

**GLOBAL FORUM ON  
BUILDING SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, AND INNOVATION CAPACITY  
FOR SUSTAINABLE GROWTH AND POVERTY REDUCTION**

**STATEMENT  
BY  
DONALD KABERUKA  
PRESIDENT, AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK**

**THE WORLD BANK, WASHINGTON DC  
FEBRUARY 13, 2007**

Honorable Ministers,  
Excellencies, Heads and Representatives of Institutions,  
Distinguished Panelists,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. It is a pleasure for the African Development Bank to be present at this important forum this morning. “Building Science, Technology, and Innovation Capacity for Sustainable Growth and Poverty Reduction” is a very timely development imperative, and I wish to express my sincere thanks to the World Bank and the other co-organizers for taking the initiative. Science and Technology is an area of great interest for the African Development Bank regional member countries. I am reassured by the presence of African ministers in charge of research and science and technology at this global forum. It is a clear indication of the political will and commitment to make knowledge the driver of economic growth.

2. As we share experience and ideas here today, we are cognizant of the reality that many parts of Africa are facing serious development challenges. Violent conflicts in some regions, man made or natural calamities, but above all misery and poverty still lingering in many countries, with a small chance that the continent as a whole may attain the MDGs. Now, that is the bad news.

3. But, Africa is also about good news. News that people seldom talk about. I want to be the messenger of the good news that across Africa, economies have been growing for the sixth consecutive years, conflicts are declining and many countries have been managing democratic political transitions. In 11 low-income, non oil-exporting countries, the economy grew at above 5 percent. Capital flight is giving way to US\$ 12

billion of remittances, of which about US\$ 6.5 billion to sub-Saharan Africa. Years of sustained reforms are paying off and the risks and costs of doing business are falling. At the African Development Bank, we have made a modest contribution in writing off debt for eligible countries under the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative –known as the MDRI–, thus giving the beneficiary countries room to increase expenditure on basic services and infrastructure. We have also contributed to the arrears clearance for the Central African Republic and are meeting, here in Washington DC today and tomorrow with development partners, to examine ways in which we can do the same for Liberia.

4. Today, Africa faces the best opportunity for growth in its past 30 years. Across countries, pessimism is being replaced with greater confidence, assertiveness and optimism. But that is not enough. To sustain this growth, the continent needs to harness science and technology, integrate Africa into the global market, and transform the economies for fierce competition in a world fueled by information and driven by knowledge. In a context of declining knowledge infrastructure, brain drain, limited support to R&D, outdated and irrelevant curricula, and limited direct links between science and industry, Africa stands little chance at making it in the new economy, unless deliberate and bold initiatives are implemented to reinvigorate higher education, science and technology and innovations in Africa.

5. Since I assumed office as President of the African Development Bank, I have committed myself to moving the institution into the direction of a “knowledge bank” and to building capacity for an African voice, providing quality policy advice and support to our regional member countries. This has resulted in the creation of a division of

Higher Education, Science and Technology, and Vocational and Technical Training; the first such division in the institution's 40+ years.

6. To further strengthen higher education, science and technology, and develop the needed human capacity to support growth in the regional member countries, the African Development Bank is currently in the process of developing a strategy to guide its interventions, galvanize the scientific community, and mobilize partners. The strategy, while being selective, would be tailored to respond to the diverse demands in higher education, science and technology in Africa. Recognizing that higher education institutions on one hand, and science and technology institutions on the other, operate in most African countries with limited interaction between them, the strategy aims at increasing the linkages and creating an intersect with the productive sector of the economy, including industry and private sector. As well, the cost of excluding the largest component of society –i.e. women–, from higher education, science and technology are likely to continue hindering growth in the countries.

7. Built around two pillars and four special initiatives, the strategy is designed to foster regional integration and mobility of skills at the regional and continental levels, an addressing the gender enrolment gap in tertiary education, especially in math and sciences.

- (i) The pillar on policy reforms for higher education, science and education will support the creation of centers of excellence and promote cutting-edge research innovations at the national and regional levels. The reforms will assist in harmonizing national policies with a view to enhancing transboundary movements of students, skilled labor and scientists; thus reducing the brain drain. The reforms supported by the AfDB will improve and

strengthen management and governance of higher education, and at the same time promote freedom of expression. The AfDB is aware of the fact that instilling scientific and technology skills starts at the primary and secondary education levels: the reforms will assist countries in including math and science in the primary and secondary education curricula.

8. Strengthening infrastructure for higher education science and technology is the second pillar of the strategy. Although most countries possess the basic infrastructure needed for that field, investments will be necessary to upgrade the existing infrastructure or rehabilitate facilities, especially in countries emerging from conflict.

9. In addition to the above-mentioned pillars, the African Development Bank will support four special initiatives targeting the development of special skills needed to support growth and promote social transformation. These are: (i) skills development for the extractive industry to create an added value in countries where the mining and oil producing generates the bulk of resources for the economy; (ii) hospitality and services skills development in countries with real tourism potential; (iii) health services skills development targeting countries with serious endemics and risks of transmission of diseases across borders ; and (iv) virtual university system for small states, including distance open learning systems.

10. A major innovation will be introduced in the lending instruments to complement the existing ones and effectively deliver the strategy. It deals with lines of credit to commercial banks to finance higher education science and technology. This stems from the recognition that, except in

middle income countries, the private demands for funding in higher education, science and technology and innovation are anticipated to be of small size. Lines of credit will, therefore, be provided to regional and commercial banks that will in turn provide loans to private individuals (or businesses) for investment in the sector. This will be essential in boosting the creation of incubators and linkages between training, research and the market, as well as stimulating the creation of national innovation systems.

11. For the African Development Bank to succeed in implementing its strategy, the countries must demonstrate leadership around a new vision for Africa, expressed at the highest level of government and focusing on the role of knowledge in promoting growth and social transformation. This means revamping (and in the case of post-conflict countries: rebuilding) the infrastructure, reforming higher and technical education, promoting business entrepreneurship and more importantly creating a culture of innovation. We may not succeed at first, but we should exercise persistence and a high degree of risk taking, until we succeed.

12. Let me tell you that although the African Development Bank has been very active in basic education, we have, in the recent past, provided support to the African Virtual University, the KIST in Rwanda, and the INSET in Mauritania. The Bank has also undertaken a massive study of higher education systems in the West Africa Economic and Monetary Union, which approach we will use to design a similar study for countries in the Central African Monetary Union.

13. The demand exceeds the available resources and none of our institutions alone can provide the resources needed and the expertise required. That is why I want to emphasize that partnership in science,

technology and innovation is of paramount importance for us at the African Development Bank and for our countries. Not only do we value the strong partnerships with the World Bank, the United Nations institutions and bilateral institutions, but I believe that the time has come to make room for new partners, in particular the private sector and philanthropists. Our success will be measured by the degree to which public-private partnerships will be established to sustain the efforts of countries themselves and the international community.

14. Of course, the partnerships are essential to sustaining the investments. But, only Africans can provide the needed vision and leadership on this strategic issue of science, technology and innovation. Let me reassure you all that where leadership exists, the African Development Bank will direct its efforts at supporting and building the institutions (including regional centers of excellence) that are critical for Africa to be a key player in the new economy. I am confident that, collectively, we will not let this window of opportunity go untapped.

I thank you for the kind attention, and wish you fruitful deliberations.