. It is just that it fell totally flat because it coincided with Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. I am just trying to figure out what, in your view, is important—the quality of ideas and analysis, or the moment when it is launched?

AA: Both and, in addition, the personalities around the ideas. An idea whose time has come depends on the timing, first of all. Secondly, the analysis. And sometimes, not so much the analysis but really capturing peoples’ imagination. I don’t think most people have ever read cover-to-cover *Partners in Development*. Nor did they read Brandt’s *Common Crisis: North-*

South Cooperation for World Recovery. But the ideas put there—particularly as publicized by the media—here stuck in the minds of people. But more importantly, in terms of internalizing such ideas, it depends in who's care they are. The North-South negotiations would have had a different ending if it had not been Reagan who went to the meeting of twenty-one countries in Cancún. Reagan and Mrs. Thatcher were there, and that was the end of it.

TGW: That was the end of North-South dialogue?

AA: There has been no North-South dialogue since then.

TGW: I think that's right. Why did you take the job as executive-secretary of ECA?

AA: From June/July 1972 until May 1975 I had to move around a lot in West Africa promoting the establishment of ECOWAS, hopping from one country to another, except that I managed to be in Nigeria on Tuesdays, to attend cabinet meetings on Wednesdays and on Friday or Saturday I would be off again. One day, early in 1974, I came back and the secretary to the Federal Military Government, Chief Tunde Lawson, came to see me and said there was a letter from Kurt Waldheim addressed to Gowon, saying that they had been searching for the new head of the Economic Commission for Africa and they had now come down to four names, among which mine was one. Before going with further progress on this, they are contacting the governments of the four persons on the list to find out if there are political objections. This was trying to avoid a *persona non grata* situation, in which the UN would be choosing someone his own country would disown. Chief Lawson then said to me that Gowon asked him to reply to the letter, saying that not only was there no objection, but also that the Nigerian government would warmly support my candidature. Chief Lawson had asked him to wait until I returned from my mission, but Gowon said he should send it.

I asked Chief Lawson if the then executive head of ECA, Mr. R. A. Gardiner, had resigned or died. He replied in the negative. So I forgot about it, because Gardiner had been at the ECA since the 1950s, and there was no way anybody could get him out. In any case, the U.S. government did not want him to go. For one year, there was no further news about ECA, and I was not surprised. And there was no reminder from our side.

Then, when the news about the Committee of 25 on the reform of the economic and social sector of the UN which, I mentioned earlier, came, I did not want to be chairman but I agreed to serve on the committee. So I went to New York in February 1975 for the inaugural meeting. And at the end of our first day's meeting, the Secretary-General held a reception in honor of the members. Naturally, we met at the reception in the presence of my country's ambassador, the permanent representative of Nigeria to the United Nations, Chief Edwin Ogbu. The Secretary-General asked me how long I would stay in New York. I said, "As we have decided to finish our meeting on Friday, I would leave in the evening of the same day to go back to Nigeria. So, he then asked if the ambassador could contact his office and see if we could meet before I left.

On Thursday, the eve of my departure, I went to see him, again with the ambassador. Mr. Abby Farah, assistant-secretary-general for African political affairs, was in attendance. After the usual small talk, he said, "A year ago we wrote to your government about the search for a new chief executive for ECA. And we were very glad that your government's response was positive. Now, we have completed the exercise and have decided to offer to you the appointment. We would like you to start during the first week of March." "What is this man talking about?" I asked myself silently. I had left home to attend a UN meeting for one week and now he is talking

of my taking up a new appointment in a matter of weeks with all the work I have in hand as a minister.

The ambassador, typically, was genuflecting, thanking him profusely. He was saying how the whole of Nigeria would forever remember him, how his relation was going to be assured. I quickly got out of my trance and I said to the Secretary-General, "I am a cabinet minister in Nigeria. I can't just walk out of the cabinet. Secondly, I have many exciting things I am doing now. I am on the verge of establishing an Economic Community for West Africa and of preparing the third national development plan for Nigeria. Since we are four on your list, there are three other candidates. Why don't you take one of them and leave me out?"

Kurt Waldheim never ceased to remind me of this. He was really shocked. He said, "No, no, no. This is a great honor." I said, "I agree and I thank you very much. But the timing is very awkward for me. I could not just leave Nigeria at this point in time." So he said, "How soon can you leave?" "June," I replied. I was sure he was going to say, "To hell with you. I will take the next candidate." But to my surprise, he simply replied, "OK, June." I could not now say September, or the following year.

So, I went back home. Of course, I had to inform the head of state. I later discovered why the date was very important, because within two days, he had announced the appointment, which was to take effect in June. Apparently, he was under pressure from some powerful Western countries to keep Gardiner at all costs even though the African governments were clamoring for a change. A delegation was to meet him the following week and he wanted to present them with a *fait accompli*. I did not take up the appointment until the third of June. So that was how it happened. It was a great honor, but that was how it came my way.

TGW: You mentioned Gardiner. His name seems to be revered by lots of people. What was it like to follow in his footsteps, or wake, or whatever the appropriate image is? And what was the intellectual climate when you got there?

AA: You see, Gardiner was one of those who taught me economics when I spent a year in University College, Ibadan. So I have known him since the early 1950s. After working for the UN Trusteeship Council, he came to Nigeria as a professor, and from there he returned to his native country, Ghana, after independence in 1957. He soon fell out of favor with Nkrumah, and when ECA was established in April 1958 he became the deputy-executive-secretary with Mekki Abbas of Sudan as the chief executive. Somehow he lost the confidence of many African governments who came to regard ECA as a neocolonial institution. One or two suspended their membership of the commission.

In fact, when my appointment was announced, I got a message from the ambassador of Guinea in Lagos that his president was sending a message to me through a cabinet minister. That was unusual since heads of state only deal directly with their counterparts. True enough the message was for me. It was delivered by Ismail Toure, a minister in the government of Guinea. The president urged me not to take the ECA appointment because ECA was an imperialist organization. If Nigeria did not want me any longer, he had a post for me in his cabinet!

The second reason that the Secretary-General was very anxious, apart from the pressure being brought on him by powerful Western countries, was that he had been warned that the ECA Conference of Ministers—which was to take place in Nairobi in February 1975—was going to pass a resolution asking that ECA should be dissolved or disbanded because it had ceased to serve Africa well. A draft resolution to that effect, cosponsored by Algeria, Guinea, Mali, and

Tanzania was already in circulation. Immediately, my appointment was announced, the draft resolution was no longer pursued. Gardiner left ECA immediately, even though the Secretary-General had invited him to stay until June when I was due to take over and the countries that had boycotted ECA returned to the fold.

But this is not to deny the place of Gardiner in ECA, nor his contribution to Africa's development. He laid some solid foundation and put together a very high quality secretariat of dedicated professionals who were engaged with issues of appropriate development paradigm for Africa and the place of Africa in the NIEO.

TGW: One of the main issues, at least as I understand ECA, was how many non-Africans, or Europeans, were around. How did this play itself out within the secretariat when you got there? Was it a priority to change the way the staff looked as well as thought?

AA: That was one of my inheritances. And to me it was red herring. All African member states wanted a highly professional ECA secretariat, but they also pressed for the secretariat to be Africanized and for the principle of equitable geographical representation to be respected. But as I often made abundantly clear, the countries from where staff members come are not as important as their professionalism and dedication to the UN and Africa's development. In any case, any regional commission, by nature and law, has to have the vast majority of its staff drawn from within its region. So the 10 or 15 percent non-African ECA staff members did not make that much difference. So I looked for people who had quality and commitment wherever they came from but having regard to Francophone and Anglophone balance. The approval of most appointments, in any case, was by the headquarters in New York. We were not totally independent.

So, bringing together a good team was the most important challenge. Ethiopia between 1975 and 1991 was not one of the most sought-after countries by people seeking UN employment. Its long-drawn civil war and attempt to turn it into a communist state under Mengistu [Haile Mariam] did not recommend it as a duty post. But, nevertheless, we managed to attract people from all parts of the globe. When I left ECA in August 1991 we had staff from over seventy countries, and there are not that many African countries.

TGW: In many of the interviews that we have done in this project, and I would say elsewhere as well, normally Europe comes up when one asks about regional commissions and the quality of work and, in terms of UN ideas, Latin America. And ECA is somewhere behind. Is this a fair characterization in your view, or not?

AA: This is not surprising for three reasons. ECE (Economic Commission for Europe), ECLAC (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean), and ECAFE (Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East, now Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, ESCAP) were the first three regional commissions to be established. But ECE and ECLAC had the advantage of geography, and economic and geopolitical importance, particularly in the 1950s and 1960s. ECE was involved in the post-World War II reconstruction of Europe and played a strategic role during the Cold War years as the only credible common forum that brought together both sides of the iron curtain. Therefore, what happens in ECE is of direct interest to Europeans and North Americans, and they constitute its membership. ECE was also lucky to have had an outstanding scholar, Gunnar Myrdal, as its first executive-secretary. Latin America is a region of primary political, economic, and strategic interest to the United States.

What happens there is followed closely and is well disseminated in the U.S. Also it has had the privilege of an outstanding chief executive officer in the person of Raúl Prebisch.

Unlike these, ECA is a late-comer to the international scene—the fourth regional commission to be established. Africa has neither the pull of Europe nor the strategic value of Latin America and Asia for that matter. Because of oil and the Arab-Israeli conflict, events in the Middle East are usually more newsworthy than those in Africa. Sub-Saharan Africa is more often than not regarded in Europe and North America as a basket case. It is marginalized and stands at the periphery of international concerns. It is only when there are disasters—HIV/AIDS, drought, flood, conflict, et cetera—that Sub-Saharan Africa gets any mention. And to make matters worse, most of its governments were in the hands of military juntas, some of whose leaders were extremely notorious—e.g., Idi Amin, Emperor Bukassa, to mention only two. The problem has not been lack of ideas from Africa or ECA but lack of positive interest in the rest of the world about ideas emanating from Africa. The only occasions when ideas on Africa receive serious attention in Europe and North America is when they have been generated from outside the continent, particularly by international financial and development institutions. It seems that in spite of independence and all that, the prevalent altitude is still that of, “Can any good thing come out of Africa?”

For example, when in April 1980 the African heads of state adopted the Lagos Plan of Action (LPA) prepared over a three-year period by the ECA with the support of the OAU and ADB (African Development Bank), the rest of the world paid little attention and within a few weeks after the Lagos Summit, the World Bank had come out with its own alternative which is the very antithesis of the LPA. In 1989, when the ECA came out with the African Alternative

Framework to the World Bank Structural Adjustment Program (AAF-SAP), the document had to be released first in London to ensure that it caught the attention of the West.

So I don't think it is lack of ideas. In the world in which we live the acceptability of ideas does not rest entirely with their quality but also does depend on the source. The playing field is still far from being level!

TGW: I am curious about this council of ministers in Nairobi which was going to vote the end of an imperialist organization. I would like to understand why this was deemed so. In fact, I thought that the original reason that ECA was the last but one to be created was that, in fact, the western world did not like the idea. From the outset, they were going to be left out of this. So, I would have thought you were caught between a rock and a hard place—being seen as imperialist by Africans, and being seen as non-inclusive by western donors.

AA: It was because the so-called progressive countries became disenchanted with economic analysis and strategy that advocate the persistence of a monocultural economic system in Africa. They saw ECA associating itself with an economic dependency paradigm rather than self-reliance. Robert Gardiner was a conservative economist who didn't see anything wrong with the extant development paradigm. We will come back to this later, because, in a way, their concern influenced what we did in ECA during the late 1970s and the 1980s.

But in terms of the origins of ECA, you are right. The West did not like the establishment of ECA. In fact, when the idea of establishing an African economic commission was raised, it was openly opposed. It took ten years before ECA could be established in 1958. In fact, the French, in order to forestall the establishment of an Economic Commission for Africa, sponsored the establishment in Lagos of an Institute for Technical Research and Cooperation,

which is now an organ of OAU. It did that in the 1950s to forestall having the African economic commission. It wanted to have something that it could control.

During this period, for a while, there were only a few African independent countries. And there was a time when Ethiopia and Morocco were part of the Economic Commission for Europe. But, eventually, the pressure mounted. On April 28, 1958, ECA was established through a resolution of ECOSOC. When that happened, there were only nine independent African countries. These were Libya, Morocco, Algeria, Egypt, Sudan, Tunisia, Ethiopia, Liberia, and South Africa whose membership was later suspended because of its apartheid policy. In 1959, Guinea joined.

For a while the colonial powers were members. These were Britain, France, Portugal, and Belgium. But their membership was soon downgraded into observer status and this adversely affected their attitude to ECA. This dramatic change in the status of four European countries appeared to have permanently prejudiced the relations, particularly as these countries enjoy full membership in ECAFE.

At the time ECA was established, it was, between 1958 and 1963, the only pan-African organization. OAU had not been established. During these five years, ECA member states did not make any distinction between economic and political affairs. ECA was the forum they used to discuss all issues. In a way, this gave ECA the anti-colonial image right from the start. Until the OAU was established in 1963, ECA was the in the vanguard of the anti-colonial, anti-apartheid, and pro-independence movement.

TGW: This is even more curious to me, in retrospect. The perception was that this was an imperial organization, even if the actions were seen as anti-colonial, anti-imperial. You

mentioned earlier the development paradigm. So the view of the way the world operated was, in this case, more important as a trace than the actual actions of the organization?

AA: Tom, to assist your understanding of this apparent paradox, we may have to distinguish between ECA as an intergovernmental body and the ECA secretariat. Because when both are often used interchangeably, confusion arises. The ECA that was anti-apartheid and anti-colonial was the intergovernmental council of ministers and their officials. They, not the executive secretariat, led the political debate; they took the political initiative. But in the field of development paradigm, analysis and strategy, member states looked up to the secretariat for leadership and for innovative ideas and all they received there from was orthodox classical economic doctrine—hence the tag of neocolonialism.

Once the OAU was established, the situation became more complicated. All the political initiatives were transferred from ECA to OAU and the unease with ECA's development orthodoxy, led member states—and both organizations have the same member states—to encourage the OAU to make incursions into the development field. In any case, its charter allows this. The OAU views on development were less orthodox, and the perception developed that ECA's orthodoxy was due to outside control because it is a United Nations not an African institution. The OAU began to gain African governments' and peoples' confidence and loyalty in the economic strategy domain. An "ECA-is-not-its-own" kind of attitude crystallized, to the extent that a draft resolution to abolish it was seriously contemplated.

TGW: So, how would you characterize that residue of the development paradigm? And how would you characterize, as you were taking over then, the counter-paradigm, or the alternative that seemed to be emerging?

AA: You see, by the time I took over, in June 1975, there were two indications which lent support to the need for paradigm shift. First, was the growing realization of the need for a New International Economic Order. The second was the General Assembly resolution passed in 1975 requesting the regional commissions to undertake an agonizing review of development in their respective regions between 1960 and 1975 and on the basis of this to come out with strategies about the trends and prospects. The conclusion of that study in so far as Africa was concerned gave cause for alarm. By 1975, Africa was on the downward slope and the development that was achieved in the 1960s was being reversed.

Hence I took the opportunity of the ECA conference of ministers in Kinshasa in February 1977 at which the findings of the study were presented to raise the alarm. I warned that African countries faced an economic crisis of great portent and that unless there was a paradigm shift the crisis would deepen and be exacerbated. I also warned that unless African countries put in place both at national and regional levels, a new national and regional economic paradigm, it would remain marginalized even under a NIEO, should there be one. Accordingly, ECA came out with a seminal document entitled the “Revised Framework of Principles for the Implementation of the New International Economic Order in Africa” in which we brought out four hypotheses—now very mundane but at that time sounded revolutionary.

First, that aid could be anti-development. To say that, in those days, made you look like a half-crazy professor. Aid was anti-development because it distorts priorities and distorts the allocation of even domestic resources. As Lester Pearson has made abundantly clear, aid was not administered by donors on partnership principle but arrogantly on the hegemonistic practice. Second, that Africa, going forward with the inherited colonial economic legacy would never

achieve socioeconomic transformation. Thirdly, that self-reliance and self-sustaining development was imperative. Fourthly, that Africa must regain and reassert its self-confidence.

As I say, these are very mundane in today's world, but in 1975, they did raise some eyebrows. We emphasized "trade not aid." We emphasized self-sustaining internal development, rather than producing primary commodities for export and depending on food imports and aid. We felt developing intra-African trade is very important for the continent, rather than continuing this vertical trade in terms of export commodities, and that the future of the continent did not lie in depending on mono-cultural production, even when you have included oil, but on diversification. The technology requirement for primary commodities export production is very little. You do not become a great technological society unless the opportunities and challenges are there. Therefore, you need to transform and diversify.

TGW: This is the beginning of tape number two, 6 March 2001. Tom Weiss is interviewing Adebayo Adedeji. We continue at UNDP headquarters. I am curious about this counter-paradigm in 1975. You mentioned some hypotheses that now seem trite, but at the time were more earthshaking. In this alternative paradigm, when did two other ideas enter, namely the importance of social development, as opposed to growth, trade, and finance, for Africa? And the second is the mixture, or the appropriate mixture, between internal measures and external measures. It seems to me that the United Nations and the debate about NIEO in UNCTAD (UN Conference on Trade and Development), the prominent debates were really about what was going on internationally in aid and trade and external measures. Subsequently, internal policies became the emphasis. When did these two issues—social measures and the importance of domestic measures—enter into your own thinking about development and into ECA's paradigm?

AA: In fact, when I made the statement about Africa being confronted with a crisis of great portent in 1977, I did say that we needed a new national economic, social, and political order, and a new regional order. And that from the NIEO, which was what the Third World was asking for, Africa would achieve marginal benefit unless it first and foremost put its house in order. Africa was not other regions which at least have put in place a process of transformation and have achieved political stability based on democratic principles. Nowadays, people talk about “good governance.” We were talking about “good government.” We didn’t call it “good governance,” but “good government.” You need political stability and good government before you can have development. And no matter how good international development is, the international economic division of labor is heavily skewed against Africa. But it is not sufficient to change it today without changing Africa itself. So, that was the new paradigm we were coming out with in 1975, 1976, and 1977.

TGW: How do you explain, then, the tough reaction, or the negative reaction, in much of Africa, and certainly the South, to the nature of, for example, Elliot Berg’s report from the Bank in 1981, or other highly critical looks at domestic policies in developing countries and Africa?

AA: Elliot Berg is a good friend. He was the one who invited me to Michigan University in 1971. He was in favor of the orthodox paradigm that we should continue to produce primary commodities for export. The Berg report reasserted the orthodox colonial economic theory. It was not arguing for economic diversification and sustainable human development but for an efficient monocultural economic system, i.e. more of the same, the perpetuation of colonial economic policies and strategies. Don’t forget that I organized the first economic summit of African heads of state, at which the Lagos Plan of Action and the Final Act of Lagos were

adopted. The LPA was based on the five principles postulated in the *Revised Framework*. These are the internalization of the forces of demand which determine the direction of development and economic growth processes and patterns of output and increasing substitution of factor inputs derived from within Africa for those derived from outside Africa; the increasing participation of the mass of the people in the production and consumption of the social product; the acceleration of internally-located and relatively autonomous processes of growth and diversification; collective self-reliance through regional cooperation and integration, i.e., developmental regionalism; the restitution of ethics in Africa's development theory and practice so as to ensure a fair and just distribution of income and of the benefits of economic development among the people and thereby reduce mass poverty and unemployment.

Thus, between the LPA and Berg's *Agenda for Action*, it is the former rather than the latter that demanded a highly critical look at domestic policies of African countries. The LPA advocated self-reliance, self-sustainment, democracy and popular participation, justice and fair play in the distribution of the benefits of development and, of course, political stability. These are more difficult to actualize than Elliot Berg's attempt to perpetrate the colonial economic legacy.

TGW: So, when you came to ECA, you actually had these ideas related to self-reliance, to a new self-sustainability. How did your ideas change over fifteen years, and what contributed to those changes?

AA: The ideas that I brought?

TGW: Yes. Were there any dramatic changes in your own approaches?

AA: In arriving at those ideas?

TGW: That's right. In 1975, you had one set of ideas that you tried to put into practice. In 1991, you leave the institution. How did those initial ideas change, and what new ideas came into your own thinking, and why?

AA: The five postulates of the *Revised Framework* and the LPA remain valid even today, particularly as the new colonial economic strategy has failed Africa woefully. Because of the overly dependent nature of the Africans on external assistance, it is foreign-crafted strategies that get funded by donors and the World Bank and in such foreign-crafted strategies. There is no room for the ECA five principles: economy that satisfies, first and foremost, the needs of African population. Unfortunately, the foreign crafted paradigms have not brought sustainable development to Africa. Rather, they have exacerbated the continent's economic weakness and aggravated its political crises.

Chester Crocker was no doubt more honest than most people when he, in his contribution to debate on LPA versus the *Agenda for Action*, admitted that in the Western perspective, Africa is only one of a panoply of global concerns which is not compelled to assume politically viable solutions nor take for granted the feasibility of rapid economic progress. Crocker then concluded that the *Agenda for Action* reflects the Western perspective of Africa while the LPA reflects the African perspective, which assumes a future that is economically viable and politically sustainable. Therefore, these ideas of ours which are African-centered will remain valid and will continue to be put forward until the African leaders and people wake up to their historic responsibility. Although the ECA conference of ministers declared that the strategy proposed in the *Agenda for Action* is in fundamental contradiction with the political, economic, and social

aspirations of Africa, individual governments, because of their dependence on external aid and their need for debt relief perforce pursue the structural adjustment program strategy.

TGW: ECOWAS was founded just as you were coming to ECA. How did your own ideas about regional integration, regional cooperation, and collective regional reliance change once in ECA? And what was the receptivity toward notions of regional cooperation within the secretariat?

AA: Yes indeed. The signing of the treaty establishing the Economic Community of West African States was on May 28, 1975. And on June 3, 1975, I was on my way to Addis Ababa to assume the executive headship of ECA. I therefore arrived in Addis Ababa with more than a theoretical background about regional cooperation and integration. I was confident that I could replicate my West African success in the other regions of Africa—East and Southern, Central and North Africa. Indeed, so confident was I that when the East Africa Community was collapsing and I was invited to assist in dividing its assets and liabilities among its three member states—Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania—I responded that I came to ECA to foster regional cooperation and integration, not to be an undertaker of the corpse of defunct ones!

Before launching any initiative on regional cooperation and integration in Eastern and Southern Africa as well as in Central Africa and reinvigorating the one already in existence in North Africa (the Mahgreb), I decided to review the ECA regional offices with a view to revitalizing them. ECA, under Gardiner, had divided Africa into four regions, with an ECA regional office in each of them. As a result of the Jackson capacity study (*A Study of the Capacity of the UN Development System*) of the early 1960s, each of these offices had been provided with a United Nations Development Advisory Team (UNDAT).

This was an interdisciplinary technical assistance team located in each region to provide policy advice to member states upon request. Due to the lack of UN budgetary posts and travel resources, the commission depended on bilateral assistance for putting the team together. But more often than not such assistance was not forthcoming. Besides, member states had become disillusioned with advice not backed by operations. There was no doubt that these regional offices needed to be given new mandates as well as new structures if they were not to remain the bureaucratic outposts of the ECA secretariat. I was also convinced that if regional cooperation and integration is to progress in Africa, ECA needed to put *in situ* in each region a catalytic agent that would encourage, promote, and monitor movement towards regionalism.

To advise on how to move forward after due consultation with member states, I set up a small expert group which was headed by Mahdi Elmandjara of Morocco, who incidentally had led the African group that negotiated the terms of reference of the commission in 1957/58, in accordance with the mandate of the General Assembly at its twelfth session in 1957, which requested ECOSOC to define those terms of reference. It was this group of experts that recommended the conversion of ECA regional offices into multinational programming and operational centers (MULPOCs), each with its own intergovernmental machinery at both official and ministerial levels. These MULPOCs were required, under the supervision of their respective legislative bodies, to be proactive in promoting, in every way possible, cooperation and integration in each region.

After several efforts spanning about ten years, I succeeded in getting the ACABQ (Advisory Committee on Budgetary Questions) and, subsequently, the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly to provide permanent posts for these MULPOCs, which have recently been

renamed sub-regional development centers. Their headquarters are as follows: West Africa—Niamey; Eastern and Southern Africa—Lusaka; Central Africa—Yaounde; and North Africa—Tangiers. Given the special and unique situation in the Great Lakes Countries of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire), Burundi, and Rwanda, a MULPOC was established for them whose headquarters were based in Gisenyi, which was also the headquarters of the Great Lakes Community. Due to the 1994 catastrophe in Rwanda, this MULPOC has shifted its headquarters to Kigali. With these new intergovernmental mechanism backstopped by a team of UN staff from ECA located in each region, it was possible for each region to promote its own regionalism in the way it considered most suitable and appropriate.

The Lusaka-based MULPOC was the first to bell the cat, as it were. After the dissolution of the East African Community, there was a regional cooperation and integration vacuum in that region. It was, therefore, not surprising that no sooner was the MULPOC inaugurated than its ministerial council passed a resolution of intent to establish a Preferential Free Trade Area for Eastern and Southern Africa (PTA) and invited ECA to organize necessary *modus operandi* for the negotiations of the treaty to establish it.

The negotiating process which began in 1977 did not conclude until 1981. The treaty was accordingly signed by the heads of state and government in the region on December 21, 1981. In fact, the PTA organization, which has since been transformed into COMESA, invited me to the summit commemorative meetings for the tenth and twentieth anniversaries of the organization in Lusaka, its headquarters in 1991 and 2001—even though I was no longer in the UN.

Similarly, the Central African MULPOC based in Yaounde and the Gisenyi-based MULPOC took the same initiative, which culminated in the establishment of the Central African

Economic Community. However, we failed in the North to revive and invigorate the Maghreb Agreement. Already in the 1960s, the ECA had supported the Arab North to establish the Maghreb Agreement. But we failed to revive it because of the geopolitical situation in the Arab world. In fact, it is not surprising that Egypt and Sudan have since joined the Eastern and Southern African economic community, rather than stay in the North and use their influence and power to get the Maghreb Agreement to be reestablished.

So, by the time of the Lagos Plan of Action, which was accompanied by the Final Act of Lagos, we had already established three strong regional organizations—ECOWAS, PTA COMESA, and CAEC. In addition, and with the support of EU, SADDCC (now SADC, Southern African Development Community) was established to reduce the dependence of the frontline states of Southern Africa on apartheid South Africa. Therefore, when the decision was taken to establish an African economic community, it was based on the pre-condition that those regional economic cooperation entities had been well-developed.

TGW: You mentioned earlier that you brought some academics into ECA. Which academics actually exert the most influence on UN decision-makers and negotiators in economic and social issues? In particular, when does more theoretical, as opposed to more practical, analysis have an impact?

AA: You see, this dichotomy between theory and practice is something that I find very difficult to subscribe to—this idea that theory, nowadays, does not lead to application is not helping anybody. What we needed, which is a problem that plagued us throughout, was to provide an answer to the basic question: “What type of development does Africa need?” We came to the conclusion, when we did the *Revised Framework*, that Africa should not mimic the

type of development that has taken place in other countries. Africa should aim to promote development that reflects its culture, politics, society and resources. It should not turn itself into a little China, a little Britain, a little America, or a little France. Development in each country or each society requires its own uniqueness. Every society is very unique. Unless there is compatibility between the political economy and the social economy, the problem of disconnect will loom large and consequently such development will not be people-centered nor become sustainable.

In the world in which we live, some of the theories that were applicable in the West cannot work in Africa. The world today is different from the world of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. For instance, we have the WTO (World Trade Organization) today. And with the information technology, you don't have the autonomy that you require. Therefore, in bringing in academics, we ensure that we brought people who are policy-oriented. And we didn't bring them only as consultants to write but recruited some to the secretariat, albeit for a fixed term. Before I left ECA, we probably had more PhDs in virtually all disciplines than some of Africa's universities.

We brought many political scientists and other social and natural scientists and technologists because of the multidisciplinary and multidimensional nature of our work. We have also recruited staff from the civil service, the private sector, and nongovernmental organizations. The number of these people brought every year to ECA is so large that it will be invidious to mention a few names. Those who have remained in the UN are now occupying very senior posts in Addis Ababa, New York, Geneva, and Rome.

Whenever we've had seminal papers to prepare (Monrovia Strategy, LPA, AAF-SAP, to mention only a few), we have convened special expert group meetings, bringing together African and non-African scholars, policymakers and business executives either for brainstorming or to test our hypotheses, findings, and recommendations on them. We have also organized major conferences to which we have invited experts *ad personam* in addition to representatives of ECA member states.

Let me provide you with a case study. For some years after the imposition of the structural adjustment program on African countries by the IMF and the World Bank, I did not make any comment thereon. We left it to the governments to decide for themselves whether it was worth the sacrifices. As it became clear that it was not achieving even the limited objectives ascribed to it, we appointed one economist in each country to review the structural adjustment program in his or her own country. All these reviews, without any exception, presented a dismal picture. On that basis, we brought the African economists together to consider what the next step should be. We also set up an interagency standing committee, in which we included the World Bank. It later withdrew when findings and conclusions were beginning to show clearly that the structural adjustment paradigm was not going to carry Africa anywhere. This was the beginning of the process that culminated in AAF-SAP—the African Alternative Framework to Structural Adjustment Programme.

TGW: Maybe we should spend a moment on this alternative framework because, as I look at the decade of the 1980s, and in our book *Ahead of the Curve?*, I think we argue mainly that the UN was asleep at the wheel, not playing its role in at least calling into question orthodoxy emanating from Washington.

AA: That is right. I have read it, but there is hardly any mention of ECA in that volume.

TGW: There is a mention, but later in the decade. We mentioned UNICEF (UN Children's Fund), *Adjustment with a Human Face*, and then ECA. And then, I suppose, UNRISD (UN Research Institute for Social Development) to an extent also. But what happened to the United Nations during the 1980s so that in many of these issues its role in calling into question orthodoxy seemed to have taken a back seat?

AA: When you say the United Nations, you mean UN headquarters organization, because ECA and UNCTAD are organs of the UN. It is true that we did not have the support of UN headquarters, no doubt because they did not understand what was going on. For many of them, their understanding of Africa was rather superficial. The continent is too far and distant. And sometime one suspects that some colleagues would heartily share Crocker's view of the Western perspective of Africa. For example, it required the great Ethiopian drought disaster for some of my colleagues at headquarters to believe that the crisis I have been talking about was not just crying foul over nothing. I remember Jean Ripert, who was the director-general and who accompanied the Secretary-General on his visit of 1984 to the drought-stricken areas of Ethiopia to see children, men, and women dying every minute before believing the severity of the crisis. Said he at the site of the drought affected displaced persons, "Adebayo, I am sorry. I wish I had believed what you said." I was so angry with him, I couldn't say anything. I simply walked away. But here was the director-general for economic and social affairs in the UN. Even the biblical doubting Thomas was not that vicious or churlish. It seemed there was a tacit understanding that the UN headquarters should not question the programs of the World Bank

which result in so much tragedy in Africa, even when claims of success are being made in the face of large-scale tragedy.

So the UN headquarters had had no input. But we in ECA had no doubt in our minds that we should not let SAP go on any longer without a public challenge. Our first challenge came when the World Bank published *Africa's Adjustment and Growth in the 1980s*. Our conference of ministers demanded a widely-circulated response putting the records straight. Accordingly, ECA came out with *Statistics and Policies: ECA Preliminary Observations on the World Bank Report, Africa adjustment and growth in the 1980s*. In fact, the World Bank tried to prevent some newspapers in the West from covering it.

TGW: Richard mentioned that they passed out their own statements.

AA: Yes, and that backfired. The response of Western media was so critical of the World Bank that its president hurriedly convened a peace meeting at which a spirited attempt was made to forge a consensus, but as the *Joint Statement on Africa's Long-term Development*, issued after, ruefully admitted, areas of disagreement remained, although participants emphasized their determination to work together and collaborate in the wider interest of Africa.

TGW: You have mentioned on a couple of occasions other institutions in the system. I am wondering to what extent, in your experience at ECA, institutional rivalry was an important source of stimulus to intellectual activities. That is, where the competition with the Bretton Woods institutions might be obvious, were there other kinds of competition—with New York, with UNCTAD, with the ILO (International Labour Organization)—that pushed you and your staff to come up with sharper or newer ideas?

AA: You know, we didn't think of ourselves as a rival to the World Bank. It is like an ant pretending to rival an elephant. It was not rivalry. We just felt that they had got it wrong in terms of Africa because they simply do not know Africa well. They look at the continent with the lenses of North America and Western Europe. Indeed, there was a fleeting moment when the World Bank appeared to be heeding the admonition of Hayek in his *Pretense of Knowledge* (Nobel Memorial Lecture 1974) that good economists cannot afford to be too cocksure and dogmatic as they are more like a gardener with his plants, cultivating a growth by providing the appropriate environment than as a craftsman shapes his hand work.

That fleeting moment was when the Bank, in its *Sub-Saharan Africa—From Crisis to Sustainable Growth: A Long Term Perspective Study*, posed the following basic and searching questions to itself: Does Africa face special structural problems that have not been properly understood? Has the institutional dimension been neglected? Have structural-adjustment-related reform program been too narrow or too shallow? Like Pontius Pilate, it failed to seek answers to the questions. I read an internal memorandum by the current president of the World Bank recently which reads like the *African Alternative*. But this is more than a decade after we had published AAF-SAP. Belatedly, the president of the World Bank, James Wolfensohn, in a memorandum to the board, management, and staff of the Bank dated January 21, 1999, warned that, “We cannot adopt a system in which the macroeconomic and financial is considered apart from the structural, social and human aspects and vice versa. Integration of each of these subjects is imperative at the national level and among the global players...The international financial architecture must reflect the interdependence of macro-economic and financial with structural and social and human concerns....Unless we adopt this approach on a comprehensive, transparent

and accountable basis, we will fail in the global challenge of equitable and sustainable development and poverty alleviation. We will fail to build a sustainable international architecture for the coming millennium.”

The World Bank is now talking about governance. The World Bank that used never to talk about the huge portion of the national gross domestic product going to defense is now critical of heavy defense budgets. For years it was left to ECA alone to dare to say to governments that they cannot be going to borrow money when they are spending half of the their own resources on defense, particularly as the weapons are being used against their own people, not against the enemies of the countries. As far back as the second half of the 1970s, ECA linked development and government together, by insisting that Africa cannot have rapid development unless there is stability and good government in every country. When nobody dared talk about corruption, ECA took a very strong anti-corruption stance. No, we are not rivaling the World Bank. We have been years ahead of it.

TGW: How do you explain the fact that the World Bank, and maybe less so the IMF, seems to have “gotten religion,” so to speak, in terms of balance of development and social concerns, anti-militarism, and other things?

AA: The World Bank has a high propensity to take over others’ ideas and claim the ownership of them. Having belatedly come to realize that the structural adjustment program has not worked and is not likely to work, the World Bank began to acquire and internalize all those ideas that other institutions have been putting forward. When UNICEF, for example, talked about *Structural Adjustment with a Human Face*, that did not go well with the World Bank. But later it came out with programs to ameliorate the devastating blow of structural adjustment on

human development. But this was a mere palliative. As one of my economists, Bade Onimode once said, “How can you give a human face to a monkey?” In other words, we need more than a human face. We need a transformational development strategy because the problem of Africa is not lack of competitiveness, but lack of an economy where competitiveness can take place. You cannot have competitiveness unless you have the economic system and structure that makes for competition.

TGW: Actually, why don't I ask one more question and then I will quit interrogating you for the day? The image seems to be that ECA is dominated by Anglophone, as opposed to francophone, concerns. This may be because I have spent too much time in French-speaking countries. Is there any truth to this?

AA: Not at all. Nothing could be further from the truth. There are more Francophones than Anglophones in the secretariat.

TGW: I see. But the fact that there has never been an executive head who is Francophone—

AA: That is also not true. The first executive-secretary was an Arab, the second and third, English speaking, the fourth and fifth, French-speaking while the present incumbent is English-speaking. I must also add that the fifth is also an Arab, a francophone Arab from Algeria. And the deputies have been mostly Francophone.

TGW: So, in other words, this rivalry has been more or less “tamed,” if that is the word, or it's not a concern within the secretariat?

AA: What rivalry? Every two years, we are required to make a submission to our council of ministers, showing the geographical distribution of our posts. These biennial reports show that

there have been more Francophones in the secretariat than Anglophones. First of all, there are more francophone than Anglophone African countries. Secondly, they have the tendency of seeking employment in the UN. Until recently, in some African countries, you really have to beg qualified people to come and work for the UN. This changed dramatically when the African economies began to decline. There are more Senegalese in senior posts than there are Nigerians.

TGW: That reminds me of one thing. Did the early emphasis on race in the analyses of ECA—I remember Bernard Chidzero talking about the first report he did on the economic consequences of racial discrimination in Africa. Did this leave a trace afterwards, or is this just an old story?

AA: I have not heard of that. So it must have been at a particular point in time when ECA was playing the political role of the OAU and apartheid South Africa was still a member of the commission. By the time I got there, there was nothing of the sort.

TGW: And, inhabiting the same town with OAU, did this pose any problems, or was it a useful division?

AA: It is problematic as well as useful at the same time? When I got to ECA, I discovered that, in fact, the ECA and OAU were hardly on speaking terms. The executive-secretary of ECA was *persona non grata*, as it were, at OAU meetings. I took over on the 3rd of June in 1975. A month later, there was an OAU summit in Uganda. Preceding that OAU summit was the meeting of the Council of Ministers. I took it for granted that I would attend both meetings and report on the economic situation in Africa. But my staff advised that I should not go to Kampala so as not to be humiliated by being asked to leave the meeting after the formal opening session as ECA enjoyed only observer status at OAU meetings. Needless to add that

my senior staff scorned the very thought that I would be given the opportunity to address at least the council of ministers. However, I dismissed all their advice and instructed them to prepare a draft speech for me. When I arrived at Kampala some members of the OAU secretariat were opposed to my addressing even the council of ministers. But having been a minister before coming to ECA, I used to attend OAU ministerial council meetings as well as accompany my head of state to the summit. I was not surprised therefore that the committee of ambassadors accredited to OAU overruled the secretariat and allowed me to address the council.

Thereafter, I addressed the council every year as a matter of course. During my third year, the OAU heads of state themselves requested the ECA chief executive to address them on Africa's economic situation. ECA was also made responsible for initiating memoranda to the OAU. Such was the close relations which I succeeded in establishing. Throughout my tenure, I emphasized OAU/ECA complementarity. The OAU is a political organization, while the ECA specializes on development. But there can be no development without politics, just as there is no credible political condition amidst poverty and stagnation. I had the honor and pleasure of working with four OAU secretaries-general who are committed Africanists and were as keen as myself in optimizing the complementarities of our two organizations. They are Williams Eteki Mbomouka, Edem Kodjo, Ide Oumarou, and Salim Ahmed Salim. Unfortunately, since I left ECA, I gather that my successors have been deprived the opportunity to address the OAU. We are virtually back to the pre-1975/1976 situation.

TGW: This is a good place to let you prepare your next meeting, and for me to end tape number two. We will begin again tomorrow. Thank you.

TGW: This is the beginning of tape number three. It is 7 March, with Tom Weiss and Adebayo Adedeji here at UNDP in New York. Good morning. I wondered whether you might just take a look at your decade and a half at ECA and think about the beginning, middle, and end, and the crises and main events that marked your tenure.

AA: One can characterize my sixteen years or so in ECA as a period of intense economic crisis, caused by a variety of factors. First, the political aspect. Sixty to 70 percent of our countries were under military dictatorships. Somehow, there was a strong feeling that a command polity under a military junta would succeed in bringing about a command economy resulting in rapid progress and development. But this was not to be. On the contrary, most of these countries were as economically unstable as they were politically unstable, even in spite of the repression. Secondly, Africa had continued, over the years, with the development paradigm that existed in colonial days—primary production, monocultural development, dependency, and bust and boom. Over the years, the increasing dependence on aid and food aid deepened the crisis. For a continent that in the 1960s was more or less self-sufficient in food, this was tragic. The dependence on P.L. 480 (U.S. Public Law 480, Food for Peace Program), and other sources of food aid was so pervasive that 25 to 30 percent of SSA's (Sub-Saharan Africa's) population depended on food aid or food imports to survive.

We were short of skilled manpower. But the irony was that the few we had had no opportunities and challenges in their own countries. So they were in America and in Europe. In the circumstance, the need to seek an alternative development paradigm that would use the existing tools in economics, while focusing on the reality of the African political, cultural, and social circumstances became very urgent.

We started in 1975/76 with the *Revised Framework*, which I discussed yesterday. On the basis of this, we came out with the Monrovia Strategy in 1979 and the Lagos Plan of Action and the Final Act of Lagos in 1980. In these three documents, we attempted to operationalize the five principles of the *Revised Framework*. These are, if I may remind you, self-reliance, self-sustainment, equity and justice, democracy and popular participation, and collective self-reliance through regional cooperation and integration, i.e., developmental regionalism.

Throughout the Lagos Plan of Action, we never mentioned anything about aid. It was perceived as being part of the problem of underdevelopment by accentuating the dependency syndrome and the debt burden. But developmental regionalism was at the core of the paradigm. About twenty countries in Africa have populations of less than 5 million people. About half of the African countries have populations of less than 10 million. So they cannot be viable. We realize we could not talk about political integration, but, at least, economic integration provided an alternative, even if it is not the best.

But once the Lagos Plan of Action was adopted, two things happened. One, the World Bank came out with the Berg report. I knew it was being prepared, because Elliot Berg came to see me in Addis Ababa, and I briefed him fully about the preparation of the Lagos Plan of Action. We urged the Bank through him to wait until at least the Lagos Plan of Action had been published and see the ways it can assist in its implementation. We felt that the Bank should put all its weight behind this very first serious effort being made by African governments to collectively come out with their own development paradigm and forge a future for the continent. Instead, Berg came out with a report which was the very antithesis of the Lagos Plan of Action, and which was no more than a neocolonial development strategy. Hence the sharp reaction and the

big row. The ECA conference of ministers rejected the report in its entirety because it was in fundamental contradiction with the economic, political, and social aspirations of Africa.

At the same time, the debt problem emerged. Many of these countries were debtor countries, not in the magnitude of the debt but in the relationship to their very narrow productive capacity. A country like Zambia owed in 1980 about \$3 billion, which was a small amount, but it was about 40 percent of its export earnings, particularly when the price of copper dropped precipitously. Of course, with the [Richard] Nixon administration changing the rules of the game and turning the dollar from fixed to variable rates, interest rates skyrocketed and the debt-servicing burden exploded. So \$5 billion became seven, then ten, and up and up it went as the interest rates increased. Inevitably, the debt problem got out of hand. The structural adjustment program was introduced, based on the Berg report, making it a condition for debt relief and debt forgiveness. So it became obligatory for the countries to opt for structural adjustment programs if they wanted anything to be done about their debt. This meant that African countries were forced under duress to pursue the World Bank's strategy and abandon their own paradigm.

So, everybody forgot about the new paradigm. For a while, we ourselves had no clue as to what to do next because we faced the reality that these countries had to pay their debt. In search of an answer, we organized Africa's first debt conference. But our heads of state were unwilling to form a debt cartel. Apparently they had been warned that if they did they would face severe consequences. In fact, many of them chickened out by not personally attending the conference. The only head of state who talked about not paying the debt at all, President Sankara of Burkina Faso, was killed a few months later. Although there was no direct connection

between the position he took at the debt conference and his untimely demise, people of Africa generally wondered.

Meanwhile, the crisis continued to loom large. Then in 1983 to 1985, we had the drought, when Africa was virtually on its back. ECA continued to insist that there was no way Africa could transform its economy on the basis of the colonial economic legacy. We therefore resumed the search for alternative paradigms. We were challenged, not only by the member states, but also by the General Assembly, to do this. Indeed, the General Assembly challenged Africa to come out with an alternative to the structural adjustment program, if it could and dared.

Meanwhile, in the face of the blatant failure of the structural adjustment program, the World Bank came out with its Long-Term Planning Strategy (LTPS), which was closer to the LPA. But the World Bank is like an elephant. It takes it ages to turn around. Those who write its seminal documents are not those who operate the loans and disburse investments. Operationally therefore, the Bank continued with the structural adjustment program, even after the African governments and, I dare add, the General Assembly had endorsed the ECA African Alternative to Structural Adjustment Program. The only country which voted against it is the United States.

In terms of your question about planning, in the 1960s, the average African country prepared a development plan hoping that 50 to 75 percent of the resources for finance would come from abroad by way of aid and direct private investment. And they are paying very dearly for that today.

TGW: In 1977, actually, at a conference of the council of ministers, you mentioned that “it has become apparent that the African region appears to be least prepared of all Third World

regions for the New International Economic Order.” And you mentioned that instead you needed a new national and regional as well as international framework of ideas. How do you feel today? Are we closer or farther away from your thought for better national, regional, and international—if not order—governance?

AA: I would, of course, say we are closer. The picture is mixed. Quite frankly, when I think about Africa, I think about what is happening in a half a dozen countries, which between them account for 80 percent of the GDP (gross domestic product) of Africa. South Africa—now we can include South Africa, because throughout my career in ECA, South Africa was politically nonexistent because of its apartheid policy—Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Sudan, and Ethiopia. These are countries together whose populations account for about 70 percent of the population of the continent. In fact, South Africa and Nigeria alone account for more one-half of SSA’s GDP. But they are all countries deep in trouble. Little wonder SSA is eternally in crisis.

South Africa has a “skyscraper economy”: very thin on the top, with illiteracy being over 50 percent of the population, with different kinds of deprivation—physiological, income, and social deprivations—being very pervasive. In spite of the romanticism in the West, the future of South Africa is rather uncertain. The African Centre for Development and Strategic Studies (ACDESS)—which in collaboration with some African and non-African leaders was established under the chairmanship of the late Nwalimu Julius Nyerere—published in 1996 a study entitled *South Africa and Africa: Within or Apart?* It raised a number of questions that require urgent answers. Will the new democratic South Africa led by the African National Congress be one where the needs of the majority population—particularly massive land reform in

favor of the poor, disempowered black population—are at last addressed? Will the new South Africa's future be one where its hegemonistic relations with neighboring states are restructured in an equitable direction? Will the new South Africa be willing and able to stand up for its own interests and those of Africa? Or will the new leadership become distanced from its popular roots and pushed into a globalizing perspective which marginalizes its own immiserated classes and an immiserated continent?

For obvious and extremely well-known reasons, Madiba (Nelson Mandela) did not address these questions. The irony is that he was the only leader who could have addressed them. But, in the interest of peace and security and the building of confidence between the black and white communities, he did not address them. I can't think of any of the leaders around now in South Africa who are in the position or who have the influence that Madiba wielded to address the fundamental structural problems.

You see, before the independence of Zimbabwe, the ECA under my leadership, and UNCTAD with my brother of Zimbabwe, Bernard Chidzero, as the contact man, prepared Zimbabwe's first post-independence five year development plan even years before independence was achieved. We put as a priority of priorities land reform and urged that Zimbabwe, while it has tremendous international goodwill, must address this most fundamental and basic problem without delay. Unfortunately, this was not done. They postponed addressing the land question for twenty years and they are now paying for it. You see, our leaders' capacity to put off to tomorrow basic problems of restructuring the African economy is a major obstacle to the way forward.

While South Africa is the largest single economy in Africa, Nigeria is the second. Nigeria's problem is one of political stability. The fledgling democracy can be overthrown tomorrow. I told you that in 1966 I was at a cocktail party where the guests discussed freely when the next coup would take place. That kind of discussion is not yet entirely absent in Nigeria, even today. The Democratic Republic of the Congo is virtually on its back. Ethiopia, well I hope they have solved this stupid war against Eritrea. The Sudan is engaged in a structural civil war.

And yet these countries—South Africa, Nigeria, DRC, Sudan, and Ethiopia—are Africa's key economies. They are extremely rich potentially. But they cannot get their acts together. So that is why it is very difficult for me to answer your question, because these problems have persisted for as long as we have had independence in the continent.

TGW: Actually, in a recent book on comprehending African conflicts, you wrote the opposite: "Africa has the golden opportunity for the first time in the past five centuries to be the master of its own destiny." What is the other half of the coin here?

AA: I said "opportunity." With the independence of Namibia in 1990 and the dawn of new democratic South Africa in 1994, Africa has rid itself of the twin problems of colonialism and officially-sanctioned apartheid and racism throughout its modern history. That is a great burden off its head. That is a new window of opportunity opening up, if only we can put our acts together. By old conflicts persisting and new ones emerging, we seem to be allowing the opportunity to slip away. If only our leaders could address the most urgent problem of political stability by comprehending and mastering their country's conflicts.

When [Laurent] Kabila, the father—and may his soul rest in peace—came to power, I had gone to Tokyo and New York, on mission. On my way back to Lagos and Ijebu-Ode, I flew to London where I was to spend one night. Hardly had I put down my suitcase when the telephone rang, and a beautiful female French voice said that Mr. President wanted to speak to me. I was surprised. I thought that both the MI6 and CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) must have been quite effective in tracking me down! But before I could say “which president?” someone said “Kabila here.” For a split second, I forgot who the hell Kabila was. When I had put my thoughts together, I said the polite things. Without much ado, he invited me to come to Kinshasa immediately. He, in fact, suggested that I should fly directly from Europe. But I could not come directly because I had an engagement in Nigeria to give a public lecture which I had accepted six months before. So we agreed that I would go to Kinshasa immediately after I had delivered the lecture. And this I did.

He wanted me to take part in a workshop on the restructuring of the devastated Congo economy, which we did. When I went to take leave of him he told me that he had been consulting one or two donors who were willing to pay my salary if I would become his economic advisor for two years. I looked at him and said, “Mr. President, two years is a long period for an old man like me. Unless you address your country’s political problems without any delay, there would be unrest and what would happen to me? I am too old to be running under the bed for cover.” He was no doubt taken aback by my candor, but I went on. I said, “First of all, you are not yet addressing the political problem of your country. You have been put into power by your neighboring countries under a false assumption, and sooner or later they are going to turn against you because you would not be able to deliver what they want from you. So why do you want

me to get involved in that? Let me go back to Nigeria. Should you need my services for no more than three to five days at a time, I will come.” I said all this based on my own assessment of the situation. Yes, Mobuto [Sese Seko] was gone, but Kabila was put in power by a coalition based on different unrealizable hegemonistic assumptions.

TGW: Analysts who look at where we are headed, at either the planetary or regional level, usually point to trends, one toward globalization and increasing integration of certain functions and at the same time we see a lot evidence of fragmentation or moving in the opposite direction. In light of your comments about Africa, just how full or empty is the glass in terms of Africa’s future? And what are the implications for development?

AA: When people talk of globalization and the future of the world, Africa is confined to the footnotes. And that is not surprising. It accounts for 1 percent of total global GDP, and 1 percent of global world trade. As I keep telling people that if there was a disaster and the entire population of Africa was wiped out, at least the rest of the world would maintain a few minutes of silence and mourn the dead Africans because that is about 13 percent of the global population that is gone. But if Africa refuses to work or trade, the rest of the world would continue without noticing that Africa has ceased to work or trade, because it accounts for 1 percent each of global income and trade. That is the extent to which the marginalization of the continent has gone. That marginalization reflects internal marginalization. Therefore, we cannot really be strong abroad unless we begin to gain strength from within. This goes back to my 1977 Kinshasa statement again. I was regarded as being anti-NIEO. But within the perspective of the African continent, I was clear in my mind that no matter what new restructuring takes place in the world, Africa will be left out of it unless Africa puts its house in order. That was as true then as it is today.

TGW: Ten years into your tenure at ECA, or towards the middle or the end of the 1980s, the Soviet Union and the socialist model came apart. Did this surprise you?

AA: Yes, it did, not because I had any illusions about the Soviet Union. I had visited the country quite a few times, but I didn't expect that kind of collapse from the second most powerful nation in the world. So it surprised me because it exposed the weaknesses of the system far more than anybody had anticipated. I was quite surprised that nobody in Washington had anticipated that the Soviet Union could collapse that easily, like a deck of cards. I lived in Ethiopia, whose government was a great ally of the USSR. It took the Ethiopian authorities by surprise. They were caught with their pants down, as it were. And, of course, their own collapse became inevitable.

TGW: Besides eliminating one part of the negotiating structure—that is, Group D—in international negotiations, what did the collapse of this model mean for the climate for ideas in which you were working? Did this make a difference in the kinds of things that were imaginable, or that were politically more feasible? Or, in contrast, did the elimination of a big alternative narrow the margin for maneuver and make another set of ideas absolutely impossible?

AA: It gave us what I thought was a great opportunity, at least to address the African political problem. I have said it oftentimes and I was quoted about this a year ago in *The Economist* in London, that the African economic crisis, grave as it is, is but a sad reflection of lack of political stability. At least the collapse of the Soviet Union gave us the opportunity to drive home the point that you need a strong participatory political base for anything to become enduring and sustainable. And we took advantage of that. We organised the International Conference on Popular Participation in the Recovery and Development Process in Africa, which

we could not have dared to organise a few years before. We couldn't call it democracy, because that would be confrontational. We called it "popular participation for development." If you look at the charter, which came out of the conference, it is all about putting people in the driver's seat. We were talking about the myriad of political problems facing Africa and the need to address them if we are going to make a move forward.

In the past we had referred to them, when not even the World Bank, the IMF, and the bilateral donors had dared to mention them. This time we thought we should put them in the center of the discourse. Fortunately, Tanzania was willing to host our conference. We could not have held it in Addis Ababa, because that was not an enabling environment for it. And it turned out to be one of our most successful conferences. In fact, it was the first conferences that the UN, through ECA, brought in the civil society massively not as observers, but as participants. I set up a twenty-one member preparatory committee to plan the conference, eleven of whom were representatives of the civil society and NGOs (nongovernmental organizations). And my colleagues in New York were appalled. They really thought that I had gone crazy, that I had gone too far. ECA is an intergovernmental organization, they kept reminding me. I said, "Yes, but we are fighting for democracy in Africa, and civil society must be empowered through us to be able to function."

In many African countries until then, both the non-African and the African NGOs were not welcome. Often they spent some of their time with the police, or they were declared *persona non grata* and were sent back home. The African ones, more often than not, worked underground. So we legitimized them. Bringing them to the conference and making them share responsibility in its organization gave them recognition and legitimacy. And we came out with

the African Charter for Popular Participation and Development. Without the collapse of the Soviet Union, we could not have done that. We were indeed far ahead of the curve.

TGW: You have mentioned this magic word—NGO—and civil society. How do you see the development of civil society in Africa in the next ten or fifteen years? And also, I think in a related way, how does the United Nations, as an intergovernmental organization, make room for NGOs and representatives of civil society? Over the years, of course, they have always been involved in one way or another. Some people would argue that in terms of the environment, women, and human rights, they were essential. So, how do you see, in the particular context of Africa, civil society development, and its impact on the United Nations and the world of ideas?

AA: I think today, more than ever before, there is increasing emphasis on the very first phrase of the Charter of the United Nations: “We the Peoples.” The United Nations was an intergovernmental organization, but its Charter was a people-centered charter. And the present Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, is beginning to remind us of that. I don’t know the extent to which that has led the organization to give space to the civil society in its activities.

But the evolution must begin from the country level. For years, we have been striving to see how the UN, while thinking globally, can act nationally, particularly since, unlike the Bretton Woods institutions, it does not have much resources. But it has people’s confidence, people’s trust. People think the UN has an agenda for their genuine welfare, unlike the Bretton Woods institutions.

So, I have been involved in UN reforms, as I told you yesterday, since 1966. And then when BBG (Boutros Boutros-Ghali) became Secretary-General, he also set up a reform group, and I was a member of that. This time around, the reform is to be country-centered, with the UN

itself speaking with one voice and acting together instead of each organization flying its kite.

There should be one UN kite, and every organization will put its own stake into the kite, rather than separate kites. And the process will be country-led, not government-led.

In 1998, I was asked to lead a team to undertake a preliminary assessment of this UN reform called United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF). Devaki Jain of India and Mary McCowan of Britain were my colleagues. Three years later, in 2001, we did a second evaluation.

We found that in many countries, only lip-service is paid to empowering civil society. So habits die hard. The civil society still has a very, very small space to maneuver. On such issues as gender equality and human rights it has been more talk than action. This was true of Africa as it was of non-African countries of Asia and Middle East. In the course of the evaluation exercise, I paid a visit to both Vietnam and Colombia, and I was not impressed by the progress so far achieved. Both countries just remind me of home. The future of civil society is still very much in doubt.

TGW: In your book about African conflicts, you mention that, in the most extreme form, civil war and strife reflects a pervasive lack of democracy and the denial of human rights, and the complete disregard for sovereignty of the people. Where do you come down in the debate about the sequencing of democracy and development? Which comes first?

AA: This is like the horse and the carriage. I regret to say that I am economist, not a political scientist. But I have come to the conclusion that development is a subset of democracy and that an internalized and pervasive democratic culture is imperative. I want to define what we mean by democracy—at least what I mean by democracy. I think it is a society where the rights

of the people are respected, a society where the people are empowered—politically and economically. And it is a society in which there is no danger to life and property. I am not talking of the symbolism of democracy—whether you have a house of parliament and you have a semblance of free and fair elections. But I am talking about a society whose citizens know that their fundamental human rights will be protected. Where you don't have that—as we don't in many African countries—you have brain drain. Where the supremacy of the rule of law is not guaranteed, people will not contribute their optimum to development processes. They will discount the future very highly. They will think of how to survive today, rather than have long-term orientation. All the things that you require for development are not there.

Development calls for long-term perspectives. Development is not like instant coffee. You can only have long-term perspective if you are safe, if you know that your security is taken care of and that your human rights are inviolable and there is a judiciary that ensures the supremacy of the rule of law. Personal security, the security of the community, the security of the society and of property are *conditios sine qua non* for democracy and development.

We modern-day economists tend to forget that economics as a discipline used to be part of moral philosophy. The founders of economics—like Adam Smith and David Ricardo—put greater emphasis on the morality of development, rather than on the quantities of development. Political environment was emphasized more in the early teachings on development.

TGW: You mentioned, a few minutes ago, gender—the role of women. And in looking at the past, during the second conference on women, you wrote that, for Africa, “The role of women, its greatest human capital must be reexamined. The achievements of the decade would have been higher if women's access to development and decision-making had been less

restricted.” When did you, as an economist, an analyst, and an activist, first become aware of the issues regarding women in development?

AA: Very early, even before it became fashionable. I have no sentiments about gender at all. I look at it purely from the economic perspective. Personally, in my family, I could not tell you whether the resources I needed for my education and living came from my mother or my father. But I knew that it was not one-sided. My father was not the only one looking after my education. Of course, that enhanced my respect for my mother. I had schoolmates whose mothers were passive in terms of their development. Even my grandmother, as old as she was, would pay for many things without asking my parents. So I grew up in that kind of environment.

But as I developed, I realized that if we really want sustainable human development, we cannot disenfranchise 50 to 51 percent of our population. It is like riding a cycle on one wheel. You will never get there. The ECA was the first in the entire UN system to establish a Centre for Women and Development. That predated, by a few months, the 1975 Mexico conference on women in development (UN World Conference of the International Women’s Year).

In Africa today, most of the farmers are women. The men specialize in producing export commodities. The women specialize on producing food. But 80 to 90 percent of investments in agriculture, for half a century or more, have been concentrated on export production, rather than on food production. We are paying dearly for that now. And it is because of the lack of empowerment for women that we are now dependent on food imports. Greater facilities are available readily and extensive services are available readily for farmers producing for export. Of course, we can argue that the colonial government did not really have gender discrimination in

mind. But its effect is the same. But this is something that pre-dated the women's conference. But it was a good thing that we have had women in development in the UN, because we are still far from achieving a breakthrough, at least in most African countries.

TGW: I am curious. Yesterday we mentioned global conferences and we mentioned the 1975 Mexico City conference on women, and then 1985—

AA: In Nairobi, yes (Third UN World Conference on Women).

TGW: And then subsequently in Beijing (Fourth World Conference on Women). How did these conferences influence the way you did your work in ECA? What was the impact of these conference, or the occasion for a new conference for your Centre on Women, or for your staff generally? Did this have an impact on your day-to-day operations?

AA: The ECA Centre on Women in Development became the focus on gender issues, and through it a lot of sensitivity was developed on gender issues and programming in the ECA. We used the center to mobilize and organize the African women through sub-regional and continental conferences.

TGW: Another big subject that figures prominently in our book and analyses happens to be the environment. How did the Stockholm conference (UN Conference on the Human Environment), and in the twenty years between 1972 and 1992 in Rio (UN Conference on Environment and Development), how did ideas on the environment penetrate ECA and governments? You were on the government side in 1972 and then you were in the secretariat. How did this relatively new idea, at least in terms of the environment and development, enter the government in Nigeria? Also, how did it play out in the work program and the research program of ECA?

AA: Yesterday, I did say that Nigeria did very little in the sense that we were not even able to establish a ministry for environment. It was not until Olusegun Obasanjo came to power in May 1999 that a ministry for environment was established. I even had a problem convincing him that he should establish one. And when I left him, I was certain that I had failed to convince him. But to my pleasant surprise, when he announced his cabinet, he appointed a minister of environment. It is yet too early to evaluate the impact that the new ministry is making.

But for the ECA itself, you must not forget that just after the Stockholm conference, we had the first Sudano-Sahelian drought. So we had no alternative but to address the problem of the environment, because we are a continent where you have a big desert that is creeping down southwards. If UNEP (UN Environment Programme) is to be believed, the Sahara desert moves by a few kilometers every year southwards. Greening the Sahara in the North and in the South was one of the things that came from ECA. The North has been more successful than the south in doing this. Libya, Algeria, and Northern countries have done the greening more successfully than Nigeria, Mali, Chad, and Niger. In the field of environment the ECA cooperated very well with UNEP's Mostafa Tolba who became UNEP executive-director. Within a year after my arrival at ECA, Tolba worked very closely with me as we both agreed that environmental degradation was Africa's Achilles heel.

One of the things we did in ECA was to globalize some of the problems by getting special sessions of the General Assembly on African crises. That had never happened before. And during the first one that took place in 1986, we wanted to get an international treaty on desertification, with a view to obtaining commitment to help in the greening and forestation effort. But it didn't work out.

TGW: Actually, about ten years into this adventure, in 1982, you wrote, “Over the past decade, common perceptions on threats to the Third World environment have emerged.” What exactly are the common perceptions of threats to environment in the Third World? Some people benefit from this, and some people suffer from it. What are the common perceptions of threats?

AA: Greening, taking care of the drought and desertification, and general environmental degradation problems. You see, in this country there are some parts of it that are drought prone. Many African countries are drought-prone. In the 1970s and 1980s, drought occurred more frequently in North Africa and West Africa, while in the 1990s it switched over to Southern Africa. The only part of the continent which has been drought-free so far is Central Africa. The common perceptions as to what needs to be done are crystal-clear. We have had enough conferences. We have made enough decisions. But implementing the decisions has been the problem.

TGW: I wanted to just look inside ECA for a minute. Sixty countries, big, small, rich, poor, densely-populated, sparsely-populated.

AA: All are poor, very poor—although some are poorer than others.

TGW: The term solidarity is oftentimes used to characterize African relations, Third World relations. Concretely, what does this mean in the context of ECA?

AA: Solidarity against the rest of the world. Julius Nyerere defined this to me very clearly once when African heads of state at an OAU summit failed to reach agreement on what actions should be taken domestically in their respective countries and I went to seek his assistance. He said to me, “Bayo, the OAU summit is a trade union organization. All trade unions have solidarity against their employers, but between and amongst themselves they have

various interest groups and consequently strong differences.” So solidarity is for facing the rest of the world, not necessarily solidarity within the continent. That is why dynamic economic cooperation has been unobtainable in Africa. That is why South-South economic and technical cooperation has made little progress.

TGW: Did the subject matter of least developed countries (LDCs) pose any particular problem for ECA? I worked on these in the early years.

AA: In what sense?

TGW: In the sense that it was seen as a sub-group. You mentioned that all African countries are poor, but some of them are poorer than others, and in particular they are supposed to get special assistance, special trade relations, et cetera. How was this issue approached internally?

AA: Poverty dehumanizes, doesn't it? What I have discovered to my horror was that many countries would very much like to be classified as LDC. I remember Botswana. You wouldn't think Botswana was a poor country. It has more foreign exchange reserves than half a dozen African countries put together. But their president once complained that if nearly-bankrupt Zambia is classified as an LDC, then Botswana should be similarly classified! When a country wants to be classified as an LDC, it goes through its regional commission to the Committee on Development Planning. To classify an African country as LDC, ECA must first pronounce on it. For an Asian country, it will go to ESCAP and so on. And in ECA, there is an intergovernmental machinery that will look at each request in the light of the established criteria. But some countries are so adamant at being classified an LDC so as to have access to soft loans and grants earmarked for this group of countries. And they are rather shameless about it.

In fact, on one occasion my own country, Nigeria, sent a delegation to an LDC conference at ECA. I had to push them out of the city. I said they should wait until I had left the post of ECA's chief executive before they come to disgrace their country. So poverty dehumanizes. And the greater the degree of dehumanization, the less the sense of shame.

TGW: Actually, with the exception of Hastings Banda. He didn't want his country to be classified an LDC.

AA: Banda was different. But that is more than one can say for post-Banda Malawi.

TGW: Oh yes, and he didn't want it. They reclassified and he didn't want to be called—

AA: Precisely.

TGW: You mentioned ESCAP, and ECLAC, and ECE earlier. What were the relationships among the regional commissions?

AA: Very cordial, mutually supportive. We met twice a year, regularly. Usually we used to have one meeting in Geneva, and the second in New York. Then we decided to meet once a year at the headquarters of one of the regional commissions so as to get to know the sister commissions. Then after the TCDC and ECDC conference in Argentina (UN Conference on Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries) in 1978, we decided to push in a concrete and pragmatic manner inter-regional cooperation. Accordingly, we had a number of agreements to work together in specific areas. Latin America and ECA on cooperation in the field of transport and communication while with ECWA and ECA the area of focus was TCDC (technical cooperation among developing countries) because there are more Arabs in ECA than in ECWA. Cooperation between both commissions was therefore imperative. But like everything in the UN, you are supposed to do all these things within a zero growth budget framework. So it was very

difficult to get resources. But in those days, we thought there were opportunities for promoting South-South cooperation. But at the secretariat level, we worked very closely together. Again, we were in solidarity against the headquarters on the issue of subsidiarity. We were for more decentralization. We promoted among the member states the need for decentralization. We partially succeeded.

TGW: Did you borrow things—in particular, ideas or thoughts—from these other regions? In looking at much of your own writing about transforming society, one is immediately led to thinking about some Latin American thinkers. So I was just wondering whether there was a fruitful flow of ideas from region to region, or whether each commission more or less focused on its own peculiar problems.

AA: Our two meetings every year were dedicated to exchanging ideas. Each of us reported on progress or lack of it in our respective commissions. We identified common problems which would constitute the agenda and so on. At one stage, we tried inter-secretariat staff transfers which would lead to transfer of ideas. But we realized that we couldn't do this without headquarters' approval, which was always very difficult to obtain. Secondly, even on our own, we thought that if we could not have inter-secretariat secondment, we could recruit from outside our respective regions into our secretariats. And Janez Stanovnic, my comrade from ECE, tried once. He wanted to recruit an African into the ECE secretariat, but it was severely criticized by some of the ECE member states. In disgust, he phoned and pleaded with me that I should fire all my European staff members if his own commission deemed it fit to oppose the appointment of a Senegalese to a P-1 or P-2 post. But that is the reality of life.

TGW: What role does, in your view and looking back over this period, does interagency rivalry, tensions, concern with turf—we can describe it positively in any way—do terms of reference of specialized agencies—is this, on balance, healthy or hurtful in terms of the production of ideas?

AA: I think competition is good for production of ideas. When it comes to turf, that is a different thing. But for the origination and evolution of ideas, competition is very good. Every year, all the agencies and the regional commissions meet at ECOSOC.

TGW: You mentioned TCDC. In your writings, you have actually emphasized South-South cooperation. At the same time, you have been quite clear that it has been more of an aspiration than a reality. Why?

AA: South-South cooperation has really not progressed. Again, the inability to put one's money where one's mouth is very characteristic, not only of Africa but of the South generally. The South Centre was established by Nyerere to set up a kind of South OECD (Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development). I think Nyerere died a frustrated man, because he could not realize that goal. The South has the capacity of generating enough resources to do that. But it simply refused to do it. It wouldn't have cost much. Probably 1 percent of the budget of every country would have put together enough resources to have an OECD-type of center where a lot of basic productive studies could be undertaken, not so much for negotiations but even for promoting South-South cooperation. And this never happened.

It was the same experience with regard to regional cooperation, which is the first level of South-South cooperation. ECOWAS, which I was involved in establishing, is always having budgetary problems because the member states won't pay their contributions. When there are

posts to be filled, they have no hesitation pushing the candidature of their own citizens. But they don't care about the budget. In East and Southern Africa, only about a half dozen of the countries used to pay their contributions regularly. I gather now, when I was there last August (2000) that that has improved considerably.

So we have South-South cooperation where the will to work together, as distinct from the wish to work together, is very latent. The wish is much stronger than the making of resources available, and the readiness to share sovereignty.

TGW: So you think that South Centre should have been a bigger enterprise, or more vigorously funded? Was this a preferable idea, to have an independent unit as opposed to having a special secretariat within the UN system? At one time, for example, UNCTAD was perceived in many parts of the West as already functioning that way. And there was a proposal—why not turn it into that? It was resisted for different sets of reasons. But would there have been an advantage to having a South Centre outside the UN versus an equivalent center within the UN?

AA: The UN could not have served as a South Centre, because after all that would not have been acceptable to the major contributors to the budget of the UN. Nor do I think that that would have done the South much credit. The countries that are funding the OECD are in the position to turn the UN around to do some of the work that OECD is doing, if they so wish. But they did not think it is right to turn the UN into regional centers for research and proactive policy studies. And I don't think it is right for the UN to be as a subterfuge South Centre. That is why I agreed entirely with Nyerere when he established the South Centre. The only thing he did which was criticized is that he put its headquarters in Geneva rather than in the South. But that having been said, one would have expected that many countries in the South would have

provided sources to build up a very strong secretariat for the South that can promote cooperation among the South and provide a strong and persistent advocacy for a new international economic order.

TGW: What is the relative advantage of an institution like OCED, which is an intergovernmental group but a regional sort of economic grouping that puts together rich countries, than a South Centre that didn't really get off the ground as an intergovernmental body but is somewhat private? In your view, is there an advantage in terms of producing independent ideas, to have universities or private research centers—like perhaps your own now, i.e., ACDESS—in existence, versus research units within intergovernmental secretariats—be it ECA or UNCTAD? What is the relative advantage of these two kinds of units—private and intergovernmental or public?

AA: I prefer the private any time. In fact, the UN organizations were not established to do research. I realized that within months of my being at ECA. And the idea to establish an independent think tank was born as early as 1976, within my first year. In each organization, you prepare your work program in accordance with the format of the UN system. And your output must be delivered within a given timeframe—which is usually not more than two years. Some research work can take five years or more before you have any output. It was this realization that made me take the initiative, which after fifteen years matured into the African Centre for Development and Strategic Studies. As soon as I realized that ECA was not designed to be a research institution, I requested UNDP's support for a feasibility study and said, "Look, in Africa we are very short of research facilities. We must do something." Michel Dookingé was then in charge of UNDP in Africa. He was very supportive. He gave us some money to put

together a team that came out with a report that we should establish a think tank in Africa.

Unfortunately, the report came at a time when the African crisis was at its height. We were more engaged in survival rather than in long-term proactive policy research studies. But the need for an African think tank persisted.

When in January 1991 I told heads of state of all African countries that I was planning to leave the UN for good, some of them reminded me of the need for the think tank and that I should try to establish it. The only reason why it is in Nigeria is that I didn't want to live outside again. The reason why I left the ECA was not that my contract had expired, but because I wanted to go back home. But everybody generously agreed that I should feel free to establish the centre anywhere I deemed fit. And UNDP gave us the initial grant to get on with it. So I think private research, fitting their findings into intergovernmental machinery, would be a great blessing, a great advantage. At least, you can see that you have some independent works.

TGW: You have actually consulted with a large number of governments and have been in numerous intergovernmental contexts. You have worked in the system, and outside of the system. And now you have a private research institute. I wondered whether you could generalize about the quality of the people who work within the UN system, within the international civil service, how they compare with a solid government civil service, and in terms of researchers, how researchers in your view compare with researchers at top-of-the-line universities, good social science faculties.

AA: That kind of comparison is rather odious. We would be generalizing. But this, one can say, that if you have a deadline to prepare a document for the General Assembly yesterday, rather than being given six months notice, the quality of the work you are going to produce will

be affected. The researchers have an advantage. Of course, some of the research workers have deadlines, but more often than not, they have elbow-room to maneuver. In any case, they are not the easiest people to be disciplined when it comes to respecting deadlines. But when you are working in the civil service, in the bureaucracy, you will be disciplined if you don't respect a deadline. If ECOSOC is going to have a meeting in July, the rule is that eight to ten weeks beforehand, the documents should be ready. Inevitably this encourages scissors and paste exercises, hoping that nobody will remember. In any case, most of the documents are not read very carefully, so you get away with it.

But there have been some extremely very good, first class works that have come before ECOSOC, that have come before our ministerial council, using the resources within the secretariat. In fact, in the ongoing UNDAF reform dealing with the UN country activities, the UN system in each country is supposed to produce two documents. One is called CCA (Common Country Assessment). The other is UNDAF (UN Development Assistance Framework). The CCA is like a social, economic, and political survey to assess what is going on, and on the basis of that identify what challenges that lie ahead. In many countries, UN agencies have not been able to prepare these themselves. They have hired consultants, which reflects the analytical weakness of the system in the countries concerned. But in a few countries, the UN officials have done the assessments and have come up very well. Not all the CCAs prepared by consultants have been of very high quality either. So that is why it is very difficult to make any generalization.

But, by and large, the UN has comparative advantage in preparing analytical work rather than in strategizing. And UNDAF is supposed to be the strategic document prepared on the

basis of the challenges and the findings and in the CCA, which will enable each of the organizations to respond with their own programs. It is very significant that although over seventy CCAs have been prepared and less than twenty-five UNDAFs have come out at all. A strategic document is very difficult to produce, and very few of them have come out.

TGW: Could you make a comparison between staff members in the Bretton Woods institutions and the UN system? I think one of our interviewees, with great immodesty, talked about the IMF as a better place to work. They paid more. They gave greater freedom to publish. And there was a more intellectually stimulating environment. How would you respond?

AA: I don't know much about the International Monetary Fund, but the World Bank I know something about. Most of the seminal documents of the World Bank are prepared by outsiders. For the annual *World Development Report*, they put together a team, just as for the *Human Development Report*. I have taken part in at least two global Human Development Reports. My center prepares the Nigerian Human Development Report for UNDP. So they depend largely on outside sources.

I don't know about the IMF. But what they have in the World Bank, which everybody respects and which all UN programs and entities must emulate is quality assurance. We have people within the World Bank who will go through line-by-line what has been produced to make sure that there is quality and, more importantly, that there is no inconsistency in what is being said and that the presentation is of the highest standard.

TGW: You were recruited by Kurt Waldheim, and you served under Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, and you continued your association under Boutros Boutros-Ghali, and Kofi Annan.

Were some of these more effective than others in terms of creating an atmosphere where development ideas were pushed? Was one of their styles more conducive than others to facilitating the production of first-rate ideas? Or did they simply react to political crises?

AA: You really want me to answer that question? You should wait until I write my memoirs. OK, I was recruited by Kurt Waldheim, but throughout his tenure we never discussed any development ideas nor the role of ECA in African development and the UN. Pérez de Cuéllar met me there. We never sat down to discuss any substantive matters. I had very great respect for my two bosses. They never interfered with my work. Whenever they paid visits to individuals or attended OAU summit meetings we briefed them on the African economic situation. Even during the controversy with the Bretton Woods institutions on structural adjustment programs, we received no assistance from UN headquarters nor did we seek any.

The only Secretary-General that I really met who had something substantive to say on the development problematic and took himself very seriously was BBG. He set up a high-powered committee on restructuring of the economic and social sector of the UN—for the umpteenth time. During a lunch which he hosted after the inauguration session of the committee, he engaged the members of the committee in a three-hour discussion which showed that he knew *a priori* what recommendations he wanted from the committee and if the committee did not produce them, he would himself. He had very strong views.

By the time I arrived in Addis Ababa in June 1975 to assume my new duties and responsibilities, my predecessor had left. Nobody told me what I was supposed to do. Whatever one did depended on one's initiative. Nowadays, weekend retreats are organized for assistant and under-secretaries-general. There is even a UN staff college. These were not

available during my time, particularly at the beginning of my assignment. It was learning while you work.

TGW: During those sixteen years, and the ten since, how did your own thinking about development change, if at all? How do you look at development in the year 2001, versus the way you looked at it as a minister in Nigeria?

AA: First I had to unlearn a lot of what I was taught at Harvard, London, Leicester, and Ibadan. I came to realize that development is more than mere economism, more than macro-economic aggregates and indicators, that human beings are not mere economic beings. They are also political, social, and cultural beings as well, and these affect their behavioral patterns in the economic domain. Therefore, what is needed to launch the development process on a sustainable basis is a holistic human development paradigm, not a narrow economic growth strategy. While economic growth is no doubt important, it is insufficient to bring about a holistic sustainable human development. Also, while globalization of ideas is very appealing, the uniqueness of each country must always be taken into account. If something works in one country, it may not automatically work in another country. I realize now that things that work in the Benin Republic, which is next door to Nigeria, will not necessarily work in Nigeria. Each country is unique. And each continent is unique.

Therefore, economists have to be modest about their grand universalized ideas about development. While there is a lot that developing countries can learn from the economic history of the industrialized market and non-market economies, they cannot constitute models for them

Look at what has happened in Asia. I did say yesterday that as a graduate student I was required to read Gunnar Myrdal's four-volumes on *The Asian Drama*. And the conclusion of

that document is that the Asian countries, because of their culture, because of their religions, because of their attitudes, will have tremendous difficulties achieving economic breakthrough. There are no Protestant ethics! Of course, he did not say that about Africa. The conventional wisdom was that Africa, being a *tabula rasa*, was not under the pressure of customs, that whatever customs there were in Africa could easily be changed and swept away, that Africans have become increasingly westernized. Whatever their traditional religions, they had been replaced by Christianity and Islam. So they would have no difficulties in mimicking the western development model.

But today we have the Asian Miracle as against the African Disaster. We are now belatedly talking about restitution in Africa. In fact, at the first international conference which ACDESS organized in Dakar, in November 1992 and which Loius Emmerij attended and Basil Davidson was a guest speaker, the focus was in *Africa within the World—Beyond Dispossession and Dependence* (Zed Books, London 1993).

Basil Davidson pleaded for a politics of restitution in Africa, looking back to the pre-colonial, pre-dispossession past for the ideas and moralities of the past, the practical solutions that were found, the structures that were built, and the rationality of those structures. For no other major branch of humanity has it been said that the past has no instructive value for the present or the future, he argued. Yet the principles of governance in Africa have been based on severance, irreversibly and completely, of pre-colonial Africa from dispossessed and dependent Africa. All the many proposals for Africa's salvation take their stand and draw their frames of reference from a history which begins around the year 1900, a history which begins with

dispossession and assumes a total disjunction between the Africa that was dispossessed and an Africa without a history of its own.

Consequently, the Africans were made to believe that what was African was inferior and bad while what was western was superior and good. So we ended being neither fish nor fowl—the mimic people par excellence. Little wonder, no breakthrough in nation-building and development has been achieved. Rather, the continent has become progressively marginalized and impoverished. There is no doubt that a society which neglects the instructive value of its past for its present and future cannot be self-confident and self-reliant and will therefore lack internally-generated dynamism and stability. This failure to look back in order to look forward largely accounts for the endemic crisis that has confronted the region since independence.

The politics of restitution will lead to the evolution of a social economy which humanizes the market economy and makes both compatible and by so doing brings about a development process that is socially just, economically productive, ecologically sustainable, politically participatory, and culturally vibrant.

TGW: When you left ECA, did you consider going back into academia?

AA: No, I didn't. I wouldn't teach in any Nigerian university at present. They don't even have money to buy chalk. Once my vice-chancellor said he was going to go to the senate to recommend me to become a professor emeritus. He said, "We will give you an office, but I am not sure the telephone will work. And you can't expect anything else from us. If you need a secretary, you have to bring your own secretary." So I said, "Why can't I do it at home, then?" The university situation in Africa is really terrible. This an area that is neglected, and we pay

very dearly for it. Incidentally, I had many offers from American and British universities, but I badly wanted to be at home in Nigeria.

TGW: You have continued writing, and in your biography it mentioned that you enjoyed writing. What pushes you to write? Why do you enjoy it?

AA: I have been writing from the age of eight. You are asking the questions my children ask: “Why are you always in the study? Why do you sit down every time to write?” I say, “Because that’s the way.”

TGW: In your center, the African Center for Development and Strategic Studies, there is an unusual combination of topics. There are international institutes for strategic studies, and there are institutes for development studies. Why the two under same roof?

AA: Because in terms of Africa, we have to strategize about development. Selecting and linking existing knowledge with the uniqueness of each country calls for a lot of strategizing. That is what we really are trying to do. We did the first study ever on conflicts by an African institution. You cannot believe it, but its completion coincided with the Security Council’s decision to have a debate on African conflicts. So we made 1,000 copies of our book, *Comprehending and Mastering African Conflicts: The Search for Sustainable Peace & Good Governance* available to the UNDP and through it to the UN and African member states.

The conflict study was looking at the African conflicts from the perspective of Africa. In fact, I wish I could claim the initiative for the study, but it was the then-administrator of UNDP, James Speth, that made the suggestion to me. I came to New York for a meeting, and I saw him in the lobby of UNDP. He said, “Oh, you are in town. Let’s have lunch together.” So we agreed on a date and time for lunch. I called on him in his office to go for our lunch. He had just

received a four-volume report on African conflicts by a Nordic institute. He said, “What are you people doing? Can’t you do something and let us have the African perspective, too? All I get are African conflicts looked at with the lenses of the West.”

This was how I embarked on the project. Needless to say, the UNDP was willing to give its support. We didn’t put together a team and say, “You go and do it.” We integrated capacity-building into the project by using national experts. We also de-tabooed public discourse and research work on conflicts. To achieve this we involved one university in each country in the study. We set up a team drawn from academia and the research community in the country, and we made sure that members of the country research team were drawn from various disciplines, and that each had a good track record in research and strategic study. We also notified the government of our intentions and asked for their support, which was freely given.

Thus, each country research team (CRT) had its own team leader under whose direction the study was undertaken in the country. ACDESS provided guidelines and supervision, but the preparation of the national baseline papers was the collective responsibility of the CRTs. The countries included in the study were Angola, Burundi, Liberia, Rwanda, and Sierra Leone.

TGW: In your own center, or these other research centers, and in the UN more generally, what would you say are the most important research issues and research challenges for the next ten to fifteen years?

AA: I could talk more comfortably about my center or Africa. The conflict situation has been getting worse by the month. When we started the research in June 1996, about ten countries were actively in conflict. Three years the later, the number had risen to eighteen. Virtually every African country is a potential conflict country. So to me, this is the number one

area, in terms of priority and strategization. The history of conflicts goes back to pre-colonial days. The countries that are now together as one polity were bitter enemies before the colonial powers came. The Angolan problem did not arise after independence. What the Portuguese did was to exploit the conflict to sustain its own rule for almost a century. It was a Pax Britannia kind of thing. Then, of course, when it was withdrawn, withdrawing in preparation for independence, it started to remove the rug gradually and the conflicts reappeared. But this is in contrast to the experience of Mozambique. The Mozambican conflict was more recent and was externally initiated by South Africa as part of its own counterattack against the anti-apartheid forces. The Angolan conflict is more deep-rooted. So it has not surprised me that there is some peace in Mozambique, while peace continues to elude the Angolans.

Developments in Liberia and Sierra Leone are also not surprising. There are many countries like that in Africa. Comprehending African conflicts and mastering them require lot of research in each country, and then to monitor the conflict situation and put in place a kind of early warning system at the national level is also of highest priority. That would be a great service by research institutions, particularly research institutions that enjoy the respect of all sides in terms of its independence and objectivity.

TGW: You mentioned capacity-building, and I meant to ask earlier, so I will just circle back a minute. I wondered whether you could tell us a little bit about the UN Institute for Namibia (UNIN) that you chaired from 1975 to 1990. What role did this play, and what was its importance?

AA: Virtually all the people currently running Namibia are the graduates of UNIN.

TGW: So that is why you are an honorary citizen?

AA: That's true. I was made the chairman of the United Nations Institute for Namibia in July 1975 by the Secretary-General. At the first meeting, they brought the CV's of three or four people for the post of director of the institute. There was no Namibian on the list. I said, "Look, we are trying to establish an Institute for Namibia. Is there not a single Namibian qualified to be its director? Most Namibians that I know of were carrying guns, fighting for their country's independence. When independence comes, the guns will have to be kept away. A few leaders would have to run and manage the country." This was an opportunity for us at least to engage people—Namibians at the institute. Such people would acquire the much-needed management and leadership skills. When I was told that there was no qualified Namibian, I said, "In that case, I will go to the General Assembly and inform it that Namibia is not ready for independence as it can't even produce one qualified person for the post of director!"

Eventually, SWAPO (Southwest African Peoples Organization) produced a name—Hage Geingob. I told Sam Nujoma, SWAPO's president, "If he is your best man, let's try him. I will give him every support." I asked Hage to meet me in Addis Ababa. The first thing he said on arrival was that we should leave him alone where he was working—the Office of the UN Commissioner for Namibia in New York—as he was not qualified nor experienced to be the director of the institute. "That shows you are qualified actually," I said. "If you are conscious that you are not qualified, maybe you will work hard enough to justify our confidence." So we recruited him. He grew up very well on the job, and he subsequently became the prime minister of independent Namibia. Virtually all members of the cabinet and permanent secretaries and senior officials were products of the institute or its associates.

You see, when the institute was established in 1975, the independence of Namibia then appeared imminent. It was unclear whether we should put together a six-month crash program or a twelve-month program. But the institute's senate decided that if we were going to help Namibia we must not turn out products who are going to do more harm than good. A little knowledge is a dangerous thing." So we worked out a three-year program. At the end of the three years, when the first batch had finished their courses, there was still no independence. Then we organized with African countries and African regional organizations—ECA, OAU, and ADB—an attachment program for the graduates so that they would see how bureaucracy works in practice and apply what they have learned at the institute. The secondment lasted between one and two years. For the very bright ones, we sought scholarships to send them to Master's degree and PhD programs in various universities. By the time of independence in 1990, we had educated and trained about 2,000 people. I am very proud of that contribution. So I am an honorary comrade of SWAPO and honorary citizen of Namibia.

TGW: This is the fourth and final tape. We are actually here in UNDP today. For a number of years, you have been serving on this high level group of experts in the future of UNDP. This is a two-part question. One, what is the role of experts, outside experts, former insiders who are not outsiders, et cetera? There are two views about consultants. One is the Robert Cox view that you invite in consultants whom you know, and they tell you exactly what you want to hear. You could have done it yourself, but it is better to have hired them. Or, you can bring in people who have distinct views and may open the window a little bit and bring a dose of fresh air. In your view, what is the role of outside experts, and how have they been used or abused in the UN system?

AA: I used consultants a lot myself when I was in the UN, and I have been serving from time to time as a consultant. I think the resources used for consultancy are very high. It would be unfortunate to use them just to confirm your own views or prejudices. That would not be cost-effective. The purpose of consultancy is to have somebody who would bring a new insight based on his experience, and his knowledge, and his track record, who will have the data assembled and analyze it and come out with some conclusions that those who have brought him probably never thought of. That is the purpose of consultants. I know that sometimes people cynically use them for other purposes.

For instance, about ten years ago, the then new UNDP administrator, Gus Speth, on his assumption of duty wanted to have a look at the UNDP and its future, because the UNDP depends on voluntary resources. So the perception of the donors, in terms of the continued relevance and impact of UNDP's activity, is decisive. If they come to negative conclusions, their contributions will dry up. So Speth, who had never before worked for the UN, then invited a few people. I was the chairman of the group. We gave the UNDP our recommendations for new programs and for changes in existing ones. We urged that it should be more focused in its programming and that it should play a lead role in governance. Governance in those days was unheard of. I'm quite sure Speth himself didn't like everything in the report. But he was a gentleman, and took our report seriously. Let me say that we were not even paid for it. Not all consultancy is paid for in the UN. Of course, some of us who came from abroad had our fares paid, and we were given accommodation. That was all. But we did it, and at least some of those ideas have since become household activities in the UNDP now.

More recently in 1998 and 2001, I was appointed to lead a three-person panel on the assessment of UNDAF. We had a balanced team. I was the only UN man on the team. The other two members, the ladies, have not worked for the UN. Devaki Jain's strength was in civil society, while Mary McCowan was a British civil servant in ODA (overseas development assistance) and DfID (Department for International Development). She had worked for a number of years in Africa, particularly in Tanzania and Malawi. She had also worked in India and for a brief period was a consultant to UNICEF. So the experiences are varied and our judgment independent. No one attempted to influence us in anyway. We just brought our experiences to bear on the information presented to us by UN headquarters and in the field. Some of the ideas that are extant in the institution we confirmed as being in the right. Others we quarried and challenged.

TGW: Does UNDP have a future?

AA: Very much so. I am sure it does. Well, perhaps I should think a little about it. I am just reacting now. I said earlier that UNDP depends almost exclusively on voluntary contributions. If, in September of this year, the donors meet and nobody pledges anything, that is the end of UNDP. But in terms of the role that it is playing in the UN, it is a role that, even if there is no UNDP, another organization will have to be devised to play.

TGW: And you see this actually as being in the general area of governance in the future?

AA: Not just governance, but development assistance, capacity building and human development. The *Human Development Report*—which people think is the antithesis of the *World Development Report* of the Bank, but I see it as complementary— is making tremendous

impact at the country level. The debate on development has shifted significantly since the *Human Development Report* came to be published. So I think UNDP still has a role to play.

TGW: Your biography mentioned that you were a candidate to become Secretary-General in 1991. How serious was the candidacy, and what were the politics of North versus Sub-Saharan Africa?

AA: It wasn't serious with me. I never gave it a thought. You see, I have no illusions as to what is required to become Secretary-General, and I think I disqualified myself by being overly pro-Africa, challenging orthodoxies which are more ideological than scientific and are largely irrelevant in the African situation. It would have been naïve of me to think of obtaining the support of the U.S. after having successfully challenged the World Bank. In the race for the headship of the UN, it is invariably not for the swiftest. However, what is significant is that when BBG decided to contest, he came to see me and asked if I was going to contest. He said I was the only candidate he would step down for, which I thought was awfully kind of him.

Another important factor in the candidacy of anybody is the country he comes from and the relationship between the leader of that country and the permanent members of the Security Council. Unless you can carry all the five, a candidate cannot succeed in his bid. BBG would still be Secretary-General now if he had not been consistently vetoed by one permanent member of the Security Council. So you need to get the five permanent members of the Security Council. That does not depend entirely on the candidate; it also rests with the government of the country he comes from at the time of the election. I didn't have a president who could phone the White House and fly to Beijing and so forth.

TGW: In negotiations, not just for the Secretary-General, but in other kinds of negotiations—UNDP, funding for the UN, et cetera—we tend to still think of the world in North-South terms. Did that distinction make sense when it was founded?

AA: There was no Cold War then. It was then a world that had just emerged from war, with all the major powers being allies. There was yet no iron curtain or bamboo curtain. But once the Cold War situation emerged, the South became the field where the battles took place in terms of allegiances and support, with people bending over backwards to woo this side or that country.

TGW: I was just wondering whether the North-South distinction, gross as it may have been—because there were and are very different parts of the South. For example, we have mentioned least developed and resource-rich. And there were different parts of the North—the like-minded are not the U.S. or UK. To what extent do those distinctions contribute to the formulation of ideas and resolutions and initiatives? And to what extent does that divide continue to make any sense?

AA: At the international level, it was a very significant factor. You have to negotiate resolutions. It is like negotiating a treaty. Unless you get the support of the North, your resolutions will not pass. And that divide is there. The G-77 (Group of 77) provides a caucus every time on issues that will have to be negotiated. So the G-77 has to agree itself as to what its minimum is. And because of the high degree of differentiation, which you have mentioned, it is the lowest common factor, even at that stage. You will have the South negotiating with the EU, with the Soviet bloc, and with the Americans. Although from the perspective of the South, they all constitute the North, yet they see things differently. So there is a very real difference, at least as perceived by the South, that these people are different and they protect their interests, which

is right. Therefore, you have to negotiate with them and to get things out of them has to be through negotiations.

It was on that basis that Cancún and Paris—the main foci for negotiating the NIEO—flopped. Cancún failed because the North, represented by the United States, did not want any settlement. So it is very, very real. And it hasn't changed at all. See what is happening in the WTO. It hasn't changed, even though the Cold War no longer exists.

TGW: Actually, throughout our couple of days together, many points have come up in relationship to the four central propositions or hypotheses or questions that we have been asking in this project. I would just like to try to ask them and allow you to make short responses to them, if you don't mind. To what extent have ideas that have either been created or massaged within the UN system changed public policy discourse? Is this a good way of thinking about ideas? South-South sustainability, any of these ideas—how have they contributed to changing the way that we discuss public policy?

AA: It is very difficult to be precise, but when we look at it generally, they have played, in many cases, very positive influences. In others, not too positive, sometimes negative. Not all the conferences that we have had have had much impact. A few of them have had much impact in terms of the ideas but effective following is always a problem. Let us take Buenos Aires (UN Conference on Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries) and TCDC. That was a major conference in those days. We spent two or three weeks in Buenos Aires and spent a lot of effort working for it—technical and economic cooperation among developing countries. But they have remained at the discourse level.

TGW: So ideas have helped change discourse, but ideas may not have contributed to policy and action all of the time?

AA: Let us take the environment conference and the follow-up conference in Rio ten years ago. Again, that is an area where the words and actions have been manifest. That has become more permanent and sustainable. There is a conference, now being prepared on financial resources. I have seen some of the preparatory documents. One would like to see what comes out of it. But I am afraid it is unlikely to turn out like Buenos Aires—a lot of discussions but limited concrete follow up. To classify conferences, in terms of the impact on the discourse, as I said yesterday, it depends on who initiated the conferences. All of these conferences start with a resolution submitted by a few countries that have come together to sponsor the draft resolution.

When a conference is designed to tackle a problem felt very urgently in the world, such a conference will not only succeed in terms of discourse but also in terms of follow-up. When a conference succeeds in terms of discourse with no follow-up, sooner or later the discourse comes to nothing. But when conferences are not substantial in terms of the problem, or are primarily of regional concerns affecting particularly the South, they have not had much impact even on the discourse. Take the Conference for Education for All. Or the Millennium Declaration, which came last year. When you look at the Millennium Declaration, they are going to reduce poverty by 50 percent. “Poverty anywhere is poverty everywhere” is what Kennedy said in 1960. But poverty is more pervasive today than ever before. So the importance of reducing poverty remains. The wherewithal to reduce poverty and the will to do so is not there. Therefore, to say that you are going to reduce poverty, among the three billion people in the world that are living below poverty, reduce it by 50 percent—I had a paper where somebody tries to calculate how

much that is going to cost—a pipe dream, unless something dramatic happens. So you have to look at each of these conferences in turn.

TGW: So, if I could paraphrase, UN ideas have often changed public policy discourse. They have, on occasion, provided a guide to policy in action. Have they also altered the prospects for putting together new coalitions, new constellations of actors—gender, human rights, for example. Have countries, and civil society, and intergovernmental organizations, have North and South groups come together in new ways as a result of new ideas?

AA: Yes, they have, but not always. Human rights is not a new idea, by the way. We came out with the Charter of Human Rights (Universal Declaration of Human Rights)—Mrs. Roosevelt negotiated that—in 1948. What happened is that we have been shy to uphold the Declaration, because of the nature of the world in which we were during the Cold War era. It is now that the Cold War is out of the way that we have developed the courage. That also shows how stubborn ideas can be. Good ideas never get forgotten. It may take a long time for them to impact on policy, but as long as they are sound they keep bouncing back until something is done. Human rights is a good example of that kind of idea. Until the 1990s—almost forty years after the Charter was signed solemnly—nothing proactive was done.

TGW: In Geneva last November, when we were together, Margaret Anstee said she thinks the UN—and I have found this useful—acts sometimes as a font of ideas. It creates them. Sometimes it acts as a funnel for ideas from the outside. And sometimes it acts merely as a forum to continue keeping an issue alive until it becomes perhaps easier to implement. One of the things that we believe—whichever way the idea comes in and intersects with the UN—once an idea takes the form of an institution, either a UN institution or a government institution,

UNEP or a ministry of environment, or a new environment NGO, is this ultimately the way that ideas matter, when they become institutionalized, or embedded within an existing institution?

AA: If all ideas were institutionalized, you would have too many institutions around. There is no doubt that once you establish an institution, in this society of ours in the world in which we live today, they are like cemeteries. You can't remove the graves. They become permanent. But that, in itself, may mean that even when experience has proven that the particular idea needs to be drastically reformulated, if not forgotten, the institution remains.

I met a gentleman yesterday. He has been appointed to assess the impact of the UN initiative for Africa. BBG, in his attempt to have African support for a second term, came out with the UN initiative for Africa. This is the UN that, in the 1980s, held two special sessions of the General Assembly and came out with the United Nations Program for African Economic Recovery and Development. To come out with a new UN initiative for Africa, when all that has been done in the 1980s is far from being fully implemented—is, to say the least, phony. But he set up an institution for it. In fact, the institution is based in the UNDP here in New York. The gentleman I met yesterday is to head the institution on the new initiative, which is now being banished to ECA in Addis Ababa. Now everybody is beginning to feel uncomfortable. And I think the CPC (Committee on Programme Coordination) has asked that the initiative should be assessed. It shows how hard it is, even when you have had a second thought on idea, once it is institutionalized, how difficult it is to forget about it because vested interests have been built in. People are working there and you have to think of compensation. So one must be very careful and not rush to establish institutions.

TGW: Was there a question that you expected me to ask, or that you wish that I had asked?

AA: I only want to say that I don't know whether I have answered all the questions to your satisfaction.

TGW: You certainly have. We have enjoyed two days together. On behalf of my colleagues, let me thank you.

AA: Well, I have to thank you for being here.

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