



**Eminent Speakers Program  
Initiated by the  
African Development Bank (ADB)  
on the Theme:**

***“Improving Africa’s Perspectives in a  
Globalized World: the Role of Regional  
Integration”***

**Presentation by  
His Excellency Abdou DIOUF  
Secretary General of *la Francophonie***

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I would like to start by expressing my pleasure at being with you today in Tunis. My thanks go particularly to President KABERUKA for offering me the opportunity to appropriately laud the action of the African Development Bank, which has unwaveringly supported our countries in their efforts to develop suitable infrastructure and effective public services, improve the environment in which businesses operate and diversify their sources of financing, with a view to fairly and equitably combining the demands of adjustment with the quest for growth.

I am well aware that I am addressing eminent economists. In other words, I would not pretend to offer you enlightenment. My simple desire is to share with you my worries, hopes and convictions concerning Africa, especially in the light of the key challenge of regional integration.

However, before doing so, allow me to highlight two realities.

Firstly: Africa, with 10% of the world's population and the third continent in terms of land area, has remained on the sidelines of globalization. Its relative share in world trade and investment has actually declined over the past thirty years. For instance, Africa's participation in world exports fell from 3.5% in 1970 to 2% today.

Secondly: regional integration is not a recent phenomenon in Africa. Without going as far back as the colonial era, it is often forgotten that economic integration experiments - conducted in West and Central Africa on the eve of independence - are almost contemporary to those of the EEC, often cited as reference. Neither can I overlook the efforts made and milestones reached in recent years.

Are we then to conclude that Africa is condemned to stagnation? Should we give up to fatalism that sees in Africa a cursed continent?

I answer loud and clear: No!

As with other matters, when raising the issue of regional integration, it is important, I believe, to be specific as to what one means.

To begin with, it must be said that integration is a continuous and long process since it engenders far-ranging economic, political, social and cultural changes.

It is also necessary to note the extreme diversity that characterizes the two hundred or so experiments at work worldwide, all called “regional integration” when in fact few are the things that make them comparable. Thus, two issues arise: What is being integrated? On what basis? If diversity must reflect justified specificity - in the sense that, as in other areas, there is no single model. It must also be stated that diversity is not synonymous with multiplicity. It is also necessary to jettison unsuccessful attempts accumulated over the years.

Lastly, it is worth remembering that although regional integration is henceforth inseparable from globalization, their respective goals differ. In other words, Africa’s regional integration should not be in service of globalization but in service of the continent’s development!

Even so, the fact remains that Africa cannot shield itself from the new global constraints and challenges.

In the past fifteen years following the end of the bi-polar world symbolized by the Berlin Wall, we have entered a period of uncertainty: we have lost our bearings. We can no longer find our coordinates based on simple roles cast in stone once for all time, passed on from one ruler to another. After standing still for half a century - which did not necessarily translate into stability - we have again entered a new period of uncertainty when history hesitates between the best and the worst, as hitherto unknown trends and tensions deploy.

At this juncture, allow me to return briefly to globalization. The phenomenon is not new. Since far ancient times, trade and war have spurred movement of persons and goods, methods and pandemics, new foods and unknown poisons.

What has changed is the rapidity of communication, the flow of information, the movement of goods and persons, in sum a form of simultaneousness and ubiquity achieved for the first time ever. There is no village, no country, no region that can afford not to confront and integrate the impact of globalization in its decisions, be in its lifestyle, production or consumption.

Unlike what some would want us to believe, globalization does not depend on some omniscient international relations actor, a hidden entity pulling the strings of helpless puppets. Globalization is above all the child of changes. It is the backdrop against which the geopolitical upheavals of recent years occur and produce their effects.

Indeed, four events deeply changed the frameworks and foundations of international relations, especially the role and perception of multilateral institutions: first the fall of the Berlin Wall, the 1999 Asian financial crisis, the 11 September 2001 attack and, lastly, the Iraq war.

Paradoxically, whereas the yoke of bipolarity is gone, the United Nations or the International Monetary Fund must reinvent their legitimacy and rebuild negotiation spaces adapted to new issues concerning global public assets. This changing multilateral system favors expertise, the capacity to negotiate, networking, appeal to world public opinion stemming from civil societies - all of which exceed the capacity of any country acting solely on its own.

Inseparable from the above, the emergence of such new powers as Brazil, China, India and South Africa, the scope of migrations and the increasing threat of climatic change, raise issues regarding the development model that humanity should follow.

These movements have a direct impact on Africa.

On the one hand, it must manage the implications of the institutional and administrative weakness of several of its States; on the other, it must control the

consequences of its wealth in raw materials and the very unstable demography marked by high population growth, the place of youths in want of training and supervision, its brain drain.

While on the subject, kindly allow me a short digression: according to the latest UNCTAD report on the least developed countries, Somalia, Gambia and Cape Verde lost half of their university-trained specialists in recent years to the industrialized nations. The specialists left in search of better working and living conditions. At the same time, Eritrea, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Madagascar, Sao Tome and Principe, and Equatorial Guinea lost more than a third of their experts to other countries.

There is no doubt whatsoever that this brain drain has had major repercussions on production infrastructure upgrade, export expansion, modernization of national enterprises and improvement of health and education. It is the direct consequence of the little room given to individual initiative and the obstacles raised against South-South movements.

That brings us to integration. Indeed, it is easier in the South to lead an informal and clandestine existence; true, the inaccurate citizen registration and identification systems nullify the scope of several controls. In the absence of a positive policy to supervise and regulate the movement of persons, in the absence of mutual agreements on the settlement and protection of operators from neighboring countries, why not take the risk of settling in the North, within a context that offers work-friendly infrastructure and resources? Yet, regional integration that promotes freedom of movement of persons recognized as citizens both in their country of origin and the receiving country, would help to offset the shortage of skills and capacity.

What then about the economic context?

Most of our countries are dependent on a small number of products and basic services. They are vulnerable to price fluctuations and worsening terms of trade,

aggravated by the weakness of currencies subjected to all manners of speculative pressures, without the capacity to defend themselves. They have been unable to build diversified economies capable of evolving with global demand. On and of themselves, their markets are too narrow to encourage investors to take the necessary risks.

By increasing intra-regional trade (thus the size of the unrestrained market), regional communities could offer three-fold growth prospects: improving the attraction of member countries to foreign investors; facilitating specialization and acquisition of comparative advantages; offering a global approach to one of the current main problems facing products from poor countries, namely the issue of traceability, standards and non-tariff barriers.

It is indeed within that purview that the difficult negotiations on Economic Partnership Agreements between ACP countries and the European Union were launched. These Agreements are only meaningful where active Regional Economic Communities exist. Although they are billed for signature by 31 December 2007 latest, it is obvious that a number of countries have a long way to go to reach the minimum integration level. Therefore, the signing of these Agreements should open a transition period based on a rigorous and detailed timetable. There are several tools at the disposal of African countries, especially the least developed. African countries should state why, how and for what purpose they intend to use such tools, in what manner they would sustain much-needed change. That goes far beyond the definition of macroeconomic and budgetary policies prepared within the adjustment framework. Our countries must, without complacency, conduct an inventory of their strengths and weaknesses and, above all, be realistic in their choice of solutions. There is no pre-defined recipe. We have all learned to what extent our best resolutions failed, in the absence of clear analysis of our difficulties.

I will not hide the fact from you that I am worried at the idea of seeing our States sign these Agreements at a time when many of them are obviously in a weak position. Yet, I also believe that nothing but strong constraint will force their

leaders to confront the problem, significantly speed up their integration efforts and reflect on how to make the best of advancing globalization. I believe that multilateral institutions should offer our States the capacity to analyze and express their problems; it should provide adequate assistance to help them find solutions whose ownership will be assumed by their population at all levels.

Having said that, I have not forgotten that regional integration raises a key issue, namely the delegation of sovereignty.

I started by stating the broad diversity of regional integration, a diversity that we must respect and preserve. Yet, there is an unavoidable constant, one I must loudly evoke: no integration can succeed without real willingness to hand over the management of certain dossiers to supranational authorities. Insofar as some are not ready to accept the fact that shared sovereignty is the path to greater sovereignty, any urge for regional integration is condemned to stagnation.

In addition, allowing economic operators, traders and industrialists to operate on the same rules and texts, and to count on the same enforcement methods, seems the way towards promoting investment and diversification within a regional block.

Within that purview, sixteen French-speaking countries set up the Organization for the Harmonization of Business Law in Africa (OHADA), and transferred the task of defining, interpreting and applying the uniform law to the Common Court of Justice and Arbitration. Yet, this integration effort, which required remarkable legal and doctrinal work and received World Bank support, continues to face the reticence of national jurisdictions. Instead of concentrating on what lies within their reach and power (adequate justice delivered consistently and transparently), these jurisdictions invoke the respect of their sovereignty in an area that they cannot properly manage due to shortage of human and material resources.

In an even broader sense, NEPAD's contrasting destiny and the issue of regional infrastructure speak volumes. NEPAD's purpose was to define the overall core

infrastructure plan, on the one hand, and to obtain and put the necessary funds at the disposal of countries, on the other. An African Peer Review Mechanism was put in place to ensure adequate needs assessment, correct project definition and transparent management of funds.

However, progress has been slow. The promoters of this great idea have either given up their positions or moved to other priorities. It is only now, in 2007, that the Regional Economic Program (REP) of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) is proposing a policy and actions hinged on the NEPAD philosophy. It is so true that concerning integration, essential continuity is a conquest perpetually threatened.

From that viewpoint - and pardon me for repeating - there can be no single model, given the fact of two continents bound by history and geography.

Since the Second World War, the world has known one major regional integration, namely European construction. Countries that considered themselves natural enemies for ten centuries to the point of making two attempts at massive extermination within a twenty-year interval, countries that built their economies on unbridled competition, countries that used their currencies as a weapon and a destabilization tool, finally transcended that history.

During that time, on the other bank of the Mediterranean, the States of Africa continue to dream dreams about the United States of Africa.

Regional integration is not an institutional gadget, a new economic panacea, neither is it a way of masking the weakness of fragile States. It is a method to build - effectively, methodically, non-belligerently and through negotiation - spaces torn apart by recent history, stifled by references imposed from outside and stuck in the automatized use of sovereignty.

This method is based fundamentally on policy. The free play of market forces, credit influx and monetary unification are useful components. However, they are

not enough to produce real integration. Leaders and the entire society must give it an impetus, backed by precise institutional work, consistent economic effort and unwavering practice of delegating sovereignty.

My conviction remains intact. Africa is in dire need of unity. But first, we, Africans, must patiently re-learn “living together” that too many crises and the heritage of History have eroded. That will have to start with our neighbors. Rootless and abstract voluntarism will not help us.

I add that to deal with the major issues of this nascent century, this new millennium that could be our continent’s millennium after such long suffering, Africa needs all shades of the continent, in its broad diversities and specificities.

Africa will not succeed if each State, often the fruit of circumstances and without deep roots, falls back on a fallacious heritage and marginalizes itself in the name of sovereignty. To prevent that from happening, we must find the middle ground between violently rejecting the Other - neighbor or foreign partner - and passive resignation before the forces of globalization, even though these two extremes born of changes and the turbulence in which the international community finds itself since 2001 seek to impose themselves on us.

That is the challenge that we all have to face. I am convinced that Institutions such as *la Francophonie* and the ADB are well placed to help those determined to overcome the challenge. As Jean MONNET - one of Europe’s founding fathers - said, “We are uniting people, not forming a coalition of States.”

Thank you for your kind attention.