



7th International Forum on African Perspectives

Opening Speech by Mr. Angel Gurría,
Secretary-General,
Organisation for Economic Co-operation
and Development (OECD)

Bercy, 5 June 2007

7th International Forum on African Perspectives

Bercy, 5 June 2007

Ministers, Ambassadors, distinguished visitors, it is a great pleasure to welcome you this morning to this 7th International Forum on African Perspectives, organised jointly by the OECD Development Centre and the African Development Bank. We are very grateful to the French Ministry of Economy, Finance and Employment which has once again kindly allowed us to use their excellent facilities.

I am very pleased to welcome the representative of the Chair of the African Union and President of the Republic of Ghana, John Kufuor: Hon. Nana Addo Dankwa AKUFO-ADDO, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ghana, as well as Mrs. Lindiwe Benedicta HENDRICKS, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry of South Africa, member of the Governing Board of the OECD Development Centre, Mr. Adama SALL, Minister of Water Supply of Senegal, and the other panellists of today. We are privileged to have you to share your experience and your vision for the African continent.

The OECD, formed by 30 market-oriented democracies, is firmly committed to promoting Africa's development, by sharing experiences and best practice in a wide range of policy areas. Most of the OECD now undertakes work of direct interest to and in collaboration with African partners. This includes work on agricultural policies and their impact on poverty reduction; investment climate, enterprise development, public and private governance reform, and the integration of Africa's countries into the global trading system.

The Organisation is also home to the Development Assistance Committee, which monitors OECD countries' official development assistance and looks at how it can be most effectively delivered. And to the APF (African Partnership Forum), which just met in Germany ahead of the G8 Summit to discuss climate change, investment, peace and security, and gender, and where some of you were present.

Our work with Africa comes at an important moment for the OECD. Three weeks ago, OECD Ministers mandated the Organization to start the process of accession with five new countries (Chile, Estonia, Israel, Russia and Slovenia), and to strengthen our relationships with the BIICS (Brazil, India, Indonesia, China and South Africa) with a view to possible membership. This will imply a much more diverse organization, more open to new ideas and cultures, more pro-active and flexible in addressing new global challenges, and more understanding of the many different paths that lead to growth and development.

It also coincides with the substantive mandate to better understand the impact of globalisation and ensure that it proceeds in a balanced manner by closely examining the trends in employment, earnings and income inequality and regional imbalances. We are strongly committed to ensuring that the benefits of globalisation are shared equitably. Our work with Africa is part of this effort.

The OECD Development Centre and the African Development Bank teamed up to produce a joint annual report on African economies because of their conviction that a reliable and shared knowledge base is required for productive policy dialogue. Mr. Louis Kasekende, Chief Economist of the African Development Bank, will present the specific results of the Outlook.

We are proud to be able to share in this project's success.

Modelled on the OECD's renowned *Economic Outlook*, the *African Economic Outlook* now covers 31 countries, accounting for almost 90% of the continent's population and economic output. It is the only publication that provides reliable and comparable data and analysis on macroeconomic, political and social trends as well as structural issues for Africa. It is also a valuable input to collaborative efforts to promote growth and the achievement of the MDGs. For the African institutions and programmes, most notably the African Union and NEPAD, it serves to identify best practice and encourage policy reform.

There has been solid growth in most African countries in 2006 and this trend is expected to continue in the near future as a consequence of improved commodity prices, good macroeconomic management and political stability. At the same time, there are many issues that need to be addressed for Africa to continue its effective integration into the global economy and to decrease its vulnerability to both external and internal shocks. Africa's oil and mineral exporters in particular are faced with the challenge of using windfall profits for investment in infrastructure and human capital to enhance the prospects for diversification.

I am also pleased that the special theme of this year's outlook is "Access to drinking water and sanitation". This coincides with the priority we have placed on the water issue at the OECD. It comes as no surprise, as access to water and sanitation can be used as a proxy for any other development goal. In the case of Africa, it constitutes a challenge that will require the imagination and commitment of policy makers, business people and the community in general.

Water, despite its general abundance on the continent, remains unexploited through a deplorable lack of infrastructure. The situation in sanitation is even worse. Even if sub-Saharan Africa were to meet the Millennium Development Goal on this matter, some 230 million people would still lack access to safe drinking water by 2015 and 320 million to improved sanitation. This is unacceptable. It is fortunately also avoidable – the problems are not so much a resource issue as a management one. This new report highlights some of the ways forward.

The African Economic Outlook is a substantial contribution to an informed debate on how to address the challenges that lie ahead for the continent's long-term development. For the Bank and the OECD, both the publication and the capacity-building process are equally important elements of the project. I am therefore extremely pleased to be able to share with you that the Bank will take over as lead manager for producing the report next September, while the Development Centre will continue to play a very active role as co-partner.

I look forward to stimulating discussions at this Forum.