

Why Poland Is Looking to Invest More in Rwanda

BY PETERSON TUMWEBAZE

KIGALI, Rwanda, July 02, 2014 (The New Times) -- Francine Umutesi, the international relations executive for the Poland-Africa Business Partnership and Cooperation at the Central Poland Chamber of Commerce told The New Times' Peterson Tumwebaze how the new Polish business initiative, "Go Africa programme" could boost Rwanda's foreign direct investments and spur economic growth. Umutesi is also the president of Rwandan Diaspora in Poland.

What is the Polish business initiative that you are trying to promote in Rwanda and Africa generally all about?

The Polish government has realised that Africa is becoming a more productive partner businesswise and wanted to take this opportunity to another level.

The primary role of the "Go Africa programme" is to forge business partnerships between Polish investors and African entrepreneurs to promote growth of the continent.

The programme supports Polish investors interested in doing business with Africa. This also includes giving loans to facilitate business partnerships in Africa.

A \$500b fund was established to support this initiative across the continent.

How can Rwanda become part of this initiative?

The idea of the Poland-Africa partnership is to improve trade and investment between the two sides. We have already signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with Rwanda's private

sector and are encouraging Polish business people to invest in the country.

We are also working with the Ministry of Education to establish a Polish school to support capacity building initiatives and act as a focal point for both sides to exchange information on the existing business opportunities.

Which sectors should Rwanda market under this programme?

Agro-processing, mining and information communication technology are some of the areas in which Rwanda could benefit if it partners with Poland.

Rwanda could exchange tea and coffee for the hi-tech agro-processing and mining technologies, for instance. Food processing is the other area where Rwanda has a great chance because there are many Polish investors who want form joint ventures with local entrepreneurs in this sector.

The good news is that once local partnership is identified, funding will immediately be availed, so it's up to the private sector to market its potential.

It's important for the private sector players to form beneficial partnerships; that's why we have invited Rwanda to participate in the next Poland-Africa Business Congress due in November.

There are many trade barriers that often make it difficult for exports from Africa, Rwanda inclusive, to penetrate European markets. What should be done to ease trade between the two continents?

There is need to ensure product quality and standards are observed. Also, enhancing partnership will boost trade between the two sides; there is no doubt that Africa offers European investors, including Poland, great business opportunities.

African countries should also market their products and opportunities because some investors still do not know that a lot has changed on the continent in terms of trade, market share and technology; so this information has to be put out there. Investing in vocational training will not build a skilled labour force that will ensure goods produced are of the right quality and can compete on the world market.

You recently launched a book, 'Forgiving the Rwandan way'. What inspired you to write this book?

Most people when you talk about Rwanda they only think of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, and not enormous business reforms the country conducted.

But also people need to be told about the truth to learn from Rwanda's experience of using forgiveness as a unifying factor towards economic growth. **(Source: The New Times)**