



AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK GROUP

From Aspiration to Action

By

**Steve Kayizzi-Mugerwa
Acting Chief Economist and Vice President
African Development Bank**

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Excellencies

Hon. Demitu Hambisa, Minister of Technology of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia

Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, Chairperson of the African Union Commission

Dr. Carlos Lopes, Executive Secretary of the ECA, and our host today

Dr. Eugene Owusu, UNDP Resident Representative in Ethiopia

University vice chancellors,

Scholars from Africa and the world,

Invitees from the world of business and commerce

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Salutations

I am very happy to be here today and to be part of the deliberations of this learned audience. I would like to thank you all for accepting the invitation to this annual conference jointly organized by the Economic Commission for Africa, the United Nations Development Program and the African Development Bank.

Dr. Carlos Lopes, many thanks for hosting us at this 9th in a series of the African Economic Conference.

Dr. Zuma, thank you very much for gracing this occasion with your presence – I know that you have a heavy agenda indeed.

The importance of AEC is that it also attracts many other policymakers, and members of civil society. This time a number of African university vice chancellors were invited, and are with us today – you are all welcome.

I would also like to heartily thank all the researchers that have prepared papers for discussion at this Conference, and of course our hardworking staff in our three institutions.

I bring you greetings from Dr. Donald Kaberuka, President of the African Development Bank. He holds the theme of our three day conference “Knowledge and Innovation for Africa’s Transformation” in very high regard – he is what you might call a true believer.

The theme touches on many things that he has tried to do during his close to ten-year tenure at the helm of the African Development Bank – the emphasis on infrastructure development, boosting the private sector and promoting science and technology, and developing capacities in the public sector.

Unfortunately, he has not been able to make the trip to Addis Ababa this week, caught up in discussing programs to support our member countries that are fighting the Ebola disease. A disease which in some respects has defined the extent of our ignorance, in Africa and globally – but which has also raised our resolve to use our knowledge and innovativeness to “fight back”.

His message to you all – which applies equally to addressing epidemics in Africa and to challenges of Africa’s transformation – is to defy those that would declare defeat, indeed sign the act of surrender, even before the real battle has begun: “Where there is a will, there is a way.”

Theme of the Conference

In my brief welcoming remarks this morning, let me spend some time on the theme of our conference “**Knowledge and Innovation for Africa’s Transformation**” – it is powerful, attractive, and inspirational. I therefore, commend our joint staffs – including our media teams – for the many hours spent on finding the right tone, inflection, etc. The theme is certainly different from those that we have used before.

However, even as we jubilate at our own innovativeness in finding the right theme for the 9th African Economic Conference, a provocative

observer could ask: what **knowledge** do you have in mind? In the broad scheme of things how do you determine “**innovativeness**” – is it a mere recycling of ideas? Where do you want to **transform** Africa to?

The point I am trying to make is that underlying our attractive theme are a number of tough and even ugly realities – those of political economy, abject poverty, inadequate and fragile leadership, uninspiring educational curricula, broad gender disparities, and inequality in access to new technologies.

From Aspiration to Action

So how can our Conference make a real difference? It can do so by being a clarion call to action. When you look across the African policy landscape, it is fully parked with themes covering as many subjects as there are challenges on the continent. I often like to cite the example of David Kenneth Kaunda’s election manifesto from 1963 called “When UNIP becomes Government” – it promised to use the country’s copper resources to eradicate “poverty, ignorance and disease” – in other words to transform that country. The message from Africa’s collection of policy themes has not changed much since then. What has been lacking is implementation – action.

As a young student in Uganda, I used to walk past Makerere University in Kampala, which some of you might know had risen from a technical and trades school in the 1920s to a prominent center of learning in Africa (some people still grumble about “when Makerere was Makerere”). On the entry gate was a big university insignia in Latin: ***Pro Futuro Edificamus*** – “We build for the future”.

I therefore hope and trust that as we delve into our discussions for the next three days on our chosen theme of “Knowledge and Innovation for Africa’s Transformation”, we shall be conscious of the importance of moving from aspiration to action, of “building for the future.”

Ladies and Gentlemen, many thanks for listening to me this morning.