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Are SDGs achievable by 2030? I would like to share my thoughts on the views expressed by Neil Ford in his article. The SDGs in Africa – challenges to be overcome, in the September / October 2023 issue.

This was a very impressive and interesting write-up, accurate and to the point on the reality of the various challenges Africa faces in its struggle to meet the targets in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Africa faces multiple challenges to its aim of achieving prosperity. First and foremost, it needs to identify what the obstacles are to its objective of sustaining enough growth and prosperity for its citizens. After identifying the impediments, it is important not to repeat past mistakes.

Today some countries, once glorified as economic powerhouses, are experiencing a sea change characterised by political uncertainty. Just a few months ago, West Africa was in the spotlight over civil strife and political unrest. Niger’s democratically elected government was toppled by non-democratic forces. In the sub-Saharan region, Sudan is currently experiencing an ongoing ethnic-based conflict and large numbers of people have been displaced. Fighting also intensified in its neighbour Ethiopia’s Amhara region. These are all worrisome issues. It becomes not only a story of humanitarian disasters, but of a growing sense of fear, despair and hopelessness amongst the diverse populations of the strife torn zones.

Millions of children are also in desperate need of humanitarian assistance, with medical care high on the list of requirements. Youth unemployment is also a most pressing challenge across Africa; a continent squeezed by fast-growing populations in many African countries.

As populations increase, it creates a need for more development, to enable adequate human settlement. For Africa, it is looking at a food crisis. This would limit external powers tapping into ongoing ethnic and religious cleavages, to further their interests. Our interests are peaceful conflict resolution, while addressing the underlying reasons for coups, conflicts and external meddling. Being colonised once is surely enough. 18 Failure to do so, will result in the sort of disasters we see daily in conflict areas in the Sahel as well as places like Sudan. Wambu is probing him an astute oracle – his warnings should be heeded.

AMBROSE SPEARS
Chicago, US
I

MOROCCO TO HOST AFCON AND WORLD CUP

It may have been by default, but Moroccan football fans were happy people when they heard, in September 2023, that their homeland had won the hosting of the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations, following Guinea’s loss of the privilege due to lack of preparation. It will be the second time they have hosted the tournament, the first being in 1988.

And when the ball starts rolling, it rolls; so, cue a drumroll for the country rolling, it rolls; so, cue a being in 1988.

The second time they have of preparation. It will be the privilege due to lack following Guinea’s loss of 2025 Africa Cup of Nations, had won the hosting of the 2023, that their homeland they heard, in September

WORLD CUP

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playing from 32 to 48, and

in the number of teams

spurred on by an increase

fray in March 2023,

only entered the bidding

when you consider they

outcome, particularly

World Cup. This is a great

Portugal to host the 2030

made with Spain and

also winning a joint bid

Six existing stadiums

will receive a giant

makeover at a cost of

around $1.4bn, in time for

AFCON 2025. Located in the
cities of Agadir, Casablanca, Fez, Marrakech, Rabat and Tangier, the stadiums all have a capacity of around 50,000 – except Tangier, which holds a crowd of up to 65,000. Renovation work has already commenced to bring these venues up to the required standards for both competitions. A further $500m will be invested into building a new stadium just east of Casablanca in Benelaimane. Planned since before 2010, when Morocco closely lost their World Cup bid to South Africa, work is finally due to begin in December, with completion estimated for 2026. The new stadium, due to hold 150,000 fans, will be the largest in Africa and second-largest in the world, beaten only by the 195,000 capacity Bungrado 1st of May stadium in Pyongyang, North Korea.

New honours have been announced for John Kani (right), the veteran South African actor, writer, playwright and director, well-known for his roles in several Hollywood hits. He played Samuel in The Ghost and the Darkness (1996), King T’Chaka in Captain America: Civil War (2016) and T’Chaka in Black Panther (2018). In 2019 he was Rafiki in the musical drama remake of Disney’s The Lion King and more recently brought his character, Colonel Uenga in Murder Mystery back to life in Netflix’s 2023 sequel.

The recipient of many accolades during his illustrious career, Kani has now been awarded the prestigious Order of the British Empire (OBE) for his outstanding contribution to drama over a 60-year period. He received the gong from King Charles III. An OBE is bestowed on someone who has been a major influence in their line of work.

Kani’s career began in the mid 1960s with a group of actors called The Serpent Players, so-named after their first performance, which took place in a former snake pit of the local zoo in Port Elizabeth! A strong, rising critic of Apartheid, his life took a tragic turn in 1975, when he returned to South Africa after co-writing and playing a role in the anti-apartheid play, Sizwe Bandi is Dead, in New York.

Receiving a call purportedly from his father, saying he wanted to see him, he was hijacked by police en route to the meeting, beaten brutally and left for dead. Fortunately he survived, but lost his left eye, which was replaced with a prosthetic one.

On receiving his OBE, he modestly said, “I am deeply moved by this honour. I have always been amazed and delighted by how my work has been received by critics and audiences.”

NEW HONOURS FOR SOUTH AFRICA’S JOHN KANI

Hair-raising record set in Nigeria

You may well wonder what can be done with the equivalent of £2,000, 1,000 wads of hair, 12 cans of hair spray, 35 tubes of hair glue and no less than 6,250 hair clips. Veteran Nigerian wigmaker, Helen Williams, knew exactly what she was doing when she cleverly crafted the world’s longest handmade wig, working over 15 days and thus securing her place in the hallowed directory of all feats extraordinaire, the Guinness World Records.

The hirsute record breather not only took all the skills and nerves of its maker to construct but also presented a conundrum to measure.

In the end, Williams surprised anyone undertaking the journey from Lagos to Abeokuta by laying her wig out on the highway that connects the two cities, and discovered its length was 30.28 metres – longer than the Eiffel Tower in Paris is tall! The incredible wig now sits in her office with an invitation to all to see it for themselves.

On winning the record, she commented, “At some point, I felt exhausted, however, friends and family encouraged me. I did not want to let them down, so I maintained my focus. The outcome is the longest handmade wig in the world. This achievement is one of the best things that has ever happened to me. I still cannot believe it.”
KENYA FIRM JOINS WHO LIST TO MAKE ANTI-MALARIA DRUG

On a continent where more than 70% of the drugs used have to be imported, it is good news that a leading African pharmaceutical company, Universal Corporation Ltd (UCL), has gained a place on the WHO’s pre-qualification programme for its combination drug, sulfadoxine-pyrimethamine + amodiaquine, used for the prevention of malaria in children who live in areas of high malarial transmission. Prequalification means UCL has the WHO’s approval to produce the drug. It is even more pertinent when you consider that Africa has always been the place hardest hit by malaria throughout the world, with around 99% of global cases. Sadly, children under five years of age in sub-Saharan Africa account for 80% of malaria deaths and almost half of all deaths from malaria occur in Nigeria, DRC, Tanzania and Niger, according to the World Malaria Report. UCL is one of six pan-African companies in Africa to receive WHO prequalification status for their medicines, and has made history for being the first African-based producer to achieve it for a life-saving malaria drug in the region of the world where it is needed the most.

Senegalese couple win 2023 Caine Prize

The Caine Prize for African Writing has been the most pre-eminent prize for short stories written in English since the beginning of the millennium. This year it attracted a record-breaking number of entries: 379 stories from 28 countries. It was won, for the first time, by a pair of writers. It was also a first for Senegalese writers to be chosen as the winners. The award delivers a cash prize of £20,000 and publication in the 2023 Caine Prize anthology. Husband and wife team, Mamé Bougouna Diene and Woppa Diallo were the worthy recipients with their story A Soul of Small Places, an intricately woven tale of love, loss and revenge set against an African backdrop where humans and spirits co-exist. Inspired by Diallo’s own experiences of gender-based violence in Senegal, the duo authored the story in six days and it was first published by an imprint of the innovative Tor Publishing Group in 2022. The judges described the work as speaking “powerfully, but not didactically, to one of the pressing global issues of our time. It reminds us too of the power of love in all its forms. The winning story leaves a lasting impression and invites readers to return to it.”

“Three nominations at the Grammys!! Delay is not denial!!”

“I know I’ve come up short, but I’m going to go back and work harder with a little more experience this time, a little more feeling of the game and come back stronger. This is a new sport that I never did, that I never knew. Now I know I can do this, get ready. The wolf is in the house.”

“France changes you forever, like nowhere on earth. Once you have been there, you will never be the same. But how do you begin to describe its magic to someone who has never felt it? How can you explain the fascination of this vast, dusky continent, whose oldest roads are elephant paths? Could it be because Africa is the place of all our beginnings, the cradle of mankind, where our species first stood upright on the savannahs of long ago?”

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“We can’t expect everything from the private sector. African governments must value and support designers.”

“We are … extremely concerned at the continued killing of children and innocent civilians in the Palestinian territories and we believe the nature of response by Israel has become one of collective punishment. We felt it important that we signal the concern of South Africa while continuing to call for a comprehensive cessation of hostilities.”

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Reform anachronistic UN veto mechanism

While Christmas is a time for families to get together and share in joyous celebrations, we should keep in mind the origins of this tradition. It is to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ (Nabi Isa in Islam) who brought a message of peace, freedom from oppression, justice and equality, charity and humanity and forgiveness.

While engaged in the more worldly traditions of this festive occasion, we often forget those values embodied in Christ (and for that matter, all major religious figures) that we should be doing our best to uphold and cherish if we wish to see a much better world than what we are saddled with.

This is also a good time to reflect on the state of the world and renew our determination to fix wrongs and promote what is right and just. There is no getting away from the fact that today the world, in many parts, is ugly and brutal and becoming more so.

Once again, war, in its most evil manifestation is stalking the world. Sometimes watching the news on television becomes unbearable as we see terrified citizens, huddling with their children and the elderly, pulverised by powerful bombs from the skies and artillery shells from tanks on the ground.

We see these scenes straight out of hell unfolding before us as tens of thousands of completely innocent civilians are butchered, as children, again in their thousands, are massacred, as limbs are torn apart and hopes die.

We watch, dumbfounded and dismayed but are powerless to do anything to stop the mass killing, whether in Gaza or Ukraine or Sudan. We can only raise our voices in protest and pray but are impotent to change anything.

The so-called big powers – the overlords of this world and destroyers of lives, have no place in the modern world. They can only wring their hands in despair and make feeble appeals for restraint.

Quite clearly the often cited ‘rules-based world order’ mantra has become a myth. The rule book, deriving from the ashes of the Second World War, accompanied by earnest pledges to ‘never again’ repeat the atrocities against civilians, has been torn apart and discarded. The only rule today is Might is Right and we are back to square one.

It was the massive scale and barbarity of the slaughter and destruction unleashed during the Second World War that finally seemed to have woken up the powerful from their dreams of dominance and led to the founding of the United Nations and the International Criminal Court.

Both these institutions were designed in the hope that their intervention would ensure that the ‘never again’ mantra would prevail in future conflicts. Their inception also led to the creation of the ‘rules-based world order’, which would lay down guidelines on the conduct of parties in conflict, both internationally as well as domestically.

As we can see, countries and invested parties are breaking the rules with impunity and the UN is helpless to do anything except to issue increasingly frantic appeals.

Stultifying veto power

The biggest obstacle to any meaningful action is of course the veto power of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council (China, the United States, France, the United Kingdom and Russia).

It does not matter if the majority of the 15-member Security Council or indeed, the majority of the UN General Assembly vote in favour of a motion, as if one of the five permanent members votes against it, the motion is quashed.

Result: deadlock, paralysis and the killing sprees and misery can continue. It is an anachronistic approach that has no place in the modern world.

Clearly this system of a privileged few having such sway over the lives and destinies of billions of people around the world cannot continue. It is broken and needs replacement.

France has been battling to get a revision of this provision adopted since 2003. Its proposal is that the five permanent members of the Security Council would voluntarily and collectively undertake not to use the veto where a mass atrocity has been ascertained.

The definition of mass atrocity would be based on the 1948 Convention on Genocide and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, and the 2005 World Summit Declaration which reaffirmed the world’s determination to halt mass killings or collective punishments.

This is a practical solution to the stultifying power of the veto and might actually give teeth to the desire to end the obscenity of mass killing.

But while at it, it is well past time that the smaller nations as well as civil society organisations also have a much greater say in decisions that impact the world – after all, the majority of the global population lives in these states.

Africa has long been calling for a permanent position on the Security Council. The AU is lobbying for two permanent seats with the right to veto and might actually give teeth to the desire to end the obscenity of mass killing.
This year’s WISE Summit, the world’s largest gathering of educationalists, held annually in Doha, Qatar, discussed the latest developments in the field but also tackled, head-on, the issue of the mass atrocity being perpetrated in Palestine and its effect on the development of children. Omar Ben Yedder was there.

Palestine conflict dominates WISE Summit in Doha

This year’s WISE Summit examined the education sector’s growing dependency on artificial intelligence (AI) and the rise of educational technologies that today raise many more questions than it answers. However, the destruction and ongoing horrors of Gaza dominated much of the messaging during the plenary sessions, attended by a very international audience from all four corners of the world.

Every plenary featured the story of a young Palestinian, bringing to life the physical and emotional destruction that is taking place. Among the highlights of the opening plenary was a performance by 15-year-old Palestinian rapper Abdulrahman Al-Shanti, who has made a name for himself as a universal, simple one; a call for peace.

In addition to the nightmare scenarios of children, women and vulnerable communities bearing the brunt of the violence that Palestinians in Gaza are being subjected to, the audience learnt that the education-related work that the WISE Foundation has done in that area over a long period was itself under attack. That was the message in the keynote address by SheikhMoza bint Nasser (inset right), founder of the Foundation and of the Summit and the mother of the current Emir of Qatar.

There was no skirting an robust language to describe what is happening in Palestine, including calling it a paradigm – a term that unleashes many implications.

During a plenary discussion around education in times of war, Israel was accused of deliberately targeting places of learning.

A clear picture emerged that the atrocities in Gaza are on a different scale to what has been seen previously, not only in Gaza itself but also elsewhere in the world.

The winners of this year’s WISE Prize for Education, Safaeeein Husain, Founder, Educate Girls, for example used AI to identify communities where the school dropout rate of girls was the highest, enabling her charity to focus its efforts on those communities, and thus make the most significant impact. According to Husani, over 102m girls remain out of school globally. If technology can in some way aid getting these girls back into schools, then that technology becomes priceless. Nonetheless, technological innovation does not inherently lead to progress. Regulators will have an important role to play. Some universal principles will have to be agreed: principles around accuracy, independence, impartiality – inasmuch as anything is impartial – and accountability.

The tech companies will have a duty to play ball. We have seen at a very basic level how tech is being used to distort info and to disseminate lies and the chaos this has unleashed, with devastating consequences.

The debate around regulation is fragmented. The Americans are seeing things from a market-based prism, the Chinese from a state and control prism and the Europeans are looking through a prism and the Europeans are looking at protecting individual rights. This discussion will have to be more inclusive, diverse and open to all and based on principles that have been established and agreed on by all. The debate has only just begun.

On a different scale

An early picture emerged that the atrocities in Gaza are on a different scale to what has been seen previously, not only in Gaza itself but also elsewhere in the world.

The organisers of the Summit were determined to use this platform to make a clear statement and bring to light the implications of what is happening. Delegates learnt, for example, that a school the Foundation had built in 2009 following the Gaza war that year, had been bombed and destroyed during the current conflict.

In her remarks, SheikhMoza added that 36 schools and universities the Foundation’s Education Above All programme was supporting had been completely or partially destroyed.

The physical infrastructure can be rebuilt but the emotional damage, and the destruction of the environment of learning will be hard to repair. The trauma of war cannot be overestimated, leaving a whole generation with psychological wounds that will be impossible to erase and difficult to overcome.

Using the backdrop of the current conflict, SheikhMoza also highlighted how artificial intelligence is being used for the fabrication of stories as well as for creating a certain narrative that will be skewed in favour of one party or another, that we do not currently control and over which we have little oversight. These are important issues that will need to be addressed.

The area raises critical questions around bias, around whose narrative will prevail, around values, ethics and independence of expression. The fall-out could be as complex as impacting the sovereignty of countries and societies.

The two-day summit brought together nearly 7,000 stakeholders in education including a strong contingent of youth.

The audience learnt that the education-related work that the WISE Foundation has done in Gaza was also under attack.

If one technology dominated the headlines in the second half of 2021 it was AI. In many ways, the world was unprepared, from the regulators to the tech community itself.

Today poses more questions than it answers and the same applies to how it can impact the education sector.

Questions around the authenticity of a student’s work and plagiarism were the first to arise. As was the issue of bias and accuracy.

These are arguably the easier questions to solve. Others, around ethics for example, will be harder to solve. Also, isn’t one person’s bias another person’s norm?

Like all technologies the issue of regulation, ownership and sovereignty will arise, and with such a fast-evolving technology as AI, these will be even more complex.

We are already fretting, and rightly so, over the use of AI to create fake narratives.

In education undoubtedly, the potential of AI is boundless, from offering tailored curricula and personalised tutoring and assessment to the ability to offer a much broader range of subjects. It can assist teachers with the more mundane tasks so that they can focus on the more important aspects of teaching around developing a child’s potential and around activities of critical thinking and analysis.

At the centre of it is, what do we need to learn and how? And AI, if properly trained and developed can deliver on the purpose of education, which is to enrich life, to engender values for a well-functioning society and to broaden experiences. Its use can be very practical too.

The debate around regulation is fragmented. The Americans are seeing things from a market-based prism, the Chinese from a state and control prism and the Europeans are looking at protecting individual rights. This discussion will have to be more inclusive, diverse and open to all and based on principles that have been established and agreed on by all. The debate has only just begun.
Education most important determinant of economic wellbeing

Education needs to be front and centre of all development agendas, argues Sachs.

Therefore to hire a good teacher you need to pay a salary that is much above average, which in theory means to attract great teachers, you need to spend even more as a percentage than in developed nations.

And it doesn’t stop there. Low-income countries generally have a much larger young population, which means that the higher educational levels needed to be able to teach.

And these governments have a much lower tax intake. So if tax collection is 20% of GDP in Africa it averages even less, with Nigeria, for example, at 15% and you would be spending 10% of GDP on education, than that means that, effectively, 50% of government revenues – what it raises and can spend – should be allocated to education.

Sachs doesn’t pretend to have the solution to the world dilemma, but points out that it has been done successfully elsewhere – namely in Asia. He advocates for the global financial system to take education more seriously – that is to provide grants or concessional finance, but at a reasonable price and the right tenure. You can’t be lending at unreasonable rates and expect a 5- or ten-year return. It’s not going to work and countries will end up in situations of debt distress.

He attributes the successes of Asia not only to the strength of its education system but also the strong cultural demand in the households and the social and political pressure in society, on performance.

Asked about technology, he agrees that it can play a positive role in increasing access, lowering the cost of education and freeing up time for more productive endeavours in the classroom.

However, technology will undoubtedly continue to exacerbate the gap in income distribution and inequalities. And this technology and knowledge – economy will require skills, accelerating the need for a skilled workforce. The world is competing for capital and that capital will go where there are skilled workers. Making the need has not robust budgets for education in developing countries even more urgent.

This is why education, despite everything else in the world is currently concerned with, needs to be front and centre of all development agendas. And right now, he feels, educationists, ministers of education and leaders of developing countries are not being loud enough nor are they getting their voice heard.

The Foundation also supports a venture capital fund to finance some of the new technology is representative, fair and necessary discussions, to ensure that the educationalists, ministers of education and leaders of developing countries are not being loud enough nor are they getting their voice heard.

The Qatar Foundation – a global educational masterpiece

What started off as little more than an idea whose time might have come less than 30 years ago has now developed into an all-encompassing, global, learning and teaching ecosystem.

The state-led Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development works on the principle that knowledge is the greatest tool to fully serve our greatest gift of all, human potential.

Qatar, with a population of under three million – of whom less than 300,000 are Qatari – gas exports worth $132bn in 2022, and a GDP of around $860bn, has the financial resources to back the Foundation’s ideas but just as important are the organisational and executive skills, as well as the crystal-clear vision needed to make a large and complex project work seamlessly.

A visit to the Qatar Foundation’s Education City takes you into a world of what could be any student’s, or educator’s dream. It consists of a large campus area complemented by various institutes, specialised units, incubators, technology parks and much more.

Arguably the most impressive building in Education City Mosque (Minaret), which serves as both a place of worship and a place of learning, in the traditional Islamic style and context.

The mosque itself is a magnificent work of art, bursting with symbolism and culture of the Arab world, including Islamic architecture, art and culture of the Arab world, including Islamic architecture.

Education is more as a percentage than in developed countries, the salary of a teacher could be corrected. That was the aim, and that is why, for many centuries, it was the preserve of the elite. And the elite, he explains, understood that knowledge is power – personal, economic and social power.

This is why, he argues, the imperial powers never wanted to educate local populations beyond enabling them to assist with administrative duties – otherwise they would have soon realised that their wealth was being plundered.

Flaws in the system

He demonstrates once you break the numbers down, developing countries will realize a considerable budget shortfall for education if the world is serious about ending poverty – which is ultimately at the root of many of today’s problems, be it migration, instability, conflicts.

He illustrates how the numbers and context require different thinking. The US, he says, with a GDP of $12tm, allocates 5% of its budget towards education, which is $600bn per year, or $15,000 per student.

In poor countries, a much larger percentage of government spending goes to education, but considerer able, $4000 per student. This is the 6% mark of the development model.

The second flaw is around teachers. In developed countries, the salary of a teacher is a little above average, which works given the higher educational levels needed to be able to teach.

However, in developing countries a teacher will have an educational level way above average and as a result will be able to do much higher salary than the average.

Flaws in the system

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However, in developing countries a teacher will have an educational level way above average and as a result will be able to do much higher salary than the average.
The 100 Most Influential Africans of 2023

The annual listing has now become traditional fare to provide our readers – and their families – with intellectual and visual delights to complement the delicious dishes, the getting together and the joyous sharing over the festive period. In Africa, people of all faiths happily share in the observance of important festivities such as Christmas, Eid and Diwali. The New Year is also a time to take personal stock of what we have achieved or the goals and targets missed and to renew, once again, our pledges for the coming year.

Every story is a tale of the victory of dedication, perseverance, hope, self-belief and an unwavering desire to follow one’s dream, no matter how impossible it might seem at the beginning. It is our hope that anybody who may be feeling discouraged in the pursuit of their dreams will immerse themselves in studying the lives of those who have made our list and take inspiration from their examples. It is truly said that when one door closes, another opens.

Shifting trends
Perhaps the greatest delight we derive in casting our wide annual net into Africa’s talent-rich waters is that more often than not, we discover totally unexpected treasures of skills and achievement. Each year yields a rich bounty of outstanding personalities, some reappearing and many more entering the annals for the first time.

Each year also provides its own flavour – reflecting the priorities and preeminent trends washing over the continent. Practically every mini-biography, even when cut to the bone to fit our space allocations, also tells a story of triumphing over the odds.

The people who feature in the following pages have had to overcome countless barriers and obstacles – ranging from dire economic circumstances, to gender-imposed hurdles, to social hostility, to race-related prejudices to physical and mental handicaps.

Every story is a tale of the victory of dedication, perseverance, hope, self-belief and an unswerving desire to follow one’s dream, no matter how impossible it might seem at the beginning.

It is our hope that anybody who may be feeling disheartened in the pursuit of their dreams will immerse themselves in studying the lives of those who have made our list and take inspiration from their examples. It is truly said that when one door closes, another opens.

Another of our preeminent trends is the exploration. Wishing everybody a happy Christmas and New Year.

With grateful thanks to our contributors: Gail Collins; Mike Renouf; Wanjuku Mungai; Emily Allen; reGina Jane Jere; Lennox Yieke; and Kwame Ofori Appiah. Special thanks to Jason Venkatasamy for design; Charles Dietz, Mike Holderness and Jon Haynes for meticulous reading and editing and Stuart West for overseeing production of this edition.

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Leading the climate charge

Ibrahima Cheikh Diong has led several high-profile institutions around the world. It may, however, be in his current role as director general of the African Risk Capacity (ARC) Group that he delivers most impact. An agency of the African Union, ARC seeks to protect African countries’ exposure to extreme weather events as a result of climate change by offering parametric insurance and utilising reinsurance markets, while also employing risk pooling and resilience measures. Since assuming his ARC position in September 2020, Diong has become the leading advocate for resilience and adaptation measures, bringing attention to the need for action and helping to increase the institution’s membership to 39 countries. He has also led the introduction of innovative initiatives, including a tool that helps countries assess their flood risk. In collaboration with the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, the organisation has provided Covid-19 modelling tools to empower member states in managing the disease effectively.

Highly connected in his native Senegal, he is a graduate of the School of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University in New York City and of Hohai International University in China. A polyglot, speaking Wolof, English, French, Chinese and Portuguese, he is shaping a cohesive African narrative around climate response.

In a little over one year since he was elected President of Kenya, William Ruto has displayed a remarkable combination of steady resolve with disarming charm.

On the domestic front, it has not been plain sailing and his popularity is waning. Yet he has faced down a series of unofficial strikes, called for by the opposition leader Raila Odinga, while sticking to his agenda to remove food and fuel subsidies to attract much-needed financial support from the Bretton Woods institutions and to reduce the nation’s external debts.

He has encouraged the youth to follow his entrepreneurial example and “hustle” for their livelihoods and recently announced the end of visa requirements for all visitors to the country. This will certainly lead to a considerable upsurge of business and leisure visitors and lay the basis for increased investments, especially in manufacturing and services.

But it is on the international stage that Ruto has cut a bold, charismatic figure. The inaugural Africa Climate Summit in Nairobi in September, on which Ruto staked his reputation as a global leader of substance, was a major success. Africa secured $23bn of green funding and made a powerful declaration on new global climate action. A day before the news, he announced that 13 November would be declared Africa Tree Planting Day, a holiday during which 100 million trees would be planted in a single day. Kenya already sources 81% of its grid power from renewables.

In an interview with Time magazine as one of the world’s 100 most influential leaders shaping global climate action, a day before the news, he announced that 13 November would be declared Africa Tree Planting Day, a holiday during which 100 million trees would be planted in a single day. Kenya already sources 81% of its grid power from renewables.

“In Africa, we can be a green industrial hub that helps other regions achieve their net zero strategies by 2050.”

PRESIDENT WILLIAM RUTO

Strengthening the DFI network

The Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa (BADEA), established in 1974, plays a unique role in African finance. A creation of the League of Arab States (now the Arab League), 18 of which are shareholders, the bank seeks to direct finance from the Arab region into Africa.

The bank’s passionate leader, Dr Sidi Ould Tah, has served as president since July 2015. Following a substantial recent capital raise, the Bank’s ambitious strategy, BADEA 2030, Dr Ould Tah explains, will encompass four main pillars: infrastructure; value chains (principally in agriculture); micro, small and medium-sized enterprises; and trade.

At the heart of Dr Ould Tah’s leadership of the institution is his co-operative approach: BADEA’s operating philosophy, he says, is that no one institution has the magic bullet that Africa needs. “That is why we are working with all the DFIs to develop joint programmes and to help strengthen their capital base so as to maximise the benefits for Africa.”

The Bank’s plan is now to scale up its interventions and affirm its role as the main bridge between Africa and the Arab region. His support of African DFIs and key initiatives such as SME financing have not gone unnoticed.

Africa’s international statesman

status quo of Africa as little more than the victim of climate change, looking for salvation from outside powers. Instead he positioned Africa as uniquely able not only to confront climate change but to lead the rest of the world into the necessary but painful transition away from fossil fuels to renewables.

“In Africa we can be a green industrial hub that helps other regions achieve their net zero strategies by 2050,” he said. “Unlocking the renewable energy resources that we have in our continent could benefit Africa, but the rest of the world.”

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In an interview with Time, he restated Africa’s position, saying: “Africa can offer climate-positive growth. It can be a globally cost-competitive climate action powerhouse; greening global supply chains; manufacturing clean and renewable energy equipment.”

In one fell swoop he changed the position of Africa from that of a back-seat passenger in the climate crisis conversation to being a lead navigator – an outstanding achievement for the continent.

“In Africa, we can be a green industrial hub that helps other regions achieve their net zero strategies by 2050.”

PRESIDENT WILLIAM RUTO
**The trade warrior**

In an era of huge global trade dislocation and mounting geopolitical tensions, the role of the World Trade Organization (WTO) has arguably never been more important. Even more so, as developing countries are being penalised in a world of greater subsidies and unreasonable tariffs.

For the developing world, and for Africa in particular, it is a huge relief to know that the organisation is ably helmed by the former Nigerian Finance Minister, Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala. The director-general remains a fierce advocate of the benefits of global trade.

At the 2023 World Economic Forum, she revealed that simulations carried out by the WTO showed that global decoupling could lead to the loss of 5% in global GDP, worse than the loss after the financial crash in 2008. Her passion for the benefits of global trade is matched by her enthusiasm for developing world nations. She insists that developing countries be given utmost consideration in trade arrangements, observing that many have resources and capacities that can be harnessed for resolving challenges such as climate change. Her loyalty to Africa is at the heart of this. She continues to be a high-profile advocate of the African Continental Free Trade Area, and has been outspoken in favour of Africa’s use of its huge reserves of green minerals, which will be essential in the fight against climate change.

What this all requires, she says, is more multilateralism, and more trade “if we want to recover and we want to recover strongly, then we need – if we want to recover and we want to recover and we want to recover and we want to recover strongly, then we need more multilateralism, and more trade.”

Bola Tinubu, who swept to victory in Nigeria’s Presidential election in March, clearly felt it was best to start his time in office by making the toughest decisions. He immediately declared the end of fuel subsidies – a possibility avoided like the plague for eight years by his predecessor – in his inaugural speech on 29 May. Fuel prices more than doubled.

Days later, Tinubu fired the Central Bank of Nigeria’s Governor, Godwin Emefiele.

Next, the new President scrapped the multiple exchange-rate system maintained by Emefiele, to let the naira float, a key reform long demanded by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund but ignored by the previous government.

The value of the naira plunged more than 40% as the artificial bottleneck maintained under Buhari burst.

While Nigeria watchers were waiting for radical action after years of drift, few were expecting such severe measures.

Will Tinubu’s bitter medicine for Africa’s biggest economy work? The jury is out – while foreign investors are sure to be pleased, Nigerians at home can expect to feel the pain of the fiscal tightening. Consumer inflation has hit its highest levels in over two decades.

Nevertheless, Tinubu’s apparent contempt for “business as usual” augurs well for further action on Nigeria’s huge list of challenges.

**Setting the stage for political leadership**

Banking, by its very nature, does not exactly allow for big personalities; but Tidjane Thiam is anything but your run-of-the-mill banker. The son of a prominent Ivorian family, he is a descendant of Queen Yamousso, after whom Yamoussoukro, the capital of Côte d’Ivoire, is named.

He obtained his education from some of France’s most prestigious schools. His career has included stints at McKinsey and Aviva and he led UK-based insurer Prudential before joining Credit Suisse as CEO. According to the Financial Review, he was “one of the most talented, cultured and academically successful men ever appointed chief executive of a European investment bank”.

When that tenure came to an abrupt end in 2020 after a board rupture, Thiam turned his attention to his home continent, accepting the position of chairman of Rwanda Finance Limited, serving as a Special Envoy to mobilise international economic support for the continental fight against Covid-19 for the African Union, and sitting on various committees.

In his latest move, he has now been elected President of the Democratic Party (PDCI) in Côte d’Ivoire, one of the main opposition parties. He was a Minister of Planning and Development in the 90s. The role is likely to reset the tenor of the political conversation in one of the larger economies of the subregion, ahead of the 2025 Presidential election.

**A new-age military leader?**

Since assuming the reins of power in Guinea in 2021, Colonel Mamady Doumboya has charted a distinctive path in the sub-region.

Domestically, he is credited with restoring some stability to the country after the protests that preceded his intervention. He was also instrumental in closing the deal to develop Simandou, one of the largest deposits of iron ore in the world, with a consortium composed of mining giant Rio Tinto, China’s Chinalco Iron Ore Holdings (CIOH) and the government of Guinea.

On foreign matters, he was one of the few leaders in West Africa to offer a more measured response to the military takeover in Niger, earning him the respect of other leaders in the Sahel region.

It was, however, his barnstorming address at the UN General Assembly in September 2023 that brought him to the attention of a global audience. His condemnation of paternalism towards Africa, of attempts to impose foreign systems on the continent and the assumption that Africa must support one or other world power resonated well, especially with young Africans who are beginning to reject this view of their continent.

“It is time to stop lecturing us and stop treating us with condescension like children.”

– COLONEL DOUMBOUYA

**No longer business as usual**

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**CÔTE D’IVOIRE**

NOGOZI OKONJO-IWEALA

**NGERIA**

BOLA TINUBU

**GUINEA**

MAMADY DOUMBOUYA

“**It is time to stop lecturing us in Africa, and stop treating us with condescension like children.”**

– COLONEL DOUMBOUYA

AT THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY
Nadia Fettah Alaoui is a Moroccan entrepreneur and politician who is currently the Minister of Economy and Finance in the administration led by Prime Minister Aziz Akhannouch. She was appointed to this position in 2021 and has established herself over the past two years as a progressive force for the Moroccan economy.

Alaoui played a key role in the country’s successful hosting of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund annual meetings in October 2023 – the first time in over half a century that the Bretton Woods institutions had held their meetings on African soil. She also played a lead role in hosting the Africa Investment Forum in Marrakech in November 2023. It generated $34.82bn in investment interest for infrastructure, agriculture, and creative industry projects.

Alaoui is an ardent advocate of climate action, arguing that years of below-average rainfall in Morocco underscore the importance of investment in water technologies. She started her career in 1997 as a consultant at the accountancy firm Arthur Andersen in Paris. She then founded a private equity firm in Casablanca in 2000 before moving to the Saham Group in 2005. She rose through the ranks at Saham, becoming its general director in 2017 – and was voted the ‘CEO of the Year’ at the African CEO Forum in Abidjan in 2018. She became a Minister three years later.

TSITSI MASIYIWA
Harnessing the power of philanthropy

Tsitsi Masiyiwa is convinced there is much more that philanthropy can do to change the world, and she is playing her part. A respected social entrepreneur, named Philanthropist of the Year at the All-Africa Business Leaders Awards last year, she steers the non-profit Higherlife Foundation, which she co-founded with her husband, Strive Masiyiwa, in their homeland, Zimbabwe, 25 years ago. She is also a founding board member of the African Philanthropy Forum and has pioneered the creation of the Africa Gender Initiative – a new cohort of African philanthropists uniting behind the common goal of advancing gender equality across the continent and committing to inspire more Africans to give directly to proactively address the issue. As a result of her work and experience, and the success of Higherlife Foundation, Masiyiwa has today become a sought-after advisor on social entrepreneurship and advocacy, education, leadership development, and youth empowerment.

In August 2023, she was elected Board Chair of The END Fund – a collaborative philanthropic fund dedicated to ending Neglected Tropical Diseases. She is also behind Delta Philanthropies, a vehicle for impact investing and grant making, which seeks innovative solutions to eliminate poverty by convening strategic partnerships and incubating new development models.

OUSMANE SONKO
Shaking up the political status quo

Senegal’s Ousmane Sonko is a dynamic opposition politician who inspires the youth and like-minded politicians. He is a controversial figure who has been accused of populism and anti-Western rhetoric, but he is also shaking up the political landscape and inspiring the young generation both in Senegal and the wider West and Central African region.

His pan-African rhetoric and condemnation of France’s continued economic role in Senegal has won the hearts of young people through a sustained social media campaign, which he uses to tap into Senegalese elites and whip up nationalist sentiment. Born in 1974, he was the youngest candidate in Senegal’s 2019 Presidential election, in which he challenged incumbent Macky Sall.

In that election he came third with about 16% of the vote, a count that analysts say is substantial for a first-time contender. Sonko has been repeatedly arrested over the last two years and has been in custody since July 2023, with his followers insisting that the accusations against him are politically motivated and unfounded. In mid-December a court ordered that he be reinstated on the electoral register, which would allow him to run in February’s presidential election.

Whether he runs and whether he wins, which is unlikely, his voice has galvanised the youth yearning for a different type of politics in Africa.

When it comes to setting the agenda, Africa’s foremost development banker is rarely afraid of ruffling a few feathers, even with established partners.

Speaking on the sidelines of COP26 in Dubai in December, Adesina said that Africa could lose up to $25bn per annum as a direct result of the European Union’s Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism, arguing that it could significantly constrain African agriculture and industrialisation progress.

Yet Adesina’s honesty and forthright opinion are dearly held in high regard by the development community. In March 2023 Ajay Banga, then the United States’ nominee for World Bank Group President, now the incumbent, visited Adesina at the AfDB’s Abidjan headquarters in his first stop on a global tour as he looked to drum up worldwide support for his candidacy. Influence is one thing, turning it into action is another. Outside the daily job of disbursing loans and crowding in investments, Adesina is fighting hard for the disbursement of SDRs. He is also coming away strongly in other areas, becoming the de facto global spokesperson for numerous Africa-related issues.

With his current term running to 2026, Adesina is a man who is growing increasingly impatient and on whose shoulders much responsibility lies.
Demographic trends suggest that Africa could well become the human resource capital of the world, with more working-age people than anywhere else by the turn of the century. The role of entrepreneurs like Didier Acouetey seems set to become even more critical.

Acouetey’s AfricSearch Group is one of the few elite recruitment and human resource consulting groups in the continent, with a presence in over 50 countries through its partnership with the Alexander Hughes Group. Connecting jobseekers to opportunities and ensuring that employers find the right fit is one thing but Acouetey’s impact stretches far beyond that as a mentor, adviser and changemaker.

He is active in several think-tanks and the dramatic story of his time in office emerged in lurid detail. His resignation from the post-apartheid presidency was announced in 2022, but it was not until a year later that the resignation from the utility was announced in 2022, but it was not until a year later that the dramatic story of his time in office emerged in lurid detail.

He claimed that he had been thwarted at every turn by vested interests in the government, thwarted at every turn by vested interests in the government, and estimated that Eskom is losing well over $500m a month through theft. In January 2023, de Ruyter alleged that he survived an attempt to poison him with cyanide.

It was a depressing story, and one that is detailed at length in his compelling memoir, Truth to Power: My Three Years in Eskom. Whether his attempt to blow the whistle will have any long-term impact on either government corruption or the broken power sector remains to be seen, but de Ruyter adds weight to the saying that ‘democracy dies in darkness’.

**Directed cancer medication breakthrough**

Bahija Jallal is the CEO of the Oxford, UK-based ImmunoCore. The biotech has pioneered a drug that works with the body’s own ‘soldiers’, its T-cells, to fight some of the most difficult-to-cure maladies including cancers, HIV and other infectious and autoimmune diseases. The implications are colossal. But none of this might have been possible without the extraordinary leadership of Jallal, who took over as CEO of the ailing company in 2019. Earlier she had overseen the development of cancer medication with global organisations such as AstraZeneca.

Immunocore had top-class science, but also governance issues, and could no longer raise much-needed finance. In less than two years she had restructured the company, raised all the finance needed, and in 2021 oversaw the first successful approval of its main drug. This is seen as one of the greatest turnarounds in the biotech industry’s history. Today the company has gone public and is working on several other critical medications.

Jallal, born in Morocco, lost her father at a young age but her mother, who remains her hero, made sure she got an excellent education. She studied at the Université de Paris VI and the Max Planck Institute for Biochemistry in Germany.

Her other hero is the late Nelson Mandela, whom she describes as a ‘powerful but humble leader’.

**Exposing skeletons in the cupboard**

As residents and visitors know all too well, South Africa continues to suffer power cuts that cripple businesses, the public sector and families alike. So when respected businessman André de Ruyter was appointed CEO of troubled state power company Eskom in late 2019 there was hope that he would finally be able to clean the Augean stables and get power production back on track.

His time in charge highlighted the deep malaise and ingrained corruption of the post-apartheid state. His resignation from the utility was announced in 2022, but it was not until a year later that the dramatic story of his time in office emerged in lurid detail.

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**Solutions provider supreme**

Benedict Oramah was one of the small group of young and idealistic men and women who answered the call to build a pan-African institution some three decades ago.

That institution, Africa Export-Import Bank, which he has led since 2015, has since grown into a sprawling behemoth that reaches into nearly every aspect of African economic life.

With a balance sheet that now exceeds $30bn, Oramah has directed the bank towards an increasingly activist posture, developing and implementing solutions for the continent’s challenges.

To buttress the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), the bank innovated the Pan-African Payment and Settlement System (PAPSS) to facilitate the cross-border transit of goods without all the hassle involved in the exchange of various currencies.

Its other initiatives include the Transit Guarantee Scheme, the African Quality Assurance Centre and the African Medical Centre of Excellence in Abuja, supplementing the continent’s creaky healthcare system.

In the face of the pandemic, global supply chain shocks, the war in Ukraine and the debt challenges that some African nations face, the bank has stepped up its counter-cyclical measures, offering innovative schemes to guide countries through the turbulence.

Such is the depth and breadth of its interventions that Oramah, the 2023 Forbes Africa Person of the Year, has to be on the speed dial of many an African leader – the bank being the A-Team to call when you have a problem and no one else can help.

Oramah’s belief in African-led solutions and successful initiatives is creating new confidence in Africa and the impact of his interventions may well lead to a new African moment that closes the door on years of underachievement in the world’s most resource-rich continent.
The go-to partner for African solutions

Samaila Zubairu and AFC are basing their approach on the conviction that African challenges can only ever be properly addressed by African solutions.

Zubairu and AFC are basing their approach on the conviction that African challenges can only ever be properly addressed by African solutions.
From the finance industry to telecoms, Ralph Mupita has shown remarkable leadership and achievement as a senior business executive. He became the CEO of MTN Group, Africa’s largest mobile operator, in 2017 and rose to the role of Group President and CEO in 2020.

He is now leading a major strategic shift that will see the group investing more heavily in Africa. “We are moving out of certain geographies, such as the Middle East, to focus all our human and financial capital on opportunities in Africa,” he says. “The connectivity gap across Africa needs to be tackled in many ways. We believe that everybody deserves the benefits of a modern connected life.”

Mupita is leading efforts to re-engineer MTN’s business model and transform it into a simpler, more efficient organisation that can capture growth much faster. He has also emerged as an astute negotiator in tax disputes with different African governments, including Ghana.

MTN, the South African telecommunications giant formerly known as M-Cell, faced a massive tax demand of GH¢8.2bn ($680m) from the Ghanaian government. The company challenged the tax bill, arguing that it was based on a flawed calculation and that it did not reflect the true tax liability. Mupita led the talks with the Ghanaian officials for 21 days, during which they reached a mutually satisfactory agreement. The Ghanaian government decided to withdraw the tax claim and settle the matter amicably.

Kieran Beguir is a pioneer of artificial intelligence (AI) in Africa and a global leader in ‘deep learning’ who co-founded InstaDeep, an African start-up that helps businesses leverage the latest AI innovations to boost their performance and profitability.

InstaDeep was acquired in early 2023 by BioNTech, a German biotech giant, for €562m – making it the biggest deal ever for an African start-up. InstaDeep now operates as a subsidiary of BioNTech and is the centrepiece of its growing portfolio of AI, a Google Developer Expert and Economic Forum Council on the Future of AI, a member of the World Economic Forum's Council on the Future of the Internet. Beguir is also a highly respected engineer MTN’s business model and transform it into a simpler, more efficient organisation that can capture growth much faster. He has also emerged as an astute negotiator in tax disputes with different African governments, including Ghana.

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The extraordinary business journey of Côte d’Ivoire-born Mohamed Kande reached new heights in late 2023 when he was named the first black global chair of PwC, one of the world’s biggest consulting firms. Raised with a half-Lebanese mother in a part-Catholic, part-Muslim family, Kande emigrated to France aged 16 for schooling and later to Montreal for graduate school before embarking on a US career.

A member of PwC’s global leadership team since 2011, global advisory leader since 2019, and co-leader of US consulting solutions, Kande appears well-equipped for any challenge that the ‘Big Four’ consultant will throw his way.

At the heart of his success is an extraordinary dedication to self-education. In his mid-50s, the one-time electrical engineer embarked on hundreds of hours of study to pass the US’s demanding accountancy tests. Kande continues to break down barriers: one of his interviewers for the role told The Financial Times that he “knocked down misconception in about who can be a leader in our firm”.

He observes: “I am a Black man, I am an immigrant, I speak English with a French accent. And my name is Mohamed. Success – or even a presence – among the world’s biggest consulting firms was far from preordained, to say the least…”

CÔTE D’IVOIRE

MOHAMED KANDE

Breaking down barriers to rise to the top

Dangote’s petroleum plant is expected to provide for 100% of Nigeria’s requirements for refined products, saving it a fortune on import bills.
Catalysing Africa’s creative industries

IBRAHIM SAGNA

Ibrahim Sagna has more than 25 years’ experience in global finance. He is currently the Executive Chairman of Silverbacks Holdings, a private investment firm focused on value investing in sports, technology, media, entertainment, and lifestyle companies.

He directs the firm’s strategy and investment decisions, drawing on his rich experience that includes senior roles in private equity firms and their portfolio companies, stints at hedge funds, as well as roles in development finance institutions.

He has experience in both private and public markets, where he has executed some transactions that received awards.

Known for his ‘Midas touch’, he has in the course of his illustrious career shepherded over $30bn of capital flows into African-related investments.

Sagna is passionate about sports in Africa and its potential to transform lives. He holds several influential roles in the sports world, including serving on the board of the Global Sports Summit’s governing body. He is also the Vice-Chairman and a Founding Partner of the Cape Town Tigers, the South African basketball team that competes in the Basketball Africa League (BAL), a joint venture between the NBA and FIBA.

Sagna has also invested in some of the most innovative tech start-ups in North and sub-Saharan Africa. Before joining Silverbacks Holdings, he worked in senior positions at hedge funds, as well as roles in development finance institutions.

Sagna also invests in some of the most innovative tech start-ups in Nordic and sub-Saharan Africa. Before joining Silverbacks Holdings, he worked in senior positions at hedge funds, as well as roles in development finance institutions.

He has a Masters in Finance from INSEAD, and an MSc from the same institution. This in addition to executive education from Harvard Business School, London Business School, and INSEAD.

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Setting fresh enterprise goals

SHOLA AKINLADE

Shola Akinlade, co-founder and CEO of Paystack, a leading payments platform, began his career at Heineken before moving into software engineering, working with banks and gaining experience in the financial sector.

Prior to establishing Paystack, Akinlade co-founded Precure, making open-source collaboration software designed for businesses in emerging markets.

In 2016 Akinlade, alongside Olubunmi Akinlade, founded Paystack, a company to do so.

The company went on to raise over $10m from a diverse array of international and local investors, including Visa, Tencent, Y Combinator, and Stripe, which would eventually acquire Paystack for $200m.

Paystack has become a major player in the African fintech sector, processing over 50% of all online payments in Nigeria, Africa’s largest economy.

Shola Akinlade has recently turned his attention to sports, in 2022 founding Sporting Lagos F.C., a football club that he says is to serve as a platform for community development and social change.

Bringing a fresh approach to development

SERGE EKUÉ

Serge Ekué has been the President of the West African Development Bank (BOAD) since 2020. He has over 20 years’ experience in international finance, structured financing, and markets, having exercised these broad responsibilities globally.

As the top executive at BOAD, Ekué has brought new dynamism to development financing in Africa. He has emerged as an important voice on African affairs and has put forward a new pragmatic and commercial vision for BOAD.

A hard worker and seasoned banker, he is known for his strong values and authenticity. He does not hesitate to think differently in the face of challenges and to offer new solutions. He represents the new generation of business leaders and bankers – confident and with a clear vision of what is possible.

Ekué has been emphatic on the need to scale up financing for West Africa. “The West African population today is 110m to 120m. We will double in population in 25 years, with an average age of 20. To cope with this growth, the needs in terms of financing are massive,” he remarks.

A recognised specialist in financial markets and capital markets, Ekué led the capital markets activities of Natixis in the Asia-Pacific before becoming the MD of the Hang Kong-based bank. Those who worked with him then describe him as a humble, accessible leader, who is passionate about the development of his teams.
Jules Ngankam is a seasoned leader in the African financial sector, with a passion for supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) across the continent. He has been the Group CEO of the African Guarantee Fund (AGF) since 2020. AGF is a pan-African financial institution that offers guarantees and other financial solutions to enable SMEs to access credit and grow their businesses. Ngankam’s mission is to leverage financial innovation to support sustainable development and financial inclusion for SMEs. “Despite the internationally-recognised importance of SMEs, African small businesses often have difficulties accessing financing for growth and innovation from the formal financial sector,” he says. “For us, AGF is the missing link that enables partner financial institutions to execute their SME financing strategies effectively.”

One of Ngankam’s key achievements at AGF is his active involvement in the Affirmative Finance Action for Women in Africa (AFAWA) initiative, a joint venture with the African Development Bank that aims to address the financial and non-financial barriers faced by women entrepreneurs in Africa.

Hassanein Hiridjee is a Malagasy entrepreneur and CEO of the pan-African group Axian. He is a significant player in the Malagasy economy, with interests in sectors such as telecommunications, energy and finance, and a leading business figure in the Indian Ocean region.

Axian is the foremost energy producer in Madagascar. The group has also made significant progress in renewable energies, operating the largest solar farm in the Indian Ocean region and implementing mini-grid technology to provide clean energy to underserved rural villages. In the telecoms sector, Axian is the first commercial 5G network operator in Africa, serving 38m mobile users. This has allowed it to extend its influence to fintech, where the conglomerate became the first mobile money operator in the Indian Ocean, reaching 18m mobile money customers.

“Whether it’s helping female entrepreneurs to access financial services, delivering energy to rural communities, or providing the space for your staff to be innovators, real leadership is about understanding the benefit of enabling people,” says Hiridjee.

He has been one of the most active business leaders in Africa this year. Further to Axian’s purchase of Tigo Tanzania and Zanzibar Telecom last April, it controls one of the largest telecoms operations in Tanzania and has been forging ahead with its network modernisation plans and upgrades for the East African nation. In West Africa meanwhile, Axian doubled its shareholding in Free Senegal, the country’s second-largest mobile operator, to 80%. Axian has also been in talks with MTN throughout the year over the acquisition of three of its operations, in Guinea Bissau, Guinea-Conakry and Liberia.

Hiridjee received the prestigious CEO of the Year award at the Africa CEO Forum 2022. Axian has been run successfully by the Hiridjee family for three generations.

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COURA SÈNE

Riding the fintech wave

Cours Sène oversees the West African operations of US-founded fintech Wave, whose Senegalese headquarters is in the shape of a rocket. The metaphor is apt. Five years after its arrival on the Senegalese market, the mobile money firm has dethroned the incumbent operator Orange Money – operated by the French telecommunications group Orange – and pushed the latter to lower its transaction rates by nearly 80%.

Wave, an app-based payment solution, raised $520m back in September 2021. It has now expanded into three other countries of the West African Economic and Monetary Union – Côte d’Ivoire, Burkina Faso and Mali, as well as Uganda and the Gambia, and is targeting a stronger presence in retail, bill-paying and transport ticket sales across the region.

Its mobile money operation in Senegal acted as a catalyst to its regional growth and provided the blueprint for its current business model. Sène believes that over 75% of Senegalese adults have a Wave account that they use daily or monthly – just over 6m users.

One of African fintech’s emerging stars, Sène believes the country is on its way to becoming increasingly cashless, and expects the trend to extend to the region. “West Africa is currently experiencing a revolution in the mobile money sector. Our long-term vision is that our customers will favour our products over cash.”

PASCAL AGBOYIBOR

Deft lawyer brings dividends to DRC

Following an abrupt departure from a top-flight American law firm where he was the number 2 at the time, Togo-born Pascal Agboyibor set his sights on creating an African legal behemoth. In the four years since, Agboyibor has managed to build a formidable collective of lawyers across African capitals as well as in Washington, London and Paris.

Through mergers, acquisitions and alliances, Asafo and Co, as he named his firm, now boasts hundreds of highly skilled partners and associates, most selected after meeting directly with Agboyibor himself. From his base in Paris, he directs this sprawling enterprise with élan, often relying on local knowledge and expertise from partner firms to finetune the approach.

When in July this year, China’s CMOC Group agreed to pay $180m to Congo’s state mining firm, Gecamines, as part of a settlement over the Tenke Fungurume Mining operation in Congo, some of the credit was rightly given to Agboyibor and his firm. The deal, which also includes a commitment from CMOC to pay a combined $1.2bn in dividends to Gecamines, is emblematic of the ethos that drives a firm named after the military unit that defended pre-colonial kingdoms in southern Ghana. Now, with the clouds that hung over his departure finally dissipating – he has been cleared of allegations of improper behaviour – this legal eagle will surely soar even higher in the coming years.

OLUGBENGA AGBOOLA

Flutterwave still dominating techies

In February 2023 Olugbenga Agboola rang the closing bell at the New York Stock Exchange – one of the few Africans ever to do so. This may well have ended an interesting chapter in the life of Flutterwave, the company he co-founded in 2016.

Following a turbulent year in which accusations from a former employee and what some describe as “missteps” led to the suspension – and eventual reinstatement – of the company’s licence in Kenya, the second-biggest market after its home market of Nigeria, Flutterwave is set to grow even further and faster.

GB, as he is known among peers, started the company after stints at tech and finance houses such as GTBank, PayPal, Google and Access Bank. In 2022 it had more than three times the market capitalisation of Nigeria’s biggest bank, where he had once been an employee.

Perhaps more significantly, the company’s infrastructure supports the ICT ecosystem in Africa. As Agboola puts it, “There’s no Africa fintech which is not our customer, and there is no other infrastructure to pay or get paid across Africa”, meaning that Flutterwave and its founder’s impact go way beyond their own balance sheet.

Recent funding rounds have sweated the chest and an IPO is rumoured to be in the offing. At this rate, Agboola, who received a national honour in 2022, could easily become one of this century’s pre-eminent tech figures in the continent.

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JAMES MWANGI

A banker – and philanthropist – par excellence

James Mwangi, the Group Managing Director and CEO of Equity Group Holdings plc, has achieved iconic status for his transformative leadership of Africa’s banking sector. Under his leadership Equity Bank, from very humble beginnings, has grown into a sub-regional giant on the back of a determined policy to extend financial inclusion to the majority that had been excluded.

Equity was one of the first lenders in Kenya to scrap minimum account balances, and the first to introduce agency banking in Kenya. This enables banking transactions in shops and has greatly increased access to financial services.

Mwangi has also successfully led the Bank’s digitisation efforts, with 99% of all customer transactions now happening outside the branch network. This has enabled Equity Bank to serve over 18m customers spread across six countries in the East African region.

Equity Bank is already the biggest bank in Kenya by assets and Mwangi is determined to make it the dominant player in East and Central Africa. One of his recent achievements was the merger of Equity Bank Congo and BCDC, which created EquityBCDC.

Mwangi is not only a successful banker, but also a generous philanthropist – the country’s foremost hand in education. He founded the Wings to Fly scholarship programme, which has supported thousands of talented, disadvantaged students to get quality education in Kenya.

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Three years after her widely-publicised ouster from her former role as the head of Google’s Ethical AI research team, Timnit Gebru is leading the charge for a world in which AI is built around – rather than at the cost of – community and individual needs.

Her vision is increasingly urgent at a time when we are grappling with the massive power and the potential risks of Artificial Intelligence (AI). In the last year, film writers and actors exposed the dark underbelly of the unregulated use of these nascent – and rapidly growing – technologies, even as they became more widespread and available with the launch of OpenAI.

Now, in her current role as Founder and Executive Director of the Distributed AI Research Institute, she is building an independent movement to address the major shortcomings of the sector.

Through her career she has strived to advance inclusivity and to address biases in the tech sector. Her groundbreaking research on the dangers of algorithmic bias and the risks of large Artificial Intelligence models continues to guide our understanding of the pressing gaps in our current approach to AI.

In a year during which AI models have more deeply permeated our collective consciousness, raising among other questions the risk to livelihoods, the value of a human’s voice cannot be understated.
Global champion of the oceans

Professor Rashid Sumaila, the Canada-based research chair in interdisciplined ocean and fisheries economics at the Institute for the Oceans and Fisheries, as well as the School of Public Policy and Global Affairs at the University of British Columbia, is one of the leading experts in, and campaigners for, ocean health and economy.

His pioneering work includes applying game theory to fisheries, rethinking discount rates for natural resource projects, analysing government subsidies to global fisheries, documenting employment in fisheries, estimating the benefits of rebuilding fish stocks and establishing marine reserves.

His groundbreaking ‘fish bank’ concept for the high seas has the potential to advance global ocean conservation. His work on international fisheries subsidies has impacted WTO negotiations and he has provided expert advice to the White House, the United Nations, the Asian Development Bank, and parliamentary bodies in Canada and the UK.

His research has been featured in the acclaimed documentary ‘Race to Save our Seas’ and ‘End of the Line’, the acclaimed documentary about the global problem of fishing subsidies and their damaging effect on oceans and coastal communities.

He has received several awards and acknowledgements for his outstanding contributions, including the 2017 Volvo Environment Prize, and admission as a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada in 2019. In April he was honoured with the 2023 Tyler Prize for Environmental Achievement – often referred to as the ‘Nobel Prize for the Environment’ – alongside Daniel Pauly.

Sumaila has been honoured with the 2023 Tyler Prize for Environmental Achievement – often referred to as the ‘Nobel Prize for the Environment’.

Leading Africa’s climate vanguard

James Mwangi is a passionate climate strategist who works closely with some of Africa’s most influential leaders, including heads of state, top business executives, investors, and senior leaders of multilateral organisations and foundations.

He is the founder of Climate Action Platform for Africa, a groundbreaking initiative that he launched in 2017 to mobilise climate action in Africa. He has quickly become one of the most respected and trusted voices on climate issues in Africa, working with leaders like Kenya’s President William Ruto, who tapped him as his Senior Advisor for Climate Change.

Mwangi believes that Africa can achieve economic transformation through large-scale climate action that leverages the continent’s rich natural resources and creates opportunities for its young and dynamic workforce.

“We need to shake the old tired idea that Africa is a poor, helpless, helpless climate change victim,” he says. “Instead Africa and its people have the potential – they can, and they should, be the world’s climate vanguards.”

Before becoming an independent climate action advocate, Mwangi was the Executive Director of the Daalberg Group, a leading global consultancy operating in over 30 locations worldwide that is focused on driving inclusive and sustainable growth.

He played a key role in helping Daalberg establish a foothold in Africa, opening offices in Johannesburg in 2007, Nairobi in 2008, and Dakar in 2009. He was the Global Managing Partner from 2010 to 2014 before taking up his final role as Executive Director. He began his career as a management consultant in 2000 at McKinsey & Company in New York.

Mwangi is a 2009 Archbishop Tutu Leadership Fellow of the African Leadership Institute. He currently serves on the boards of the Skoll Foundation, One Acre Fund and the Global Centre for Pluralism among others. He holds a BA in economics from Harvard University.

Championing biodiversity globally

Elizabeth Maruma Mrema, now Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), grew up in Moshi, a small town on the slopes of the mighty and fabled Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania.

She has described how growing up surrounded by nature fuelled her passion for the environment and how growing up in Tanzania influenced the work she does today.

According to one of the world’s most prolific biodiversity champions and activists, Mrema took up the UNEP position in early 2021 – an opposite role given the current discourse on climate change, which is one of the key drivers of biodiversity loss.

UN Secretary-General, António Guterres says that despite climate change and biodiversity loss being connected, the latter has historically received less global attention.

Mrema believes that despite climate change and biodiversity loss being connected, the latter has historically received less global attention. In her new role, she is thus keen on using her experience to help find lasting solutions.

A lawyer by profession, she has spent more than 20 years in various roles with the UN agency. But one of her defining roles was as Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) – part of UNEP – a post she held from 2020 until her current appointment.

Mrema is also co-chair of the Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures, whose mission is to encourage businesses to shift investments from destructive activities, toward those that restore and protect nature.

She was listed among Time Magazine’s 100 Most Influential People of 2023. She has also held the Nicholas Robinson Award for Excellence in Environmental Law.
Wanjira Mathai, daughter of the late global environment icon, Wangari Maathai, is Managing Director for Africa and Global Partnerships at the World Resources Institute and chief Africa advisor to the Bezos Earth Fund. She is a change-maker whose work has pushed for greater climate action at the grassroots and international policy level.

She is the head of the Wangari Maathai Foundation and formerly led the Greenbelt Movement, which has planted more than 50m trees since its inception in 1977. “For over a decade, I have watched Wanjira work her magic in rural communities and international halls of power alike. Throughout, she has focused on restoration – of land, livelihoods, and communities,” writes Andrew Steer, President and CEO of the Bezos Earth Fund.

Wanjira is guided by a sense of effervescent hope but has a deep clarity on the intentional and difficult work of bringing about positive and lasting societal change. “Each of us can be potent agents of change and I believe that together, we are a force, that if we put our hands together, we can change the situation and no problem is too big,” she said in a TED talk, “Shifting culture takes patience, persistence and commitment, and it is extremely slow and deep work. But if we are going to shift a culture, we have no choice but to get that work started,” she said.

For Wanjira, climate change and environmental degradation are issues of life and death, as she articulated in the aftermath of COP28. “We are at a moment of life and death, as she articulated in the aftermath of COP28. “Shifting culture takes patience, persistence and commitment, and it is extremely slow and deep work. But if we are going to shift a culture, we have no choice but to get that work started,” she said. For Wanjira, climate change and environmental degradation are issues of life and death, as she articulated in the aftermath of COP28.
**TEJU COLE**

**Trap music muse with a social conscience**

DJ Snake, born William Grigahcine, is a prominent French Grammy-nominated producer and DJ known for his influential role in the relatively new genre of trap music. He gained widespread recognition with his 2013 single Turn Down for What, featuring Lil Jon, which became a crossover trap hit. His global success continued with the 2015 multi-platinum chart-topper Lean On, in collaboration with Major Lazer and vocalist MØ, the 2016 chart-topping collaboration with Justin Bieber, Let Me Love You and his debut album, Encore, which reached number eight on the Billboard 200 chart.

His allure has continued in 2023, with sold-out concerts through 2024. Tickets for a March 2025 concert sold out in a mere three minutes.

While his impact on the music industry is evident through his consistent chart-topping releases and collaborations with renowned artists across various genres, off the mic, DJ Snake has become a prominent activist for social causes, raising money for causes even as far flung as the displaced Rohingya.

In 2019, he made a passionate appeal for calm while performing in India, at a time when a controversial citizenship bill had spurred mass protests across the country. With his combined social media following that is north of 30m, DJ Snake clearly has the attention of the youth and the ability to affect movements.

**ALGERIA**

**DJ SNAKE**

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**KENYA**

**ALI SAID ALAMIN MANDRY**

**Cooking up a storm**

Ali Mandry, also known as Chef Ali Liariste, has been banging the drum for East African cuisine so loudly and relentlessly that it has now finally migrated from its home territory and become one of the world’s great cuisines.

He is now a major TV chef and personality. His hugely popular cookery shows, broadcast both by local stations as well as international streamers such as Zuku, have earned him a massive following. He also hosts radio shows and writes weekly columns on food culture. He is a judge on Kenya’s first reality cooking competition, Kikwetu Supa Chef, and is a culinary instructor at the Kenya Utalii (tourism) College in Mombasa.

He has also shared his knowledge of food presentation, including pastry, with young chefs at Kenya Utalii College, raising Kenyan cuisine standards to a new level.

Mandry, who was born and raised in the culturally rich, historical city of Mombasa, says the delicious cakes to a highly appreciative clientele, even if most of them were his schoolmates.

The coastal area of Kenya with its diverse Arab, Swahili, African, European and Asian cultures, has a fabulous cuisine but has generally kept its cooking triumphs within its borders. Mandry is changing all that and food lovers from all corners of the globe can now share in the region’s exquisite delicacies.

**GHANA**

**NANA DAKOAA SEKYIAMAH**

**Empowering African women’s sexuality**

Nana Darkoa Sekyiamah is a trailblazing writer, blogger, and feminist activist dedicated to amplifying the voices of women, and exploring themes of sexuality, feminism and social justice.

Based in Ghana, she is recognised for her impactful contributions to contemporary African literature and her efforts to create spaces for open dialogue on taboo subjects.

As founder of the blog Adventures from the Bedrooms of African Women, Nana has created a platform for African women to share their stories, personal experiences and insights on topics often considered sensitive or stigmatised.

Through her writing, she challenges societal norms and sheds light on the diverse and nuanced narratives of African women, contributing to a more inclusive and authentic portrayal of their lives.

Nana’s work extends beyond the digital realm, and she is an accomplished author, well-known for her debut novel *The Sex Lives of African Women*, which explores the complexities of women’s lives and relationships in contemporary Africa.

The book has been widely praised for its examination of the intersectionality of gender, culture, and identity.

Alongside her literature, Nana is a vocal advocate for sexual and reproductive rights. Her career illustrates the power of storytelling and activism in countering norms and empowering marginalised voices.
**NIGERIA**

**OMOYEMI AKERELE**

**Queen of Africa’s biggest fashion show**

Lagos Fashion Week (LFW) is without doubt one of Africa’s largest and most anticipated events in the industry. And the woman behind it, Omoymei Akerele, is equally one of the most admired and determined fashion industry catalysts in Africa today. For 12 years, LFW has been a mecca for fashion enthusiasts from across the globe. And for the creatives themselves, the high visibility it offers has been a launchpad on their journey to commercial success. The 2023 event, held in October, was perhaps the best and most popular ever. But her vision for LFW goes beyond the catwalk and as such, she continuously innovates new ventures to buoy the flagship event and brand as well as to support the creatives themselves. “There’s a need for a consistent platform like Lagos Fashion Week to not only consistently showcase the collections… but to be able to shift the conversation from fashion as entertainment to fashion as a business and provide useful tools for commerce and creativity across the continent,” she said in an interview with Vogue.

Omoymei is also the founder of Style House Files – a fashion business development agency that focuses on the advancement of the Nigerian and African fashion industry, through different initiatives including creative direction, fashion production, market and brand positioning, retail strategy, mentoring and market analysis.

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**SENEGAL**

**DAVID DIOP**

**Master storyteller of hidden narratives**

A true modern literary great, David Diop’s literary career has left a remarkable impression on the world of contemporary literature. Born in Paris to a French mother and a Senegalese father, Diop’s multicultural background enriches his storytelling, infusing his works with a unique perspective on identity, history, and the human condition. Diop gained international acclaim with his debut novel, *At Night All Blood is Black* (Féte d’Âme in French), which won the prestigious International Booker Prize.

Set against the backdrop of World War I, the novel explores the psychological toll of war on an African soldier fighting for the French army. Diop’s narrative mastery and poignant exploration of themes such as friendship, trauma, and the dehumanising impact of conflict have earned him widespread recognition.

His ability to navigate complex emotions and depict the untold stories of African soldiers in historical contexts has resonated with readers globally. The novel stands as a testament to his commitment to shedding light on overlooked narratives and challenging conventional perspectives.

In addition to his literary achievements, Diop is known for his scholarly work. He is a professor of eighteenth-century literature at the University of Pau in southwestern France, and brings his academic expertise to the exploration of historical and cultural themes in his fiction.

His fantastic career is a true celebration of storytelling as a powerful tool for empathy and understanding, and his profound insights into the human experience, coupled with his exploration of complex historical events, position him as a remarkable figure in contemporary literature.

“No one knows what I think. I am free to think whatever I want. And what I think is that people don’t want me to think.”

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**ETHIOPIA**

**AÏDA MULUNEH**

**The lens prodigy with a bold vision**

Aïda Muluneh is a visionary photographer whose career is characterised by a profound commitment to visual storytelling, cultural preservation, and challenging societal norms. Born in Ethiopia and raised in Canada and the US, Aïda Muluneh’s diverse background informs her work, which captures the complexities and beauty of the African experience.

Muluneh is renowned for her evocative and visually striking photography that often incorporates vibrant colours, bold patterns, and symbolic elements. Her images go beyond aesthetics, and serve as a powerful means of addressing issues such as identity, race, and the impact of globalisation on African cultures.

Through her well-poised lens, Muluneh challenges stereotypes and offers a fresh perspective on the rich and diverse narratives found on the African continent. As the founder of the Addis Foto Fest, Ethiopia’s first international photography festival, Aïda has played a pivotal role in fostering a thriving photography community in Africa.

The festival provides a platform for pan-African photographers to showcase their work, nurturing cross-cultural exchange and celebrating the continent’s artistic talent. Aïda’s artistic vision extends to her role as a curator and cultural advocate. She has been instrumental in promoting the work of African photographers globally, emphasising the importance of diverse narratives and representation for underrepresented African talent in the visual arts world.

As well as her innovative contributions, Aïda is recognised for her dedication to mentoring and education. She has worked tirelessly to nurture emerging talent, particularly from underrepresented communities, providing them with opportunities to learn and grow within the field of photography.

“Vision without action is merely a dream, action without vision just passes time. Vision with action can change the world.”

Aïda Muluneh
Combining hit music with mental health advocacy

Temilade Openiyi, known professionally as Tems, is a Nigerian singer, songwriter, and record producer whose career has been defined by her exceptional talent and unique contribution to the music industry.

Tems gained prominence with her distinctive voice and genre-blending style, seamlessly fusing elements of R&B, soul, and Afrobeat. Her breakout single Mr Rebel drew attention to her soulful vocals and marked the beginning of a promising career in the Nigerian music scene.

One of Tems’ defining moments came with her feature on Wizkid’s hit single Essence from the album Made in Lagos. The song became a global sensation, introducing Tems to an international audience and earning her widespread acclaim for her captivating performance.

Apart from her success as a featured artist, Tems has released her own critically-acclaimed projects. Her EP For Broken Ears further solidified her reputation as a versatile and boundary-pushing artist.

Known for her introspective lyrics and emotive delivery, Tems brings a fresh perspective to contemporary African music. In addition to her musical achievements, Tems is recognized for her advocacy for mental health awareness. She has been open about her own struggles and uses her platform to address the importance of mental wellbeing, particularly in the high-pressure world of the entertainment industry.

Tems’ career is a testament to the power of artistic expression and individuality in shaping the global music landscape. Her ability to seamlessly blend genres, coupled with her advocacy for mental health, marks her as an individual who is not only making waves in the music industry but also contributing to important conversations.

Spreading the unique taste of African cuisine

Thiam’s culinary expertise is deeply rooted in his commitment to showcasing the rich and diverse culinary traditions of Africa. He has become a global ambassador for African cuisine, using his skills to break down stereotypes and introduce the world to the depth and complexity of flavours found on the continent.

In addition to his culinary prowess, Thiam is a celebrated author, educator, and entrepreneur. His cookbook Yolele! Recipes from the Heart of Senegal has received critical acclaim for its ability to capture the essence of Senegalese cuisine and make it accessible to a global audience.

As an educator, Thiam has dedicated himself to sharing his knowledge and expertise, conducting cooking classes and workshops that inspire a new generation of chefs and make it accessible to a global audience.

Tems’ advocacy for mental health marks her as not only making waves in the music industry but also contributing to important conversations.

Serge Attukwei Clottey’s far-reaching impact extends beyond the art world. As an educator, Clottey has organised workshops and mentorship programmes to empower young artists and promote the transformative potential of art in addressing social issues.

By repurposing materials, Clottey not only highlights the environmental impact of consumerism but also sparks conversations about waste.

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\text{OUR PERCEPTION OF OURSELVES STARTS WITH THE FOOD WE EAT,” SAYS THIAM.}
\]
EGYPT

**BASEM YOUSSEF**

**Going beyond comedy and satire**

From heart surgeon to ground-breaking satirist, comedian and talk show host—quite a journey for just one man and not one without its bumps in the road.

Baseem Youssef graduated in 1998 from Cairo University’s Medical Faculty, specialising in cardiothoracic medicine. In 2011 he administered aid to wounded victims in Tahrir Square during the Egyptian Revolution, and that moment sparked a vastly different direction for his life.

Inspired by the events that had unfolded before his eyes, he began making short YouTube videos, giving a voice to the millions of Egyptians who disagreed with the traditional media’s coverage of the revolution. Three months down the line he had 5m viewers.

ONTV invited him to host an Egyptian news satire programme called Al Bernameg, and he became the first crossover success from internet to television in the region.

His daring, observational and witty critiques of his country’s politics soon reaped an audience of over 40m, but it did not take long for the government to respond and pursue charges against him. This led to his exile to the US the following year, where he continues his unique brand of intelligent parody to new audiences.

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In October and November 2023, his new series Uncensored in two interviews on the Piers Morgan TV show, the first of

**NIGERIA**

**EDITI EFFIONG**

**Made one of Netflix’s biggest 2023 hits**

Hailing from southern Nigeria, Editi Effiong left university with a degree in environmental science. Before he was 30, his enterprising spirit led to the founding of Anakle, originally set up as a digital marketing company.

In 2018 he made his movie debut as the writer behind Up North, a romantic drama released by Anakle Films. He made his first foray into directing with Fishbone, a short film that he also wrote and produced depicting the underworld of counterfeit drug dealing in the Lagos slums. Just over 30 minutes long and shown on YouTube, the film received favourable reviews: but the best was yet to come.

In 2021 Anakle Films released Day of Destiny, written and directed by Effiong. It was the first time a Nigerian movie maker had brought a family-oriented time-travelling adventure film to the silver screen.

Effiong’s big breakthrough year was 2023. He wrote, produced and directed The Black Book, his first feature-length film, which he later described as his “love letter to Nigeria”. The idea for the film was originally formulated during the 2020 #EndSARS protests against police brutality in Nigeria, in which he was a prominent voice. It became a Netflix sensation and the first Nigerian film to top the Netflix World Ranking, moving to #4 within two days of its release and viewed over 70m times globally within the first month.

Where will his success story go next? Up and up, no doubt.

**BURNA BOY**

**More triumphs for Africa’s music powerhouse**

After becoming the first African artist to headline New York’s Madison Square Garden in 2022, Burna Boy continued to captivate international audiences in 2023. The Nigerian singer-songwriter bagged his fourth Best International Act award at the BET Awards ceremony in June and won the Best Afrobeats Act at the Billboard Music Awards in November.

His triumph at the 2023 Grammy Awards, securing the Best Melodic Rap Performance for Sittin’ On Top Of The World, marked a pivotal moment in his career.

And his historic performance at the London Stadium (below), part of the Love, Damini tour, further solidified his global impact, making him the first African artist to sell out a UK stadium, with an astounding 80,000-person audience.

Closing off the year, Burna Boy earned four nominations for the 2024 annual Grammy Awards. His relentless international presence extended to prestigious events like Coachella, Afronation, and the UEFA Champions League final. His new album, I Told Them, released in August 2023, quickly soared to the number one spot in the UK, while the accompanying I Told Them… tour captivated audiences across the US, Europe, and Africa.

Burna Boy’s trailblazing achievements in 2023 underscore his status as a musical powerhouse and a cultural icon on the global stage.
Tyla is the first South African to debut on the Billboard Hot 100, more than five decades after Hugh Masekela.

TyLA LAURA SEETHAL

The sensational rapidly-rising star

2023 stands out as a year of remarkable achievements and global recognition for Tyla, including a 2024 Grammy nomination for Best African Music Performance.

The Billboard Top 40 artist earned a coveted nomination for Best New Artist at the prestigious 2023 BET Soul Train Awards, attesting to her rapid ascent in the music industry.

But it is the beats of her 'song of the summer’ – Water – that have kept us all singing. A blend of her childhood R&B influences and the Amapiano beats from her home country of South Africa, Tyla’s music has a joyful, uplifting quality to it. The YouTube video for Water boasts over 80m views. It also introduced millions around the world to the Bacardi dance and the Water dance challenge.

The 21-year-old has achieved an impressive feat: she is the first South African to debut on the Billboard Hot 100 more than five decades after Hugh Masekela.

ALICE DIOP

The outspoken but compelling storyteller

Raised by Senegalese immigrant parents who arrived in France in the 60s, Alice Diop grew up in the suburbs of Paris, a background that would be an inspiration for her powerful documentary filmmaking.

A Sorbonne graduate in African colonial history with a Master’s degree in Visual Sociology, her first documentary, La tour du monde (2005), made a big impact with its view of a marginal world that had not been seen before.

Diop’s later work, such as her 2020 Nous, revealed a growth in her filmmaking abilities and a broader view of French society. Nous garnered the award for best documentary and best film in the Encounters section at the Berlin Film Festival.

The year 2022 was a turning point in her filmmaking. Her debut feature film, Saint Omer, came out to a slew of accolades and awards. Based on the emotive true story of a mother accused of killing her child, Diop’s sensitive interpretation showed another facet of a human tragedy.

Saint Omer won the Best First Work and Silver Lion awards at the Venice Film Festival in 2022 and went on to gain the Gotham Independent Film Award for Best International Feature. It was also submitted as the French entry for the Academy Award for Best International Feature at the 2023 Oscars.

Her work continues to be outspoken and compelling in its revealing of voices that go unheard and people who remain invisible.

KAOUTHHER BEN HANIA

Fimmaker pushing boundaries

Kaouthar Ben Hania’s Four Daughters has been making quite a splash across the global film festival circuit. After the Tunisian filmmaker was nominated for an Oscar for her 2020 film The Man Who Sold His Skin, she made what some might have considered a surprising decision to turn down commercial Hollywood projects, instead focusing on a Tunisian story that had greater emotional resonance with her. Yet the stories and films that she produces are not ‘Tunisian per-se’ but rather, universal in their themes and appeal; and this is what distinguishes her from her peers.

Four Daughters (Les filles d’Olfa) garnered widespread attention and applause for its creative use of genre-bending techniques – combining fiction and nonfiction elements – as well as the powerful, timely story behind it. The film follows the story of Olfa Hamrouni, whose two eldest teenage daughters left to join the Islamic State in Libya a decade ago. The cast incorporates Olfa’s two youngest daughters alongside professional actors. Critics have been raving about the work, which is striking a chord with varied audiences globally.

This year, Ben Hania was one of two co-winners of the L’Oeil d’or for Best Feature at the Cannes Film Festival. She also won the Best Documentary prize at the Gotham Awards and the film has been selected as Tunisia’s entry in the Oscars.

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Most Influential Africans

GANDHI DJUNA

Shaping direction of French urban music

Gandhi Djuna, known by his stage name Gims (formerly Maître Gims) is a rapper, singer and composer living in France.

He initially gained recognition as a member of the hip-hop collective Sexion d’Assaut before transitioning into a solo career. His first solo offering, Subliminal, was a ground-breaking piece of work that not only sold over a million copies but also secured the second spot on the French albums chart.

Following this he continued to assert his dominance with subsequent albums like My Heart Was Right (2015) and Black Belt (2018). These albums claimed the number one position in both France and Belgium’s Wallonia, while also making a significant impact in various other European countries.

In a display of versatility he returned to his hip-hop roots with the release of Le Ptitou in 2020, accompanied by two reissues in 2021, followed by LDVM, released in December 2022.

He had had similar success with his singles, including La Même in 2018, which topped the charts and was the most listened-to track in France, making him the most-played artist on television and French radio that year. In that same year he was the seventh most-played artist worldwide on music streaming app Deezer.

With over 5m records sold, Gims is undoubtedly a key player in the contemporary French music landscape.
**ZIMBABWE**

**DANAI GURIRA**

**Looking to the future after Black Panther**

Danai Gurira is a Zimbabwean-American actress, playwright, and activist whose career is characterised by her outstanding contributions to the entertainment industry and her advocacy for women’s rights and social justice.

Her portrayal of Okoye, the leader of the Dora Milaje warriors in the superhero films Black Panther (2018) and Black Panther: Wakanda Forever (2022), brought her universal acclaim for her acting but is also an accomplished playwright. Her play Eclipsed made history as the first Broadway production to feature all-female, all-Black cast and creative team.

The play, which explores the experiences of women during the Liberian civil war, showcased her ability to tell powerful stories.

In addition to her artistic achievements, Gurira is a dedicated activist. She is engaged in promoting gender equality, social justice and access to education, particularly in her home country of Zimbabwe. She is an ambassador for UN Women and has been recognised for her efforts to empower women and girls.

Gurira’s career is a testament to her multitalent and her commitment to using her profile for positive change.

Her impact on both the entertainment industry and the realm of activism marks her as someone who continues to inspire and make a difference.

**SOUTH AFRICA**

**THEBE MAGUGU**

**Young and gifted fashion maven**

Fashion powerhouse Thebe Magugu, whose luxury fashion designs have become huge international sellers, is also spinning stories that could otherwise be forgotten. The recipient of 2023’s Franco Sozzani Award, which is named after the late Editor-in-Chief of Italian Vogue, his work continues to dazzle with its physical beauty as well as its emotional power.

“When I started my brand, I wanted to do something that would have been unthinkable less than a decade ago.”

Gatwa becomes the first Black Dr Who, a prospect that would have been unthinkable less than a decade ago.

**RWANDA**

**NCUTI GATWA**

**African Dr Who is the new Time Lord**

Rwandan-Scottish actor Ncuti Gatwa gained millions of grdent fans of the long-running and iconic TV sci-fi series Dr Who when he was selected to play the 13th Time Lord in the BBC’s new series, starting over Christmas.

The role of Dr Who is one of the most sought-after in the British TV and film world as it is almost certain to catapult the actor playing the role to dazzling star status. Gatwa becomes the first Black Dr Who, a prospect that would have been unthinkable less than a decade ago.

Best known until now for his breakout role as Eric Effiong in the popular Netflix series Sex Education, Gatwa has garnered acclaim for his performances and become a notable figure in the world of acting.

His portrayal of Eric, a confident and openly gay character, has been widely praised for changing perception of Rwanda or Rwandans. Gatwa becomes the first Black Dr Who, a prospect that would have been unthinkable less than a decade ago.

He and his family escaped the Rwandan genocide in 1994 to settle in Scotland, and as such Gatwa brings a multicultural background to his roles, showcasing the richness of diverse narratives in storytelling.

Before gaining international recognition with Sex Education, he was active in theatre, participating in various productions and honing his craft as a versatile actor.

In addition to his acting career, Gatwa has been an advocate for LGBTQ+ rights and representation. His visibility as a gay actor playing a significant LGBTQ+ character on a mainstream platform contributed to important conversations about the need for more diverse and authentic storytelling in media.

Gatwa’s career is a testament to the power of authentic representation in the entertainment industry. His talent, coupled with his advocacy for inclusivity, has positioned him as an individual who is making a meaningful impact on how characters are portrayed on screen.

“I’m most proud of my heritage; being someone who can change the perception of Rwanda or Rwandans. You make your own destiny,” he says.
Superstar soprano

Pretty Yende’s place on the world stage is a far cry from her childhood in the remote province of Mpumalanga in eastern South Africa. In Zulu, Mpumalanga means “the place where the sun rises”, and Africa. In Zulu, Mpumalanga means “childhood in the remote province”.

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Put simply, Mariam Issoufou Kamara is an architect in a league of her own. And for all the right reasons. “Architecture has been complicit in so many atrocities around the world, including our industry’s contribution to the climate emergency, and it is my belief that we have a duty towards building with sustainability in mind,” she recently told Architecture & Design magazine.

As such her work is guided by the belief that architects have an important role to play in creating spaces that have “the power to elevate, dignify, and provide a better quality of life”. Atelier Masōmī, an architecture and research firm she founded in 2014, works on the principle that architecture is an important tool for social change. Her work has garnered several awards, including the Silver Global Lafarge Holcim Award for Sustainable Architecture. She has also been named by the New York Times as one of 15 ‘Creative Women Of Our Time’. In 2023, she was shortlisted for Dezeen Awards’ Architect of the Year list. Her performances included Major League DJz, Maxine Ashley and Zoe Kyri, as well as a 12-piece orchestra. He also collaborated with South African luxury brand AMIRI to design a custom outfit for the event which featured the women who had raised him, including his mother.

It was a year brimming with highs for the DJ. In April, he was honoured by the South African Minister of Sport, Arts and Culture for his “achievement on the global stage”. In December, he was named on British GQ’s Men of the Year list. His performances included the sidelines of the Las Vegas Grand Prix, the Beonix Festival in Cyprus, and the Soundstorm Music Festival in Riyadh. And in the midst of all the travel and appearances, he also made time to guest-lecture at Harvard Business School.

A new generation of strong, talented and defiant African filmmakers has emerged and Wanuri Kahiu is right at the heart of it.

She discovered her passion for filmmaking at the tender age of 16 and whilst it was not seen as an ideal career choice by her conventional businessman father and paediatrician mother, she decided to pursue a career in the arts.

Finishing high school, she continued her studies with a degree in Management Science at Warwick University in the UK. However, the call of creativity proved too strong. She went on to obtain a Master of Fine Arts degree, which eventually led to her first true filmmaking experience, working as an intern on the 2003 remake of The Italian Job.

Since then, she has risen to dizzying heights of success. Her first feature film, From a Whisper, made an immediate impact, winning in five categories at the Africa Movie Academy Awards.

The versatility of the multi-talented lady has been shown repeatedly, from the publication of her first children’s book, The Wooden Camel to co- founding Afrobubblegum, a platform to promote Africa’s creatives. In 2018, Kahiu’s Rafiki – the first Kenyan film to debut at the Cannes Film Festival – was banned by the Kenyan Film Classification Board for its portrayal of two young girls falling in love with each other. The Board and won a suspension of the ban for seven days.

Receiving an award at the International Film Festival of Kerala in December 2023, she told the local press that she had made the challenge because she wanted her film to be seen. “I hope it inspires other filmmakers from communities that feel they don’t have a voice and where self-censorship is happening,” she said at the time.

Kahiu’s Rafiki was banned by the Kenyan Film Classification Board for its portrayal of two young girls falling in love with each other.
Victor Ekpuk has gained international acclaim for his immense contribution to African art and culture. His paintings, drawings, and sculptures reflect his interest in historical narratives and the contemporary African diaspora. He draws inspiration from Nsibidi, an ancient Nigerian system of communication.

He recently held a new solo exhibition of his work, INTERwoven TEXTures, at the Efie Gallery in Dubai — his debut show in the Middle East. At the same time, he also became the first African artist to display a public sculpture in the UAE. This was a significant achievement for the Nigerian creative master, who has honed his craft for more than 30 years.

Ekpuk's works have been acquired by many prestigious collections, including the Smithsonian National Museum of African-American History and Culture, and Boston Museum of Fine Art.

In recent years, Ekpuk has added large-scale murals, installations, and public art projects to his portfolio. He has received commissions from the Phillips Collection, Washington DC; North Carolina Museum of Art; Memphis Brooks Museum; Washington DC’s city government (for Boone Elementary School); and Bank ABC (Arab Bank Corporation).

Ekpuk's aspiration, as he puts it with disarming humility, is to leave a legacy as someone who “contributed something worthy to culture.”
Nigeria

Jadesola Osiberu

Nollywood’s female royalty

In Nollywood’s male-dominated arena there are women who are challenging for a place in the spotlight, and none more so than Jadesola Osiberu, daughter of royalty (her father is the Elepe of Epe) and a prominent figure in Nigeria’s evolving film industry.

She left the University of Manchester in England with a computer systems engineering degree, but her career changed direction when she joined GTBank’s digital marketing team and played an integral role in the setting-up of its NdaniTV web channel. This led to her first opportunity to create and produce, with Gidi Up, a web drama series that ran for two seasons in 2013.

In the meantime, Osiberu founded her own film studio and her directorial debut came four years later with Isoken (her own film studio and her directorial debut came four years later with Isoken) – a romantic comedy that premiered in London and garnered her numerous awards including Best Film West Africa and Best Director at the 2018 African Magic Viewers’ Choice Awards (AMVCA), establishing her as a force to be reckoned with.

Other successful films quickly followed, including Sugar Rush which became Nollywood’s fourth highest grossing movie of all time, and Gangs of Lagos, which she directed and produced as the first Amazon Prime Original Movie from Africa. It was released in April 2023. This heralded a three-year deal with Prime Video, one of the ‘Big Five’ American technology companies, elevating her studio to new heights.

Her latest movie, Everything Scattered, was wrapped up last summer with an unconfirmed release date. Like Gangs of Lagos, its exploration of police brutality in Nigeria may well be met with backlash from the authorities. But this is a woman undeterred. She describes herself perfectly in a post on X (formerly Twitter): “I love women who lead unconventional lives, who travel paths uncommon and dare to follow the calling of their soul.”

Jadesola Osiberu

Ghana

Lesley Lokko

Showcasing African indigenous systems

This year, the multi-talented Ghanaian–Scottish architect, academic and novelist Lesley Lokko curated the world-famous Venice Architecture Biennale.

Titled The Laboratory of the Future: Agents of Change, the exhibition spotlighted African and indigenous systems of work in architecture. Over half of the exhibition’s 89 participants were from Africa or the African diaspora.

Challenging the centrality of Eurocentric models and ideas of construction, Lokko’s work drew links between the climate crisis and colonial plunder.

At a time of rising xenophobia and the ascendancy of far-right political movements in Italy, her exhibition’s focus on African construction was particularly timely. In a disappointing, yet illustrative moment ahead of the event, a number of her collaborators were denied visas.

Against this backdrop, Lokko’s work centring African narratives – whether through architecture or literature (she is a best-selling author) – remains essential. Through her position at the African Futures Institute, which she established in Ghana, Lesley is training the next generation of African architects.

At the start of 2023, her contributions to architecture and education earned her recognition on the UK King Charles’ first New Year Honours list, with the award of an Order of the British Empire (OBE). “More than ever, architectural education matters, and I’m deeply touched by this recognition,” she said.

Lesley Lokko

Ethiopia

Julie Mehretu

Breaking world-record art prices

Julie Mehretu was born in Addis Ababa but her family fled the country in 1977 due to political unrest and settled in the US. A keen student, Mehretu gained a Bachelor of Arts degree and then went on to add a Master of Fine Arts degree.

Her unique approach and eminently recognisable art began to take shape at the Rhode Island School of Design, where she began to explore the visual impact of lines, symbols and shapes and how they could form and depict living landscapes. This expression of art would become her trademark.

Mehretu’s first solo exhibition in 2001 sold out before it opened and she continued to rise higher into the world of elite artists with her ‘Grey Area’ series of paintings exhibited at the Guggenheim, New York, in 2010. In the same year she produced Mural, a 23 x 80 feet commission from Goldman Sachs to hang in their New York lobby.

Her work has been exhibited globally but reached dizzy new heights when in October 2023 she broke auction records for an African artist when her piece, Untitled (2021), sold for a staggering 99.3m at a Sotheby’s auction in Hong Kong. Astonishingly, in November 2023, she broke her own record, at Sotheby’s in New York when her painting, Walkers with the Dawn and Morning, which she had created in reaction to the devastating 2005 Hurricane Katrina, sold for 101.3m.
Sпринклинг the advertising magic dust

As managing director of the Voodoo Group, the preeminent communications firm in French-speaking Africa, Fabrice Sawegnon has a media footprint that has vastly outgrown his modest beginnings. After earning a diploma in management and commerce from the National Higher Institute of Technical Education at Tamoussoukra, he began his career in advertising at Panafcom Young & Rubicam. He went on to become the customer director of Coca-Cola and Sprite at advertising giant McCann Erickson and in 1999, at the grand age of 27, he set up Voodoo Group, which quickly grew into an award-winning juggernaut in the industry.

Focusing on advertising, marketing and event planning, the company has built a reputation for exemplary execution of simple and compelling concepts.

Since the early 2000s, Sawegnon has also spread his magic dust on electoral campaigns, bringing the innovation and creativity that has made his company a commercial success to the field of politics.

Notable successes include Alassane Ouattara’s successful 2015 presidential campaign, which was hailed for its slick messaging. The launch of his first book, Transcending the Mirror Theory (“Transcender la théorie du miroir”), shows that he has a lot more in the tank that he is keen to give to the world, both as a businessman and as a public figure.

\[\text{CÔTE D’IVOIRE} \]

\[\text{FABRICE SAWEGNON} \]

Sprinkling the advertising magic dust

\[\text{GHANA} \]

\[\text{WODE MAYA} \]

Spotlighting the best of Africa

Berthold Kobby Winkler Ackon, better known as Wode Maya, is a Ghanaian vlogger, social entrepreneur, and advocate for positive change in Africa. His on-screen career is characterised by a commitment to showcasing the diverse and often untold stories of the African continent, using digital media as a potent tool for empowerment.

Maya gained widespread recognition through his YouTube channel, where he documents his travels across Africa, highlighting the beauty, resilience, and innovation present in different communities and countries. His innovative viral videos provide a platform for positive narratives that challenge stereotypes and celebrate the richness of Africa.

One of Maya’s notable projects is the Say It Loud documentary series, which delves into critical issues affecting African communities, from education and entrepreneurship to environmental sustainability.

Beyond his digital presence, Maya is an entrepreneur with a focus on community development. He is co-founder of the Wode Maya Foundation, an organisation dedicated to supporting education and healthcare initiatives in underserved communities.

His ability to leverage digital media for positive change, coupled with his dedication to community development, mark him as a changemaker actively shaping a more positive narrative for Africa.

\[\text{GHANA} \]

\[\text{EDWARD ENNINFUL} \]

Leaving an indelible mark at Vogue

Fashion industry insiders responded with surprise to the news that Ghanian-British Edward Enninful was stepping down from his role as editor of British Vogue and as the European editorial director for the magazine.

When he was appointed as British Vogue’s Editor-in-Chief, Edward Enninful became the first man of many firsts. He was both the first Black person and first man appointed to this role, the culmination of two decades in the fashion industry.

The news came after six illustrious years during which he changed the face of the fashion magazine to be more diverse and inclusive. His editions changed the definitions of beauty, placing at their centre women of colour, plus-sized women, disabled women, and also men – expanding our understanding of what fashion means.

What’s next for Enninful? Having been announced as the Most Influential Black Man in Britain in October and after receiving the Trailblazer Award at the country’s 2023 Fashion Awards in December, Enninful is counting down to March 2024, when he will edit his last issue of the magazine.

He will hand over the reins to Chioma Nnadi, staying on as an editorial creative and cultural advisor to Vogue. (See separate entry)

Whatever he does, he will continue to influence the fashion world and to change the world’s perception about what is beautiful.

\[\text{NGERIA} \]

\[\text{CHARITY EKzie} \]

Demolishing stereotypes Tik by Tok

The pandemic created many social media sensations including (mostly) young people performing stunts and skits from their homes, for enjoyment and to relieve the boredom of the lockdowns.

Many of these skits disappeared once the lockdowns lifted, but Charity Ekezie’s content has endured beyond the pandemic and has become rather a force for good, at least for Africa, on the internet.

With a major in mass communications and journalism, Ekezie’s content on TikTok was rather mainstream until she decided to respond to misconceptions about Africa with pointed humour, which gained her a large and dedicated following.

Typical videos see her demonstrating the absurdity of some of the questions that people have about Africa – such as whether Africans have water or travel by car – by rigging up elaborate, often tree-based alternatives for such creature necessities.

In one video, she gathers logs and branches for a bed and in another, leaves fruit, roots make up for her lack of shoes. She has accumulated more than 120m views and a dedicated following of 3.1m, emerging as one of the most prominent TikTok content creators in Africa. She achieved the runner-up spot for the TikTok SSA Top Creator Award in 2022.

She is also building a presence on YouTube, where she has garnered over 670,000 subscribers, earning her the coveted YouTube Play Button Award.

In a world driven by clicks and views, Ekezie’s cheerful videos might just be doing more to promote a reality-based view of Africa than 100 earnest advertisements and books about life and lifestyle on the continent.
Moses Kiboneka, commonly known as Uncle Mo, is a Ugandan comic and star of the channel 'I am Uncle Mo'. From the automobile garage where he works, Uncle Mo offers biting commentary on highs and lows of life in the East African country.

While he studied engineering at school, Uncle Mo has always had the acting bug, performing in some stage productions and even getting a few television credits under his belt. An indication of his future comedic success could have been gleaned from his success in back-to-back stand-up competitions, but it wasn’t until the pandemic, when he allowed himself to be copied by a friend to upload one of his videos, that he finally caught the attention of the wider audience he had dreamed of.

Despite initially modest expectations, his videos gained momentum and he has since become a mainstay of digital entertainment in Uganda and beyond. Filming his content at the garage where he plies his trade, he says, provides a unique backdrop to his humour. More significantly, it epitomises a new approach where authenticity trumps professionalism and talent makes up for the absence of slick production values.

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With over 50,000 subscribers on YouTube alone, Uncle Mo, along with others like him, is opening a new door into the soul of Africa, with raw comedic takes that circumvent the typical narratives that have long defined the continent.

Nicolas Pompigne-Mognard, the founder and chairman of APO Group, has displayed a mastery of Africa’s media landscape which has earned him the trust of many prominent business and political leaders globally. APO Group is the dominant force in press release distribution in Africa, reaching more than 350,000 journalists across its network. It works with over 300 clients, including titans such as the Danone Group, Microsoft and the NBA.

Over recent years, Pompigne-Mognard has diversified APO’s offerings beyond press release distribution and is providing strategic advice. He acts as a trusted personal adviser to several leaders, such as the president of the Africa Rugby Association. His platform and personal relationships are making him an agenda driver on the continent. He is especially interested in using his influence to transform sports and create opportunities for the youth.

One of his lasting contributions is his involvement in African Rugby. In 2017, he made APO Group, his wholly-owned company, the official sponsor of Rugby Africa, the governing body of rugby in Africa. Pompigne-Mognard serves as a senior advisory board member of the Commonwealth Africa Chambers of Business, which promotes trade and investment between the two regions. He’s also an advisory board member of the EurAfrican Forum, which fosters stronger collaboration.

As a presenter on the BBC World Service with its daily audience of millions, Alan Kasuuja is a familiar name the length and breadth of Africa and beyond. He has been rightly recognised for his engaging and insightful reporting, bringing the evolving story of Africa to a vast global audience.

Kasuuja has an extensive background in broadcast journalism, having worked with various reputable news outlets. On the BBC World Service, he hosts the hugely popular podcast, Africa Daily.

His career has been marked by a commitment to storytelling that reflects the diverse and nuanced narratives of the African continent. His reporting often covers a wide range of topics, including current affairs, politics, and cultural developments, providing audiences with a comprehensive understanding of the issues shaping Africa.

Kasuuja is recognised for his insightful commentary and analysis. He has been a voice for journalistic integrity, emphasising the importance of accurate and unbiased reporting in the media landscape. His career is a testament to the power of journalism in shaping narratives and fostering a global understanding of Africa. His dedication to excellence in reporting, coupled with his ability to engage audiences, positions him as an individual making a significant impact in the world of media. Not to mention his role as a mentor to aspiring journalists on the continent. Leading to a rapid increase in his online popularity.

Despite the simplicity of his content, Khaby’s comedic style has proven highly effective. His ability to find humour in everyday situations has not only entertained millions but has also established him as a cultural phenomenon, with fans around the world appreciating his straightforward and universally relatable comedy.

Beyond his success on social media, Khaby has leveraged his platform to engage with various brands and collaborate with other content creators. His influence extends beyond his digital presence, as he continues to expand his brand through partnerships and endeavours such as launching the iconic fashion outlet Hugo Boss. Khaby’s career serves as proof of the power of authenticity and relatability in the digital age. His rise from relative obscurity to global fame highlights the possibility for individuals to connect with audiences on a massive scale through humour that transcends cultural and linguistic boundaries.

Khaby’s unique comedic style and cultural background have enabled him to leave a significant mark on the landscape of online entertainment.
Keeping the African flag flying at Vogue

In October, Chioma Nnadi took over from Edward Enninful as British Vogue’s Head of Editorial Content. The appointment marks the first time that the iconic publication has been led by a Black woman, a major fact at a time when the world is continuing to demand greater diversity in the bodies and faces reflected in the media.

Chioma, a London-raised journalist of Nigerian and German descent, will undoubtedly have big shoes to fill, stepping in after Enninful’s departure in July. Her role in the top job follows a background in journalism, which began as a fashion writer before joining Vogue 13 years ago.

In the announcement, publisher Conde Nast highlighted her achievements as a writer and editor at Vogue, and her successful efforts driving “record-breaking engagement across the site and social.” Her appointment was praised by both Enninful and global editorial director Anna Wintour, who spoke of her “impressive talent and reputation.”

Chioma has expressed her determination to bring to the magazine the energy of London – its “boundary-pushing style and creative scene” – along with an international bent, and to reinforce the diversity of the British identity.

“I’m looking forward to engaging a loyal and inspired digital community that is energised by our access, point of view, and storytelling,” said Chioma, who has also hosted Vogue’s podcast, The Run-Through.

“Chioma is beloved among her colleagues at Vogue, and as an editor and writer with an impeccable reputation – both here and in the fashion industry at large.”

Anna Wintour

Nigeria

ANTON HARBER

A behemoth of the free press

Anton Harber, who retired from his post at the University of the Witwatersrand at the end of 2023, is a distinguished South African journalist, media scholar, and influential figure in the realm of media and communication. His career has been marked by a steadfast commitment to investigative journalism in Africa, academic excellence, and the promotion of media freedom.

He has played a crucial role in South African media, notably as the co-founder and former editor of the influential anti-apartheid newspaper The Weekly Mail (now the Mail & Guardian). Under his leadership, the publication served as a vital platform for investigative journalism and played a pivotal role in exposing social injustices during the apartheid era.

He continues to write a column for Business Day.

As an academic, Anton’s roles include being the founding director of the journalism programme at the University of the Witwatersrand. He has been instrumental in shaping the next generation of media professionals in South Africa. In addition, he has authored several books, contributing insightful commentary on media issues, political transitions, and social changes in South Africa.

Harber’s career is a testament to the transformative power of journalism and media in challenging societal norms, advocating for justice, and promoting democratic values.

South Africa

CÔTE D’IVOIRE

DANIEL AHAOUSSA

Spinning a wide web of Weblogy

While studying in the US, Daniel Ahaoussa and Jir-Alexandre N’Dia set up abidjan.net. At the time, it was meant to be a source of news and entertainment, while fostering a sense of community among Ivorians in the diaspora. With visits rising and users becoming more reliant on the site, Ahaoussa and his partner embraced the higher purpose that beckoned, branching into other services such as e-commerce and trade.

Today, Weblogy, the company they formed, has birthed several partner sites including abakomo, com, adakar.com, abangui.com and adakar.com, serving a varied and growing list of users in various ways. With the flagships of the enterprise, abidjan.net, alone attracting more than six million visitors a day, Ahaoussa is one of the most consequential digital entrepreneurs in West and Central Africa.

Although not journalists themselves, Ahaoussa and his partner say that the magic ingredient is partnering with reputable media houses, publishing only verified information and maintaining rigorous impartiality. The result is a user base that trusts their offerings, whether these are news items, recommendations or financial products such as prepaid credit cards.

As internet penetration spreads and more people come into the digital ecosystem in the subregion, Weblogy is aiming to bring their tested approach to more countries, including the English-speaking ones.

Côte d’Ivoire

MARIE MBULLU

Digitally savvy, creating feelgood news

Marie Mbullu is a Tanzanian–American student and a popular TikTok creator. She runs the account Habari Njema, which means “good news” in Swahili, and utilizes her platform to disseminate positive and informative content about Africa, covering topics such as culture, history, politics, innovation, and travel.

She has over 650,000 followers and 8m likes on TikTok. Impressively, her posts have garnered more than 24m cumulative views and counting. Mbullu is a grantee of Africa No Filter, an initiative that supports African storytellers. “This grant will allow for the continuation and expansion of my series Cool African Things. My audience will be able to experience innovation occurring on the continent in real time,” she says.

Like many trailblazing content creators, Mbullu is involved in digital marketing. She partners with brands to create sponsored content that showcases their products and services.

She enjoys dancing, reading poetry and travelling. Mbullu epitomises a new generation of digital-savvy content creators and storytellers in Africa who are leveraging the power of social media to tell their stories and generate wealth.

Tanzania

Most Influential Africans
TOMIWA ALADEKOMO

The trailblazer in tech media

As the CEO of Big Cabal Media, Tomiwa Aladekomo oversees TechCabal and Zikoko, arguably two of the most influential online news platforms in Africa. He joined Big Cabal Media in 2018 and has since launched new products, services, and partnerships that have increased the company’s revenue, audience, and impact. In 2022, he secured a $2.3m seed round from external investors to take Big Cabal to the next level.

“The reality of executing in Africa is harder and takes longer than you expect. It was challenging to get to this point,” he explains.

TechCabal has emerged as the foremost source of news and analysis on the continent’s dynamic and fast-growing tech space – a TechCrunch for Africa, if you will.

Aladekomo has received several awards and acknowledgements for his work, and was an Archbishop Tutu African Leadership Fellow. He began his career as a writer and editor, publishing science fiction books and magazines in Nigeria and the US. He worked for Atlantic Records in New York, where he was an art director and handled digital marketing campaigns for releases by artists like T.I., Lupe Fiasco, and Missy Elliott.

He returned to Nigeria in 2008 and joined THISDAY, one of the country’s leading newspapers, as the head of digital strategy. He later worked for Nigerian Breweries, the largest brewer in Nigeria, as the head of digital marketing and innovation.

He is passionate about creating and supporting quality journalism, storytelling, and content that reflects the diversity and potential of Africa.

“I believe in products that address real human needs, brands that stand for something, marketing that thrills and great ideas executed well.”

TOMIWA ALADEKOMO

Claude Grunitzky

Uniting people in the creative space

Claude Grunitzky is a true force of nature – a modern-day polymath whose dynamic career spans the realms of media, entrepreneurship, and cultural innovation. Born in Togo and raised in France, with an American go-getter spirit, Claude’s multicultural background has significantly influenced his diverse and impactful professional journey.

As the founder of TRACE, a global African media and entertainment brand, Claude played a pioneering role in bringing African and Afro-diasporic cultures to the forefront of the global stage.

TRACE encompasses a lifestyle publication, television, digital media, and events, and contributes to a more inclusive representation of black cultures in mainstream media. Claude is a true entrepreneur with a keen interest in technology and innovation. His ventures include TRUE Africa, an online platform showcasing diverse narratives from the African continent, WIDE, a cultural innovation agency that explores the intersection of technology, creativity and business, TRUE, a content marketing agency, and The Equity Alliance, an investment fund focused on diverse venture capital fund managers and entrepreneurs. He is also raising a second fund that invests in minority-led businesses, as well as helping artists raise funds for projects.

Claude is recognised for his philanthropic work, and he co-founded the Grunitzky Foundation, dedicated to supporting educational initiatives in Togo and fostering the next generation of African leaders.

Claude’s multi-faceted career is a testament to the transformative impact of media, entrepreneurship, and cultural innovation. His ability to bridge continents, amplify underrepresented voices, and pioneer new approaches to storytelling and technology has rightfully established him as an amazing individual whose work unifies people across the global cultural landscape.

Claude has helped launch media ventures that promote Black culture, focusing on transcultural styles and ideas.

SOUTH AFRICA

BRANKO BRKIC

Fearlessly exposing state scandals

Branko Brkic is the founder and editor-in-chief of the Daily Maverick, a leading online news outlet in South Africa that reaches about 10m readers every month – arguably South Africa’s most influential today.

Through it, he has been involved in breaking some of the country’s most significant news stories, such as the infamous Gupta Leaks in 2017 and the Marikana massacre, where 34 miners were killed by the police in 2012.

Brkic received the prestigious Nat Nakasa Award in 2018 for his work on the Gupta Leaks, having initiated the collaborative corruption investigation into the Gupta family and former President Jacob Zuma. “The Guptas left South Africa soon after we started publishing, and Zuma resigned about eight months later. So, over time, I’d say we’ve been able to make a nice name for ourselves,” he says.

He began his career by publishing science fiction books in 1984, in his native Yugoslavia. He moved to South Africa in 1991 and launched several successful magazines.

In 2009 he launched the Daily Maverick, which soon became one of the most respected sources of independent journalism in South Africa. He has been steadfast in insisting that the online edition should remain free. (Shoppers at one of the country’s major retail chains can also obtain its weekly print edition free with a loyalty card.) “South Africa is a poor country, and we cannot afford for people not to read what’s going on,” he notes.
Goalkeeper Yassine ‘Bona’ Bounou, who came to the attention of casual football followers as the bedrock of Morocco’s surprise fourth place at the 2022 World Cup – where he helped achieve a complete shout of Spain, saving two spot kicks in the penalty shoot-out, and kept three clean sheets in six games – carried his form into 2023.

He played in and won his second Europa League final for Sevilla – who defeated José Mourinho’s Roma on penalties 4-1.

Bona, who saved one with his legs and saw another effort crash off his post, was named Player of the Match and saw another effort crash off his post.

On 28 October 2023, when Francis Ngannou entered the ring in Saudi Arabia to face Tyson Fury, the undefeated WBC heavyweight champion, the world press gave him little hope of even hearing the final bell, let alone making it a fight.

Ten rounds later and the world had a different perspective. If you did not know, you would have never guessed that Ngannou’s last fight was 644 days before in a different sport – Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) – and this was his pro debut as a boxer.

The Cameroonian was trained by former heavyweight boxing king Mike Tyson and it showed. He started well, throwing double jabs reminiscent of Tyson in his heyday, and in the third announced his arrival as a serious boxer with an overhand left that sent Fury to the canvas. Now the doubters were looking for ways to reinterpret their earlier put-downs.

They should have known better than to write off a man who worked in a Cameroonian sand quarry aged 10, spent time in a Spanish jail and lived on the streets of Paris before making it big.

At the end of 10 rounds a split decision went to Fury but the fact that one of the judges felt Ngannou did enough to win should send a warning to the rest of the division. The final was for the 37-year-old boxing debutant: “Tonight was a feel of the water and I know the temperature of the water now, and I am getting ready to come here and take over.”

Boxing has been warned.

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In 2022 Kelvin Kiptum made an astonishing marathon debut in Valencia. Two days before he turned 23, he won the race comfortably in a course record of 2:01:53, making it only the fourth eligible marathon to be completed in under 2 hours 2 minutes. (Some marathon races are run with conditions that are specifically set up to record fast times for selected runners so are not recognised by the powers that be.)

So where could Kiptum go in 2023? Well, London then Chicago, two of the six races that make up the World Marathon Majors.

First up he took on the field of nearly 50,000 and a rainy London in April, where he again ran away with a victory in a time of 2:01:25 – nearly a full 3 minutes ahead of runner-up Geoffrey Kamworor, who hails from the same part of Kenya. Kiptum covered the second half of the race in an astonishing 59:45.

Six months later Kiptum entered and won his third marathon, this time in Chicago, America’s Windy City. Here he obliterated fellow Kenyan Eliud Kipchoge’s world record by 34 seconds, crossing the line in a time of 2:00:35, again running the second half of the race in under an hour after making his trademark push at around the 30km mark.

In his first three marathons Kiptum has set three of the six fastest times in history. Now he must be one of the favourites for Olympic gold in Paris in 2024, if he is selected to participate by his country.

Can he be the next FIFA president?

Billionaire Patrice Motsepe, the founder and executive chairman of African Rainbow Minerals (ARM), is one of Africa’s most influential figures in business and politics and now in continental sport.

He was selected unopposed in 2021, to the high-profile role of president of the Confederation of African Football (CAF) after a fairly tumultuous campaign against Jacques Anouma of Côte d’Ivoire, Augustin Senghor from Senegal and Mauritania Football Federation president Almud Yaya.

Motsepe was the ‘outsider’ of the group – at least until a deal struck by FIFA president Gianni Infantino saw the others withdraw their challenges and Motsepe sail through unopposed.

This led to accusations of attempts at ‘recolonisation’ by European soccer supremos, dictating the choice of African leaders at this level, and suspicions that Infantino would demand his pound of flesh when he next contests the FIFA leadership.

Over the two years he has been in office, however, Motsepe has shown clearly that he is his own person as he works to raise the profile of African soccer worldwide and secure better TV deals and larger prize money for African national teams.

With his attention to detail and the management and deal-making skills that have made him such a successful entrepreneur, he is slowly but surely carving a niche for himself as perhaps the most efficient soccer administrator in the FIFA world – and many believe he could pose the greatest challenge to Infantino’s position in the near future.

Motsepe’s career is a testimony to the impact that entrepreneurs can have, whether in business or other areas, like professional sports. Put it together with his dedication to philanthropy – he is a member of the Giving Pledge, begun by Warren Buffett and Bill and Melinda Gates – and he is a consistent high achiever.

“If we continue doing the right things in Africa, we can create a very exciting and competitive global market here,” he says.

The people of Naples have two taxonomies: football and religion. So, for Victor Osimhen to be the catalyst for Napoli’s 2023 Serie A title, the first since Diego Maradona’s triumphs in 1987 and 1990, with none in between, means he will be forever adored in the city that is the home of pizza.

His third season (2022/23) with Napoli ended when the Nigerian forward showed the Italian fans and the wider watching world what he could really do. He ended the season as Serie A’s top scorer, finishing the campaign with 23 goals in 32 league outings, to take top goal scorer honours in the Italian league. He added five more in the Champions League to leave him with impressive statistics for the season: 31 strikes in 39 games.

In 2023 he also lined up for the Serie A Player of the Year gang, the first of the south American to do so. Once again, he was voted the third South American footballing ‘loyalty’ past winners include the Brazilian pair of Ronaldo and Ronaldinho.

He also broke the duopoly of Sadio Mané and Lionel Messi, winning the high-profile player of the Year award, a feat which saw him chosen in the Ballon d’Or, placing eighth.

Osimhen was also top scorer in the Africa Cup of Nations qualifiers with 10 goals. He will be looking forward to the knock-out stage with his country in Côte d’Ivoire in early 2024.

He may not have the very top skills that have made him such a great leader in the FIFA world – and secure better TV deals and larger prize money for African national teams.

Victor Osimhen
Napoli finds a new ‘god’ after Maradona
Kenya’s President Ruto.

Unsurprisingly, she was named Female World Athlete of the Year for 2023 and in December was awarded the Golden Heart (EGH) award by the Golden Heart Foundation. Hassan was the first African woman to be named World Athlete of the Year dating back to 2015.

In August in Budapest Kipyegon won a silver medal at the UCI under-23 Road World Championships race in 2021, becoming the first Eritrean, and the first Black African, to notch a podium finish in the history of the UCI Road World Championships. The achievement opened the door for African cyclists to compete and succeed at the sport’s highest levels.

In the 2022 Giro d’Italia race he became the first Black African cyclist to win a Grand Tour stage, after winning stage 10 in a reduced bunch sprint.

Biniam began the 2023 season racing in Spain and had his first win of the year in the first stage of the Volta a la Comunitat Valenciana. He won the second stage of the 2023 Tour de Suisse and entered his first Tour de France in 2023 as the team leader for Intermarché–Circus-Wanty, placing third in a sprint finish on stage 7.

Biniam’s career symbolises the growing influence of African cyclists. His dedication and breakthrough wins are an inspiration for aspiring cyclists on the continent.

In the final, the Springboks and the All Blacks, with three world championship titles each, faced off to determine undisputed supremacy. For the first time ever in a final a player was red-carded – and not just any player but the All Blacks captain, Sam Cane, who left the field in the 27th minute.

In contrast, South African skipper Siya Kolisi was one of three players to be sin-binned – but only missed 10 minutes of action. This South African side really demonstrated that rugby is the ultimate team sport, but special mention must go to Pieter-Steph du Toit, who made an incredible 28 tackles in the final as his side took the trophy 12-11.

FAITH KIPYEGON
KENYA

Once again conquering all before her

What a stellar year 2023 was for the Kenyan runner. In June and July, she set world-record times at 1500m, 5000m and finally, one mile. Her tour of record-breaking took in some of Europe’s finest locations, starting off in Florence, Italy where she took the 1500m record from Ethiopia’s Genzebe Dibaba by 96 hundredths of a second, clocking a time of 3 minutes 49.81 seconds.

Exactly one week later she had added the 5000m fastest time to her already impressive resume, finishing in a time of 14.09.20 to take the record from another Ethiopian, Letesenbet Gidey, at the Stade Charléty in Paris. (This time was beaten in September by Gidey, at the Stade Charléty in Paris.

In the 27th minute.

Biniam Girma is a professional Eritrean cyclist who currently rides for Intermarché–Circus-Wanty – labelled the Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI) as a professional cycling team of the highest category. This team is sponsored by French supermarket chain Intermarché, Belgian engineering firm Wanty and Belgian building materials provider Groupe Gabert Matériaux. Biniam won a silver medal at the UCI under-23 Road World Championships race in 2021, becoming the first Eritrean, and the first Black African, to notch a podium finish in the history of the UCI Road World Championships. The achievement opened the door for African cyclists to compete and succeed at the sport’s highest levels.

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Biniam’s career symbolises the growing influence of African cyclists in international competitions. His dedication to the sport and his breakthrough victories serve as inspiration for aspiring cyclists in Eritrea and across the continent.

As an athlete, his story is one of talent, perseverance, and breaking barriers. His success not only contributes to the global diversity of professional cycling but also represents the potential for talent to emerge from regions not traditionally associated with the sport.

His career shows the power of sports to create opportunities, break stereotypes, and foster a sense of pride and achievement on a global scale.

Kenya’s President Ruto.

In August in Budapest Kipyegon won the 5000m world title to add to her three 1500m golds from previous World Championships. She has now placed first or second in an event at five World Championships.

Her three 1500m golds from previous World Championships were completed in Monaco in 2022. In the 2023 World Championships race in Paris, France.

In the semi-final they faced the team they overcame in the final four years earlier, England. For 77 rain-sodden minutes everything you thought you knew about rugby was upended as England outthought, out-tackled and outthought the physically superior South Africans, but a 78th-minute Pollard penalty set up a historic result as the Springboks squeezed through 16-15.

In the final, the Springboks and the All Blacks, with three world championship titles each, faced off to determine undisputed supremacy. For the first time ever in a final a player was red-carded – and not just any player but the All Blacks captain, Sam Cane, who left the field in the 27th minute.

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South Africa’s rugby heroes held onto their crown as world champions after defeating New Zealand’s All Blacks in the final of the 2023 Rugby World Cup in Paris, France.

In the quarter-final they contributed to of one of the greatest games of rugby ever played, defeating hosts France 29-28. In the semi-final they faced the team they overcame in the final four years earlier, England. For 77 rain-sodden minutes everything you thought you knew about rugby was upended as England outthought, out-tackled and outthought the physically superior South Africans, but a 78th-minute Pollard penalty set up a historic result as the Springboks squeezed through 16-15.

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This South African side really demonstrated that rugby is the ultimate team sport, but special mention must go to Pieter-Steph du Toit, who made an incredible 28 tackles in the final as his side took the trophy 12-11.
Interview: Mahamudu Bawumia, Vice-President of Ghana

Educating Ghana’s children for a world where science, technology, engineering, and mathematics are essential for a country’s success, and making Ghana a digital hub for Africa will be high on the agenda as Mahamudu Bawumia bids to become the next leader of his country. He is in conversation with Omar Ben Yedder.

LEADING GHANA THROUGH A FOURTH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

In early November, Vice-President Mahamudu Bawumia (opposite) was chosen by the New Patriotic Party as its candidate in Ghana’s 2024 presidential elections, which incumbent Nana Akufo-Addo will not contest following two terms in office. Before entering politics as the surprise running-mate pick for Akufo-Addo in the 2008 elections, Mahamudu Bawumia was deputy governor of Ghana’s central bank and one of the team that implemented the re-denomination of the currency and a reasonably successful programme targeting inflation. As Akufo-Addo’s Vice-President since 2017, Bawumia has found himself a new mission.

While he serves in the traditional role of Ghanaian Vice-Presidents as head of the government’s economic management team – during a time in which the country has entered an economic crisis and emerged with an IMF package – he has mostly dedicated himself to the digital transformation agenda, becoming the chief apostle, instigator and overseer of several landmark digitalisation projects that are slowly transforming how Ghanaians trade, access public services, interact with each other and travel.

Critics have been quick to accuse him of deserting the economic mandate, especially in the wake of recent economic challenges, but Bawumia insists that digitalisation is very much part of the economic transformation that his party promised.

With Bawumia himself leading the party into the 2024 election, that message will be tested and the impact rigorously assessed. We talked about how his recent priorities will feed into his presidential bid.

New African: The digitalisation of government has been a central pillar of this administration – how have you driven digital transformation?

Mahamudu Bawumia: When we came to office, we looked at how best to achieve our objective of modernising our country and creating more inclusion in terms of society and getting more growth. We looked at where the world was heading and how do you get this country ready to participate in the fourth industrial revolution.

Africa missed out on the first, second and third industrial revolutions and we didn’t want Africa and Ghana to also miss out on the fourth. We came to the conclusion that digitalisation was the best way to get inclusion in society and that we could leverage technology to address many issues.

You are able to bring in efficiency in the delivery of public services, you are able to reduce corruption, you are able to increase access [to the poorest]. Historically the elites have generally been the beneficiaries of the inefficiencies that have come through since independence. For me and for us, digitalisation is a way of lifting up the poor to participate fully in society.

You look at the situation where many people did not have a national ID. They were not counted as part of society. Most people don’t have bank accounts and are financially excluded. How do you participate? We asked ourselves: how do we make it possible for anybody in Ghana to have a bank account?

We introduced mobile money, interoperability. We made mobile money accounts and bank accounts interoperable.

Today in Ghana anybody with a national ID card can open a bank account sitting at home. They don’t have to go and fill a form, they just need to enter a USSD code [on a mobile phone], enter their Ghana Card number, their national ID number – and that’s all: their bank account is open and they can begin to transact.

That really helps a lot of people, in the villages, in the rural areas, who would not normally be able to go and apply for a bank account. They are intimidated even just to enter banks.

We believe that digitalisation in all the aspects that we are doing really helps the poor. It helps efficiency of delivery of services. It provides a major pillar for the country. This is where we are going. We want to leverage technology for economic growth with inclusion.

During this administration, has it made things more efficient?

It really has. If you go and you want to clear your goods at the port, it used to be a very laborious process; we’ve digitalised that process. Even sitting at home, you can go through the clearing process. You don’t have to go down [to the port] to pay bribes to people. Even sitting abroad, you can go through and clear your container.

If you are trying to apply for a driver’s licence, we have digitalised the whole process and this was always a place where you needed middle people to facilitate the process but now it’s world-class.

The service that you are getting to obtain a driver’s licence in Ghana is even better than in the UK or the US. I’ve got all government services on to one portal, the ghana.gov portal. You can go there and have whichever service you are looking for. Today,
you can pay your ‘taxes’ online – it never used to be the case. Through digitalisation we have been able to widen the tax net.

When we came into office, only 4% of the adult population had tax identification numbers. This has now increased to 75%. While this is still low, we have issued the Ghana Card, the national ID, to everyone – and we came up with the idea of associating that number with the tax identification number for everyone – and we came up with the idea of associating that number with the tax identification number for everyone.

Once we did that, we went up to 42%. And the numbers have continued to increase. We have digitalised the passport office, which has increased to 80%. Your national ID number, it’s also your social security number. Your national health number is also your tax and education number. It’s a very powerful tool.

Looking at the passport office, we have digitalised the process. As a result, the number of people that are being served through the passport office has increased. The number of people that are being served has increased.

I introduced a new policy for Ghana cedis ($4,800) a year. Since digitalisation they are generating 56 Ghana cedis ($4,800) a year. We went to the electricity company and digitalised their collections.

Previously they were generating 45 Ghana cedis ($4,200) a month. Now they are doing 1.2bn a month ($1,000,000,000).

The whole digitalisation initiative is really helping us reduce corruption, increasing efficiency, increasing inclusion. The objectives are being met and we want to deepen the process.

When you first came into government, education was at the heart of your manifesto: free senior high school, to enrol more kids in education. But critics say it’s been a drain on public finances. Where are you with your education programmes? Are you satisfied?

For President Akufo-Addo, and for our government, education was key in terms of transforming society. All the research that we have shown that human capital is the defining factor for the transformation of countries.

We thought that increasing access to education and the quality of education was the key to the transformation of Ghana. We have too many children dropping out every year because of the inability of their parents to pay the school fees for secondary education. We made the decision that we were going to implement free senior high school education to bring inclusivity to the north. As a result, 80% of people who were not included.

We made the decision that we were going to implement free senior high school education. We have almost doubled the number of public libraries in the country. And today there is so much information on the internet for students. Your typical library in a school now does not hold all the information that you can get on the internet.

When you look at the world going forward, the sort of things that are happening - the importance of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) studies; robotics; artificial intelligence, and the way the world is heading.

We believe that with laptops and access to wi-fi in the schools allows our children to have access to all of this knowledge that is being created with in the developed world.

It’s not a luxury; it’s a necessity. We think about one laptop for every child in senior high school, it’s actually a necessity for us at this stage of our development, so that we are not left behind. The first thing that we did was to make sure that every child has a laptop in senior high school. Not only did we do the senior high schools, we did the colleges of education, and we did the same thing for the district education offices, because the teachers and those who manage must also be able to be online. Across 12 public universities, you’re 80% provided wi-fi. It’s not just the senior high school – we are looking at the whole country, not just different levels of the education system.

Now we are bringing in the laptops. The students will have access to material that they would not normally have. They will have access to past questions. We will [integrate] video content. You can be in a [remote] village school, you will be able to see how all the best schools are teaching and the best teachers are teaching. It will be going to their nose, and all of that. Every teacher can find out what their colleagues are teaching.

Students will also be able to take modules from the best in the world. In other words, through this, we believe that we are going to make savings through this.

How are teaching methods changing?

It’s important that you are going to bring this country towards an education system that is really key for the fourth industrial revolution, you cannot maintain the same [methods of] teaching. Teachers are being trained in many areas and getting better ways of teaching. We are putting an emphasis on robotics, and STEM. We’ve set up ten model STEM schools. What is also very interesting for me is that there is [a desire] from the students to participate in this area – technology, digital, STEM, robotics.

This article has seen two high schools win the world robotics competition in America.

We want to make Ghana the digital hub of Africa. The world right now is looking at systems data, artificial intelligence and all of that. We can use that to improve agricultural productivity, to improve healthcare and to improve education. These are for me the three big areas. For all the concerns about artificial intelligence and data it is very important that we get the best out of that for Africa.

We need to go into predictive agriculture. Today in Ghana we have drones delivering medicines and vaccines. We are networking all the hospitals so that your records are centralised. We have launched Africa’s first national scale e-pharmacy, so that when you have a prescription you can go online and find the nearest pharmacy to you.

If you have artificial intelligence getting all this data, you can have solutions to diseases which, given our own DNA in Africa, may be quite different from other places. We need to get healthcare outcomes which are suitable for us, so we need to develop our own research.

Food security is another area we want to focus on. I want to introduce what I call a golden age of the maximisation of the benefits of our natural resources: gold, lithium, and domestic beneficiation. I introduced a new policy recently – gold for oil – in which we are leveraging the gold to pay for oil and not going looking for scarce dollars that we don’t have.

And there is energy transition, with a focus on renewables. And to unleash the private sector, including in infrastructure. The government can’t be doing all these things in all the areas I want to really touch on.
Until 2017, secondary education in Ghana was expensive and the quality was often hit or miss. Now, as Kwame Ofori Appiah reports, students do not have to pay fees for any education up to senior high level and Ghana is well on its way to joining the ranks of some of the best educated nations in Africa.

ROLLING OUT FREE QUALITY EDUCATION FOR ALL

In September 2017, the government of Ghana announced that all students—both public and private, wholly or partially funded—would be entitled to 10 years of free and compulsory education. The initiative was a cornerstone of the Vision 2030 programme and formed part of the National Education Policy, which seeks to ensure that Ghanaian children are equipped with the skills they need to be competitive in the global job market.

The intention was to provide free and universal primary and secondary education in Ghana. The programme, for all communities, was introduced by the Ministry of Education in collaboration with other government agencies and non-governmental organisations. The initiative was implemented under the guidance of the Education Commission, which was established to oversee the implementation of the programme.

The main objectives of the programme were to:

1. Ensure that all children have access to free and compulsory education.
2. Improve the quality of education and reduce the dropout rate.
3. Promote the use of technology in education.
4. Enhance teacher training and professional development.
5. Strengthen the management of the education sector.

The programme was expected to bring about a revolution in the education sector, particularly in rural areas, where many children had previously been excluded from education due to high costs.

The government introduced a double track system where students attend high school every two years. This approach has been successful in reducing the dropout rate and improving the quality of education.

With the implementation of the programme, the government has been able to provide education to more children, especially in rural areas. The programme has also helped to improve the quality of education in Ghana, with more resources dedicated to education and better offerings in terms of curriculum and instruction.

The programme has been well-received by students and parents, who have praised it for its accessibility and affordability. However, there have been some criticisms, particularly regarding the quality of education and the availability of resources.

The government is committed to continuing and expanding the programme, with plans to extend it to include tertiary education. The programme is expected to bring about a significant improvement in the education sector, with more children receiving a quality education and preparing for future success.

Despite some challenges, the programme has been a success, and the government is determined to continue and expand it to reach its full potential. By providing education to all, the government is ensuring that Ghanaian children have the opportunity to succeed and contribute to the development of the country.

The government has been working on improving the infrastructure of schools, particularly in rural areas, where many children have previously encountered barriers to accessing education. The programme has also introduced new technologies, such as digital tablets and laptops, to support learning and enhance the quality of education.

Overall, the programme has been successful in improving education in Ghana and providing equal opportunities for all children. The government is committed to continuing and expanding the programme to ensure that all children have access to quality education and are prepared for the future.
Under the high patronage of H.E. Denis Sassou-Nguesso, President of the Republic of Congo, the first Africa Finance, Banking and Digitalisation Summit: AFBDS - CEMAC will be held in Brazzaville on Thursday 25 and Friday 26 January 2024.

THE THEMES TO BE DISCUSSED:
- Fintech and financial compliance
- Technological innovation
- The challenges of the banking and financial ecosystem in the CEMAC zone
- Financial inclusion
- The digitalisation of payments
- The fight against money laundering

AFRICA FINANCE, BANKING & DIGITALISATION AWARDS: AFBDA - CEMAC

THE CATEGORIES TO BE AWARDED:
- Banker of the Year in the CEMAC zone
- Bank of the Year in the CEMAC zone
- CEMAC Zone Finance Minister of the Year
- CEMAC Fintech of the Year
- CEMAC SME Bank of the Year
- Banking and Finance Women of the Year
- CEMAC Asset Management Company of the year

www.afbds.com

Ghana’s digitalisation campaign, championed since 2017 by President Nana Akufo-Addo’s administration, has been slowly but surely changing the physical, cultural, administrative, social and commercial landscape of the country. Kwame Ofori-Appiah describes the scale of these changes.

GHANA’S EXTRAORDINARY DIGITALISATION MAKEOVER

For decades, the haphazard system of property addresses in Ghana verged on the ridiculous. Despite several attempts to have a formalised structure in place, finding directions often required using local landmarks or specific vendors. Thus, the joke went, if the woman selling wakye (a local delicacy) had not set up her stall that day, the directions that depended on her position would be completely useless to the person to whom they had been given. The actual consequences of this, however, were far from funny. In 2017, the current administration, led by President Nana Akufo-Addo, then in its first year, launched the Ghana Digital Property Address System – GhanaPostGPS, as it is known. It uses digital infrastructure to give every property a unique identifying marker that becomes its address. At the launch of the system, the President noted that an effective address system would aid emergency response, improve efficiency, reduce crime and provide a vital fillip to the e-commerce sector.

In the years since, name plates have been affixed to properties and it has become the foremost identifying marker that becomes its address. At the launch of the system, the President noted that an effective address system would aid emergency response, improve efficiency, reduce crime and provide a vital fillip to the e-commerce sector.

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The card is the foundation of a SIM registration exercise that now links every single number issued by the mobile network operators to a traceable identity, limiting fraud and discouraging mischievous hoaxes.

The Ghana Card will also help overcome a perennial problem in Ghana’s public sector, the issue of ‘ghost workers’, whereby beneficiaries or government employees that are either bogus or dead still receive government payments. Some estimates put the money lost to this practice at $400m annually. With the Ghana Card, efforts to remove such names from the rolls of state institutions, pension schemes and other records have gathered steam. In 2022, the Ghana Audit Service announced that it had been able to trace and remove as many as 140,000 fake names that were on the government’s payroll. The benefits of digitalisation in exposing and preventing corruption while preserving national resources could not be more starkly demonstrated.

Digital evangelist
At the centre of this drive for digital transformation is Vice-President Mahamudu Bawumia. With his evangelism for digitalisation and hands-on approach to implementation, he has come to symbolise the drive. He is directly involved with the process, is often present at launches and has become a passionate advocate for greater digitalisation Africa-wide.

‘The Fourth Industrial Revolution is a digital revolution, one that is based on data and systems,’ he told KTN News in Kenya in September, 2022.
“If you are an economy and you don’t digitalise, you will be left behind and Africa has been left behind for far too long,” he added.

Back home in Ghana, during a public lecture at Ashesi University, he drew on references to the World Bank and the World Economic Forum to argue his contention that “data is the new precious resource” and that digitalisation is sine qua non for sustainable development in Africa.

Public service digitalisation

The government stresses that digitalisation is key to expanding public services and tackling corruption, for example in the acquisition of statutory documents such as passports and drivers’ licences. The processes for these and other documents have been completely digitalised.

Applications are initiated online with forms submitted virtually. It is only after these have been accepted and verified that a date is given to the applicant to appear at an office for the final stages of the process which requires their physical presence for the collection of biometric details such as fingerprints and iris scans.

Previously, this activity was taken up by middlemen, or ‘goro boys’ in the local parlance, who exploited their connections to and conned with officials to prioritise applicants who paid the highest black fees.

Similarly, revenue collection and payments have also been digitalised. On the ghana.gov platform, payments have also been digitalised.

For this, the government partnered with a Silicon Valley firm that had previously deployed the service in Rwanda.

Opponents baulked at the cost and practicality of the initiative, which was championed, once again, by Bawumia.

In December 2022, at a National Health Insurance Service Active Month event in Tamale in the Northern Region, the Vice-President was able to report on the success of the initiative.

“So far, the drones have delivered over 12 million medical deliveries over 278,936 flights. You can see they are saving lives.”

In any case, the application of technology has become central to the government’s agenda for health. Away from the medical drones, health insurance records have been digitalised, making it easier to store and locate medical records.

In Ghana’s public hospitals, with the country’s disease control and treatment efforts under the Lightwave project. For patients, this will mean that when they enter a hospital anywhere in the country, it will be possible for them to find their medical records and history and be able to treat them better, with the benefit of all the relevant information.

The national health insurance records have also been integrated with the national ID database. Users now only need their Ghana Card number when interacting with the service. They can also pay their annual premiums and update their records via application.

The country’s justice system has also been given the digital makeover.

The e-justice project, under the transform programme, was launched in March 2019 by President Nana Akufo-Addo.

The project sets out to digitalise all court records and processes, thus eliminating the phenomenon of ‘missing dockets’ that often drag out litigation and frustrate parties as well as officers of the court.

Virtual hearings are now possible in at least three courts around the country, which means lawyers, witnesses and even accused persons can participate in hearings without the burden of travel.

For Ghana’s notoriously crowded court system, this has been a major boost to clearing the backlog of cases, especially for prisoners who have been held on remand for, in some instances, years without having their day in court.

When Covid-19 struck, the benefits of the system became even more apparent as the judicial service became one of the few institutions that continued to operate, with minimum adjustments, through the pandemic.

Mobile money explosion

For ordinary Ghanaians, the digitalisation drive has perhaps been most keenly felt in access to financial services. Mobile money is now used widely. Mobile money usage has continued to grow and in 2022, a record of GHc1.07trn ($94.1bn) worth of transactions were recorded across the mobile money network in the country, up from the GHc90.5bn ($78.6bn) recorded in 2021.

The government’s justification for its focus on and investments in digitalisation is that it will create the basis of a formalised, modern economy that will assure the country of sustainable growth, less prone to the occasional disruptions that have been its lot up to the present.

In his lecture at Ashesi University, Bawumia argued that digitalisation would boost the systems that have served Western, developed economies so well, while acknowledging that these might not be immediate political gains from these initiatives, such as contributions to large-scale infrastructure projects.

A sustained programme will be essential to the full benefits and likely, there seems to be a need for the government to boost public enthusiasm. No one wants to go back to using the waakye seller as a default mode of food delivery from home and taking digital payments now.
Will the Accra Reparations Conference of 2023 prove as seismic in seeking justice for slavery and colonialism as the 1948 All Africa Peoples Conference did for African liberation?

Reparations bid takes firm shape

The contemporary global order, currently under immense stress on multiple fronts, remains shaped by the historical impact of Western imperial expansion, which manifested itself through trafficking and enslavement, colonialism, and neo-colonialism.

In the case of Africa, its material, artistic and human resources were pillaged, leaving a legacy of underdevelopment and structural inequality.

As part of the quest for reparatory justice, and seeking to close this particular historical chapter, the African Union and the Government of Ghana convened, in November 2023, the hugely significant Accra Reparations Conference. It gathered to gether the modern global African reparations movement, including significant participation from the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM), as well as civil society veterans from the diaspora and Africa.

Addressed, amongst others, by the Commonwealth President and Chair, President Akkufo-Addo of Ghana, and Mia Mottley, Prime Minister of Barbados, the conference built on a number of earlier initiatives.

These included 2022’s inaugural Global Conference on Reparations and Racial Healing, held in Accra; the 2001 Durban Declaration and Program of Action, which had acknowledged the kid napping, trafficking and enslavement of Africans that constituted the so-called ‘slave trade’, as a crime against humanity; and the 1991 Abuja Proclamation, which 30 years ago, on the eve of the final liberation of South Africa and the end of the continental decolonisation struggle, actually kick-started the modern discourse surrounding formal reparations for historical injustices such as slavery and colonialism.

For me as an invited speaker, it was a heady experience to be amongst a diverse group of participants, including policymakers, lawyers, activists, researchers, diplomats, and journalists from Africa and the African diaspora.

The event involved a global stocktake of current campaigns and achievements, and strategising on ways of linking disparate actions for maximum impact, while discussing new perspectives on reparatory justice for people of African descent.

The conference tapped into the growing momentum around reparations along a number of multi-sectoral fronts – the return of cultural museum artefacts; the apologies and token reparations respectively from the Prime Minister and King of the Netherlands and Heirs of Slavery, whose ancestors profited from slavery; the £100m commitment by the Church of England; and £20m by Ghana University; and the State Commissions in New York and California to review the case for reparations, etc.

Chaotic proliferation of responses

But it also noted that the proliferating responses from different individuals, institutions, businesses and governments were themselves chaotic and frequently arbitrary.

Important questions remain unanswered – on what basis did the Church of England, for instance, reach its £100m figure when CARICOM estimates a figure of trillions is owed just in the Caribbean? Who should receive it and how?

The conference was seen as an important intervention in the process of bringing clarity and focus to these questions, while coordinating positions that will reduce the number of confusing freelance divide-and-rule tactics.

It recalled a similar historical moment, when again with Ghana in the lead, President Kwame Nkrumah called the 1956 All Africa Peoples’ Conference, gathering leaders from across Africa, with diaspora participation in the newly-kick-started shape of George Padmore and Franz Fanon, to begin the process of decolonising the continent through liberation struggles.

The decisions made at that 58 conference were later adopted in 1965 by the Organisation of African Unity, which established a self-financed Liberation Committee for the coordination of strategy, and 25 May as African Liberation Day for the mobilisation of ordinary Africans.

With the end of Apartheid in 1994, the continent was largely decolonised, proving that with unity victory follows. Now a similarly united structure and laser focus is unfolding in the struggle for reparatory justice.

The outcomes of the 2023 Reparations Conference will not only establish an African Committee of Experts, from the continent and the diaspora, on Reparations for the purpose of developing a Common African position to implement the Action Plan of the 2022 Accra Reparations Conference, but also a Reparations Fund to finance its work.

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