

PATRICE KITEBI

TRANSFORMING THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO'S ECONOMY INTO A REGIONAL POWERHOUSE



Democratic Republic of Congo Minister of Finance Patrice Kitebi

BY PAUL TRUSTFULL

Minister of Finance Patrice Kitebi is working diligently to change the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Replacing the outgoing minister of finance, current Prime Minister Matata Ponyo Mapon, Kitebi is striving to change the nation's economy to both foster social welfare and increase foreign capital from private investors.

Boasting a 7.2% annual growth rate, the DRC is one of the leading countries

around the world in terms of growth potential. With the implementation of newly introduced regulation to improve the business environment and boost domestic prosperity, under the influence of Kitebi, the DRC is well on its way to becoming a beacon of prosperity within the global economy.

While Kitebi has his challenges set before him, with the support of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank he promises to greatly

address several key social and economic issues in the DRC, including infrastructure, food security and private services. While working to effect change in the domestic environment, he also is looking at bringing in foreign investors to deploy capital industries.

Rich in natural resources and human capital, the DRC holds a considerable value proposition for investors who are looking to get into the resource extraction industry. In addition to the country's

booming mining industry, Kitebi supports the forestry and agriculture industries as potential boons for exponential progress.

Growth Supported by the International Community

In early August, the DRC once again hosted the annual Africa Caucus meeting in Kinshasa to discuss the future of agriculture and agribusiness throughout the continent.

Prime Minister Matata Ponyo Mapon led the discussions and helped develop a framework to address some of the issues currently facing the African continent. His efforts were widely lauded by the international participants who were in attendance, as well as by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO).

International financial markets are still reeling from the global financial crisis, and developing nations such as the DRC suffer both directly and indirectly from the turmoil in North America and Western Europe. According to Minister Kitebi,

it is critical for his nation to work closely with the IMF, the World Bank and the G8 nations to mitigate some of these effects.

“While the headlines across the world focus on developed markets, developing markets such as ours face the brutal reality of decreased capital, both public and private, that is needed to develop our nation and build the infrastructure we need to succeed,” Minister Kitebi notes.

As a further sign of international commitment and the DRC’s leadership role within the region, President Joseph Kabila will host this year’s annual Francophonie Summit in October. The summit will not only bolster international support for growth in Francophone Africa, but also continue to boost efforts that are taking place today.

Developing the Nation From Within

The management of the DRC’s natural resource wealth to develop the nation is undeniably Minister Kitebi’s greatest challenge. In his eyes, however, the task

is even bigger than just properly utilizing, or even growing, this wealth. His biggest concern is improving the lives of the Congolese people by developing the necessary structures and framework to protect citizens and encourage their own growth.

Following the leadership goals of President Joseph Kabila and Prime Minister Matata Ponyo Mapon, Minister Kitebi is focusing his attention on creating a way to equitably create wealth and distribute the benefits of domestic resources to the citizens of the DRC. Only through the development of society—infrastructure, communications and transport—can the country be appealing to outside investors.

According to Minister Kitebi, “If your home base is not satisfied with the availability of basic goods in the nation, it will be extremely difficult to find foreigners to invest in the country.”

Developing the agriculture sector, which has great potential for investors and the Congolese population, is



DRC Minister of Finance Patrice Kitebi (center) at the annual Africa Caucus held in Kinshasa in August

particularly important for the minister. Speaking at the Africa Caucus meeting, UNIDO economist Dr. Kandeh Yumkella noted how important agriculture is to the development not only of the DRC, but also of sub-Saharan Africa as a whole: “Agriculture is the most important sector of the African economy and will have to be its driving engine out of poverty. It accounts for 65% of the continent’s employment and 75% of its domestic trade,” he stated.

Finding New Investors With the Success Stories of Established Companies

The DRC has been an international destination for investment for many decades. Rawbank, one of the premier financial institutions in sub-Saharan Africa today, has been involved in the country since 1922 and has seen immense growth in recent years stemming from the reforms and standardizations put in place by the Kabila government.

Focusing on creating transparency, many of these reforms have worked directly to alter the judicial system and to enforce law and order over everything else. By creating a system that promotes just governance and a predictable due process for infractions, the DRC is continuing to improve its image and business environment, not only for new investors, but also for long-established companies.

The recent interest in the country has sparked a frenzy to create ancillary services that are key to the nation’s infrastructure and primary industries. The recent boom in luxury hotels, for example, is indicative of the nation’s successes. The newly constructed Fleuve Congo Hotel reestablishes the standard for luxury hospitality within the DRC as well as in sub-Saharan Africa as a whole. Boasting over 200 rooms, the hotel will soon be joined by a new Hilton Group property and the Grand Hotel Kinshasa, which is managed by London-based Lonrho.

Also launched earlier in the year, Korongo Airlines, a subsidiary of the Forrest Group, provides a new standard of safety and comfort throughout the



Employees in the Kamoto underground copper and cobalt mine in the DRC



Fleuve Congo Hotel rooms afford panoramic views of the Congo River and the city of Kinshasa.

region as a primary player in the commercial aviation market. Partnering with SM Brussels, the airline will use European expertise to become one of the premier airlines in sub-Saharan Africa.

Setting the Stage for a Powerful Future

As the DRC continues to develop and create a wealth of opportunity for both international investors and its citizens, the development of business-friendly environments will be key to transforming the country into a future superpower.

Fostering partnerships, another key aspect of the country’s growth, will be at the top of Kitebi’s list as he continues to work with international partners and development organizations to lead the nation to prosperity.

Under the auspices of leaders such as Minister Kitebi and his dedicated team, the future successes of the nation are immeasurable. With positive economic growth figures unseen in most parts of the developed world, the potential for the DRC to thrive over the coming decades is looking increasingly likely. ■