

African leaders and business executives on Thursday called for faster implementation of large-scale infrastructure projects to drive industrial growth, as a continental summit opened in Kenya's capital Nairobi.

The meeting, hosted by the Africa Finance Corporation in partnership with the Government of Kenya, has brought together heads of state, policymakers and private investors to focus on financing and delivering projects in transport, energy and manufacturing.

Kenyan President William Ruto, who delivered the keynote address, said Africa must accelerate industrialisation and expand value addition to compete globally. He noted that manufacturing on the continent has remained largely stagnant and urged stronger political commitment to regional connectivity and production.

Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni said infrastructure development should be integrated with key economic sectors, including agriculture, tourism and small businesses, rather than treated as standalone investments.

"The transformation of Africa requires moving priority infrastructure projects from conception to implementation through coordinated planning and regional cooperation," Museveni said.

He added that Africa's economic performance has yet to match its natural resources and population potential, citing structural challenges such as weak institutions and political instability.

Several speakers stressed the need for countries to shift from exporting raw materials to producing finished goods locally, arguing that value addition in commodities such as minerals, coffee and petroleum would increase revenues and create jobs.

Museveni also urged governments to direct borrowed funds toward productive sectors like electricity generation, railways and industrial manufacturing instead of recurrent spending.

Business leaders signaled interest in expanding investments if policy frameworks remain supportive. Nigerian industrialist Aliko Dangote said he was prepared to support refinery development in East Africa, citing ongoing collaboration with regional governments.

Participants highlighted the role of the African Continental Free Trade Area in boosting intra-African trade and creating larger markets to sustain industrial production.

The two-day summit is expected to produce commitments aimed at improving coordination between governments, financiers and private investors to advance infrastructure projects across the continent.