

**Eminent Dinner Address by Dr Akinwumi A. Adesina,  
President of the African Development Bank,  
at the at Kellogg Center, Michigan State University  
Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> May, 2018  
“Zipping through 6 Blocks to Accelerate Africa’s Development”**

*All protocols*

Ladies and gentlemen,

1. It’s a wonderful delight to be with you today. Thank you once again for the gracious and very kind invitation.
2. Kindly permit me to go down memory lane.
3. In 1983, with a single suitcase in tow, I arrived for the very first time in the United States. Downtown Manhattan in New York City to be precise. I was *en route* to Lafayette, Indiana, for graduate studies at Purdue University. I was 23 years old and this was my first trip ever outside of my native Nigeria.
4. To say I was astonished by the sheer size of everything around me, would be an understatement. The buildings, billboards, cabs, the cops on the streets, and even the Big Macs, were super-sized. And everything was fast – traffic, trains, customer service, food, and the way everyone seemed to speak.
5. I mentioned earlier that I had a suitcase with me. Now, this was 1983. Back then, except you were a pilot or an airline cabin crew, your suitcase did not come fitted with rollers or wheels. Basically, you lifted your case and trudged along or you depended on a porter to do the heavy lifting.

6. So, what was I doing with a roller-less suitcase in the middle of Manhattan on a cold freezing day? Well, I was making my way first to the Nigerian Consulate to sort out some paper work and from there on to Indiana by Greyhound.

7. A good bystander had informed in his rapid-fire New York accent that the Nigerian Consulate was **6 blocks away**. “Not too bad,” I wrongly assumed.

8. You see, in Africa, a ‘**block**’ simply means one building. That’s it. Nothing else. Nothing more. One building! Well, ... I was about to find out the hard way that in America, and in Manhattan for that matter, a ‘block’ meant something entirely different. Needless, to say, it was an experience I will never forget.

9. With this as a background, I have taken the liberty to title my presentation today, **Zippping through 6 Blocks to Accelerate Africa’s Development**.

10. Today, Africa has a population of 1.2 billion and a median age of 19.4 years. 60% of the population live in rural areas. These statistics have serious implications for development and the future of the continent.

11. So, what must Africa do to accelerate its development?

12. **FIRST**, development is contingent on EDUCATION!

13. I grew up in a small rural community. My grandfather was a poor subsistence farmer, and my parents were by no means well to do. Actually, it was God’s Grace and the kindness of a benefactor who helped my father send me to school and to college. I therefore stand here today, representing millions of rural and urban Africans for whom a quality education is and has been a launching pad into a brighter and better future.

**14.** Essentially, the youth are Africa's future and its present. Each year, more than 11 million young Africans enter the labor market, but only 3 million formal jobs are created. To put things in perspective, Africa will have half a billion young, hungry, and restless youth.

**15.** The picture I have painted is one that many international students who are looking for academic and economic opportunities can relate to. Not necessarily economic opportunities to stay in America, but rather to take advantage of excellent facilities that help create generations of world changers. While it is possible to put borders in place that limit human mobility, knowledge once acquired is a borderless torrent that cannot be limited by location or distance. And that's how we must think of education in a hyper-fast global community of fluid information and knowledge.

**16.** I would be remiss if I did not say that without the benefit of a world class education here in the United States, more likely than not, I would not be where I am today. If anyone had said to me in Purdue 35 years ago I would one day win the World Food Prize, I would never have thought it possible. But then again, that is what happens when fortuitous circumstances collide with excellent educational opportunities.

**17.** Therefore, building first rate human capital that changes nations and the world is the best investment America can ever make. That is why I firmly believe in land grant universities and the need for expanded international programs.

**18. Ultimately, those you train become your greatest allies!**

**19.** In order to build creative and innovative capacities in science, mathematics, medicine, IT, agriculture, artificial intelligence, robotics, cryptographic technology, and quantum computing, we must invest heavily in educational institutions and in vocational schools, especially for those for whom a college education is not suited or a viable option.

**20.** The African Development Bank is investing heavily in establishment of coding centres and computational training for young Africans, including at high schools, and is currently engaged with major global players such as Google and Microsoft to speed up digital economy for the continent. The Bank has supported the Kigali Institute of Technology to train world-class students at the Masters level in computer sciences and information technology, in collaboration with the Carnegie Mellon University. To date, 100% of the students are employed.

**21.** They, as well as others we are supporting through African Universities of Science and Technology, and the African Institute for Mathematical Sciences, will produce globally-respected scientists, who will drive research and development in Africa and globally.

**22.** To not proactively engage, re-think, and invest in Africa's human capital, is to light the proverbial fuse of a ticking time bomb. There are no short cuts, ifs, or buts. We must do what is necessary.

**23.** This is why the African Development Bank's *Jobs for Youth in Africa* initiative is designed to address the continent's gigantic youth employment challenge. It aims to expand employment, strengthen human capital, and build sustainable markets and value chains. We plan to help create 25 million jobs and train 30 million young people over the next decade.

24. **SECOND**, to accelerate development, we must Light Up and Power Africa.

25. No economy, country, or continent has ever developed in the dark. Africa will not be an exception. Therefore, scaling up investments in energy, is the African Development Bank Group's top priority in a continent where more than 600 million people still do not have access to electricity. **I used to be one of them.**

26. So, let me continue with my earlier story. My suitcase and I finally made it to Purdue University where I was hosted by a generous American family and faculty member, Chris Melby and his wife Barbara. Not long after, Barbara noticed that I had been ironing all the clothes in my suitcase for a little over an hour. Quite curious, she asked me why? I responded that I was trying to get all my ironing done before the power company disconnected electricity. Little did I know that unlike the Africa I had just left behind, electricity in America was a 24-7 reality.

27. That epiphany made me realise that Africa had to power itself and that the abnormal should never become normal.

28. Consequently, when I became President of the African Development Bank, in concert with the Board, we decided that universal access to power and electricity was foundational to the continent's development. The bank has done and continues to do quite a number of very innovative things to light up and power Africa.

29. We were the first investor in the world's largest solar power plant in Ouarzazate, Morocco, with an injection of \$250 million in funding. Following the success of Ouarzazate, today the African Development Bank is spearheading the development of what we call the *Desert to Power* initiative, to help harness 10, 000 MW of power from the sun all across the Sahel, and to provide 250 million people with electricity.

**30.** Our goal is clear. We intend to invest a total of USD 12 billion in five years to leverage \$45 - \$50 billion dollars into the energy sector

**31.** Also, when I took office as President of the Bank two and half years ago, the share of renewable energy in our total power portfolio was just 14%. However, we increased that to 74% in 2016. And in 2017, we achieved a record-breaking 100% of our new lending in renewable energy.

**32.** For generations in Africa, it has always taken a village. Our interests, challenges, and solutions have always taken a collective and collaborative effort. While our continent has low levels of fossil fuel emissions, paradoxically we have borne the brunt of climate change and environmental degradation.

**33.** We are highly conscious of our environmental responsibilities and are actively engaged with many of our global partners in combating climate change and promoting green growth. Consequently, we will triple our climate finance to 40% of our portfolio by 2020.

**34.** **THIRD,** to accelerate Africa's development, we must Feed Africa. God has blessed Africa with abundance. Think about it. 65% of all the uncultivated arable land left in the world to feed 9 billion people by 2050 is in Africa. So, what Africa does with agriculture will determine the future of food in the world. I firmly believe that we must unlock this potential for the benefit of Africa. As my mentor the late Dr. Norman Borlaug used to say, you cannot eat potential.

**35.** To get this done, we must therefore change the lens through which we view agriculture. Agriculture is not a development program. Agriculture is not a social sector. Agriculture is a business.

**36.** There are already a number of very exciting initiatives being implemented to help unlock that potential.

**37.** One of these is **Technologies for African Agricultural Transformation (TAAT)** that the African Development Bank is spearheading in partnership with the World Bank, Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa and the Bill and Melinda Gates, for which we have jointly committed **\$ 1 billion** to support the accelerated uptake of agricultural technologies on the continent.

**38.** TAAT is a regional technology delivery infrastructure for agriculture, linking countries across agro-ecological zones. It will help breakdown decades of national boundary-focused seed release systems and allow technologies to be released in one fell swoop across agro-ecological zones and infrastructure corridors, rather than on a country-by-country basis.

**39.** After all, pests don't require visas to inflict devastation across borders in Africa as the Armyworm is demonstrating right now. In like manner, agricultural technologies must be applied without borders.

**40.** The second in a number of major agricultural projects is the Bank's Transformation of African Savannahs Initiative (TASI) in partnership with Brazil, Japan, the World Bank and a number of other partners. Together, we are committed to maximising the potential of the savannahs of Africa, which remain the world's largest underutilized agricultural zone, with less than 10% currently under cultivation, and another 400 million hectares available.

**41.** To my mind, Africa must seize the initiative to develop its savannahs as the last frontier of sustainable agriculture.

42. Replacing the current rapidly aging population of farmers requires a concerted effort to develop a new generation of young, skilled, dynamic and entrepreneurial farmers – agripreneurs.

43. When we consider that by 2030, the food and agribusiness industry in Africa is projected to be worth \$1 trillion, the strategic importance of young agribusiness entrepreneurs will be critical to the objective of Feeding Africa sustainably, and turning Africa’s youth bulge into a powerful driver of economic growth.

44. Last year, I had the privilege of donating my **\$250,000 World Food Prize** to establish a fund that will support young men and women in agriculture as a business and help build the next generation of agricultural leaders for Africa.

45. Last year the bank invested nearly \$800 million in six countries to support youth in agriculture as a business.

46. **FOURTH,** Africa must rapidly accelerate industrialization. As with any other sector, industrialization does not exist in a vacuum. It must be backed with appropriate policies and infrastructure. Only then, can Africa facilitate the entrance of African brands into global value chains, scale up local production, and become a powerhouse in areas of comparative advantage.

47. Ethiopia is one of Africa’s success stories. In a relatively short period of time, it has created world class industrial parks and over 50,000 new jobs. Quite a number of countries are already understudying Ethiopia and expect to make giant leaps in the coming years through local processing, value addition, and manufacturing.



48. The focus of the Bank's industrialization strategy is to facilitate a major shift from low to high productivity activities – from agriculture to agro-industries; and the conversion of raw mineral resources to high-value semi-processed or processed exports.

49. This requires increasing the capacity of and funding to African SME's to help them compete regionally and globally. Ultimately, the driver of growth is and will continue to be the private sector, which as a bank we are actively supportive of.

50. **The FIFTH** building block to accelerate Africa's development is Integration. Just 7 days ago, I was in Tanzania with President John Magufuli, where we had the privilege of commissioning the **Dodoma – Babati road project**, a 251-kilometer long road co-financed by the African Development Bank and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).

51. The road is part of the Trans-Africa Cape to Cairo Highway and will help link Tanzania to three neighboring countries with one stop border posts to facilitate the movement of people, goods, and services.

52. When one considers the fact that intra-Africa trade accounts for only 26% of all African trade, the importance of economic and infrastructure integration comes into glaring focus.

53. Integration must be multifaceted.

54. It must include digital infrastructure. One of the bank's and indeed Africa's boldest initiatives in this regard is the East African Submarine Cable System otherwise known as (EASSY). The 9,000-kilometer fiber-optic cable, runs along the east coast of Africa connecting 20 coastal and land-locked countries to each

other and to the rest of the world, and provides the last link to close the digital gap and completely encircle Africa with high-capacity optical fiber telecommunications networks.

**55.** African integration received a big boost just two months ago when the African Continental Free Trade Area was signed by 44 African countries at a summit of the African Union in Kigali, Rwanda. With 55-member nations, the continental free trade area will be the largest economic bloc in the world and potentially bring over 1.2 billion people together into the same market.

**56.** The key to unleashing the power of the regional trade block is driving private sector investments. That is why the African Development Bank has launched the **Africa Investment Forum**, along with several global financial institutions, to leverage global pension funds, sovereign wealth funds and other institutional investors to invest massively in Africa. The 100% transactional forum, which will be held 7-9 November 2018 in Johannesburg, South Africa, will help to de-risk major investments in Africa, creating a new platform for making Africa a globally attractive investment market place.

**57.** **SIXTH,** to accelerate Africa's development, we must improve the quality of life for millions of Africans. After all, 'development' without tangible impacts on the daily lives of Africans cannot be defined as development at all.

**58.** Therefore, development must be equitable. It is not just about growing large economies, but also ensuring that small and fragile states are made even more resilient. We must integrate resilient states, not fragile states. That is why the bank invests in building institutions, strengthening the delivery of public services, building human capital and expanding job opportunities in fragile states.

**59.** Last weekend I witnessed the award of the Mo Ibrahim Prize to former President Johnson Sirleaf for her remarkable work in bringing Liberia out of war and instability, to a state where it has experienced its first transition of power democratically in 74 years. She showed what can be done when women in rural and urban communities are empowered. Hers should be the rule and not the exception! This is why we are investing in girls' education and strategically mobilizing capital for the businesses of women in Africa.

**60.** The Bank has launched a major initiative, called Affirmative Finance Action for Women in Africa (AFAWA), which will help change how the financial markets engage with women and mobilize \$3 billion to support women entrepreneurs in Africa – majority of the in the rural areas.

**61.** I have always maintained that a bird cannot fly with one wing. For that matter, neither can Africa. For the continent to move faster and to soar to heights unprecedented, it will be because women are no longer excluded socially, legally, and financially, and because Africa guarantees equality for women in access to land, property rights and finance.

**62.** Ladies and gentlemen,

**63.** Our future and our solutions are our own. They will be self-made and not imported. They must be transformational, fundamental, and not tangential. They must be permanent and not temporary.

**64.** As I bring this presentation to a close, join me in thinking about this for a moment ...

**65.** Africa is the world's fastest-growing continent. Its population in 2050 will be equal to the current population of China and India combined. Consumer spending in Africa is projected to double to \$1.4 trillion by 2020, and business-to-business spending will reach \$3.5 trillion by 2025.

**66. This**, is why Africa must think big and futuristically. Africa must act boldly. And, Africa must act strategically to deliver accelerated development because the future is already here. It is my strong belief, that together we can add wheels to our journey and make the proverbial **6 blocks** that much quicker and sooner.

**67.** Thank you very much!

3011 words = 22 minutes