

WELCOMING REMARKS FOR OFFICIAL OPENING

VICE PRESIDENT ELKHESHEN

SUNDAY APRIL 1ST, 2012

9h00 a.m. - 9h30 a.m.

[Honorable Ministers responsible for Science and Technology;
Honorable Ministers of Finance;
Government officials;
Distinguished experts and scientists;
Executive Secretaries of Regional Economic Communities;
Representatives of international agencies and non-governmental
organizations;
Ladies and gentlemen:]

Introduction

I wish to begin by joining my colleagues in expressing our appreciation to the Government of Kenya for hosting this event. Allow me to also welcome you, on behalf of the African Development Bank [and President Kaberuka], to the **First Africa Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation**.

This Forum represents an excellent opportunity to discuss the common goals, which the Continent needs to attain to ensure the welfare of its populations.

Context: “Africa on the move”

One distinguishing feature of the African continent is that it is continuously on the move:

- Africa’s demographics are among the most dynamic in the world;
- Several countries across the Continent have experienced notable economic growth rates of 5% to 8%, on average, each year.

- There has also been, over the last ten years, a revolution in mobile technology.
- In addition, we have seen that, with enhanced social media such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, African youth are driving changes towards greater democratic governance.

Key Issues

These developments impact the building of human capital. In this context, throughout our discussions over the next few days, I invite you to keep in mind several critical issues:

It is urgent for the Continent to bridge the divides, by including the excluded. It is undeniable that Africa enjoyed rapid growth in the run-up to the global economic meltdown. However, this growth was not sufficiently inclusive: indeed, in spite of double digit growth rates in many countries, the phenomenon of jobless growth has become an increasing cause of concern. Our challenge is to address the mismatch between skills development and the actual requirements of the labor market.

Now is also the time to confront the digital divide. While there is a revolution in access to modern communication, the continent is lagging behind in the broadband race. Quick and feasible solutions thus need to be found for the IT revolution to reach African countries equally.

There is a need to develop skills in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math. Between 1999 and 2009, the number of university graduates in Sub-Saharan Africa more than tripled. Yet, the quality of higher education, especially in Math and Science, remains inadequate. We must strengthen scientific research as well: Africans will need to become knowledge producers instead of knowledge consumers.

And last but certainly not least, we must seek to foster a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship. A vision for private sector development in Africa would link entrepreneurship to sustainable and inclusive growth.

The Bank's Role

Through our Human Capital Development Strategy, the African Development Bank has prioritized these issues. The African Development Bank will continue to assist clients in three major areas which are essential for inclusive growth:

- Through increasing competitiveness and employment opportunities, and addressing Africa's large informal sector;
- By ensuring value for money and accountability for improved service delivery; and
- Through ensuring inclusion and social cohesion, with particular attention to gender issues.

For example, the Bank-supported *African Virtual University*, helped put in place a new education model for Africa, which is mainly ICT-based. It allows us to move away from the traditional classroom model in order to provide increased access to education. To date, the African Virtual University has established a network of Open Distance and e-Learning institutions in over 30 African countries.

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, now is the time to ask:

- ⇒ What should we be doing more of?
- ⇒ And what should we be doing differently?
- ⇒ What is it that we must now review, both in scale and scope, to ensure that the benefits from the current growth momentum are shared inclusively?

I would like to conclude by wishing you all fruitful discussions during the First Africa Forum on STI.

Thank you.