

Forum has sights set on concrete goals

Focus is on building personal leadership skills, productivity and profitability, writes **Graeme Addison**

MOBILISING the private sector throughout Africa to build prosperity remains the main theme of the Eskom African Leaders Forum. The forum holds its second conference on October 13 to 15 in Johannesburg.

The forum, established a year ago, concentrated on good corporate governance, efficiency and social responsibility. It will now take the prosperity theme forward by focusing on leadership skills, productivity and profitability.

The conference, which will be held at the Sandton Convention Centre is designed to help leaders in the private and public sector understand how to grow their organisations and apply new ideas about African leadership.

African business culture is distinctive because it is based on African humanism and communal relations. These values strengthen the competitive position of organisations by

building solidarity around group goals. The recognition of the worth of every individual encourages the creativity necessary for innovation.

One of the objectives of the forum is to explore, develop and apply these values in a way that benefits businesses and the society in which they operate.

American, Japanese and German business cultures each have their own clear characteristics in terms of work ethic, efficiency and corporate citizenship. African business leaders believe that the elements of a unique African management style are to be found in traditional culture.

Champions of this idea in Southern Africa include the top leadership of several major businesses including Eskom, MTN, Honeywell and the National Ports Authority — all sponsors of the upcoming conference.

The two-day forum is a follow-up to an inaugural gathering a year ago

when the participants agreed to hold further meetings to sustain the growth of African leadership in principle and practice. The 2004 forum will be hosted by Business in Africa magazine and is supported by organisations in 17 African countries.

This year, delegates will meet in the spirit of common purpose: to seek African solutions for African problems. There is consensus that only through restoring African self-esteem can African nations prosper and develop as global players. The forum is aligned with the objectives of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (Nepad).

The inaugural forum, held in October 2003, concluded that African business leaders in the public and private sectors realised that through the Nepad initiative, African governments are increasingly engaged in expansion of infrastructure and continued social, political and economic

development.

In a press statement after the 2003 conference, the forum committed itself "to engage political leaders, legislators, entrepreneurs, the investor community, bankers, venture capitalists, multinational corporations, policy makers, business development partners and emerging business leaders in the search for sustainable leadership solutions on which growth and profits can be built".

At this year's conference, the forum will focus on concrete goals — in particular how institutions can invest their human and financial capital to create and sustain development.

The event marks the convergence of political and business awareness of the dire need for better leadership in Africa. The forum seeks to distil ideas about leadership, governance, accountability, efficiency, profitability and social responsibility into a co-

herent strategy for developing African economies.

The drive toward establishing an African business ethic has gathered significant momentum recently. In 2002, the Nepad Business Group (South Africa), was established. The group received pledges of support from 180 major businesses active in this region.

At that time, Reuel Khoza, Chairman of Eskom, made an initial presentation

of aims and objectives to delegates of the African Union Business Summit. Subsequently, in December 2003, a joint one-day conference of the African Round Table (ABR) and the Nepad Business Group for the whole of Africa was held. Addressing the conference, President Thabo Mbeki, as vice-chairman of Nepad, called for the African private sector to be mobilised in support of Nepad. The event provided new impetus for the Forum.



AFRICAN VALUES: Eskom Holdings CEO Thulani Gcabashe