

African Women Form Trade Bridge With Turkey

By Amina Al-Hassan

ISTANBUL, Turkey, March 20, 2014 (The Daily Trust) -- Women in the emerging and developing world are considered important in entrepreneurship because, as participants at the recent African -Turkey Women Trade Bridge conference in Istanbul, Turkey chorused, women entrepreneurs demonstrate the power and promise of entrepreneurship more when it comes to expanding the array of opportunities available to them.

The Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists of Turkey (Tuskon) held its first Turkey-Africa Women Entrepreneurs Trade Bridge Conference early March in Istanbul, Turkey. Tuskon, Turkey's largest business confederation, gathered over 38 African countries, more than 500 African women entrepreneurs and 448 Turkish businesswomen in Istanbul for a four-day conference at the Convention Centre of Wow Hotel in Istanbul, Turkey to talk about new business opportunities both in Turkey and Africa.

The summit themed, "Africa-Turkey Women Entrepreneurs Trade Bridge", was done to create a platform for African businesswomen to meet with Turkish manufacturers, business investors, industrialists and exporters.

Declaring the conference open, Tuskon president Mr. Rezanur Meral acknowledged that Africa and Turkey had developed a strategic partnership that would encourage and create a framework for cooperation of trade at all levels.

Meral said Africa was the most promising continent in the world, recording an economic growth of 5.2% in 2013, while most countries elsewhere are still struggling to come out of their economic recess. "We are excited that such a conference came to reality because this programme constitutes one of the most important steps taken by Tuskon's women's entrepreneurs towards building everlasting bridges and forming another pillar of friendship ties with their sisters in Africa."

The Tuskon president expressed the Turkish business community's readiness, with a view of realising the goals of its friends and partners in Africa, to share its industrialization, experience and know-how to help overcome business challenges on the African continent. He said the confederation would discuss opportunities, encourage business people, provide exchange of information and assist in vigorous entrepreneurship and SMEs development.

Discountenancing the belief in some quarters about male superiority in business matters, participants at the conference stressed the power of women in contributing to business life. The conference was organised as an avenue to highlight that inherent potential that women entrepreneurs in Africa and Turkey possess.

In her welcome address, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, chairperson of the African Union Commission (AUC), represented by her deputy, Mr Erasmus Mwencha disclosed that, "African women are responsible for 50 to 70 per cent of food production but earn less than one per cent of the economy, including land." Dlamini-Zuma believed Africa is poised for growth but this, she

pointed out, "can only be fully potentially achieved if women are given equal opportunity in developmental issues."

Observing that Africa has delivered strong economic growth over the last decade, the AUC chairperson said Africa is becoming an increasingly attractive hub for foreign investors as a result of the sound macro-economic policies being implemented now.

She added that though Africa is faced with a lot of challenges, business summits like the trade bridge conference would soon situate it in its rightful place on the global map.

She stated that a lot more investment opportunities await Turkish investors and the world at large if only they can focus on some of the key areas in Africa. In her words, "by 2050, Africa will be capable of supplying food to over nine billion people in the world due to its agricultural potentials."

Dlamini-Zuma went on to name some sectors that foreign investors could tap into, with agriculture the first point of call. She stated that Africa has the world's largest uncultivated land lying idle yet to be explored and with the world's population continuing to increase rapidly, global agricultural producers must rise to feed the growing numbers.

She gave an example of Nigeria, which she identified as having a huge potential for agricultural production. "Nigeria is one country blessed with cotton production which Turkish businesswomen could be a huge beneficiary from."

The good news here is that private investors are increasingly moving into agricultural production in Africa, although with men still dictating the pace. Those investors are not looking the way of tourism yet; tourism is one area always mentioned as unexplored in Africa. It is expected that in the year 2014, 50 million tourists would explore Africa, which will provide several opportunities in Africa's tourism.

ICT, which is one of the fastest growing and most promising sectors in any part of the world, also remains untapped in Africa. Mining and infrastructural development were also mentioned as promising investment friendly sectors in Africa.

In concluding her speech, Dlamini-Zuma said that for a win-win partnership, Africa welcomes all those who wish to support Africa's development priorities aiming at processing and adding value to raw materials, regional integration, capacity building and human resource development.

"The whole world is focusing on having economic ties with Africa, so I urge Africa to make good use of the opportunity. Africa is the future of the world," she maintained.

A memorandum of understanding was signed by Tuskon and the African Union Commission to enrich and foster economic ties with the two partners. Business deals were also sealed and a lot of business opportunities developed among the women.

Nigerian delegates comprised over 17 different individuals and companies representing different sectors of the Nigerian economy. Representative of head of the Nigerian, Turkish Business Association (Abinat), Mrs Ayse Yigit, said Nigeria had a lot to benefit from the trade bridge conference: "Nigeria is one of the world fastest growing economies and has a lot of natural and human resources which the world can explore. Women on the other hand move the economy and we felt this was an opportunity for women to interact with each other business wise, both from Africa and Turkey. This is a platform that would benefit all if well utilized'. I am also optimistic that the conference is going to foster positive ties with both countries. Nigeria has a lot to offer the world. With a conference like this, Nigerian women are set to take their place on the global map of business."

Mrs Maimuna Dabo Rabi, a textile entrepreneur from Nigeria enthused, "With such an opportunity provided by Tukson, I am optimistic Nigeria is set to rule the world in terms of business opportunities. African women entrepreneurs demonstrate the promise, power and entrepreneurship when it comes to expanding the array of opportunities available to them. We are extremely happy to advance economic ties and opportunity between Turkish and Nigerian entrepreneurs. As women we are set to push higher the Nigerian economy."

Mrs Helen Uche Nduji, another Nigerian entrepreneur who manufactures mattresses challenged Turkish investors over the lack of infrastructure in African countries.

"Most times, we are at a disadvantage when all investors want is to take natural and raw resources out of Africa at a very cheap rate and return them to us in finished state but at a very high cost. It would do us and the investors a lot of good if they could invest in putting up manufacturing companies in, at least, one state of each African country. Africa will continuously be at a loss if the current trend remains," she declared.

Her contribution got a response from the Tuskon vice president Mrs. Rena Tezcan Acikgoz, who said, "With a trade bridge like this, issues like that would soon be a thing of the past. The MoU signed with the African Union Commission will address and look into issues of this light and proffer solutions to them. We are out to help each other and not to deprive Africa any one of her resources. Africa is the future of the world and we cannot afford to ignore such suggestions."

Despite the security challenges facing Nigeria, Mr Meral expressed the commitment of Turkish business men and women to remain in the country to do business. "Everyone looks up to Nigeria in the global world. Business ties with Nigeria as an African country is essential," he maintained.

Africa generally, he said, is the future of the world and the trade bridge conference came up to pave a way to the beginning of that future. "Therefore, we encourage women to expand their businesses and investment all over the world and also encourage Turkish women to invest in the land of opportunities, Africa. Africa is the way to go if we must secure our future and the future of the world," he said. **(END)**