

PANEL BRIEFING

For Ms. Ahunna Eziakonwa, Assistant Secretary-General, Director Regional Bureau for Africa, UNDP

Opening Ceremony

Strengthening Africa's Financial Agency in a Multipolar World

African Development Bank Group Headquarters (CCIA Building), Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire

10-12 July 2026

Plenary Session – High-Level Dialogue 1
Highlights from the African Economic Outlook 2026

WHEN	Sunday 12 July 2026. 11:00 am – 12:00 pm
WHERE	AfDB Head Quarter, CCIA, Auditorium
SESSION	AEC 2026 Closing Ceremony
KEYNOTE SPEAKER	• **Ms. Ahunna Eziakonwa,** Assistant Secretary-General, Director Regional Bureau for Africa, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) • **Ms. Ida McDONNELL,** Head of Development Research Unit, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development **(**OECD) • **Dr. Sidi Ould Tah**, President, African Development Bank Group (AfDB)
MODERATOR	**Mr. Solomon Mugera, Director, Communication and External Relations Department, African Development Bank Group**

CLOSING CERENONY

MODERATOR

- **Mr. Solomon Mugera,** Director, Communication and External Relations Department, African Development Bank Group (AfDB)

REMARKS

- **Ms. Ahunna Eziakonwa,** Assistant Secretary-General, Director Regional Bureau for Africa, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
- **Ms. Ida McDONNELL,** Head of Development Research Unit, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development **(**OECD)

CLOSING STATEMENT

- **Dr. Sidi Ould Tah**, President, African Development Bank Group (AfDB)

CLOSING REMARKS

BY

AHUNNA EZIAKONWA

UN ASSISTANT SECRETARY GENERAL

UNDP AFRICA DIRECTOR

8th July 2026 -- DRAFT

Distinguished guests,
Esteemed colleagues:

We are living through a definitive moment in history. A time when the African continent is being called to fundamentally rebuild its financial architecture to withstand a rapidly shifting economic and environmental landscape. We must accomplish this in an era of unprecedented volatility. Data from the World Meteorological Organization shows that global climate- and weather-related disasters have multiplied fivefold over the past 50 years. The Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters reports a staggering 180 percent spike in the frequency of floods across Africa since the turn of the century. Compounding this, an eightfold increase in global financial openness since 1970 means that external shocks become domestic crises more easily, and with terrifying speed. We are experiencing this right now as the effects of the Middle East crisis ripple through our economies.

As we conclude this landmark gathering that includes this year's African Economic Conference and the historic launch of the African Chief Economists Network, we must recognize that this is not just another closing ceremony. This is a turning point. Over the past three days, we have engaged

in a rigorous, strategic deliberation on how to anchor Africa's sovereignty in a fractured global landscape. The decisions we make today, the policies we design tomorrow, and the unity we forge through these networks will determine whether Africa remains a spectator in the global arena or emerges as the primary architect of its own destiny.

We opened this conference acknowledging that the world is undergoing seismic geo-strategic shifts. The fracturing of traditional trade alliances, intensifying economic security concerns, and regional supply chain shocks present real and immediate risks to African macroeconomic stability. The ongoing conflict in the Middle East has laid bare these structural vulnerabilities, dragging our 2026 economic growth forecast down from 4.2 percent to 3.9 percent, and precipitating sharp inflationary spikes across the continent. Crucially, these shocks hit women the hardest, because women make up the vast majority of Africa's informal traders and smallholder farmers. They bear the brunt of these economic disruptions while continuing their primary role of sustaining families and communities.

It is worth recalling that our deliberations have emphasized that this shifting global architecture is an unprecedented opportunity for Africa to innovate, integrate, and unlock its immense potential. Solutions must be homegrown, powered by Africa's own human, mineral, and environmental assets. Africa's $3.4 trillion green economy can drive the continent's green energy transition while unlocking some $6 billion in carbon market revenue annually. Also, with a median age of just 19 years, Africa's youth remains the world's ultimate engine for innovation.

Together we can accelerate this transformation by fully unleashing the digital economy. In 2025 alone, mobile technologies and services contributed a staggering $240 billion to Africa's economy, roughly 8 percent of our collective GDP. Furthermore, this dynamic ecosystem supports approximately 13 million jobs. By scaling digital connectivity, investing in tech infrastructure, and rolling out continent-wide e-government tools for natural resource management, we can bridge the productivity gap, eliminate costly red tape, and generate millions of high-value opportunities for our young professionals.

Simultaneously, Africa must deepen regional integration. The full implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is our most extraordinary tool for self-reliance. It is projected to boost intra-African trade by up to 45 percent by 2045, expanding our manufacturing sector by $110.3 billion and lifting more than 32 million Africans out of extreme poverty. By harmonizing customs, dismantling non-tariff barriers, and linking our domestic capital markets, we form an unbreakable buffer against global trade volatility.

Our discussions have been incredibly thoughtful and creative. But let us be entirely clear-eyed, excellent research is meaningless if it remains confined to conference halls. Our ultimate metric of success is not the volume of papers we publish, but the quantum of lives we change. We must translate our strategic thinking into the kind of tangible progress that transforms local communities and propels Africa toward the aspirations of Agenda 2063.

Global economic storms will continue to test Africa's institutions, but they can never erode the fundamental wealth, talent, and resilience of the African people. Through the newly minted African Chief Economists Network and the enduring partnerships forged here in Abidjan, let us combine our efforts. Let us move forward together with urgency, clarity, and unyielding resolve to build the resilient, prosperous Africa we all deserve.

Thank you, and safe travels.