

2<sup>nd</sup> Africa Rural Development Forum

# Talking Points for the NEPAD CEO's Opening Remarks



*Transforming Africa's Rural Area through Skills Development, Job  
Creation and Youth Economic Empowerment*

8<sup>th</sup> September 2016  
Yaoundé, Cameroon

**Talking Points by Dr Ibrahim A. Mayaki**  
**at the**  
**Opening Session of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Africa Rural Development Forum**

Date: 8<sup>th</sup> September 2016

Time: Session starts at 09.30am

**a. Salutations**

- Provide list of dignitaries present

**b. Key Messages**

1. **Preamble:** I would like to preface my remarks by pointing out that my core message is not simply state the obvious in saying “rural transformation is important and a priority for Africa”. We know this for decades. Within the context of Agenda 2063, I want to focus my remarks on “how do we make it happen”. This I believe is also the ambiance in this forum and is the orientation we took from the 1<sup>st</sup> Africa Rural Development Forum which was held in Benin in 2014.

2. **Message 1: Building on the gains from past efforts while embracing lessons and new knowledge:** Talking about rural development today, in this decade, it's not going into uncharted territory. We have been there before, therefore we should be moving forward with the benefit of the massive experiences of successes and failures - within Africa as well as in other continents. Lessons are many and profound and many can serve as critical pillars for action going forward. Therefore, contributing to deeper understanding current status and trends in Africa's rural transformation pathway is important value this Forum aims bring to the development discourse. We are not re-inventing the wheel, but aim to summon to the fore existing knowledge and lessons, so that on the basis of that we can determine objectively the levers and actions to move us forward within our Agenda 2063 transformational aspirations and goals.

Some lessons are worthy recalling here:

- i. Centrality of people – not as objects to be development, BUT as genuine and willing drivers and actors in the transformation. It is transformation from the inside. In this case, and unique to Africa, the element of youth and women demands special attention – I will return to this point
- ii. The rural transformation agenda, is not and cannot be pursued as sector issue. It is intricately multi- and inter-sectorial. This also means that policies and investments in, for instance, infrastructure, education and health, manufacturing, etc... should be rationalised on the basis of driving (evidence-based) national and regional rural transformation goals
- iii. Rural transformation does not and will not happen in isolation form urban development
- iv. The general marginalisation of business and private sector in the development drive

3. **Message 2: Rural transformation at the centre of Africa's broad-based and sustainable economic growth and inclusive development agenda:** It is increasingly clear, that advancing rural transformation, is not pity or charity to the rural populations. It is critical and integral success factor for Africa's sustainable economic growth and inclusive development agenda. Attaining Arica's Agenda 2063 aspirations and goals, to a large extent depends on the change (transformation) in Africa's rural areas – both in location and people terms.

4. **Message 3: Understanding where we are and local context is critical:** The forum theme includes two concepts which I would like to highlight. These are (a) “transforming rural areas” and “youth economic empowerment”.

**First**, this Forum and indeed Africa's overall development discourse needs to spend some time and effort to understand character and transformation dynamics of the rural areas. Let me raise few points, here:

- Even with the general rapid urbanisation, the UN 2015 statistics, estimates over 60% of Africa's 1.2 billion population leaving in rural areas with livelihoods based on what is largely subsistence farming
- with weak and most time dysfunctional institutional capacity to offer desired social service delivery to their populations, the rural environment is marked by continuing stagnation in socio-economic progression with populations increasingly vulnerable in the face of social, economic and climate shocks
- The rural population is poorly organized and often isolated, beyond the reach of emerging economic opportunities or social safety nets
- The limited success of the old approaches, and changing international development contexts, call for a new rural development paradigm that takes advantage of the diverse and innovative roles rural areas can play while integrating specific economic, social and ecological concerns

**Second**, “youth economic empowerment”:

- With a median age of 19 years and over 60% of the population under the age of 35, it is not unexpected that Africa's rural population is characteristically young and increasingly facing unemployment, underemployment, lack of industry-related skills, limited or no access to capital, unmet needs for education and health services
- Therefore, the rural areas accounting for a significant proportion of the continent's youth population that is marginalised and trapped in the poverty-cycle and hence unable to develop their capacity to contribute to the realization of Agenda 2063 aspirations. Note, those picking up some level of education and skills are mostly the ones migrating into urban and peri-urban centers within and outside their countries including venturing into Europe and the Americas

- Growing populist policies and systems including a lot of celebrated and “politically correct” rhetoric on the “importance of youth” remain just that – often coming out as objects to be developed including considered as people in the becoming with their value being in their “leaders of tomorrow” or ‘tomorrow’s hope’.
- While Africa has to respond to the immediate question of creating jobs for the ten million entering the job market annually, it is important that there is at the same time medium-to-long term considerations starting with relevant investment in children from infancy – especially in their health, nutrition and education.

5. **Message 4: As this is about IMPLEMENTATION AND RESULTS**, I would like to briefly reflect on the form and character of National Action – of course acknowledging that business-as-usual will not deliver desired change. This will need all of us to think outside the box in determining those situation-specific rural development pathways. Countries, regions and the continent should be ready to take objective decisions in the face of most time complex and delicate trade-offs. Africa will also need the unity of purpose and assertiveness to engage global systems and agreements, such as the WTO; e.g. some analysis note that countries that managed to leverage globalization, such as China and Vietnam, employed a mixed strategy of export promotion and a variety of policies that violate current trade rules. Subsidies, domestic-content requirements, investment regulations, and, yes, often import barriers were critical to the creation of new, higher-value industries

6. **Message 5: Perceptions and practices on the role of the state in championing rural transformation is one area that require radically new thinking especially as concerns accommodating private sector as equally critical players in accelerating sustainable rural transformation-**

- The government’s strong vision and ability to plan and facilitate coordination and implementation of a multi-sectoral strategy by regional and local authorities
- Supportive policies, including reform and early investment in education, presence of a certain degree of social capital in rural areas, and implementation of contracted plans
- Authority is being challenge everywhere and local voices are critical in the design and implementation of new paradigm in an inclusive approach. The Cost Benefit Analysis will indicate that the transformative benefit far outweighs the transaction cost

7. **Message 5:** This leads me into my last point – which is; what does the NEPAD Agency intend to achieve through the Rural Futures Initiative:

First, it is important to recognise that NEPAD’s Rural Futures Initiative is not an addition of one more Project, Programme or Framework to the already clouded space of often discordance of initiatives on rural development

The NEPAD Rural Futures Initiative:

- is about providing an overarching space and tools to stimulate and facilitate informed dialogue on comprehensive and integrated transformational action with Africa's rural population and areas as the primary entry point
- should emerge as space where the continent is innovating and/or domesticating own strategic understanding of meaning and implication of development concepts such as “development” and “transformation”
- Is providing opportunity to organise and nurture local capacity to identify and communicate local development needs and priorities, on one hand, and on the other hand, mobilising and organising support capacity thereby bringing coherence and harmonised ability to response to community and country needs. This will bring increased value to existing and new project and programmes to optimise delivery including enabling the synergies and complementarities across sectors and policies
- Ultimately, the NEPAD Rural Futures Initiative is a space where countries and regions will develop African solutions to issues and problems as understood and articulated by Africa itself including backed by data and statistics, analysis that is “African”.
- Is multi-agent and multi-level: involving not just national government, but also local and regional governments, the private sector, international donors, NGOs ,and rural communities

Let me also mention that, I have referred to a number of statistics. Shortly, we are launching the 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition of Atlas of Rural Development in Africa. It is unacceptable that power hubs for data and statistics on and about Africa continue to be largely outside the continent. This is a sovereign as much as it is technical. The NEPAD Rural Futures Initiative should be used as platform and means to launch the urgently desired revolution to strengthen Africa's own data and statistics capacity and reclaim ownership of its own development narrative

END