

■ Former Prime Minister of Niger Ibrahim Assane Mayaki is a key name in African politics and is now beginning his second term as CEO of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). His somewhat unconventional career path reflects his vision for a changing continent. A vision that is both clear and bold. ■



Ibrahim Mayaki

A vision for Africa

BY PATRICIA COIGNARD. PHOTO: CHRISTOPHE MAJANI D'INGUIMBERT FOR VEOLIA PHOTO LIBRARY

At first sight, Ibrahim Assane Mayaki has all the traits of a man of power. Just a few hours after arriving in Paris from South Africa, he is impeccably dressed, friendly, thoughtful and focused. Mr. Mayaki's personality shines through as soon as the 61-year-old Nigerian starts speaking. Former Foreign Minister of Niger, then the country's Prime Minister from 1997 to 2000, he began his second term as CEO of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) in 2012. On starting his new mandate, he volunteered a few life goals: "I strive for integrity in the 'Anglo-Saxon' sense. In other words, I aim to be as true to myself as possible. I make sure I find the time to do things other than work; to enjoy life with my family. To read. I prefer books on development issues." He also happens to practice meditation and taekwondo, in which he is a fifth dan! He introduced the martial art in Niger in 1976.

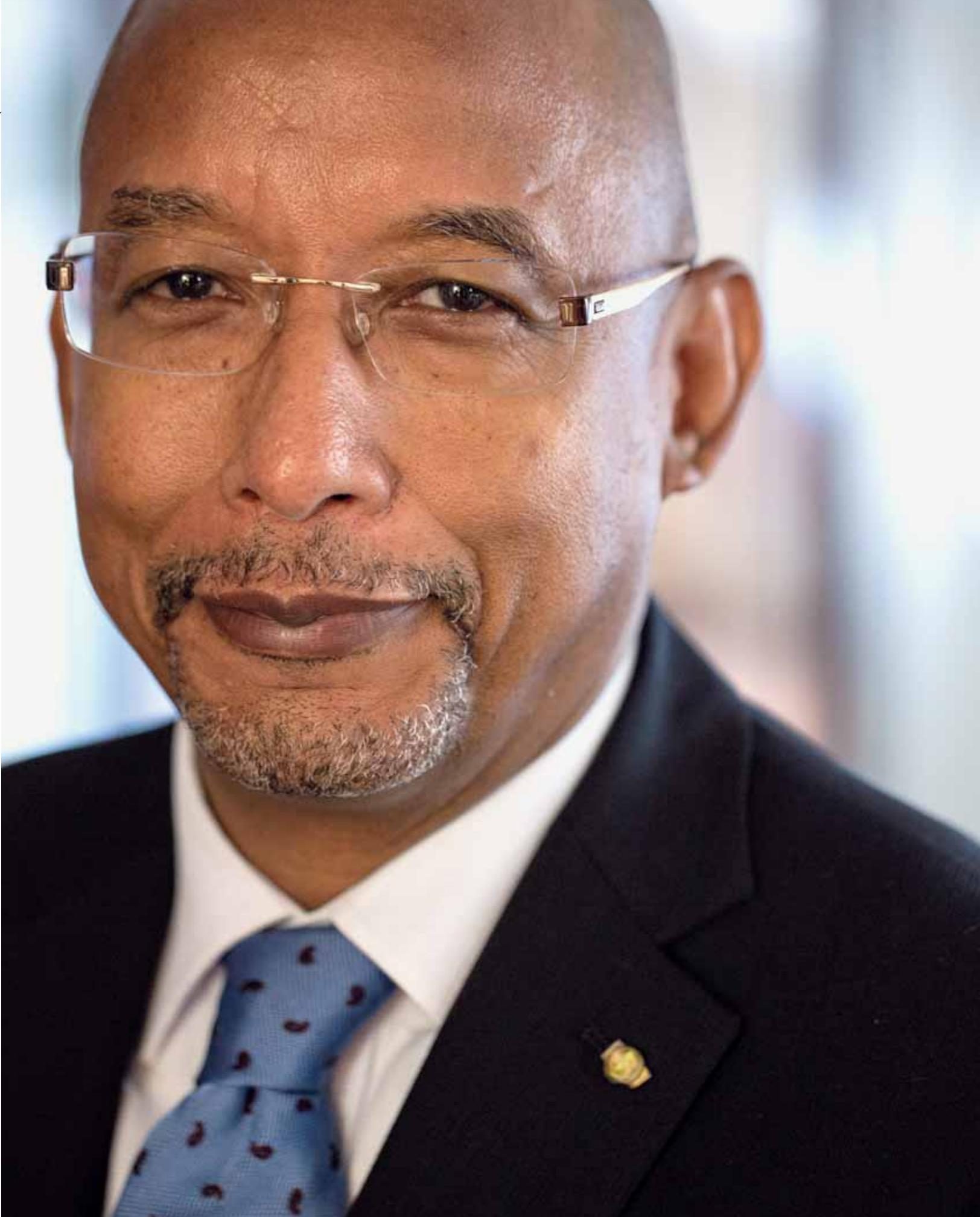
This personal quest for balance throughout

an outstanding career comprising three consecutive "sequences" of 10 years—in education, mining and politics—has undoubtedly been instrumental in helping Ibrahim Assane Mayaki rise to the challenge he is about to overcome, working closely with a number of African leaders: getting the continent on track towards sustainable development and growth to make Africa a true stakeholder in the global economy. "We still too often forget that Africa has the largest share of arable land, the highest density of natural mineral resources and the youngest population in the world!" he explained.

The roadmap he promotes with NEPAD seeks to implement a synergistic approach in which each country plays its part, both individually and collectively, to ensure gradual, balanced, sustainable recovery. So what exactly does that involve?

The first goal is economic integration on a regional scale, with a focus on creating pan-African





■■■■ corridors: “In this respect, West and East Africa are highly representative regions.” The second is a more modern approach to agriculture: “Burkina Faso has significantly reduced poverty.” Third, the approach focuses on creating a more diverse rural economy to offset rampant urbanization and ensure the employment of young people “to prevent the kind of social implosion seen in Tunisia”. Next is the bid to improve the system of primary and secondary education, with a specific focus on technical training programs “that will underpin the industrialization process.” Last but not least, the campaign also aims to introduce innovative financial mechanisms and measures to mitigate the effects of climate change.

“This long-term strategy is now beginning to reap its rewards, with sustained annual growth of 5-7% across a continent that escaped the worst of the global economic and financial crisis. While Africa still needs to deal with regional conflicts, an outflow of capital, and food insecurity, which all hamper development, the successes of the past decade are proof that Africans are able to tap their potential—to support continuous

improvements in government and to promote economic development without relying on oil and uranium exports or foreign aid. In each major region of Africa, there are now two or three countries that are really emerging and driving the rest. And this is just the beginning.”

Since he left politics in Niger in August 2000, Ibrahim Mayaki has done his utmost to defend his practical vision of a stronger Africa. An activist by nature, he sets little store in the lure of power. Towards the end of his time as Prime Minister, he set up the Public Policy Analysis Center, “an independent think tank that gives recommendations on issues related to health and education.” In 2004, he was appointed Executive Director of Rural Hub, a Dakar-based organization supporting rural development stakeholders in West and Central Africa. He was recruited as Chief Executive Officer of NEPAD five years later, largely thanks to his track record with the Hub.

So what does the future hold? “Nobody can say what fate has in store. All we can do is remain clear-sighted and accept the opportunities that life brings our way.” ■

■ **Nepad: promoting synergy throughout Africa** The New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) was set up in 2001 and is still Africa’s only continent-wide development plan today. NEPAD joined the African Union (AU) in 2010 as the NEPAD Agency and the organization now has an official, clearly defined mandate.

Its Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA) is a key driver in promoting the creation of cross-regional corridors—like the routes between Dakar, Libreville and Djibouti—which will provide a link between the capitals Bamako, Niamey, N’Djamena and Bangui by 2020. Other projects with strong economic potential include the Kribi–Bangui–Kisangani and Pointe-Noire–Brazzaville–Kinshasa–Bangui–N’Djamena corridors, and the coastal route between Abidjan and Lagos. The completion of the Trans-Saharan Highway in 2013 will provide both a road and fiber-optic link between Niger, Nigeria and Algeria.

Another priority project for NEPAD is the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program (CAADP), which has led to a 6% increase in agricultural productivity and seeks to encourage each country to allocate 6% of its public spending to the industry. Since 2007, NEPAD and the Veolia Foundation have been working together on a program to eliminate cholera in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. “This philanthropic use of skills and expertise to help eradicate this terrible disease also aims to develop innovative partnership models that can be applied beyond the health sector,” explains Mr. Mayaki. ■

BRIEF BIO

■ Ibrahim Assane Mayaki was born in Niger in 1951. His wife is from Venezuela. He has two children. ■ Mr. Mayaki holds a Master’s degree from the National School of Public Administration (ENAP) in Quebec and a PhD in Administrative Sciences from Université Paris I. ■ 1978-1987: Professor of Public Administration and Management in Niger

and in Venezuela ■ 1988-1997: Head of strategy and training for Nigerian engineers at SOMAIR, a Nigerian subsidiary of Areva ■ 1996-1997: Minister of African Integration and Cooperation and Minister of Foreign Affairs for the Republic of Niger ■ November 1997–December 1999: Prime Minister of the Republic of Niger ■

■ 2004: Executive Director of Rural Hub, a Dakar-based organization supporting rural development stakeholders in West and Central Africa ■ Since April 2009: Chief Executive Officer of NEPAD ■ Since 2010: Chairman of the Global Alliance against Cholera (GAAC) ■

FIGURES

1 in 2 African people is under the age of 25.
50 years from now, over 70% of the African population will still be under 30 years of age.
40 out of 54 African countries now hold democratic elections.