

SPEECH

by Junior Minister of Finance, Hon Dhaneshwar Damry

On the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the African Development Bank

4th April 2025

My colleagues Ministers

Members of the Diplomatic Corps

Mr Gerard Bussier, Executive Director representing Botswana, Malawi, Mauritius and Zambia, African Development Bank

Mrs Leila Mokaddem, Director General – South, African Development Bank

Mr Ramakrishna Sithanen, Governor of the Bank of Mauritius

Distinguished guests, excellencies, ladies and gentlemen

All protocols observed

It is a great honour to welcome you to the 60th anniversary celebration of the African Development Bank here on our beautiful island of Mauritius.

Sixty years ago, Africa was emerging from one of the darkest periods of its history—colonization. For far too long, our nations had been deprived of their resources, their sovereignty, and their dignity. The road to rebuilding Africa on our own terms was daunting, but our founding fathers recognized that a prosperous future required more than just political independence—it required financial empowerment.

Understanding the scale of the challenge, visionary leaders came together to establish an institution that would unite the brightest minds on the continent. They sought to create an entity with the scale and influence necessary to convince global financial institutions that Africa was ready to embrace growth, innovation, and wealth creation. Thus, the African Development Bank was born—a bold declaration of Africa's determination to take charge of its own future.

The African Development Bank has played a vital role in meeting Africa's evolving needs. Its mission is guided by five strategic priorities:

Light up and power Africa

Feed Africa

Industrialize Africa

Integrate Africa

Improve the quality of life for the people of Africa

In Mauritius, the African Development Bank has been a vital partner to our growth projects. Today, the active portfolio of support for Mauritius includes a total portfolio of 1.8 billion US dollars. We thank you for your continued support to the development of our country.

Sixty years on, Africa is a continent on the rise. Ambitious leaders, a burgeoning middle class, a vibrant youth and thriving cities are attracting talent and investment.

However, our development journey is being tested by significant global shifts. The first and most pressing challenge is climate change.

The year 2024 has set yet another record as the hottest year, and we are witnessing the consequences—more frequent and devastating floods, droughts, and cyclones. Africa requires an estimated \$1.3 trillion in financing by 2030 to meet its sustainable development goals, but factoring in the revenue lost due to climate disasters, the real figure is closer to \$2.7 trillion, as recently highlighted by Dr. Akinwumi Adesina, President of the African Development Bank.

The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated the situation. The resulting economic downturn has pushed many countries deeper into debt, diverting critical resources away from climate adaptation and development efforts toward debt servicing.

More recently, a new approach to foreign aid and trade tariffs is reshaping the world order, with far-reaching impacts on the manufacturing industries of many African countries.

But does this mean that Africa's future is uncertain?

There are many challenges, none of which Africa is not prepared to face. Not so long ago, when African nations became independent, the mountain seemed very high. At the time, Chief Obafemi Awolowo of Nigeria, described the challenges as follows, I quote:

"After independence we will have to stand on our own and rely on our own resources... the unifying force, the cement...will be new virtues of our own. We must be capable of keeping all the diverse elements of the country together, in mutual trust and harmony and with a common national purpose." Unquote.

History has shown that in moments of adversity, Africa has always found the strength to unite and forge its own path. Yet again, now is the time to come together to face these challenges with unity.

I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to all African nations that stood with Mauritius in advocating for our sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago at the United Nations and the International Court of Justice. This victory demonstrates that when Africa speaks with one voice, it is heard.

This same unity and determination must now be applied to overcoming the financial hurdle that stands before today and the future.

(Jack Ma story?)

I firmly believe that the key to Africa's success at mobilising the resources it needs to address these daunting challenges lies within Africa.

In a not-so-distant past, I was a tech entrepreneur, engaged in the digital payments sector, I have travelled around Africa. I was impressed to see how rapidly the African markets were embracing digital financial solutions. There is an opportunity here for our legacy economies to leapfrog into the future and become frontier digital economies.

The rapid digitalisation of African economies will therefore set the conditions for an effective mobilisation of savings, that will then be channelled to the financing of African projects.

Another untapped potential lies with trade within Africa. In Europe, trade between neighbouring countries accounts for 70% of all trade. In Asia, it is 55%. We, African countries, only buy 15% of our needs from our neighbours in Africa. Why is it so low? Did we develop bad habits? Or have we not yet explored what our neighbours could sell to us and what we could buy from them?

There is so much potential there, that in Mauritius, we are actively reviewing all our trade agreements with Africa with a view to boosting our trade with African nations. Let's all do it together. Our job as political leaders is to develop an economy for Africa, by Africa, with Africa.

The African Development Bank will continue to act a catalyst for the transformation of the continent. To play its role effectively, it must continue to evolve, reinventing itself as a leader in financial innovation. It must continue to champion new financial solutions that attract both public and private investment into Africa and to facilitate trade from within Africa.

The Bank must and will become the engine of financial engineering for our continent. With its leadership, credibility, and influence, the African Development Bank has the power to ensure that investments are directed toward projects that promote prosperity, equity, and sovereignty across the continent.

In this regard, Mauritius also stands ready to play its part. As an international financial hub, our country is well-positioned to facilitate investment flows between Africa and the rest of the world. We are proudly African. We will embrace our Africanity to support the economic transformation of the continent.

Together, we can shape an Africa that is resilient, self-reliant, and ready to seize the opportunities of the future.

Thank you.