

Collaboration is crucial to boosting trade in Africa, says DHL

Business leaders from around the world gathered in Cape Town last week at the World Economic Forum (WEF) on Africa under the theme, Then and Now: Reimagining Africa's Future. According to Charles Brewer, managing director of [DHL Express Sub-Saharan Africa](#), the forum's theme could not be more fitting given the rise of Africa over the last few decades.

Plenty of untapped opportunities



Charles Brewer

Whilst participating in various panel discussions at the conference, Brewer said that despite Africa being one of the last frontiers for economic growth and development, leaders need to urgently determine the best approach for the continent going forward and work hard to implement it. To ensure that Africa is equipped to maintain and exceed its current growth trajectory, business leaders, government and the community need to work together towards making Africa easier to do business with.

He says that a strong growth engine for the continent is the rise in small and medium enterprises (SMEs). "The region offers plenty of untapped opportunities, which pave the way for SMEs to fill the gaps not presently being catered for by larger corporations. Manufacturing, on a large scale, is still somewhat embryonic in Africa and as such, there is a definite opportunity for SMEs that operate in the manufacturing industry."

Africa should focus on developing connectedness

Having set up in Africa in 1978, DHL is today present in every African country and territory and the company is very familiar with the continent's unique challenges and characteristics. Brewer says that the biggest game changer for Africa going forward will be its ability to boost connectivity and intra-Africa trade.

He points to the most recent DHL Global Connectedness Index, which revealed that Africa is the world's least connected continent, when considering the ease of moving people, trade, information and finance. "All African countries should therefore be focused on developing connectedness on the continent and building trade relationships," says Brewer.

A need to boost the level of trade

According to a panel discussion on the Future of Trade which took place at the WEF on Africa forum, the participants highlighted the fact that just 12% of African countries' total trade is with each other, and the continent only accounts for 3% of value addition in global trade.

"Africa needs to remove the obstacles which hinder the ease of doing business and continually investigate new trade agreements in the region, as these have the potential to boost the level of trade significantly. Africa has already benefited from several trade partnerships such as the East Africa Community (EAC) and ECOWAS and the imminent launch of the Tripartite Free Trade Area. These are significant developments for Africa - and it is crucial that these collaborative relationships continue and more importantly, that they be implemented consistently."

"Government and the private sector therefore need to work together to create a sustainable and inclusive environment, and work on solutions to make it easier to conduct business and for the business environment to flourish. Attending a forum such as WEF definitely enriches your knowledge, but what I find most valuable, is that a lot of the discussions challenge your beliefs and value sets. As an example, the sessions about gender equality in the workplace, digitisation across Africa

and being a socially responsible organisation that delivers shared and inclusive value have really reignited my focus areas. These have always been a top priority for DHL, but it is always great to hear how other organisations are managing these issues and to learn from them." concludes Brewer.

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