

Time to move Africa from the periphery to the centre of the global economy

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The 20th World Economic Forum on Africa concluded in Dar es Salaam with a joint statement from 13 African heads of state/government who, together with more than 1,000 participants from 85 countries, declared that Africa lacked integration in the global economy despite its huge potential.

“ If there is any predicament to African development, it is this state of affairs, ” said Jakaya M. Kikwete, President of Tanzania. “ [It is time] to move Africa from the periphery to the centre of the global economy. ”

President Kikwete reminded participants at the closing plenary that the smallest share of global exports comes from Africa – just 3.5%. Just a trickle of global foreign direct investment (FDI) goes to Africa at 0.96% and the continent is not integrated into international financial markets.

“ Africa remains predominantly a primary producer and importer for industrial use. We produce what we don ’ t consume and we consume what we don ’ t produce, ” he said. “ This cannot continue. ”

To end the continent ’ s marginalization, Africans must believe in themselves and “ be the change they want to see ” was a message that resonated across the Forum ’ s sessions and private meetings.

Jacob Zuma, President of South Africa, noted that the upcoming World Cup 2010 will show the world that Africa is ready to do anything.

“ There were a lot of doubts and scepticism. But people who come to Africa will see that we are not just bushes and mountains. They will see how Africa is ready to do anything that can be done anywhere else in the world. ”

President Zuma urged potential investors to act now. “ In a short period of time, Africa is going to be the place for doing business globally. FDI will come on its own. ”

There is no time for appropriate regulatory structure to be set up before initiating public-private partnerships, advised Pat Davies, Chief Executive, Sasol, South Africa, and Co-Chair of the meeting.

“ Focus on where there are markets and opportunities and use business to remove barriers, ” he said. “ Give business reasonable certainty and predictability and we can [create more] partnerships. Companies help create regulatory frameworks by making the investment decision. ”

One of the keys to unlock Africa ’ s potential lies with young people, who comprise 60% of the population. “ Let ’ s take a bunch of young people and put their minds on fire. You should believe in the demographics [of Africa], make your human capital capable and entrepreneurship will happen, ” said Co-Chair Ajai Chowdhry, Founder, HCL; Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, HCL Infosystems.

At this year ’ s World Economic Forum on Africa, eight international companies committed to driving agriculture by creating an alliance to support the government of Tanzania in its Kilimo Kwanza Agriculture Initiative, a programme expected to spark a green revolution across the country.

“ This meeting is about making change happen and about being the change, ” said Katherine Tweedie, Director, Head of Africa, World Economic Forum. She pointed to a new fund set up by the World Economic Forum ’ s Young Global Leaders to finance solar lamp entrepreneurs in expanding their businesses and an “ historic ” session on

Zimbabwe, which took place on Thursday 5 May.

There are still “ deep misconceptions ” about Africa in the world, noted Klaus Schwab, Founder and Executive Chairman, the World Economic Forum. “ The media has a great responsibility to highlight the progress made so far and the potential of this country. ”

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