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Africa's Agency in an Era of Geopolitical Change

Trade, Investment and Economic Transformation

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Executive Summary for Delegates

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The international economic order is changing. Geopolitical competition is reshaping trade and investment; supply chains are being reorganized around resilience and security; demand for critical minerals is rising; artificial intelligence and digital technologies are altering production; and the cost and availability of finance are becoming increasingly strategic. These changes create risks for Africa, but they also create a window of opportunity.

What We Mean by African Agency

Africa's central challenge is not a shortage of resources or ideas. It is the limited capacity to convert resources, ideas and opportunities into productive systems. African agency should therefore be understood as the capacity to choose partners, negotiate better terms, build productive capability, add value to resources, diversify markets and shape the rules under which African economies participate in the global economy.

Five Strategic Imperatives

The keynote advances five strategic imperatives. They are mutually reinforcing - progress on one depends on progress on the others.

1	**Build the African Market** Deepen intra-African trade and make AfCFTA usable by ordinary businesses.
2	**Build Productive Capacity** Move from raw commodities to processing, manufacturing and regional value chains.
3	**Build African Capital** Mobilise domestic savings and institutional capital for productive investment.
4	**Build African Capability** Invest in foundational learning, skills, research and technology.
5	**Build Institutional Agency** Strengthen the policy, regulatory and implementation capacity of African institutions.

Why they are interdependent, not separate agendas:

- A larger market without productive firms will not transform Africa.
- Investment without skills and technology transfer can reproduce dependency.
- Education without productive opportunities cannot deliver a demographic dividend.
- Infrastructure without competitive enterprises can become underutilized capacity.

Uganda: A Case Study

Uganda provides a useful case study within this broader African conversation. The country's Fourth National Development Plan (NDP IV) already places sustainable industrialisation, value addition, private-sector development and productive infrastructure at the centre of the national transformation agenda. The strategic question is therefore less about writing another vision and more about converting existing priorities into competitive enterprises, export capacity, technological capability, jobs and greater regional market share. The Ugandan experience also offers lessons that are relevant to other African economies facing similar questions of productive transformation.

From Dialogue to Action

The paper concludes by proposing that the Yobel Biashara/CASTLE dialogue should become the starting point for a continuing continental evidence-to-policy process. The objective should be to move from one-off conversation to a cycle of dialogue, evidence, recommendations, implementation and measurement, connecting African experience and international expertise around practical economic transformation.

This summary accompanies the full discussion paper, which sets out the supporting evidence, the Uganda data, and five propositions for debate in detail.