

Kikwete: a hands-on approach

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Under Kikwete's mandate the country has continued to implement much needed reforms

Approaching the end of his first term in office and with his sights set on re-election in the October polls, President Jakaya Kikwete has continued with the investment-friendly policies and reforms of the previous three governments. The programme of selective privatisation has been sustained, while social spending and poverty reduction has been boosted.

The President can take a large part of the credit for the economic management which has brought sustained growth of around 7 per cent annually, underpinned by political stability and continued inflows of foreign investment. As well as steering the country through the current global financial crisis, the President has taken a hands-on approach to tackling core issues that still hinder Tanzania's growth. With 80 per cent of Tanzanians still living off the land, he tours different regions several times a year holding meetings with local people. Aware that connecting those rural communities to each other, and the world, is vital to meet development goals, he has pushed to connect his country to the global telecommunications network, understanding that economic growth can be speeded up through the provision of low-cost, mobile telephony.

Another of President Kikwete's steps to bring Tanzania in line with the global economy has been the fight to improve governance and accountability. The President strengthened the Prevention and Combating of Corruption Bureau (PCCB) in 2007, which the following year took action against a number of high-profile figures, with the prime minister and two cabinet ministers resigning, along with the arrest of other senior officials. While damaging, the scandals have also shown the strength of Tanzania's democracy with Parliament and the media playing an important role in exposing and fighting corruption.

President Kikwete has recognised that women can, and should, play a bigger role in society and the economy and has re-orientated government policies toward this end. With a view to enhancing the legal, social empowerment and protection of women there have been reviews of legislation on marriage, inheritance, rights of the child, and land and property ownership, while educational opportunities have been broadened. At the same time, the Government is looking into ways of increasing the number of women parliamentarians to 50 per cent by 2015, and the President has appointed more women

in high decision making roles in the judiciary and the executive than any other President.

Economic growth over the last five years has been led by mining, manufacturing, construction and services. Mining, fuelled by foreign investment, has grown from a low base to provide almost half of all merchandise exports. The government plans a major overhaul of the mining sector. The changes should guard against conflicts over mineral resources, enhance fiscal gains and facilitate domestic investment growth and new inflows of FDI into the sector. Manufacturing has maintained steady growth rates and contributes just under 10 per cent of GDP. But more determined action is needed to improve the business environment, say multilateral agencies.

Improving the agricultural sector – which still accounts for the largest share of GDP and provides a livelihood for the majority of the population – remains a challenge. The sector has performed poorly, due in part to drought, with an annual growth rate of just 4 per cent over recent years. In response, the government has adopted a number of measures to promote agricultural recovery following the drought-related downturns of 2005 and 2006 that have included improvements of rural infrastructure, agro-inputs, enhancing access to domestic and foreign markets, and assistance in compliance with international quality standards. He has also promoted 'Kilimo Kwanza' (agriculture first) to support both subsistence farmers and large scale commercial farming.

It is precisely in agricultural areas where healthcare, education, employment and poverty reduction measures are most needed. In recognition of the continued problem of low income and joblessness in the countryside, President Kikwete has introduced a raft of initiatives under the umbrella of MKUKUTA (National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty) in the health care and education sectors, increasing access to education for children and reducing infant mortality.

President Kikwete's presidency has been marked by difficulties: he has had to deal with the aftermath of drought in 2005 and 2006, and then the impact of the global financial crisis. But under his mandate, the country has nevertheless continued to implement much-needed reforms, the success of which are reflected by the continued growth of the Tanzanian economy, and a fast-modernising society. **F**