

The Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Ms Nkosazana Dlamini - Zuma has urged governments to provide women with access to land, credit and extension services as they constitute more than half of Africa's population. Speaking at the opening ceremony of the 16th Summit of the COMESA Heads of State and Government held on 23 November 2012 in Kampala, Uganda, Ms Zuma said that women are the critical half that produces powerful leaders and are responsible for the continuation of the human race.

"Women are also mainly involved in agriculture, which is the backbone of Africa's economy. Fifty percent of land in Africa is arable and has the potential to develop the African people and countries if used optimally to guarantee food security," she said.

She gave the example of China, which has provided food security and infrastructure for the citizens and experienced exponential economic growth.

She also encouraged delegates to operationalise the Abuja Treaty, which urges African nations to self reliance without cutting ties with the rest of the world.

"The fact that the growth of the African economy is driven by export in raw materials should be discouraged. Since Africa has 30 percent of the world's reserve of natural resources, there is need to change paradigm and use our natural resources as this will make a big difference in our economies."

In line with COMESA's theme for the Summit, 'Enhancing Intra-COMESA trade through micro, small and medium enterprise development', Ms Zuma said, "MSMEs are increasingly becoming a powerful engine of wealth creation in Africa as they constitute over 90 percent of businesses in Africa and are responsible for creating over 50 percent of employment. We should therefore take advantage of the sector as it is pivotal for growth."

COMESA was commended for its initiative in laying a solid foundation in trade for the African people by spearheading Tripartite negotiations which, when concluded, will create huge momentum for continental integration.

Ms Zuma encouraged delegates to exercise inclusion and equity to curtail underdevelopment as it is a threat to peace and stability.

"Conflicts threaten development and therefore, there is need for us to come up with our own solutions geared towards not only preventing conflicts but also solving those that arise. I encourage delegates to take advantage of the African Union as the premium voice of the continent in collaboration with the regional economic communities and increasing the pace for peace, integration and prosperity. This will drive Africa to take its place among the greatest."

Ms Zuma was pleased to announce that the OAU/AU is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year with a call to African nations to communicate and inform themselves of their past and future.

“As we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the OAU/AU this year, there is need for us to communicate and inform ourselves of our history and where we are going. Let us talk about prosperity and not poverty. There is need to plan a smoother route for Africa for the next 50 years so that it can become a dynamic force in the international arena as a united force of African people cannot be ignored,” she concluded.