



THE CHINA AFRICA BUSINESS SUMMIT FORGES CLOSER BUSINESS LINKS

The China Africa Business Summit held in Cape Town on the 22nd and 23rd of October 2009 achieved its primary goal and successfully brought investors and businesses together. Even at this early stage, the partnerships formed at the event shows every sign of increasing the flow of trade between Africa and the China to the mutual benefit of all.

The event attracted 140 delegates from almost every continent. The summit highlighted investment opportunities and provided practical advice for businesses in various sectors including agriculture, finance, tourism, information and communication technologies, mining, and power and energy to attract investment and improve their business practices. It also highlighted the opportunities in the SME arena.

The China Africa Business Summit kicked off with a networking breakfast at the Hotel Le Vendome, which was attended by ministers from China and Africa, a delegation from the CABC as well as delegates and speakers from around the globe. The breakfast provided the ideal opportunity to break the ice and to get to know the participants of the event at an informal gathering - an opportunity that many took up.

The actual summit, held at the BMW Pavilion Centre, started with Ms Kellie Jane Whitlock from the Times Publications Group introducing the chairman of the first panel, Dr. Martyn Davies, the CEO of the research and analyst firm, Frontier Advisory.

Dr. Davies set out the agenda and set the tone for the two day summit, before introducing the members of the first panel and the first speaker, the highly regarded Dr Rita Cooma the CEO of the ICC Council in New York. She showed the audience a universal model for Chinese African cooperation. The presentation generated much interest from the delegates and sparked an avalanche of questions.

The first panel discussion addressed some of the major concerns about China's activities in Africa such as the hiring policies of Chinese organisations which limit the employment opportunities of the local population. The Chinese acknowledged that there is a problem and pointed the finger of blame squarely at the lack of skills in the local workforce.

Chinese organisations believe that developing the skills of the local workforce is a long term project that Africans need to embrace. They point out that they do not just build roads and stadiums they also build schools and training centres, but that it is up to Africans to use these schools and training centres to create a workforce that businesses can readily employ.

On another front the technology behemoth Huawei highlighted some of the things that it has done to improve the lives of ordinary Africans and help its own business at the same time. An example of this is when Huawei built a road to a port because of the difficulty it was having transporting its goods. The road is now used freely by the local populace as well as by Huawei.



The spirited first debate was followed by a coffee break where delegates as well as the attending press got an opportunity to question the panellist from the morning face to face.

A panel discussion on agriculture followed immediately after the coffee break. The panel was chaired by Motsepe Matlala, the Vice President of the Southern African Confederation of Agricultural Unions. The discussions centred on the different ways Chinese organisations involved in agriculture could partner with African businesses that would prove mutually beneficial.

Panel members talked about some of the farming technologies including a device that can help control fires; a major problem for some African farmers. The panel also examined the different ways of farming and looked at how the Chinese model for agriculture could be tailored to fit into the African environment. The interest in this panel discussion was such that it overran into lunch and delegates were still asking questions.

Following lunch delegates were given an opportunity to attend a workshop of their choice. The workshops were designed specifically to provide an intimate atmosphere for delegates to quiz the experts and lasted three hours.

The first day concluded with informal drinks at the Hotel Le Vendome. This again proved fruitful in terms of reinforcing the relationships that were formed by those attending the event.

The second day of the summit saw Dr Sydney Gata, the Chairman of the Rural Electrification Agency of Zimbabwe, heading up a panel on Power and Energy. The panel looked at the energy resources and the exploitation of it. They also discussed issues surrounding financing, infrastructure development, technology, international and local energy markets, social equality, and the challenges and goals for this millennium.

The Second panel of the day was on tourism. It was chaired by George Abogaye, the CEO of the Ghana Investment and Promotion Council. The panel started with a widely appreciated and well received presentation by Unarti Qobo, the Marketing and Communications Officer for Cape Town 2010. She talked about the public benefit brought about by hosting the 2010 World Cup and the economic boost that it will give the economy. She also explained the positive legacy that it will leave. The panel also discussed the fact that Africa is a major destination for Chinese tourists and the different ways that Africa can tap into this market.

The final panel discussion of the day was on Health and Medicare. This was chaired by Professor Tim Quinlan, the Research Director of the Health Economics and HIV/AIDS Research Division at University of KwaZulu-Natal. The panel discussed current medical trends, policies to allow medicine into Africa and whether or not the medicines are effective. Also examined were the policies to increase the right to healthcare. Again just like all the other panels many questions were raised by an appreciative audience.

The event came to an end at the BMW Pavilion with a number of potential partnerships in the pipeline. The summit proved so successful in paving the way for future partnerships that the CABC asked for a declaration that their delegation and others attending the event could sign which would highlight the importance of what had just taken place. There was also an overwhelming demand from all those present to make this an annual event.

The evening concluded with a cocktail reception at the Hotel Le Vendome where the delegates had an opportunity to enjoy drinks, food and the music. ■