



# Tapping Africa's huge potential

South Africa and Nigeria are two countries which offer rich rewards for Irish companies, writes **Martha Kearns**

**A**frica holds many opportunities for Irish businesses, many of which have tapped into the vast market.

The value of Irish exports to South Africa is €218 million, and it is the biggest market on the continent for Irish exporters, according to John Whelan, chief executive of the Irish Exporters Association.

The main sectors, in terms of exports to South Africa, include computer equipment at €51 million, pharmaceuticals at €28 million, telecommunication equipment at €13 million and foodstuffs at €15 million.

However, the main growth industry is now in the services sector, according to Whelan.

"There are very significant opportunities on the services side and there is a major growth opportunity there for Irish exporters. This is from engineering, electrical and electronic services, computer and internet services to legal and other general services. It is a very wide range," he said.

"Quite a number of Irish developers have been sending their support teams to Africa, as there wasn't the same collapse in the construction sector there as there was here. There are a lot of contracts available at the moment in South Africa, as there are lots of infrastructure projects being rolled out there."

Whelan said that, once a company had got into South Africa, it could make contacts and sign contracts that would make it easier to branch into other African countries, especially on infrastructural projects.

Other African nations that were being tapped into by the Irish include Morocco, which takes €54 million in Irish exports, Algeria, which has €36

million, and Egypt at €93 million. However, Nigeria – with €196 million in Irish exports last year – is one of the countries where Irish businesses are seeing real potential.

## Nigeria

**W**ith a population of more than 150 million, Nigeria has been identified by the Irish Exporters Association as having business opportunities, particularly in the 'green and clean' technology sectors.

Whelan said that vast opportunities they existed across consumer markets, business-to-business, financial products and services.

"The liberation of the telecoms sector in Nigeria opens up opportunities for mobile software products to be developed," said Whelan.

"Ireland is the second-largest software exporter in the world and we have a wide range of SME [small and medium-sized businesses] software companies, many of which have grown out from larger companies. The opportunity to branch out into the large consumer market in Nigeria is enormous."

An English-speaking country, Nigeria has an ambitious economic strategy, which aims to make it one of the top 20 economies in the world by 2020. This was outlined at a international business conference in Dublin last month, which was facilitated by Dr Kema Chikwe, the Nigerian ambassador to Ireland.

One of the issues that might put people off doing business in Nigeria are problems with corruption. However, the conference heard that the country was in the midst of successful anti-corruption and good governance efforts.

Dr Idi Hong, the Nigerian Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, told delegates that any company going into Nigeria to undertake legitimate business would have the backing of the Nigerian government.

Also at the conference was Clive Carpenter, deputy chairman, ANC International Finance in Dublin and vice-chairman of the Business Council of Africa in London.

He said that Nigeria was "wealthy beyond all measure

if you look at the facts".

"Nigeria is the giant of Africa. What Nigeria wants is that you trade with it fairly," said Carpenter, who told business people that, if they did their homework carefully, then they would be rewarded.

Growth areas in Nigeria, he said, included finance, professional development and retail with a growing middle class, and he also said that the opportunity in telecoms was "massive".

But he said that the US and China were already developing strong relationships with Nigeria. "We need to be as aggressive as the Chinese are," he said.

## Cork firm's gateway to Nigeria

Cork-based **Azotel** Technologies last week announced a significant contract with Gateway Business Nigeria to use one of its broadband support systems.

It will use the company's SIMPLer™ platform to operate and manage a network that will deliver wireless broadband connections across Nigeria. This deal follows Gateway Business Nigeria's successful roll-out of its Airlink™ and Metro-Link™ wireless broadband services.

Headquartered in Lagos, Gateway Business Nigeria is building a 10.5GHz countrywide wireless network, which will provide broadband access to the global internet at speeds comparable to fibre, but with much faster installation in every major city.

Up to 8Mb wireless broadband access services will be rolled out across ten Nigerian states this year, and 26 additional states will go live in 2011.

"We have a long-standing relationship with Gateway Communications," said John O'Hare, chief executive of **Azotel**. "The fact that they've chosen our SIMPLer™ platform as the OSS solution for a project of this size demonstrates Gateway's confidence in the product itself, and in **Azotel's** ability to deliver."

Publication: Sunday Business Post  
Date: Sunday, August 08, 2010  
Page: 15  
Extract: 2 of 2  
Circulation: 52271  
Author: Martha Kearns  
Headline: Tapping Africa's huge potential

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**Dr Idi Hong, Nigerian Minister of State for Foreign Affairs; Dr Kema Chikwe, Nigerian ambassador to**