

THE SAVUTI DECLARATION

The First Annual Southern Africa Business Forum was held on 11 and 12 August 2015 in Gaborone, organised by Business Botswana, the Business Council of Southern Africa and the NEPAD Business Foundation. It took place in the margins of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Heads of State Summit. It brought together over 100 business leaders from across the region to identify shared priorities for enhancing regional integration through trade, investment, industrial development and infrastructure projects in Southern Africa.

The following are the key messages that emerged from the discussions that took place during the Forum and at a facilitated dialogue on promoting socio-economic cohesion held in the evening of 11 August. Additional detail is provided in the summary of the various sessions below.

SADC has extensive plans for regional integration. The private sector of the region calls for the focus to now shift to implementation. Investors require legal certainty and failure by SADC member states to implement their regional obligations have serious implications for business. The removal of access by private actors to the SADC Tribunal has reduced the legal remedies available to ensure legal compliance in SADC.

The Southern Africa Business Forum should become an annual event that provides a platform for public-private sector dialogue in SADC. Specific initiatives should be discussed further in sectoral or thematic working groups supported by a fully functioning secretariat.

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The Southern Africa Business Forum proposes the following as a way forward:

- The revised RISDP and Industrialisation Strategy acknowledge the private sector as at the centre of plans for growth and employment creation in SADC. The documents should be made available to the private sector and input sought into the activities and timelines for action, including the plans for public-private dialogue, inclusive business and creating an enabling environment that focus on implementation of specific issues.
- SADC needs to urgently address the movement of goods, services and business people in the region and provide certainty with regards to processes, regulations and timeframes. The private sector is very disappointed to see the lack of progress in the negotiations on the movement of business people under the Tripartite Free Trade Agreement.
- A SADC Railway Development Master Plan is needed as a framework for prioritised and synchronized implementation of hard and soft projects identified in the Regional Infrastructure Development Master Plan and to re-balance road/rail market share.
- The monitoring mechanism for non-tariff barriers must continue to be operational and a procedure for the resolution of priority issues should be developed in partnership with the private sector, particularly to address key transport related barriers such as harmonized road user charges and transit documentation and procedures. This could include greater business involvement in the Joint Border Committees in SADC.
- Sustainable and affordable access to energy and water is critical for all of the economic development goals of SADC. Member states must prioritise joint infrastructure projects between two or more member states which deal with both water and energy requirements. The role of the private sector lies in financing, providing innovative technologies and technical expertise.

