



THE AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK GROUP

Opening Remarks



African Economic Conference

Regional and Continental Integration for Africa's Development

Gabriel NEGATU

Director General

Excellencies

Hon. Claudine Uwera, Minister of State of Finance, Rwanda;

H.E. Prof. Victor Harison, Commissioner for Economic Affairs African Union Commission;

Ms. Giovanie Biha, Deputy Executive Secretary, United Nations Economic Commission for Africa;

Ms. Ahunna Eziakonwa, Assistant Administrator, Regional Bureau for Africa, United Nations Development Programme;

Ambassadors and Heads of Diplomatic Missions;

Delegates from member countries;

Researchers and Scholars from Africa and the world;

Ladies and Gentlemen.

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1. I am pleased to welcome you to the African Economic Conference (AEC) 2018 jointly organized by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), UN Economic commission for Africa (UNECA) and the African Development Bank. At the outset, I would like to express the Bank's profound gratitude to the Government and people of Rwanda for the warm welcome to this beautiful and dynamic country.
2. I extend the warmest regards of the president of the AfDB group, Dr. Akinwumi Adesina, who is unable to join us for deliberations at this year's conference. He has asked me to convey his best wishes for fruitful deliberations in finding solutions to the challenges of regional and continental integration issues in our continent.

3. The theme of this year's AEC- "**Regional and Continental Integration**", is central to Africa's transformation. Regional integration is imperative to overcome the challenges of fragmented markets, connect landlocked countries and small island countries to market, and to link up regional markets for infrastructure services, particularly in power, transport, and information and communication technologies (ICT).
4. Recent developments in the global environment characterized by growing protectionism further underscore the need for African countries to integrate, as one way to sustain growth and enhance the Continent's resilience to external shocks.
5. Regional integration also offers Africa's private sector and African firms a stepping-stone to grow and become global giants. It enables firms to exhaust opportunities in their regional backyards, and allowing them to accumulate critical capabilities and foreign asset management experiences in more familiar markets, before venturing into less familiar trans-continental markets.
6. This is why the African Development Bank continues to support the Continent's integration agenda and has made '**Integrate Africa**' one of its five operational priorities- **the High-5**. The Bank's strategic framework for economic integration approved in March 2018 focuses on three pillars: infrastructure connections, trade and investment promotion, and financial integration.
7. Under this framework, the Bank aims to step up investments in cross-border infrastructure to unlock regional trade and create

economic opportunities for communities along the transport corridors. We are also investing in regional power interconnectors to boost cross-border trade in electricity. In 2017, approvals for Integrate Africa amounted to approximately USD605 million (UA432 million).

8. Besides investing its own resources, the Bank is helping to mobilize private and public finance into strategic projects. We have helped to design complex financial transactions to crowd in commercial finance, using risk guarantee instruments. By way of illustration, the USD635 million Lake Turkana Wind Power Project in Kenya, is an example of a project where the Bank deployed an innovative approach involving a private sector loan to finance the power plant, and a public sector partial risk guarantee to cover against political risks on the delivery of a transmission line by the power utility.
9. In addition, as a knowledge Bank, we continue to generate and disseminate analytical and policy-relevant research to support effective policy making in the Bank's Regional Member Countries. In connection with this, I would like to invite you to **special event B** tomorrow, where we will launch the third edition of the Africa Visa Openness Index (AVOI). The Index has helped raise awareness and drive visa policy reforms across the continent to ease movement of people unlocking opportunities for intra-African tourism, trade and investment. In so doing, the Bank is directly contributing to the objectives of the AU initiative for a Single African passport.
10. We are encouraged to do more, by the strong commitment shown by Africa's political leadership to make regional integration a prominent aspect of the African Union's Vision 2063.

11. In this regard, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) which was concluded in this very city in March this year marks yet another milestone in Africa's quest to integrate its markets. Therefore, the choice of Kigali as the venue for this year's African Economic Conference under the regional and continental integration theme, is fitting and symbolic.
12. The AfCFTA is one of Agenda 2063 flagship projects and, when it comes into effect, will provide the framework to remove impediments, such as non-tariff barriers to trade (NTBs), and restrictions on cross-border movement of people across the Continent.
13. Against this backdrop, the AEC offers an opportunity for some of Africa's best minds and upcoming researchers for serious reflection and dialogue on a theme that is pertinent for Africa's transformation. I therefore call upon all of you to come up with practical solutions that will help shape policymaking in member countries and inform the design of operations to break down the barriers separating us and create the next global market.
14. It is the Bank's firm hope that this Forum will not end up as just another talk shop. I believe the Forum will come up with innovative ideas to make integration happen and yield tangible results in terms of increased intra-African trade, more and better jobs, private sector growth, and freer movement of people in Africa.
15. Finally, I would like to recognize the young bright minds out there and who have joined us for this conference- the future of Africa lies in its youth and one of the highlights of this conference for me- is offering the opportunity for young African researchers

to share their work and be the key proponent in shaping the continents future

I thank you for your attention and wish you fruitful deliberations!