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**OPENING REMARKS by H.E. Mr. Moses Vilakati, African Union  
Commissioner for Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy and  
Sustainable Environment (ARBE)**

**UNIDO–AUC–AUDA-NEPAD TICAD 9 Side Event on: Leveraging  
Innovation for Africa's Industrial Transformation: Building Resilience in a  
Globalized Economy**

**Yokohama, Japan, 21 August 2025**

- **H.E. Ms. Fatou Haidara, Deputy to the Director General, UNIDO,**
- **H.E. Mr. Ogushi Masaki, State Minister, Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry of Japan,**
- **H.E. Ministers and distinguished heads of delegation,**
- **H.E. Nardos Bekeleb-Thomas, Chief Executive Officer, AUDA-NEPAD**
- **Leaders from Smart Africa, development banks, and the private sector,**
- **Colleagues from academia, civil society, and the media,**

It is an honour to join you in Yokohama for TICAD 9. I extend our deep appreciation to the Government and people of Japan for their warm hospitality and Japan's steadfast partnership with Africa. The Japanese ethos of **Kaizen, emphasizing "continuous improvement,"** and the spirit of resilience resonate profoundly with Africa's journey toward transformation, sustainability, and shared prosperity.

**Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Africa's pursuit of inclusive and sustainable industrialization unfolds amid rapid technological advancements, shifting global value chains, and mounting climate and geopolitical challenges. Yet, our continent holds tremendous potential to expand innovation ecosystems, with more than 600 hubs, and the continental market of the AfCFTA uniting over 1.4 billion people and a combined GDP exceeding \$3.4 trillion.

Moreover, we must confront persistent structural challenges, as Africa's share of global manufacturing remains under 2%, and the proportion of medium- and high-technology manufactured goods has stagnated at around 15% for decades. Massive infrastructure gaps, fragmented regulatory environments, and limited R&D investment constrain our ability to scale innovation and build resilient industries.

This is why the theme of this event is timely, as we discuss strategies to translate innovation into competitiveness, jobs, and value addition across various sectors, including agriculture, manufacturing, energy, and the blue economy.

**Excellencies,**

Allow me to reflect on concrete pathways:

- From farm to factory, precision agriculture, agro-processing, and digital logistics are connecting our farmers to markets, reducing losses, and driving rural industrialization. Across the African continent, the evolution of agro-industrial parks is demonstrating how coordinated investments in energy, water, standards, and skills can unlock value chains.
- Modernising manufacturing through digitalisation, robotics, and green technologies in alignment with Japan's Kaizen initiative improves quality, productivity, and resource efficiency, especially for SMEs.

- Youth and innovation ecosystems are transforming our demographic dividend into an innovation dividend. With targeted skills, incubation, and finance, Africa's startups and research institutions are co-creating solutions that are both locally relevant and globally impactful.
- The blue economy, encompassing sustainable fisheries and aquaculture, as well as marine-based renewable energy and coastal tourism, drives value addition and livelihoods while protecting fragile ecosystems.

These pathways align with Agenda 2063 and are reinforced by the Joint Communiqué of the 2024 TICAD Ministerial Meeting, which reaffirmed the AU–Japan partnership for a prosperous and resilient Africa.

**Excellencies:** Japan's collaboration with Africa—through initiatives such as Kaizen, quality infrastructure, One-Stop Border Posts, and technology transfer—has delivered tangible gains. UNIDO's technical expertise has been invaluable in advancing cleaner production, SME upgrading, and industrial statistics that guide policy. AUDA-NEPAD and Smart Africa are strengthening continental platforms for innovation, digitalization, and enterprise growth.

To accelerate impact, I would like to propose four areas for deeper cooperation.

1. We must scale technology transfer and co-creation in the areas of Research and Development (R&D), standards, certification, and scaled mechanisms in AI, robotics, advanced manufacturing, and green tech.
2. Energize regional value chains under the AfCFTA by harmonizing regulations and quality standards, and deploy digital trade facilitation and smart logistics.
3. Finance for resilience and green industrialization through blended finance and de-risking instruments for clean energy in industrial zones, resource efficiency, and circular economy projects.
4. Co-designed curricula, TVET-apprenticeship pathways, and leadership programs for women and youth in manufacturing, agritech, and the blue economy.

**Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I also propose that we identify a set of flagship initiatives to pursue:

- A Japan–Africa Green Industrial Zones Initiative focused on renewable energy, resource efficiency, and circularity.
- Regional agro-processing value chains tied to AfCFTA corridors, with digital traceability and logistics.
- A Blue Economy Innovation Facility to scale sustainable aquaculture, fisheries management, and coastal resilience.

As we co-create these solutions, the African Union stands ready to work with UNIDO, AUDA-NEPAD, the Government of Japan, development banks, and the private sector to accelerate implementation and track progress through clear metrics on productivity, job creation, inclusivity, and sustainability.

**Dear colleagues,**

With Japan's partnership, Africa's ingenuity, and the commitment of all stakeholders gathered here, we can move from promise to performance by building resilient industries that compete globally, create dignified jobs, and steward our environment for generations to come.

I thank you for your attention and wish us productive deliberations.