

IOE-BUSINESS AFRICA ENTERPRISE FORUM
hosted in Algiers on 18-19 February 2019
by the General Confederation of Enterprises of Algeria (CGEA)

SUMMARY REPORT OF KEY TAKEAWAYS

7 March 2019

CGEA-hosted IOE-Business Africa Forum in Algiers explores “inspiring, supporting and nurturing entrepreneurs” for a brighter future for Africa’s youth

More than 300 participants were present for the opening ceremony of the highly anticipated IOE-Business Africa Enterprise Forum, which was generously hosted in Algiers on 18-19 February 2019 by the General Confederation of Enterprises of Algeria (CGEA). The participation of IOE member organisations, and entrepreneurs, from across the African continent was made possible by the financial support of the European Union.

IOE members from across the African continent were among the contributors and panellists who came together for this year’s **IOE-Business Africa Enterprise Forum**. The 2019 edition was graciously hosted by CGEA, whose business affiliates and high-level national government contacts joined the young entrepreneurs, as well as the IOE and ILO representatives, who brought their perspectives to the two days of deliberations and insights.

The theme for this year’s Enterprise Forum, “Inspiring, nurturing and supporting entrepreneurs”, was widely acknowledged as a shared priority. It responded particularly to the need to put the spotlight firmly on delivering comprehensive, practical and concrete support to encourage Africa’s youth to create their own businesses. The Forum acknowledged such action as key to alleviating the high youth, and female, unemployment rates on the continent; to providing a fulfilling and rewarding future for the millions of young people entering Africa’s labour market each year; and to contributing to the sustainable development of the continent in line with the UN’s 2030 Agenda and the guiding vision of the African Union’s Agenda 2063.

The opening ceremony was honoured with words of welcome and encouragement from a host of leading figures, including Ms Saïda Neghza, President of CGEA; Ms Jacqueline Mugo, Secretary-General of Business Africa; and Mr Matthias Thorns, IOE Deputy Secretary-General, among others.

Setting the scene, Ms Neghza underlined the potential of Africa’s increasing youthful population to “provide momentum for the global economy”, as well as the efforts made by both the Algerian government and CGEA to implement programmes directed at bringing innovation, competitiveness and quality to youth-, and women-initiated SMEs in the country. Mr Thorns’ intervention called for “local action for changing the reality on the ground”, highlighting the success of national apprenticeship networks through the GAN, as realised in Malawi and other countries. He also called on employers’ organisations (EOs) in Africa to contribute to the global employers’ voice when it came to the achievement of the SDGs.

As Secretary-General of Business Africa, Ms Jacqueline Mugo highlighted the responsibility of the participants to channel their experience and expertise to ensure the right policies were in place to avert the social challenges that would continue to erupt as a result of inaction. For Ms Mugo, it was important to recognise that it was not enough to rely on FDI to unleash Africa’s potential, the answer to many of Africa’s challenges lay in transforming the rich seam of Africa’s ingenuity, which was often

to be found in the informal sector, into formal entrepreneurship. She said: “Governments need to create an environment that is conducive to home-grown enterprises...to helping our people to do business successfully”.

The idea that Africa needed to develop more intra-Africa trade, to better integrate into the global economy, add value at local level, and export more products that could compete globally, was articulated by Ms Mugo and many of the other participants. She pledged that Business Africa would push for concrete recommendations arising from the Forum to be taken up at African Union level.

The Forum provided a rich opportunity to be inspired by the journeys of the young men and women themselves who had set up their own businesses, as well as the programmes and experiences of EOs and the ILO in their support to entrepreneurs and SMEs.

Common prerequisites for business success cited by the young entrepreneurs included the need for passion, work ethic, tenacity, creativity, the aptitude to spot and seize an opportunity, and the strong motivation to find a solution to a local problem. The participants heard about young businesses that addressed personal transportation issues in busy urban areas, as in the case of Mobiticket (Kenya); the digital learning platforms provided by Shule Direct (Tanzania) to meet the demand of students; the provision of skills for the building industry by Baticonseil (Algeria), and the generation of reliable electricity by Strauss Energy (Kenya) thanks to their renewable energy product.

It was suggested, in the case of women entrepreneurs, that confidence and support even from family might be lacking and that empowering women meant building their confidence through training and networking with other women SME owners. Ms Natalie Mukundane, of the African Youth Commission, set out the key barriers to young people fulfilling their education, employment and life aspirations, including outdated and uncoordinated policies and education curricula; lack of rights for young people; lack of effective family planning; no culture of personal investment; and no seat at the table. She called for greater collaboration between the generations and for more opportunities for young people to have their voice heard in the policymaking process and contribute to the development of their continent.

Reiterating the need for African businesses to become better integrated into the global economy, ILO ACT/EMP’s Adam Greene talked about the importance of small businesses participating in global supply chains. Such participation could increase productivity through technology transfer, skills development and increased exports. SMEs could gain entry to GSCs by supplying larger suppliers to MNEs – nowadays also through digital platforms. Mr Greene, like many other speakers, emphasised the importance of regional integration – which was a vital economic driver in other parts of the world and could likewise drive African growth and jobs. Ms Jeanne Schmitt of ITC-ILO shared information on practical programmes that specifically train women entrepreneurs, and Mr Youcef Ghellab underlined the key importance of social dialogue in developing successful employment policy that delivered decent work opportunities. From the ILO Enterprise Department, Mr Emmanuel Julien explained how the ILO promoted entrepreneurship through a range of initiatives, including the Enabling Environment for Sustainable Enterprises Programme (ESEE). For Mr Julien, entrepreneurship was “a matter of empowerment”. Currently 45% of the department’s projects were being implemented in Africa, some together with ACT/EMP and ITC-ILO, in DRC, Cameroon, Mozambique and South Africa. The ILO SCORE programme had, to date, trained 1,500 enterprises in 10 countries.

IOE Vice-President to the ILO, Mr Mthunzi Mdwaba, set out how EOs in Africa could shape and influence the work of the ILO and urged them to get involved, including through the ILO country offices.

EOs, as well as international organisations, could help to promote entrepreneurship by instilling an entrepreneurial culture in collaboration with schools and other institutions. EOs shared their experiences of special programmes they had developed to attract and retain start-up and SME members. Some organisations provided free membership for a given period; had created a dedicated support team within the EO; offered access to micro-financing through their own larger financial-sector members or facilitated other forms financing, such as crowd-funding; organised networking and knowledge-exchange opportunities; provided mentoring – from marketing advice through to invoice issuing; lobbied governments for funding for training, as well as for the adoption of policies that support MSME creation and growth; collaborated with education and training facilities to design curricula that ensured skills needed to start a business; facilitated PPPs; and helped to nurture B2B partnerships.

One young entrepreneur, Mr Abdallah Djedid of Helvetia Nuts, explained how he had found it difficult to identify a homegrown entrepreneur role model when he was starting up his own business and called for an online platform to be developed for sharing success stories that can inspire other young African businessmen and women.

The IOE Regional Vice-President for Africa, Mr Mahfoudh Megateli, joined with Matthias Thorns in providing the concluding remarks and in thanking all the participants for sharing their views, as well as acknowledging the organisational support of the IOE and CGEA teams, and the EU for providing financial support.

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All the available presentations are uploaded to the Africa members page of the IOE website [here](#).