

Skills revolution puts Africa on growth path

Africa's skills revolution has put more young people in institutions of higher education, which will translate into a workforce that will grow and modernise the continental economy.



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“The skills revolution means that our young people should be educated and skilled in science, technology engineering and maths... Today’s economy needs these skills. We should not deny education to any child at any level because of poverty,” African Union Commission chairperson, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, said on Monday.

She was speaking at the State of the Continent Address in Durban. The address comes only weeks before she bows out as chair of the AU commission after four years at the helm.

Dlamini Zuma chose not to seek a second term, which means AU member states have to choose her replacement when they sit for their January summit in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Dlamini Zuma said the skills revolution will, however, only succeed through investment in education targeting these scarce skills. She singled out Ethiopia as one of the countries on the continent that is increasing its tertiary education investment by focusing 70% of its efforts on science, mathematics and engineering.

She called on other countries on the continent to follow the Ethiopian example of investing in education to reverse the trend

of poor access to higher education.

The AU, Dlamini Zuma said, has started harmonising the education sector across the continent, with 200 universities participating.

Nurturing agriculture

The Commissioner called on countries to take charge of their own resources and use them to industrialise their economies.

She said the AU has put in place a programme to encourage more young people to study agriculture.

Taking charge of agriculture would also help address the disparity between rich and poor Africans and will make countries self-reliant.

“Africa has an abundance of mineral resources, its people, land, oil and gas, and a diverse ecosystem... Yet, the paradox is that Africans are poor. If we look at the 48 least developed countries of the world, 34 are on the African continent,” she said, adding that it was for this reason that the AU introduced Agenda 2063.

Agenda 2063

Introduced in 2014, Agenda 2063 is a roadmap for Africa's socio-economic framework that is meant to eradicate poverty, deliver sustainable development, and promote continent-wide integration and political unity based on the ideas of Pan-Africanism.

The plan also aspires to deliver a democratic and just Africa, where citizens of the continent enjoy peace and security. It promises to have dialogue-centred conflict prevention and resolution, with an ambitious pledge of silencing all guns by 2020.

Agenda 2063 has already been integrated into over 25 member states' national development plans.

Dlamini Zuma said now is the time that Africa needs to unite more than before.

“It's even more important now to integrate. With globalisation and technology, [the world has become] a global village. It has now become much smaller. The economic shocks and booms affects us all.

“Diseases such as Aids, Ebola, Zika virus know no borders. The imperative for integration is even more [urgent] so that we can address these challenges together.”

Continental integration

She encouraged countries to allow for free movement of African citizens on the continent, saying it would be more advantageous.

“We are developing a comprehensive protocol of free movement and we are hoping it will be signed by 2018, with the hope that more countries will open their borders.”

Currently, the AU has in place the 30-day visa offered by African States to Africans.

The AU, Dlamini Zuma said, will also continue to lead the integration process, with the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) as the main agents for the implementation of regional agreements.

Already three RECs formed an integrated market covering 26 countries in eastern and southern Africa through the

Tripartite Free Trade Area.

The Tripartite Free Trade Area is formed by the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), East African Community (EAC), and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). It is expected to increase intra-regional trade and deepen integration through improved investment flows and enhanced competition.

On peace and security, Dlamini Zuma said the continent is on track to silencing the guns by 2020, although there are still challenges in countries like Central African Republic, DRC and South Sudan, among others.

The AU will continue to play a key role part in these countries to bring about peace.

Meanwhile, Dlamini Zuma was bestowed a Humanitarian Award for Leadership for her work by Communications Minister Faith Muthambi.

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