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Welcome to *Invest in Africa 2015*, the fifth edition of this annual publication in which we take stock of Africa's achievements over the past year and identify investment opportunities across multiple sectors.

Building on the achievements of the past 50 years, we have embarked with vigour in order to achieve the aspirations laid out in the Common African Position on the Post-2015 Development Agenda and Africa's Agenda 2063, a comprehensive development framework for African citizens.

Africa is developing as a key player in the global arena. The region's annual economic growth rate has averaged at five per cent for more than a decade and domestic productivity is high. The continent is also making great progress towards reducing its [reliance] on external financial aid and increasing funding its own development agenda through improved domestic resource mobilisation. The challenge facing us over the next 50 years is to maintain momentum and ensure that all levels of society feel the benefits of growth.

The promotion of education and technical skills development is vital in order to achieve this. Without market-relevant skills, people are unlikely to benefit from employment opportunities that generate a decent income. Initiatives such as the 10-year AU Continental TVET (technical and vocational education and training) Strategy will help bridge the skills gap, making the African labour market more internationally competitive.

The empowerment of women is critical to Africa's prosperity, which is why we have declared 2015 as the African Union Year of Women's Empowerment and Development. We must ensure that women are given equal space in the development process, are fully integrated into the labour market and are given equal access to ownership of resources.

Peace and security is also key to economic prosperity and though we have made significant progress over the past 52 years, we are still grappling with security issues in some areas. We are working together to finalise the tools and legal instruments needed to better position ourselves to deal with current issues and prevent any further conflicts.

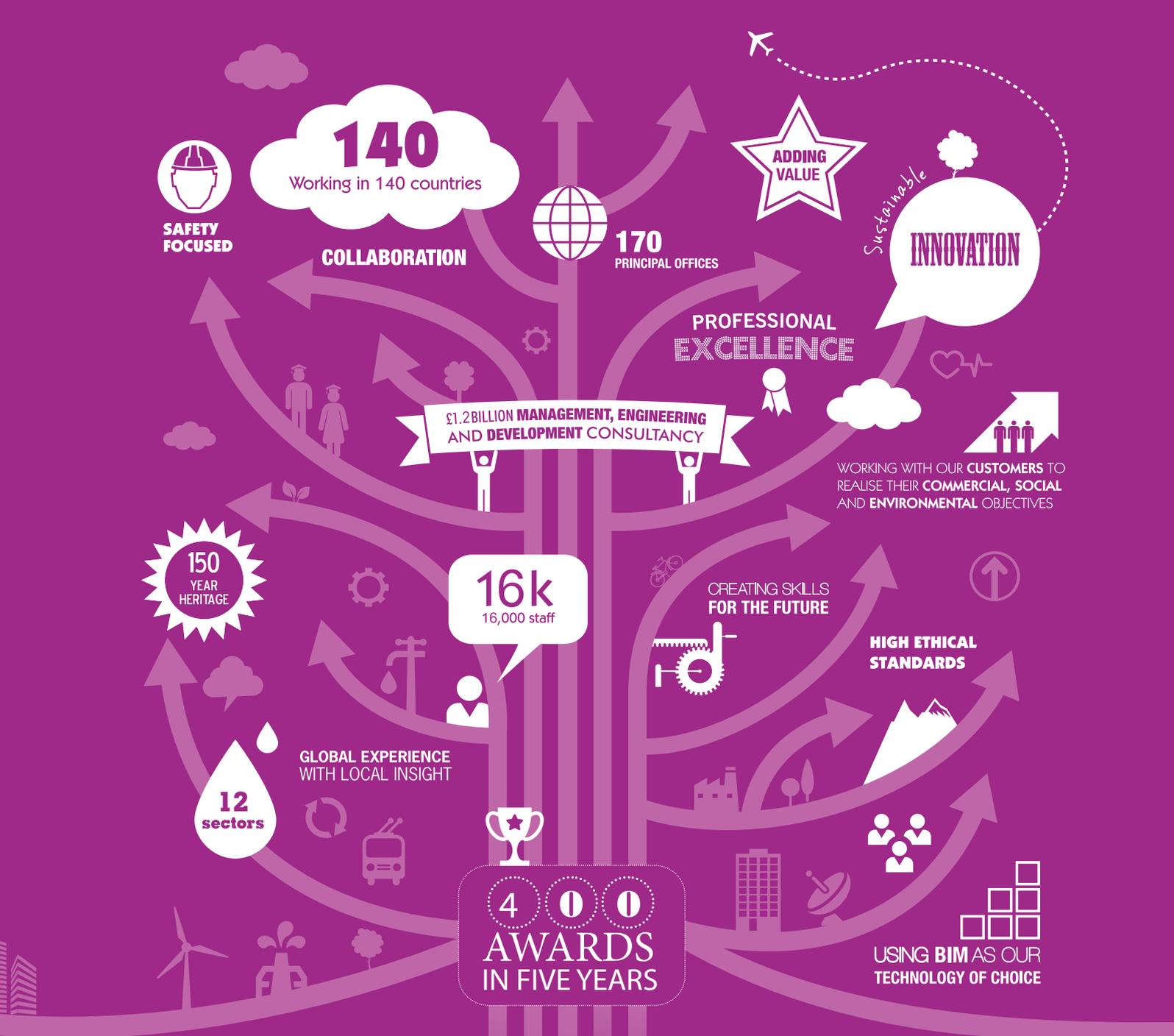
Over the past year, the Ebola virus outbreak exposed weaknesses of our health sector as it presented serious challenges to the continent as a whole and West Africa in particular. We have worked closely with the affected countries, the international community and medical professionals to mobilise resources and continue to raise awareness of how best to continue to tackle this disease. In the long term, we have resolved to set up an African Centre for Disease Control.

Food security remains a priority area. If Africa continues at the current pace of growth, by 2050 the continent will only be able to feed 13 per cent of its population with its own resources. Our continent has enormous potential, not only to feed itself, but also to be a major player in global food markets. The Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP), launched in 2003, seeks to completely transform the agricultural sector by increasing large-scale investments in agriculture and agribusiness, fostering entrepreneurship and improving the management of natural resources.

Furthermore, Africa must and will accelerate the beneficiation of its raw materials and resources. Not only will this diversify the continent's export portfolio and boost intra-Africa trade, but it will also create employment opportunities.

Finally, regional integration and unity will help Africa leverage its competitive advantage. All AU Member States belong to at least one integration grouping, and these institutions are faced with weaknesses, they are fundamental to creating economies of scale. Over the next few years, we will be cooperating with these institutions to improve connectivity and facilitate the movement of goods and services.

The future of Africa is in our hands. Let us all work together in harmony to produce the Africa we want: an integrated, prosperous and peaceful continent made up of free citizens and expanded horizons. ●



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