

All set to drive more investment in Africa

Wolfgang Bernhard, global boss of Daimler Trucks and Buses and a member of the management board of Daimler, was in SA recently to announce the [brand's new regional centre](#).



Image via [Quickpic](#)

Africa is a region that Bernhard and his colleagues are watching closely, particularly with a view to future growth for the business. However, it is also a region that provides many challenges. He points out that developments, not least of the all the volatility following the firing of former finance minister Nhlanhla Nene, are being watched.

Investment requires stability

"Every political decision has seen and unseen reactions. We anxiously watch and are hopeful that government will ensure a good business environment," he says. "We are ready with investment, commitment, education and community support," he says.

But he cautions government "not to restrain business so much that we will not be able to go forward anymore". While his comments might be directed towards the South African government, challenges apply across the continent. "The level of corruption is unbearable. We have to get rid of it," he says. "I know it is Africa, but things have to change."

Bernhard also does not see governments in central Africa following through on commitments to plans such as a central

Africa automotive hub, as championed by former South African trade and industry minister Alec Erwin. "The plans will not give the customs break," he says. "We do not see governments following through on their commitment. So why should we invest? "We need to have a reliable environment," he says.

Investment could also see an increase in the number of models produced at the company's plant in East London. Bernhard says the company is looking at complete knock-down production of the Indian-built Bharat-Benz models which could provide a solution for those looking for sturdy, reliable and affordable vehicles. "They are high quality, but simple," he says. "We cannot allow only the Chinese to have these type of products."

At the other end of the scale, Bernhard says there is great potential for the autonomous or self-driving truck in SA. Daimler has already showcased its [Future Truck 2025](#) which is now being tested in a live environment on German roads, while the company's Freightliner division is also testing autonomous trucks in the US.

Autonomous opportunity

He says there is the potential for autonomous trucks in a number of applications in SA. One of these is mining, which he says would be very simple to do, but Bernhard says it is a niche industry. "We believe that long haul is the holy grail of autonomous driving. I do not see why this isn't an enormous opportunity for SA."

However, he says that the legislation will take years. This is a frustrating issue for Bernhard and others in the truck industry. The industry is moving ahead with technological advances much faster than legislators and there have been numerous calls for governments to fast-track their legislation and infrastructure.

It is clear though that Daimler is focused on providing product at both ends of the spectrum and all areas in between as it aims to satisfy the very diverse needs of the African market.

Source: Business Day

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