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Remarkably successful Smart Partnership dialogue comes to an end

Saiful Azhar Abdullah in Kampala, Uganda

THE Global 2001 Smart Partnership International Dialogue ended on Tuesday evening at the Speke Resort Monyonyo, 15km from here, giving the smart partners a new confidence in approaching the future.

The main beneficiary is the African countries. While some of the developed countries, including the United States, have forgotten the process which promoted its growth, Malaysia is its closest smart partner which still remembers how it (Malaysia) rose to become one of the world's emerging economies.

The four days of dialogue was an opportunity for the smart partners to tap as much lessons as possible from the stories of success and failure of their partners.

At the end of the dialogue, the delegates issued a statement that: "At Monyonyo however, we have identified one thing that we are anti-inequality."

Some of the African countries were at par with Malaysia in terms of growth in the 1960s as Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni stated: "Look at Malaysia. Malaysia and Uganda were almost at the same level of per capita income in the 1960s until Malaysia took a step forward in its development policies.

"Malaysia's per capita income has risen to US\$5,000 (RM19,000) while Uganda is still languishing around US\$400."

It was Museveni who suggested that this year's Southern Africa Dialogue focus on "enhancing the climate for foreign direct investment through smart partnership".

Dismissing a perception by saying that "we are not meeting here to conspire to rule the world, we are meeting here to survive in this world," Museveni and other African leaders used the meeting "to explore ways and means to survive in the new globalised world".

Africa needs attention. Less than one per cent of the total world's business investment has gone to the African continent. Africa, according to Museveni, has lost a lot of time since 1960s in terms of economic development.

Dr Mahathir felt the dialogue has helped in changing the attitude of Governments of participating countries towards foreign investments since they started talking about a smart partnership in 1995.

"They have realised the need for a co-operation between the private and public sectors. The only people that they seem to be unable to work with is the Press. They are now focusing specially on foreign direct investment ... something that is very new to them."

At the end of the dialogue, the smart partners managed to identify the bottlenecks, challenges and issues concerning FDI in order to map the way forward.

The impact of political instability and policy reversal on investor confidence, media images and their effect on potential investors and developing countries' marketing of investment possibilities were among the subjects which came under scrutiny.

Delegates were also told the effects of changing governments frequently, how governments must ensure that FDI results in a smart partnership between the government and foreign investors, the importance of national self respect, integrity and independence and the need to look again at globalisation.

This year's dialogue also witnessed a respectable achievement with the launching of Smart News Network International, an alternative news source, participated in by 11 news agencies from Africa, the Carribean and Southeast Asia.

Undoubtedly, this year's dialogue was a remarkable success despite the teething problems.

Indeed, the smart partnership concept is progressing and Malaysia is taking the pivotal role and the offer by Dr Mahathir to African Governments and businesses to have a stake in the country's third satellite is certainly a step forward for the movement.

And it was the first time it was hosted by a country outside Southern Africa.

Even the organisers were surprised by their own achievements.

Unlike in previous dialogues, participants here spent nearly 16 hours a day engrossed in deep discussion.

For the Southern Africa International Dialogue, it was a first time for everyone and this year was Uganda's turn. In fact, SAID moves from one country to another in the African continent.

It was a remarkable job done by Uganda in hosting this year's dialogue.

It has been agreed that Smart Dialogues will be held in Africa and Malaysia in alternate years and it will be linked to the Carribean and West Asian and Mediterranean Smart Partnership activities.

The next dialogue will be in Langkawi next year.