African leaders on Wednesday underscored the urgent need to fast-track the continent’s regional integration process in order to accelerate Africa’s economic transformation.

The call was made at the opening ceremony of the Bank’s 2019 Annual Meetings, in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, with the theme: “Regional Integration for Africa’s Economic Prosperity.”

“Apart and divided, Africa is weakened. Together and united, Africa will be unstoppable,” the Bank’s President Akinwumi Adesina told delegates at the packed Sipopo Conference Center.

Adesina urged African governments to work toward the elimination of non-tariff barriers. “Pulling down non-tariff barriers alone, will spur trade by at least 53%, and potentially double trade,” he said.

The opening ceremony was presided over by the host nation’s President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo. Also in attendance were King Letsie III of Lesotho; President Félix Antoine Tshisekedi of the Democratic Republic of Congo; and Ambroise Mandvulo Dlamini, Prime Minister of eSwatini. High-level government officials from Rwanda, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, and Côte d’Ivoire were also present.

In his opening speech, President Obiang Nguema Mbasogo recalled that Equatorial Guinea, once one of the poorest countries in the world, has since been radically transformed with one of the highest per capita incomes on the continent.”

“For me, development is not about per capita income, it is about expanding the opportunities for the people to live a more dignified life,” Obiang Nguema Mbasogo said.

“Equatorial Guinea is open for business. We are committed to regional integration for shared prosperity. We count on the African Development Bank to help us achieve economic diversification and the consolidation of social equality.”

Regional integration is one of the Bank’s strategic High 5 agendas to rapidly advance Africa’s economic transformation.

In the past several years, the African Development Bank has invested over $13 billion in the central African region. “And for every dollar invested, the region has leveraged $36, an incredible rate of return of 36 times,” Adesina noted.

The Bank’s investments include the construction of the Central African fibre optic network that connects the population with faster and less expensive access to the Internet, and is boosting businesses and regional integration.

In his remarks, Equatorial Guinea’s Finance Minister Cesar Mba Abogo said: “Progress is the realisation of utopia. This is a country of utopia in Africa, with independence and the ability to control our own destiny. It seemed impossible at
Much has been achieved in advancing integration in Africa, as exemplified by the decisive progress made by the African Continental Free Trade Area. Yet the overall pace of integration remains slow mostly because integration’s most critical drivers and enablers — especially strong institutions and effective leadership — have demonstrably not received adequate attention.

Three key institutions deserve serious attention if Africa’s integration goals are to be realised. First are the institutions that set the agenda and make policies and laws including treaties or legal frameworks that define the rules of the game, be it at continental or regional levels such as the Assembly of the Heads of State and Governments. A good treaty should enable the African Union (AU) and regional economic communities (RECs) to enforce their will through member countries while an appropriate legal framework should make political actions relevant to citizens locally, compel governments to incorporate agreed laws and facilitate the passage of these laws by national legislatures.

Second are the various organisations — supranational and national — that implement policies and programmes on regional integration. These include continental, regional, and national institutions such as the AU and its organs and RECs dealing with the various issues that foster regional integration. The compliance and implementation agencies also include formal and informal independent watch groups that monitor compliance with laws, implementation of decisions, and mobilisation to ensure that action is taken at various levels.

A third category are continental and pan-African institutions such as the African Development Bank, the African Capacity Building Foundation and the Economic Commission for Africa supporting the process and whose roles are critical.

The reality is that these institutions have not performed optimally in driving integration and there is often insufficient synergy among them. Enhancing institutional performance will require strengthening legal frameworks; identifying, reinforcing and rationalising overarching integration institutions; developing more functional institutions; and establishing critical ones such as the African Central Bank, the African Monetary Fund and the African Investment Bank.

Yet, the key ingredient for accelerating and maximising the benefits of integration is effective leadership at all levels, especially in countries where implementation takes place. Visionary and effective leadership is critical for addressing institutional weaknesses, providing inspiration and clear direction to ensure that decisions are implemented, and fostering shared values towards African solidarity and a pan-African ethos. A citizen-driven integration process certainly requires building the relevant capacity and a change in mindset by all the key stakeholders.
first in the last century but it was done. Now our utopia is regional integration.”

More than 2,000 participants are attending the Annual Meetings, a unique opportunity to share the Bank’s perspectives on the state of Africa’s economy. The meetings also provides updates on the Bank’s work and serves as a platform for the exchange of views on emerging issues shaping the future of the continent.

The Prime Minister of Equatorial Guinea, the president of the Senate, members of governments, the diplomatic corps as well as the African Development Bank’s Governors, Executive Directors, and other dignitaries attended the opening ceremony.

“There’s excitement in the air on Africa’s economic opportunities, and those opportunities are boundless. The newly ratified Africa Continental Free Trade Area will make Africa the largest free trade zone in the world, with a combined GDP of over $3.3 trillion,” Adesina said.

Continued from opening ceremony

Continued from ADFI

the form of debt from the Bank’s ordinary capital resources by 2030, to scale up electronic financial services for low-income communities.

“We believe that with the right investments in innovation and smart digital growth, the obstacles to achieving financial inclusion and greater economic opportunity for all will be overcome,” African Development Bank President Akinwumi Adesina said.

The interventions will be aligned to four pillars; infrastructure, including digital and interoperable payment systems; digital products and innovation; policy and regulatory reform and harmonisation; and capacity building. It will help to close the transaction gender gap between men and women.

Africa saw double-digit growth in mobile phone ownership in the first half of this decade, trigger a surge in innovative digital tools and services across the continent. Yet, the benefits are not shared equally. It is estimated that only 43% of adults across Africa have a banking account.

“Financial inclusion, achieved through digital financial service models, is simultaneously a powerful anti-poverty strategy and a catalyst of sustainable economic development for national and regional economies,” said Michael Wiegand, Director of the Financial Services for the Poor Program at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

ADFI’s opening project, which serves as a pilot for the facility, is a $11.3 million grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to the Bank and the Central Bank of West African States. The grant will create an interoperable digital payment system that will allow consumers to send and receive money between mobile wallets, and from these wallets to other digital and bank accounts.

“With ADFI, we are convinced that our joint efforts can contribute efficiently to bring down the barriers that still undermine the full potential of digital finance in Africa. It will enhance the delivery of quality and responsible digital financial services to the underserved, a cornerstone to inclusive and sustainable financial systems. AFD welcomes the specific attention that will be given to women's digital financial inclusion in the evaluation of the projects to be supported,” said Sébastien Minot, AFD's Deputy Head for Africa.

The ADFI will work with banks and non-bank financial institutions, mobile network operators, remittance and payment service providers, fintech companies, government ministries, regulatory bodies as well as regional economic organisations.

“Luxembourg believes that poverty reduction and social cohesion go hand-in-hand with economic empowerment and financial inclusion. ADFI provides an excellent platform for Luxembourg to combine its focus on economic inclusion with its Fintech orientation for the benefit of Africa’s poor,” said Georges Heine, Alternate Governor for the African Development Bank from the Luxembourg Ministry of Finance.

A three-member panel including Bank Vice President Pierre Guislain, Private Sector, Infrastructure and Industrialization, discussed modalities, expected challenges and policy requirements that must be in place to enable the fund achieve its goals.

Other members were Vanessa Moungar, Bank Director of Gender, Women and Civil Society, and Konstantin Peric, deputy Director, Financial Services for the Poor at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

You must be torch-bearing partners in regional integration efforts – African Development Bank VP Guislain tells African bankers

• Ethiopia’s Admassu Tadesse, named ‘African Banker of the Year’
• Cairo-based Pan-African multilateral lender, Afreximbank, wins ‘Bank of the Year’ prize.

The African Development Bank Group on Tuesday urged financial institutions in Africa to use their investments and other business portfolios to deepen regional integration efforts for the economic transformation of the continent.

“We need you African bankers and African financial institutions to be actors of this regional development, to invest across borders, to finance trade and investments and make regional integration a reality.” Bank Vice President for the Private Sector, Infrastructure and Industrialization, Pierre Guislain said at this year’s African Banker Awards in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea.

The Awards, held annually on the sidelines of the Bank’s Annual Meetings, have become the Oscars of African banking, celebrating excellence in banking and finance on the continent. The Bank is holding its 54th Annual Meeting in the central African country on the theme: “Regional Integration for Africa’s economic prosperity.”

The two big awards of the night went to development finance institutions. The President of Trade and Development Bank (TDB), Ethiopia’s Admassu Tadesse, was adjudged ‘African Banker of the Year’, while Cairo-based Pan-African multilateral lender, Afreximbank, won ‘Bank of the Year’.

TDB has grown its portfolio five-fold since Tadesse took over as President, largely increasing its presence in East and Southern Africa. Afreximbank in the past 18 months has launched game changing new banking products.

Top executives in banking and finance, business leaders and the Bank’s Governors and senior management attended the awards ceremony, organised by a consortium, led by the African Banker Magazine.

In his welcoming speech, Omar Ben Yedder, Publisher of African Banker, underscored the need for banks to ensure that capital investments are deployed effectively and more quickly to help create profitable African businesses and brands. “We need to speed up the dreams of millions of our entrepreneurs in order to achieve the transformation we desire.”
Creating Decent Jobs Strategies, Policies, and Instruments


This strategic report contributes to the Bank’s efforts in promoting knowledge, education and idea sharing, whilst also providing research access. It aims to support development policies in the region across the framework of the Bank’s five key strategic priorities areas: Light up and Power Africa, Feed Africa, Industrialise Africa, Integrate Africa and Improve the Quality of Life for Africans.

A Must Read Publication

“Africa’s greatest resource is its youth population,” says Bank President Akinwumi Adesina.

“What we do today for our youth will shape the future job market on a global scale. Africa must become the world’s largest employment market, with a well-informed and highly skilled workforce, able to propel the continent into the fourth industrial revolution.”

The continent currently has 250 million young people. By 2050, this number will reach approximately 840 million making Africa the youngest continent on the planet.

DAYO GAWATI
Farmer, Nigeria

This is the third time I’ve been to the African Development Bank’s Annual Meetings - I really enjoy the discussions. I am particularly interested in the Bank’s strategy on value chains in agriculture and in training programs for young farmers. I intend to visit some farms around Malabo. There is a good level of infrastructure here.

MALEK AL-SHERIF
Banking Consultant, Liberia

This is my first time at the Annual Meetings. It’s a great experience. I have come to Malabo especially for the launch of the Digital Financial Inclusion Facility in Africa. I was attracted by President Adesina’s speech to young African leaders and by developments in the African continental free trade area.

JEAN-PAUL COUVREUR
International consultant, Belgium

This is my fourth time at the Annual Meetings of the African Development Bank and I have enjoyed the networking. I have discovered this country and have a very positive impression of Malabo’s level of development. The Bank must continue to play its leadership role, and help to mobilise the necessary resources that will make Africa’s integration a reality.

ASABA KAE
Administrative Officer, Embassy of Japan in Gabon

I am attending the Annual Meetings for the first time. It is wonderful! The Sipopo conference centre is amazing! I did not think I was in Africa, but rather in Japan! The facility is huge and spacious, with a modern design. Our wish is to see more developed African countries. We think the continent is on the right path.

PROSPER ZE OMBAME
Lawyer, Gabon

It’s my first attendance at the Annual Meetings. These meetings are organised annually by the African Development Bank and provide a real opportunity for networking and strengthening South-South cooperation. From what I hear, the Bank is strongly engaged in supporting African countries in areas such as the physical infrastructure, but also and particularly in the grey matter infrastructure: education and vocational training. I have lived in Equatorial Guinea since 2005. The country has changed a lot. It’s impressive!
An estimated **USD20-25 billion** per year needs to be invested in basic urban infrastructure and an additional **USD20 billion** per year in housing to respond to urban population growth. More than 80% of Africa’s population growth will occur in cities over the next 30 years.

The African Development Bank is supporting national and local governments with investments in:

- Sustainable transport
- Waste and pollution management
- Energy
- Water
- Climate-informed city planning
Five priority actions for the African Development Bank and for Africa – is the African Development Bank’s channel for focusing and scaling up its 2013-2022 Ten Year Strategy, to bring about the social and economic transformation of Africa. The High 5s are designed to deliver the twin objectives of the Ten Year Strategy: inclusive growth that is shared by all; and the gradual transition to green growth. The High 5s are: Light up and power Africa; Feed Africa; Industrialise Africa; Integrate Africa; Improve the quality of life for the people of Africa.
African Agribusiness, Still an Under-Exploited Goldmine

After the mobile phone, the next African revolution will be agricultural.

The next African revolution will be agricultural. In its report of September 2017 at the Abidjan edition of the African Green Revolution Forum, the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) joined one of the African Development Bank’s major ambitions: to help create SME and small-scale agro-entrepreneurs who would generate up to $1 trillion in annual revenue on the continent by replacing food imports with domestic production thanks to the rise of local-level food-processing industries.

Agribusiness is big business in Africa. It is conducted continent-wide and its great competitive advantage is itself, by creating a domestic market of 2 billion people by 2050. Africa has the resources, the skills and the human capacity to become a consumer and exporter of foodstuffs produced on its soil. Yet at the moment, its agricultural balance sheet is heavily in the red: food imports exceed $65 billion per year. If nothing is done to change the situation with regard to competitiveness, this could rise to $110 billion by 2025. The paradox is that the African agricultural sector employs more than 60% of the African workforce, half of which is women, with two thirds of the uncultivated arable land in the world. Agribusiness is a goldmine that is underexploited.

For Africa to become the world’s breadbasket, competitiveness is the main challenge. It hinges on the development of novel agricultural financing (combining public and private stakeholders), better support for small farmers (technical assistance to increase yields) and support using innovative technologies. There is a strong correlation between the rate of the use of fertilizer and agricultural yields, as demonstrated in Ethiopia’s results growing maize and flowers. Serious efforts are being made to improve productivity, and these require the support of reliable infrastructure (roads, ports, rail lines), one of the five pillars, the High 5s, of the African Development Bank’s financing policy.

Private investments are growing on the continent yet so much remains to be done. In November 2018 in Johannesburg, the African Investment Forum, held under the aegis of the Bank, highlighted the need to invest $45 billion per year (contrasted with the current $7 billion) to meet the needs of agribusiness, a key development sector. The involvement of private investors has already made it possible to create cost-effective and integrated sectors, including the poultry sector in Côte d’Ivoire, Senegal and Morocco. In these countries, increased domestic demand, massive investment, and control of the entire value chain in an ever-better structured market.

Faced with great international competition, agriculture, which accounts for just a quarter of Africa’s GDP, is far from achieving its full potential. The difficulty of accessing financing and input prices leaves African countries struggling to find the right economic model to increase their productivity and transform agriculture into a commercial activity that meets international standards. The African Development Bank’s view is that every effort should be made to radically transform modes of production and distribution and to ensure that a competitive, inclusive sector that creates wealth and protects the environment can emerge.

For “Feed Africa”, one of its High 5s priorities, the Bank uses its financial support across the continent by creating value chains and agricultural clusters, or “agropoles”, using long-term investments from international agribusiness groups. This funding promotes the dissemination of technologies and improves access to water and irrigation. Africa’s economic transformation can only come about by focussing agriculture on these new technologies to address climate change, create employment and wealth, and promote food security and health. The Bank supports and trains the young Africans who symbolize the entrepreneurial revolution now taking place nearly everywhere on the continent. Indeed, they are already shaping the coming revolution in African agribusiness.
Equatorial Guinea is the only Spanish-speaking country in Africa. French was adopted as the country’s second official language in 1997 and the presidency uses both French and Spanish. French is taught in secondary schools.

DID YOU KNOW?

Cabo Verde
Olavo Correia

Bureaucracy at the borders constitutes an enormous cost for all our countries. It doesn’t benefit anyone. If the market were free, and there were free movement, there would be opportunities for all African countries because we would have more consumers, have a larger market and more opportunities.

Chad
Issa Doubragne

It is also the only solution for the uncontrolled emigration that entices young Africans to go in search of a European Eldorado. But all that glitters is not gold. And so, while Europeans come to Africa in search of commodities or go to Asia or America for new opportunities, all these young Africans emigrating in their tens of thousands should be putting their efforts into developing businesses in growth sectors, especially agriculture and livestock.

Madagascar
Richard J. Randriamadrato

Regional integration constructed on the basis of common institutional and financial policies is not sufficient. It is essential to secure the support of the public, because citizens have to be convinced by the process and technical aspects.

Switzerland
Raymund Furrer

Africa is the world leader in mobile money-transfer services. Fast-rising internet coverage has enabled broad-based access to financial services for the wider population and businesses. Regional payment systems can potentially deepen the performance of mobile money. The African Development Bank supports payment platforms that work across borders.

Kenya
Henry Rotich

Kenya is a leader in the development of renewable energy, mainly in the forms of geothermal, wind and hydro, which cumulatively account for about 80% of the country’s energy mix. I am glad that the development of these resources was in partnership with the African Development.

Ghana
Kenneth Ofori-Atta

The framework afforded us through economic integration needs to be pursued until realised. We know the value of institutional, infrastructural and information networks for achieving this on a continental scale. We have to reinvigorate on-going attempts at the sub-regional level, since they provide useful bedrocks for continental integration. We must equally promote intra-African trade.
Skilled youth are the bedrock of an integrated and enterprising Africa

Bank policies contribute skills, training and investment to Africa’s future

A
frica’s youth population is growing rapidly and is expected to double to over 830 million by 2050. That is a trend that would surely stir envy in industrial powerhouses like Japan, whose youth population is reducing, raising fears for the future of industrial production, not to mention the cost of caring for an aging nation.

As the continent prepares for the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA), we cannot afford to leave Africa’s sons and daughters behind. Only an adequately trained and skilled workforce can turn the vision of this historic agreement into reality. When youth are empowered with the skills they need to succeed, individual countries benefit and the whole continent stands to win.

Once in place, the AfCFTA will cover a market of 1.2 billion people and a combined gross domestic product of $2.5 trillion—making it the world’s largest free trade area with the potential to generate much-needed jobs, address inequality and accelerate inclusive economic growth. However, critical skills gaps across the continent and limited public spending on youth entrepreneurship training, education and skills development has so far been a major impediment to Africa’s regional integration agenda.

The Bank’s human capital investment schemes such as the Jobs for Youth in Africa initiative, and education and skills development projects, are addressing these challenges. By 2025, the initiative aims to create 25 million jobs in agriculture, technology and other key industries across Africa, while equipping 50 million youth with the skills needed for the digital economy. Since the launch of the initiative in 2016, the Bank has created just over three million direct jobs and invested more than $11 billion in 175 projects focused on job creation, youth entrepreneurship and micro, small and medium enterprises.

The Bank also aims to create an enabling environment for the youth entrepreneurship ecosystem through a new grant facility called the Youth Entrepreneurship and Innovation Multi-Donor Trust Fund. With the support of partners Denmark, Norway, Italy, Sweden and the Netherlands, the Bank has increased the fund’s financing from $4.5 million to $40 million. The Fund benefits enterprise support organisations such as financial institutions, incubators and other agencies that help start-ups and small and medium enterprises to thrive.

In addition to youth entrepreneurship, the Bank’s investments in higher education prepare young women and men for jobs in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) sectors. With mentorship and support, youth gain more insight into the skills needed to succeed in science, research and innovation fields. To advance STEM in Africa’s higher education systems, the Bank has teamed up with the private sector, research institutions, policymakers, and other key stakeholders to support centres of excellence. These centres play a critical role in connecting young African innovators with universities, training facilities and business incubators. Another important track of the Bank’s education and skills development focuses on improving national technical and vocational education and training systems to strengthen STEM curricula and enhance the capacity of teachers to train the next generation of young innovators.

To sustain these human capital investments, policymakers must harmonise education and skills policies across Africa as part of the AfCFTA. Harmonisation of education and skills policies across Africa will promote the skills needed for future job opportunities that regional integration will generate. Secondly, Africa’s regional integration must facilitate the movement and circulation of a skilled workforce. For instance, a continental skills policy would enable an engineer trained in Ghana, Rwanda or Mauritius to secure job opportunities in Zambia, Senegal or Egypt. Regional cooperation and collaboration would allow countries to pool limited resources to accelerate investments in science, technology and innovation. Countries can work together to develop regional centres of excellence focused on critical skills areas such as STEM, which will enhance trade and improve competitiveness of the African market worldwide. These centres of excellence would also provide an important laboratory for youth to test, develop and launch their innovations. In Mali, Uganda, and Rwanda the Bank has invested over $124 million in ICT centres of excellence in higher education, which aim to create a new model of higher education in the three countries. The centres break the barriers between education and business by linking universities and training facilities to business incubators and by using digital technology to improve learning outcomes. The main goals are to give a boost to science and technology as well as to job creation: to prepare youth for the fourth industrial revolution.

Young entrepreneurs and innovators are paving the way for a new and enterprising Africa. Ange Frederick Balma, a young technology entrepreneur from Cote d’Ivoire, is a prime example. He founded a wireless technology company that operates not only in Cote d’Ivoire, but also in Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania and Zambia. Balma recently won the prize for the best technology company at the Bank’s inaugural African Investment Forum last year. “The Africa Investment Forum has allowed me to gain visibility and given me confidence in conquering the Africa territory. It was a unique opportunity to benefit from mentorship opportunities and high-quality training on how to pitch to investors,” said Balma.

Young innovators such as Balma are proof that young Africans can accelerate Africa’s regional integration efforts if given the opportunity and equipped with the right skills.
Why is the African Development Bank promoting gender issues and women’s empowerment?

The African Development Bank’s mission is to advance the regional member countries’ social progress and sustainable economic development. We know that women can be powerful agents of change and inclusive growth on the continent. Indeed, the developmental impact of women is significant. Research indicates that women reinvest up to 90% of their income in the education, health and nutrition of their family and community — compared to 30% to 40% for men. Therefore, empowering women is not only a question of social justice and moral imperative. It is also essential for the long-term prosperity of African societies. That is why the African Development Bank is committed to advancing the gender equality agenda through its Ten-Year Strategy and High 5 Agenda. There is an extraordinary opportunity to empower women through our operations, processes and policies to achieve more impact across the board in Africa. Beyond gender mainstreaming, we are also concentrating on high-impact issues with gender-targeted interventions. As part of our focus on private sector development in Africa, we are in a unique position to support and unleash women’s entrepreneurship. The African continent is home to the highest percentage of women entrepreneurs in the world: one in four women starts or manages a new business. This means that there is a critical mass of innovators and a positive trend to work with.

How can African women entrepreneurs be best supported?

We know the playing field is not level: women entrepreneurs face multiple challenges in accessing the same opportunities as men. The difference in access to finance is particularly striking, with a financing gap between women and men estimated at $42 billion. The underlying causes of this gap are linked to perceptions of risk and the reality of lack of collateral. Banks and other financial institutions perceive the risks of lending to women as greater than those of lending to men. These prejudices are reinforced by customs and systems of law that do not allow women to present guarantees or collateral when they want to create or expand their business.

Therefore, the real challenge is: how can we de-risk lending to women in order to close the financing gap and liberate women’s entrepreneurial capacity?

The African Development Bank’s Affirmative Finance Action for Women in Africa (AFAWA) program intends to close this gender gap in access to finance. Since its launch, the Bank has accelerated its lending to women enterprises. In addition, AFAWA features an innovative solution: a pan-African, risk-sharing mechanism aimed at drastically transforming the African banking and financial landscape by guaranteeing lending to women entrepreneurs. This mechanism will leverage donor funds, multiplying ten times over the guarantees through the African Development Bank and the African Guarantee Fund. Through this risk-sharing mechanism for women-empowered businesses, AFAWA aims to mobilise $300 million to catalyze $3 billion over the next five years. Beyond the financing mechanism, AFAWA’s strength resides in its integrated approach, composed of three pillars: access to finance, technical assistance, and enabling environment. Most commercial banks do not understand the specific needs of women entrepreneurs, and they often lack adequate strategies, processes, and financial instruments for this market segment. With its technical assistance pillar, AFAWA aims to assist banks in setting up specific programs, products and services for women entrepreneurs, including gender-disaggregated indicators to track and improve impact through the long-term deployment of experts in commercial banks. Direct assistance to women entrepreneurs is also included in order to strengthen their capacities to put together their projects in bankable formats and meet the requirements of financial institutions. Finally, to ensure long-term systemic change, the third pillar of AFAWA is to engage advocacy with African governments to improve the legal and regulatory environment for women’s entrepreneurship – with a particular focus on property and inheritance rights.

Through this multi-pronged and multi-stakeholder approach, AFAWA aims to disrupt the status quo and exert a transformational impact for African women entrepreneurs.

What are the specific areas where women can be empowered and where can they have the most impact?

Supporting women’s empowerment and reducing gender gaps are crucial in our work, particularly in specific areas. For instance, through affirmative procurement, we explore how public procurement processes can be used to increase the access of women entrepreneurs to business opportunities. Through
Fashionomics Africa, we support the growth of the African textile and fashion industry to open its potential for revenue and job creation, especially for women and youth. Through our work on the inclusion of women in the Information and Communication Technologies sector, our objective is to bridge the digital gender divide to ensure that women and girls participate in the digital economy.

Climate change is another priority sector: we know that climate change affects women and men differently, because of the different roles they play in society and their different access to resources. Women are more vulnerable to the effects of natural disasters, primarily because they constitute the majority of the world’s poor. They are also more dependent for their livelihood on natural resources that are threatened by climate change. That is why the Inclusive Climate Action initiative focuses on the need for transformational changes towards low-emission, climate resilient, inclusive, and sustainable development, with a gender perspective. Through the inclusive climate change adaptation for sustainable Africa program, the Bank is also providing knowledge management and capacity building activities for the African group of negotiators on gender. We also ensure that we support women in the most fragile environments. As development stakeholders, we have a responsibility to do more for the most vulnerable populations living in remote and challenging areas. Recently, I was part of a visit to Niger organised by the International Committee of the Red Cross and witnessed first-hand the multiple challenges faced by displaced populations in the Sahel, particularly women. In my conversations with displaced women there, I heard them emphasise that they need more than just humanitarian assistance – they told me they need support to access the means to help themselves. They are eager to restart the economic activities that will rebuild societies in the long run. Innovative partnerships with like-minded institutions with complementary strengths such as the ICRC, will help us reach those who are most in need by combining our experience in economic empowerment and the presence of women in the most fragile contexts.

Women are key drivers of change and innovation. Everyone working in this field must prioritise the challenges they face to make sure that women can fully play their role in Africa’s transformation.
In 2018, the African Development Bank formed an association with the Rockefeller Foundation and US computer giants Microsoft and Facebook to launch the "Coding for Employment" program, to train young Africans in information and communications technology (ICT) and to put its graduates in direct contact with employers in the sector. Presented in June 2018 at the 2nd Africa Innovation Summit in Kigali, Rwanda, the new training program was launched in September for a period of two years. It involves millions of young people and aims to create more than 9 million jobs across the continent.

The Bank has implemented the first phase of the program in five pilot countries -- Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda, Côte d’Ivoire and Senegal -- opening 14 centres of excellence in innovation, each intended to train at least 1800 young people by September 2020. Ten years from now 130 centres of excellence will be up and running in Africa.

Ms Oley Dibba-Wadda, Director of Human Capital, Young People and Skills Development at the African Development Bank, explained the aims of the program: We want to prepare the future generation of innovators and enable young women to lead the digital revolution on the continent. Investing in young people through programs such as Coding for Employment will help stimulate inclusive economic growth, place Africa and its young people at the cutting edge of technological innovation and ensure that the digital transformation of Africa is led and managed by young Africans for the benefit of Africans.

Mamadou Biteye, the Rockefeller Foundation’s Managing Director for Africa, said that the program promotes the acceleration of investments in Africa’s most valuable resource: its young people, women and men. That is why the Rockefeller Foundation is so thrilled to partner with the African Development Bank to help all young Africans realise their full potential.

The Coding for Employment program is at the heart of the Bank’s “Jobs for Youth in Africa” programme. By 2025, this initiative will have provided 50 million young Africans with qualifications in line with labour market needs and will have created 25 million jobs in agriculture and ICT, among other sectors that are crucial to Africa’s economic development.

The African Development Bank has invested $1.64 billion over 15 years in several youth training programs in science, technology and innovation. Young people are at the heart of its program for inclusive growth in Africa. By 2050, the African population will include more than 800 million young people, hence the urgency to equip them with professional skills, especially in ICT.

ICT qualifications are rapidly becoming crucial for the jobs of today and tomorrow, said Ms Ghada Khalifa, Director of Microsoft Philanthropies for the Middle East and Africa. The partnership between Microsoft and the Bank will help disadvantaged young people and women and will equip them with the qualifications they need.

Facebook’s Policy Programs Lead, Ms Sherry Dzinoreva confirmed that Coding for Employment will help young people access ICT qualifications and support them by offering real opportunities to exercise their talents, ideas and expertise for the economic and social development of the continent.

"Coding for Employment":
Training Africa's information technology innovators
Agriculture, fisheries and tourism are flourishing in southwest Madagascar. Previously, the region was practically inaccessible because of poor road conditions and the near impossibility of crossing rivers during the rainy season.

Today, thanks to US$ 70 million in financing mobilised by the African Development Bank, roads and bridges have been built. Trade and tourism have developed as a result, poverty has been reduced and lives have been saved.

Rehabilitation efforts financed by the African Development Fund have opened up the southwest of Madagascar by laying and paving 107 km of roads between Toliara and Analamisampy, and the construction of the Befandriana Bridge. The goal of the project of improving road infrastructure and promoting trade between the region and the rest of the world has largely been achieved.

A permanent connection and secure conditions for the circulation of goods has made it possible for the region to open up and to enjoy greater access. The region’s farming and tourism potential has gained visibility and access to socioeconomic services and infrastructure has become easier.

What's more, trade has increased and agricultural production has risen by 15 per cent in the region.

Ms. Lydia, farmer and President of the women’s association, Tsianisiha

“The Government provided us with equipment that enabled us to increase our revenue. Before the road was paved, we had no way to transport our products to other regions. Now we can do so easily. With our profits we have been able to pay our children’s tuition.”

Juliette and Blaise Retrama, farmers, wholesalers and hotel proprietors, Ankililoake, Toliara

“We have been wholesalers and farmers for 16 years and hotel proprietors for 10. Before the roadwork was completed, few guests visited the hotel and we had a hard time selling our farm goods. Now we receive more guests and we are looking to expand our business.”

Razay Zanabaindrano, pharmacist and midwife, Ankaraobato, Toliara

“When the road was unpaved, it was difficult to transport ill people to the hospital in Toliara. One day, a person who was being transported in a cart died before he could be transferred to a vehicle and taken to the hospital. The new road has saved many lives.”
High Level Luncheon: The President of the Bank surprises H.E. Felix Tshisekedi on his birthday

High-Level Presidential Dialogue: H.E. Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, President of Equatorial Guinea

Formal Opening Ceremony – Group photo

From left to right: His Majesty King Letsie III, King of the Kingdom of Lesotho, Dr. Akinwumi A. Adesina, President of the African Development Bank Group, H.E. Felix Tshisekedi, President of DRC, and H.E. Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, President of Equatorial Guinea

Formal Opening Ceremony – H.E. Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, President of Equatorial Guinea and Dr. Akinwumi A. Adesina, President of the African Development Bank Group

High-Level Presidential Dialogue – The panelists: His Majesty King Letsie III, King of the Kingdom of Lesotho, Dr. Akinwumi A. Adesina, President of the African Development Bank Group, H.E. Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, President of Equatorial Guinea, H.E. Felix Tshisekedi, President of DRC, Eswatini Prime Minister, Mandvulo Dlamini with the moderator Bronwyn Nielsen.

High-Level Presidential Dialogue: H.E. Felix Tshisekedi, President of DRC

High Level Luncheon: The President of the Bank surprises H.E. Felix Tshisekedi on his birthday

High Level Luncheon: Guests toast H.E. Felix Tshisekedi on his birthday

High-Level Presidential Dialogue: H.E. Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, President of Equatorial Guinea,