

Welcome address
African Innovators and inventors: unlocking growth potentials for Africa
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by
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Ladies and Gentlemen, it is indeed my pleasure to welcome you to this seminar on Innovation and Inventions from the African perspective.

Recent history continues to show that Africans from the continent and Africans in the diaspora are making incredible and fascinating contributions in all sectors of industry and society. Against all odds, many continue to master the art of innovation and exceptional creativity.

Some of these innovative activities will be showcased during today's seminar. However, let me just mention a few examples for which we were not able to get the initiators to be here with us today.

- Did you know that the traffic light, elevator, and the pressure cooker all have one thing in common - they were invented by Africans
- Paul Kaine, a Nigerian engineer, invented a pocket electronic map. This invention was patented in France and now all over the world.
- George Kabiru, a 44-year-old resident of Nairobi, Kenya invented an alarm-fitted television set, a manually operated washing machine and a stove built of wood and windows
- In South Africa, an entrepreneur has recently come up with a response to the housing of disaster stricken population – a foldaway house - complete with door, windows and electrical fittings - that can be erected in five minutes. Of course, we are aware of a number of innovative ideas and inventions from that country including the CAT scan.

I am sure that there are a lot of inventions and innovative ideas out there. However, despite the increase in achievements it appears that the terms "African" and "Innovation" or "Invention" are still incompatible. Lack of support and in many cases lack of awareness stifles invention, innovation and impoverishes the economic growth of many African countries.

But I hasten to add that a number of recent events will tend to show that the problem is now being considered at different levels of the African continent and internationally. Thus for example,

- 1) African science ministers met last month in Cairo, Egypt did recommend a number of measures to promote science and technology across the continent for endorsement at AU summit of heads of states. Some of the key recommendations included in the Cairo declaration is the expressed need to:
 - Declare 2007 as the year to launch the building of constituencies and champions for science, technology and innovation in Africa
 - Promote research and development (R&D) and develop innovation strategies for wealth creation and economic development by allocating at least 1% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to R&D by 2010 as agreed by Khartoum Decision (EX. CL/Dec.254 (VIII));

- Approve the establishment of a Pan-African Intellectual Property Organization (PAIPO);
 - Support South-South cooperation in science, technology and innovation and enhance its role in international partnerships
- 2) There is a powerful symbolism in the decision of the Rwandan government to convert a former military barracks into the Kigali Institute of Science, Technology & Management (KIST), inaugurated in 1998. KIST is now training more than 3,000 students.

In today's seminar we have tried to bring together two sets of distinguished speakers;

- On the one hand, we have with us today a number of Africans with innovative and inventive ideas to showcase what they have been doing and to share with us some of the challenges they had to overcome.
- On the other hand, we are delighted to welcome a number distinguished speakers from institutions who we hope will share with us what incentives, programs and other avenues of support available to assist in the protection of ideas and in the translation of ideas into concrete products.

Let me end with this quote:

Africans invented walking! But as usual we never wanted to profit from it, brand it or commercialise it! We sat back, relaxed and let the Americans run away with the idea! Hurray to Africa, what would the world be like if Lucy had not taken that first step? ("Lucy" or Dinkenesh is one of the oldest known hominids (who preceded humans) and was found in Ethiopia.)

I sincerely hope that this seminar will contribute to putting innovation and inventions in and by Africans in the spotlight and provide budding innovators with the platform to start translating their ideas into concrete realisations and products.