

Infrastructure Africa to focus on regional opportunities

 By [Sindy Peters](#)

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[Infrastructure Africa 2016](#) will this year, among other topics, showcase some of Africa's mega projects, address the need for public-private partnerships, and tackle gender inequality in the infrastructure space.

High-profile keynote speakers include the likes of South Africa's Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa and chairperson of the Africa Union, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma.

We interviewed Liz Hart, managing director of Infrastructure Africa, to find out what some of the highlights are at this year's conference, and what the general sentiment of investors doing business in Africa is right now.



Liz Hart, MD, Infrastructure Africa

■ ***What are some of the highlights attendees can expect at Infrastructure Africa this year?***

As always, content is king. Our content sets us apart from other infrastructure events because those setting the programme and agenda for Infrastructure Africa 2016 are Africa's leading infrastructure investors. With this year's African Development Bank (AfDB) partnership, we are hosting the Africa Inclusive Infrastructure Forum (AIIF) during the conference which focuses on empowerment of women in the infrastructure space. Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi, the AfDB Special Envoy on Gender, and several of her high profile colleagues will present the case for inclusive infrastructure. In addition, with the challenges being faced by South Africa's economy, there is a big focus on regional opportunities for South African businesses and a call to action for South Africans to look beyond our borders for new business opportunities.

■ ***How has the conference been developed since last year's event?***

The event is now in its fifth year and continues to grow year-on-year. This year welcomes the partnership of the African Development Bank (AfDB). Other partners include the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA), and the NEPAD Planning & Coordinating Agency (NPCA). We continue to have many corporate sponsors. We have the highest level of endorsement of any infrastructure event on the continent. It has become the go-to event for infrastructure players on the continent and it plays an important role in networking and catalysing new business opportunities across Africa.

■ ***What is the general sentiment of investors doing business in Africa right now?***

Although growth in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) has relatively slowed, two-thirds of the region's economies are still growing at rates above the global average and SSA remains the second fastest-growing region in the world in the foreseeable future. Africa is actually one of only two regions in the world in which there has been growth of foreign direct investment (FDI) projects over the past year.

■ ***What are some of the bottlenecks for infrastructure development in Africa?***

Many businesses think of countries or regions in Africa as single-driver opportunities, which when buoyant, offer great short-term opportunities, but when depressed, signal the time to leave. But sub-Saharan Africa's mining and energy belts that were initial drivers of development have opened up support infrastructure opportunities that offer growth prospects in the longer term. The years ahead will be challenging, not because the opportunities are not there, but because the opportunities are likely to be more uneven than before and will require a long-term investment view.

■ ***What trends are currently driving Africa's infrastructure sector?***

Low commodity prices have tempered the desire of many companies to involve themselves in Africa, but this is, arguably, the best time for those with longer-term ambitions to integrate their operations into key development nodes.

There is an evolution of infrastructure development that takes place over the longer-term and the underlying drivers will be highlighted at the Infrastructure Africa 2016 conference on 9 and 10 June 2016 at the Sandton Convention Centre. With discussions on specific project development opportunities from infrastructure players operating on the ground, the Infrastructure Africa offers businesses the opportunity to set their regional strategies for long-term growth.

■ ***In which African countries are we seeing the most progression? What's driving this development?***

In Tete, Mozambique, for example, coal and infrastructure projects have slowed, but there are agri-industrial and support infrastructure opportunities. There is also a much broader regional, national and sub-national opportunity that is unfolding from Southern to East Africa, which is becoming an energy corridor.

■ ***How important are public-private partnerships in developing Africa's infrastructure sector?***

In the face of growing international competition in sub-Saharan Africa, South African-based companies need to take a long-term strategic view of the region. Companies need to develop a local presence and integrate their strategies with the

evolving economies and underpinning infrastructure in the region. A local presence does more than wave a flag: it demonstrates commitment to the future, it allows for in-country intelligence gathering and goodwill (and ultimately contracts) from project developers and government. Without the presence of private sector companies in the region, there will be no partnerships with governments and therefore no development.

■ **What is the most critical sector for infrastructure development in Africa? Why?**

The importance of digital infrastructure in leapfrogging Africa's economies cannot be overestimated, but without physical infrastructure that provides access to water, food, electricity and healthcare, the continent cannot attain the quality and standards of life set out by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). So all sectors of infrastructure are critical for life whether it be water, transport, power and then ICT & telecommunications infrastructure which are necessary for job creation and remaining globally competitive.

For more info, go to www.infrastructure-africa.com.

Having started her tenure in the events industry by conceptualising and launching the annual Meetings Africa showcase, Liz Hart is highly experienced in the MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences & Exhibitions) market. Hart has hosted and coordinated many major trade shows, conferences and specialised events. She currently runs the continent's biggest energy, manufacturing and infrastructure events – Africa Energy Indaba, Manufacturing Indaba and Infrastructure Africa and has grown these events from scratch. She formed Siyenza in 2003, a boutique events and PR consultancy focused on service and delivery for clients. Hart has served on the Working Group of the Business Coordinating Forum (BCF) for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) and is well respected in government and business circles. She currently serves on the World Energy Council Strategy and Outreach Global Committee. Hart and her team have successfully represented South Africa on numerous occasions: The NEPAD Business Foundation that hosted the state president; a formal banquet for former president Nelson Mandela and David Rockefeller; and a private dinner for Princess Anne that was hosted by Tokyo Sexwale.

ABOUT SINDY PETERS

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