



Press Release

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Investment Pitches, Power Challenges and a Digital Future

“The ability for government and the private sector and investors to converge on expectations,” is how Riccardo Ridolfi., the director & founder of Absolute Energy Capital, describes the EU-Africa Business Forum’s Investment Pitches session, which was first held in 2014.

The session, which took place in the afternoon of the Brussels forum at the European Development Days yesterday (June 7, 2017), presented an opportunity for four governments – Ivory Coast, Uganda, Guinea and Ghana - to present concrete opportunities for investment to investors from the public and private sectors.

Speaking about the purpose of the session, which is expected to be a regular on future forum agendas, Mr Ridolfi said: “Governments have increasingly ambitious investment targets and draw up interesting, visionary plans, but often these don’t coincide with the expectations of investors. On the other hand investors are seeking to deploy liquidity and are complaining that they don’t have bankable projects.”

The majority of the pitches yesterday were focused on ICT and telecoms, which Mr Ridolfi said was enjoying tremendous success in Africa. “We are seeing huge opportunity with technology enabling a lot to be with a little in rural Africa,” he said.

Bridging divides

The impact of digitalisation was a theme echoed in another afternoon session titled ‘Bridging the Digital Divide in Africa,’ one of the three high-level round table debates that took place yesterday.

Alexander De Croo, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Development Cooperation, Belgium, who moderated this debate, was keen to understand what policies could aid digital development on the continent.

Michel Reveyrand-de Menthon, an advisor to the chairman and CEO of Orange, said the challenges were multidimensional. Many countries in Africa still didn’t see digital as important, he said, so the EU’s decision to include it in development policy is crucial.

Panellists agreed that investment in ICT infrastructure should be a priority, as it could have wide-ranging impact. Walter Mayer, CEO and founder Progis SA, a technology firm specialising in applications for agriculture in rural areas, said that today Africa had to import food but by harnessing technology this could change in a short period. One of the challenges though was stakeholder cooperation. Nevertheless Mr Mayer believed that “ROI in agriculture could be tremendous if it is

done correctly, and big, but you cannot do it small.”

The agribusiness debate continued later in the afternoon in another high-level debate titled ‘Innovative agriculture for the next generation farm’.

Power play

The third, and most heated, high-level debate titled ‘scaling power sector investments with a creditworthy purchaser’ was competently moderated by Penny Herbst. Ms Herbst, an energy expert with 30 years experience mainly at Eskom, South Africa’s national power utility, is also a non-executive director of Africa GreenCo, which was the focus of this discussion.

Africa GreenCo, a public private partnership, is aiming to act as an intermediary and increase private sector investment in energy generation in sub-Saharan Africa by mitigating the credit risks. Creditworthiness of off-takers is of the big challenges for the sector, said founder and CEO Ana Hajduka who is “hoping to prove that you can leverage much more private sector capital.”

Ms Hajduka fielded some tough questions, both from fellow panelists and the audience, not least from Seyno Nafo, chair of the Africa group of climate negotiators. He started by saying that “nothing is easy in Africa, and solving the energy challenge will require multiple diverse interventions.”

The intensity of this power debate is a clear indication of the challenges and opportunities ahead. Through its proposed *European External Investment Plan*, the European Union is committed to playing its role in the future of Africa. The plan will be launched at the 5th Africa-EU Summit in Abidjan, Ivory Coast in November.

