

## **Opening Comment - Australia Africa Knowledge Partnership**

Can I begin by also extending a warm welcome to all participants and thanking the organisers of this Forum for the opportunity to make some opening comments, and I would like to thank, in particular, DFAT, AAUN and UWA for the support they continue to offer in the organisation of activities that strengthen Australia Africa cooperation and partnership and for their commitment and contribution to Africa's effort to achieve sustainable development.

The focus of this year's Forum on the SDGs is a most welcome one considering the importance of those goals both for addressing the major concerns of Africa and advancing the global development agenda.

Africa is the continent endowed with considerable resources, a huge percentage of which remains untapped. With a population projected to reach two billion by 2050, it has some of the fastest growing economies. About 40% of its population now live in urban areas and it is estimated that by 2030, the continent's top 18 cities could have a combined spending power of \$1.3 trillion. It is also estimated that the continent holds 40% of the world's hydro-electric power supply potential, about 60% of the world's uncultivated, arable land and a dominant share in a number of core commodities, including platinum, chromite ore, phosphate rock, bauxite, and cobalt. And there is data which indicate that Africa's proven oil reserves are over a hundred billion barrels. And so, Africa is a continent that is key to the future of the world's economic growth because of its vast natural resources.

And yet, the continent continues to struggle in its development efforts. -a situation which highlights the imperative for strong partnerships around the world to advance our objectives. Partnerships that build on the strengths of the parties for the attainment of mutually beneficial goals.

In the search for partnerships, we are aware of Australia's interest in the security, stability and prosperity of Africa and note that, among others, it provides assistance in various areas, including in education and human capacity development. It is also noteworthy, that Australia has \$20 billion worth of Foreign Direct Investment in Africa, with about 200 mining companies running more than 700 projects across the continent.

While we appreciate the contribution Australian businesses are making to Africa's extractive minerals industry, we are also aware that minerals are non-renewable resources and therefore encourage equal emphasis on investments outside the minerals industry.

It is for this reason that we welcome this dialogue on knowledge partnerships. And I will briefly point to 3 areas for consideration. I have chosen these three because of their cross sectoral nature and therefore collective impact on several of the SDGs.

### **1. Research and development in science and technology**

Firstly, partnership is required for research and development in Science and Technology in Africa, and for sharing knowledge in our centres of excellence for research and education. Among others, such partnership can assist both in the transfer of technology and the development of appropriate technology for the continent. It will also enable the continent to retain the bright youth who feel they must leave Africa to further their studies, or to publish or develop personal expertise.

### **2. Agriculture - Health, Nutrition and food Security**

Secondly, partnership should be deepened in the field of agriculture and agro-processing to support the health, nutrition and food security areas. Australia has world class expertise in agricultural science and productivity. The two continents have similar environments, crops and

climatic issues. Partnership will help strengthen Africa's effort to address sustainable agriculture and food security challenges. Africa will gain, among others, through increased production and adaptation to variable climate, while the lessons learnt can serve as basis for developing further expertise not just for Australia but also for the Asia Pacific region which is an important constituency for Australia.

### **3. Infrastructure**

Thirdly and finally, in whichever field of relevance we consider partnership, we will need to confront the related question of infrastructure: whether we identify medical research institutions, or areas for technology transfer or development of agricultural expertise etc, the fact is that many African countries lack the requisite financing not just to provide, but also maintain the optimum infrastructure and systems to ensure the quality and sustainability of programmes.

Investment in the area of infrastructure is therefore critical to ensure that the knowledge we acquire initially is not whittled away through the lack of continuation programmes. This is the only way our emphasis on higher education institutions and research will remain relevant to the needs of the continent and the global market place.

Hopefully, by the end of the conference, we will, together as Government, academia and business, have a pathway for operationalizing the relevant partnerships for our mutual benefit.

Thank you.