



Easing movement of goods and services within Africa is critical, says DHL

A key discussion topic at the 24th World Economic Forum on Africa

15 May 2014: A key topic of discussion among global leaders at the 24th World Economic Forum on Africa was the need for free movement of talent and goods across Africa, in order to significantly strengthen businesses and boost intra-Africa trade on the continent.

This sentiment is echoed by Charles Brewer, MD of DHL Express Sub-Saharan Africa, who attended the forum which took place in Abuja, Nigeria from 7 – 9 May 2014. “There was a collective consensus among African leaders on the topic of mobility in Africa, as well as the importance of efficient border and visa policies. We have seen good follow-up particularly in East Africa and it is imperative to continue to work on the border and customs environment to grow intra-Africa trade.” says Brewer.

He says that the forum took place against a backdrop of significant economic growth in Nigeria – having recently overtaken South Africa as the largest economy in Africa – and that this has spurred investment interest in the country. “Africa is clearly on the global agenda. Despite security concerns, delegates and heads of state from all parts of the world gathered in Abuja to discuss inclusive growth for Africa.”

A key view expressed by a number of African leaders at the Forum was the need for a proactive approach to border management, which will enable trade between various regions. The creation of an environment that enables business growth on the continent as opposed to obstructing it was also addressed by various parties.

Recognizing the importance of travel facilitation and talent mobility as drivers to integrate and develop the region, President Paul Kagame of Rwanda, President Uhuru Kenyatta of Kenya and Prime Minister Moussa Mara of Mali have all signed *The Call to Action on Travel Facilitation & Talent Mobility*, which urges all African States to work together towards the establishment of joint policies and the removal of barriers to facilitate movement of people.



Brewer adds that it was also positive to witness how small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are increasingly being recognized as the primary driver of economic growth in Africa and how they are being supported across Africa. “A growing SME base will create thousands of new jobs, which is an absolute must for this ever-growing continent, as it is a critical driver of sustainable economic growth.”

Having entered Africa in 1978, DHL Express has witnessed the continent grow its economy to what it is today, as well as the evolving opportunities available to SME owners and entrepreneurs. “Nigeria, as an example, previously generated its wealth from the oil and gas industry, but today is a thriving economic hub of diversified sectors, such as finance, retail, telecommunications, as well as its rapidly growing film industry, Nollywood. The expanding sectors offer multiple opportunities to business owners looking to capitalize on the continent’s expansion and economic growth.”

Brewer adds that it is also difficult to ignore the opportunities stemming from the rising middle class in Africa. “The thoughts and preferences of African consumers are changing in that they are increasingly seeking access to new markets and this is only creating further opportunities for both local and international businesses.”

With that said, Brewer says some of the challenges SMEs face include infrastructure challenges and customs regulations and controls. “The fact that world leaders have recognized these issues and put actions in place towards easing the difficulties experienced can only bode well for future business development and success on the continent.”

He points to the commitment made by the Chinese Government to prioritize infrastructure development in African, which is necessary in order to develop connectivity and promote trade between various regions.

“Infrastructure is vital for connecting regions and by improving this, the number of investments within Africa will grow exponentially, creating further opportunities for its people,” says Brewer.

He says that in order to fuel the continent’s momentum, sustained trade from international markets, as well as intra-Africa trade is needed. “If Africa is to compete with global,



advanced countries, investment is needed in facilitating trade and the ease of doing business. We walk away from the meeting feeling positive, having witnessed various influential leaders from business, government, civil society and academia, all having similar views of facilitating trade on the continent,” concludes Brewer.

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