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South African singer Tyla
(Tyla Laura Seethal)

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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, and poverty levels. So how can governments resolve such challenges? They need to attract foreign investment. But the question is, will investors risk their capital in an environment which is not conducive to a favourable outcome?

The article also referred to the continued loss of forest cover, leading to land degradation and reduced biodiversity.

African nations need to step up their efforts in mitigation of climate change. The threat to their precious ‘water towers’ (the forested areas on mountains that are a source of springs and streams that become

rivers and lakes) needs to be taken seriously for future food security. This is especially because of fast-growing populations in many African countries.

As populations increase, it creates a need for more development, to enable adequate human settlements. The demand for new residential construction projects leads to cutting down more trees, with negative effects on the environment.

Water towers are necessary for the survival of humanity. If sufficient climate action is not achieved soon enough, then all nations could be looking at a food crisis. This would be a disaster for humanity’s survival.

Africa therefore needs to address multiple challenges with determination before it can achieve its ambition of attaining the SDGs by 2030.

KOKIL K. SHAH,
Mombasa, Kenya

Heed Wambu’s warning

In his always thought-provoking columns, Onyekachi Wambu warns us in the September / October issue, that Africa is once again laying itself open to proxy wars by foreign powers who have little interest in the continent beyond their own economic or diplomatic goals.

He points out, rightly, that Africa’s youth, now connected to their age-mates across the globe and very well versed in the political and economic dimensions that function there, are refusing to react as they are expected to by the older set of politicians – and in some cases, rooting for the military against corrupt and inefficient ‘democratically elected’ leaders.

He argues: “Africans need urgently to develop a set of mediation rules for conflict resolution, which will 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.”

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 proving himself an astute oracle – his warnings should be heeded.

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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 event, the last being in 1988.

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

also winning a joint bid made with Spain and Portugal to host the 2030 World Cup. This is a great outcome, particularly when you consider they only entered the bidding fray in March 2023, spurred on by an increase in the number of teams playing from 32 to 48, and Ukraine's withdrawal from the Spain/Portugal bid due to its war with Russia.

The big question is, will they be ready?

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 45,000 – 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 Benslimane. 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 115,000 fans, will be the largest in Africa and second-largest in the world, beaten only by the 150,000 capacity Rungrado 1st of May stadium in Pyongyang, North Korea.

NEW HONOURS FOR SOUTH AFRICA'S JOHN KANI

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 Ulunga 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.

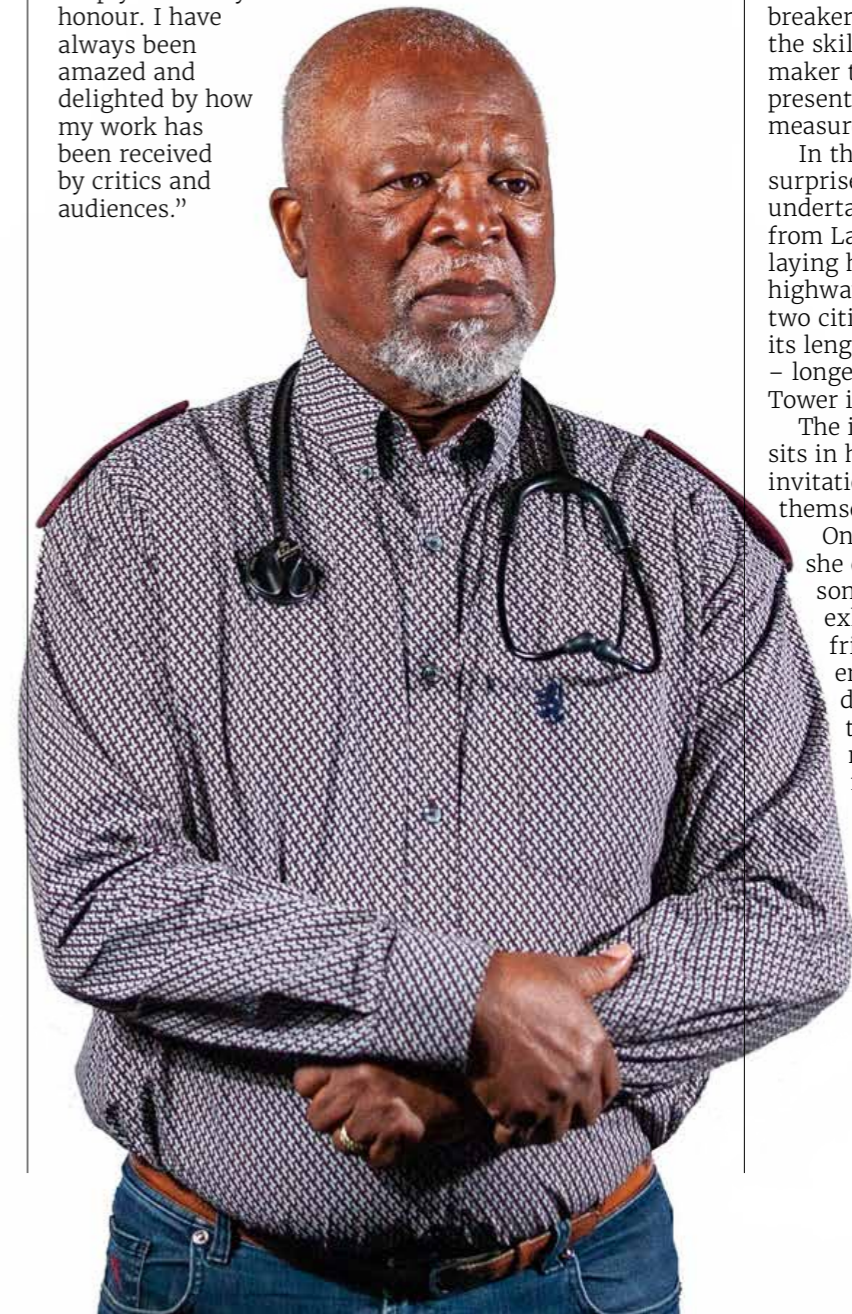
An OBE is bestowed on someone who has been a major influence in their line of work.

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."



Hair-raising record set in Nigeria

You may well wonder what can be done with the equivalent of £2000, 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 11 days and thus securing her place in the hallowed directory of all feats extraordinaire, the Guinness World Records.

The hirsute record-breaker 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 351.28 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 95% 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, DCR Congo, Tanzania and Niger, according to the *World Malaria Report*. UCL is one of six pharma manufacturing 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: 297 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 £10,000 and publication in the 2023 Caine Prize anthology.

Husband and wife team, Mame Bougouma 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 of a world 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."

"The time has come, therefore, to retire the false comforts and illusionary benefits of wasteful expenditure and counterproductive subsidies on consumption by which we dug ourselves deeper into the hole of avoidable debt."

PRESIDENT WILLIAM RUTO, KENYA

"We can't expect everything from the private sector. African governments must value and support designers."

NELLY WANDJI, CAMEROON, OWNER OF PARIS GALLERY 'LE CABINET DE CURIOSITES'

"We're a society that values religion and its cultural norms, and internet platforms like this can violate those values because the concept of a dating app (comes) from the West."

MOHAMED YASIN - COMMENTING FROM SOMALIA ON NEW DATING APP

"The impact of the flooding is much worse because the soil is so damaged from an unprecedented recent drought - years of conflict and al-Shabaab militia's presence also makes building flood defences and resilience more complex and costly."

NAZANINE MOSHIRI - SENIOR CLIMATE ANALYST, INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP, KENYA

"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 fit. Now I know I can do this, get ready. The wolf is in the house."

FRANCIS NGANNOU - UFC (ULTIMATE FIGHTING CHAMPIONSHIP) CONTESTANT, CAMEROON



"By honouring each other's ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds, we become stronger and happier, brightening the cosmic masterpiece of artwork that is our world. Rather than emphasise differences, we should be looking for similarities. Our differences are ultimately superficial, and the best thing to do is celebrate them."

TINA TURNER - SINGER, SONGWRITER, US



"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 do signal the concern of South Africa while continuing to call for a comprehensive cessation [of hostilities]."

NALEDI PANDOR - FOREIGN MINISTER, SOUTH AFRICA



"Africa 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, dusty 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?"

BRIAN JACKMAN - JOURNALIST AND AUTHOR, UK

"Three nominations at the Grammys!! Delay is not denial!!"

DAVIDO - SINGER, NIGERIA ON BEING FINALLY NOMINATED FOR THE 2024 GRAMMY AWARDS

"Honestly, people who are not from South Africa don't understand what this means for our country. It's not just about the game on the field. Our country goes through such a lot. We are the hope they have. We're just grateful we can be here and I want to tell the people of South Africa, thank you so much. Children from a third-world country who just fight over and over. This team shows what diversity can do for this team and our country. Together all is possible."

SIYA KOLISI, SPRINGBOKS' CAPTAIN, FOLLOWING THE SOUTH AFRICAN RUGBY TEAM'S UNPRECEDENTED 4TH WORLD CUP VICTORY

"France is in no way being driven out of Africa."

OLIVIER BECHT, FOREIGN TRADE MINISTER, FRANCE, CALLING ON FRENCH COMPANIES TO CONTINUE AND STEP UP THEIR INVESTMENTS ON THE CONTINENT



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FROM THE EDITOR



ANVER VERSI

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 brutish 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 with their vast wealth and enough weaponry to destroy several worlds altogether – also seem helpless. 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 2013. 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 two additional seats in the non-permanent category. ■

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 and discussed in detail, the role of AI in education across the board. Most sessions focused on this relatively new but immensely powerful technology that today raises 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 or the voice 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, known as MC Abdul. His message was a 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 Sheikha Moza bint Nasser (*inset right*), founder of the Foundation and of the Summit and the mother of the current Emir of Qatar.

There was no skimping on robust language to describe what is happening in Palestine, including calling it a genocide – 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. An example given was disclosing that five out of six universities had been destroyed. The destruction was not limited to Gaza but also took place in the West Bank.

On a different scale

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 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, Sheikha Moza 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 destruc-

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



tion 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, Sheikha Moza 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. ■



Perils and benefits of AI

If one technology dominated the headlines in the second half of 2023 it was AI. In many ways, the world was unprepared, from the regulators to the tech community itself.

AI 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 winner of this year's WISE Prize for Education, Safeena 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 particular communities, and thus make the most significant impact. According to Husain, 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.

AI is here to stay and the question is no longer how it is going to change our world but how will we adapt. Educationalists will have a clear role to play to ensure our societies are ready and equipped with the skills to adapt.

Another issue is that currently AI is dominated by elites in the global north. 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.

Right: MC Abdul performing during the opening plenary session of the Summit



Jeffrey Sachs (*below*), the US economist and academic, has never minced his words when it comes to clear-eyed political analysis. He was a Special Guest at the WISE Summit 2023 and his views on education were characteristically forthright. Omar Ben Yedder discusses.

Education most important determinant of economic wellbeing



The outspoken academic Jeffrey Sachs – described by close friends as a gentle soul and kind person – has never been afraid to speak his mind and has never shied away from taking a contrarian view on global issues.

For example, contrary to the prevailing view from the Western World, he puts the blame of the conflict in Ukraine on the US and what he terms NATO provocation.

During WISE in Doha, he didn't hold back from criticising the UN Security Council as well as previous US administrations for being complicit in the chaos unleashed in Syria and Libya, which, for Africa, has had massive ramifications in the Sahel region. He referred to US actions over the best part of the last fifty years as "great power mischief, irresponsibility and illegality".

He refers to himself as "obstinate and difficult" but this is a price worth paying, he argues, if it leads to the right outcomes.

His stance, when it comes to education, is that the world is falling short on many counts. Education, he says, is the single most important determinant of economic

wellbeing. In simple terms, he argues, not enough resources are going to education. Rich countries, international development organisations and the multilateral development banks need to raise their game if they're serious about reducing poverty globally – and averting future problems such as mass migration, in the best of cases, and conflicts and instability in the worst.

Sachs takes an economist's approach to putting across his thesis. He illustrates the issue in numbers. The first problem with education, he says, is the pay-out cycle. You only start getting proper returns 40 years down the line, he says; however, he goes on to explain, the returns are excellent – 20% on a compound annual growth rate (CAGR).

The second, is that education is expensive and it requires a huge effort to train teachers, build facilities and equip them, and that is why, for many centuries, it was the preserve of a very small elite. And this 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 that once you break the numbers down, developing countries will need considerable budgetary assistance 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 \$26trn, allocates 5% of its GDP towards education, or approximately \$15,000 per student. In poor countries, a much larger percentage of government

spending goes to education, but considerably less per student. This is the first flaw in 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 attract a much higher salary than the average.



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 requirements for teachers are even greater.

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's tax collection around the 6% mark) and you should be spending 10% of GDP on education, 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 solutions to this conundrum, but points out 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 tenor. 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 success of Asia not only to the strength of its education system but also the strong cultural demand in the household and an emphasis, at all levels of 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.

Nonetheless, technology will undoubtedly continue to exacerbate the gap in income distribution and inequalities. And this tech – or 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 to have robust budgets for education in developing countries even more urgent.

This is why education, despite everything else the world is currently concerned with, needs to be front and centre of all development agendas. And right now, he feels, 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 unlock our greatest gift of all, human potential.

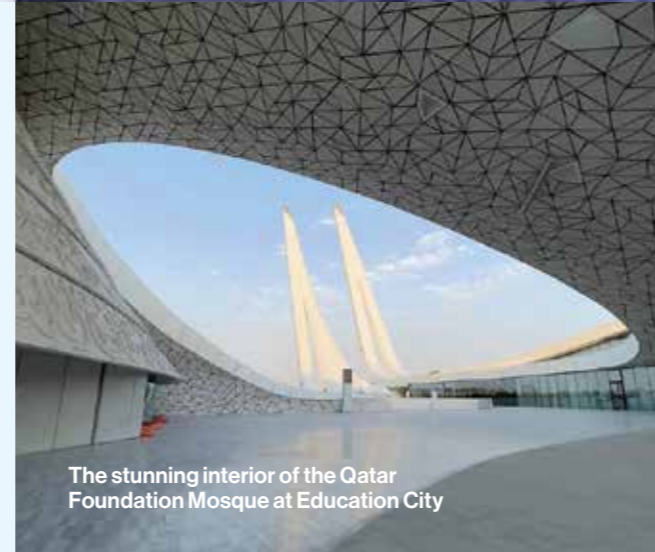
Qatar, with a population of under three million – of whom less than 350,000 are Qataris – gas exports worth \$132bn in 2022, and a GDP of around \$180bn, has the financial resources to back the Foundation's ideas but just as important

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 that 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 is Education City Mosque (Mineretein), which serves as both a place of worship and a place of learning, in the traditional sense and purpose of a mosque.

The mosque itself is a magnificent work of art, bursting with symbolism throughout. Our guide for the day, Sulaiman Timbi Boa, an American of West



The stunning interior of the Qatar Foundation Mosque at Education City

African origin, a former postgraduate student at Hamad Bin Khalifa University, personifies the diversity and variety of teachers and students in Education City.

The site today hosts eight universities, including seven international ones (six are leading institutions from the US, as well as the famous French business school, HEC) across 12 square kilometres.

We were taken around the campus of Cornell, which focuses on humanities and also media studies. We visited state-of-the-art studios where students gain a range of real-life skills around TV and news bulletin production in all its formats, as well as looking at new technologies and innovations such as the metaverse and AI and how these will impact news, media and society.

This year's WISE Summit was wholly

focused on AI, and all the questions it raises. The Foundation wants to ensure that the conversation is not dominated by just one perspective – currently that of the big tech players in Silicon Valley, and their implicit biases and priorities – with the regulators playing catch-up as well as the other stakeholders, whose needs, priorities and voices are largely ignored.

The Foundation was initially launched to help communicate the rich history and culture of the Arab world, including through education. Much of the nuance and the richness of the culture had been lost, or was underrepresented and largely misunderstood.

This was an area that through research, the preservation of culture and education could be corrected. That was the aim, to some extent of what the Foundation

wanted to rectify at the roots.

Today, a similar problem arises. Arabic is a subtle, highly expressive language, and large language models such as ChatGPT can't capture this yet. The Foundation wants to be at the heart of necessary discussions, to ensure that the new technology is representative, fair and accurate.

Today, the Foundation's remit has grown to include an ecosystem where it is helping solve some of the world's most complicated education-related issues. There are 30 units focused on research, where non-linear adaptive learning and critical thinking are encouraged.

The Foundation also supports a venture capital fund to finance some of the innovations that are produced from the different institutions of learning.

The 100 Most Influential Africans of 2023



We extend a warm welcome to our faithful readers to enjoy this special edition dedicated to your favourite annual feature, 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.

Nothing can serve as greater inspiration than to take a dip into the potted biographies of the 100 men and women who have made it onto our list this time around.

Each and every entry in our list tells a story of single-minded determination to reach the limits of one's capabilities, and then still find unexpected reserves to push even further – often surprising oneself at what can be achieved.

Each year's listing 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 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. In this year's listing, for example, politicians take a back seat to scientists, entrepreneurs, environmentalists and creatives of all descriptions.

Leadership comes in all guises, and it has been the leaders in science, climate, the arts and culture who have mostly defined this year.

The overall health and wellbeing of a nation is often judged on its cultural and artistic output and leadership. On this score, and judging by the large number of creatives who make up our list this year, Africa, by and large is indeed a healthy, nurturing place.

Our burgeoning 'Creatives' section will introduce some of the world's most

exciting and thought-provoking singers, musicians, authors, actors, playwrights, film and TV producers and directors and invariably, megastars of mass platforms, such as TikTok and YouTube.

It has been a challenging year for business and an eventful one in politics. In many respects though, it has been the year of the Development Finance Institutions.

They have had to fill the gap, with governments fiscally constrained and with the world distracted by other crises.

Unexpected treasures

Some of those 'unexpected treasures' dredged up in our net and mentioned earlier include a clutch of outstanding scientists and academics, many of them women, who are redrawing the worldwide contours of their disciplines.

Several of these names were completely unknown to us and it was an astonishing journey to discover the scale of their contributions and the enormous influence they wield globally in their chosen professions.

Keeping in step with the scientists and academics are the steadily increasing number of Africans doing invaluable work in the critical field of climate change and the environment.

We have no doubt you will share in our admiration and pride as Africans when you discover them for yourselves as you go over

the entries.

On this score, a word about our diaspora champions, many of whom have overcome incredible prejudices and hurdles to not only succeed and thrive in their chosen fields, but to become world leaders.

Africa has always held its head high in the field of sports, especially in athletics and soccer. Morocco's totally unexpected march into the semi-finals of the 2022 World Cup in Qatar set a new benchmark for Africa's national teams and expert observers say it will not be long before an African team wins the world trophy. In the mean-

time, African players continue to dominate the highest echelons of European football – with a few making side-trips to the Gulf states and the US.

In this year's listing, we celebrate the astounding victory of the South African rugby team, the Springboks. The first multiracial team won the Rugby World Cup in 1995, a rousing victory watched by Nelson Mandela, the first president of a free South Africa. The team went on to win the tournament in 2007, 2019 and now 2023, to make an unprecedented four times.

This introduction of our *100 Most Influential Africans of 2023* is only to give you a small and hopefully tantalising taste of the feats of African achievement that await you on the following pages. We hope you enjoy the exploration. Wishing everybody a happy Christmas and New Year.

Anver Versi,
Editor, *New African* magazine

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.

With grateful thanks to our contributors: Gail Collins; Mike Renouf; Wanjohi Kabukuru; Wanjiku 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.

MAURITANIA

DR SIDI OULD TAH

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.



SENEGAL

IBRAHIMA CHEIKH DIONG

Leading the climate charge

Ibrahim 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.

KENYA

WILLIAM RUTO

Africa's international statesman

In a little over one year since he was elected President of Kenya, William Ruto has displayed a remarkable combination of steely 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 taxes and a restructuring of the financial architecture – that formed a backdrop to the COP28 Summit in UAE. Ruto's most profound impact was to completely overturn the accepted

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

PRESIDENT WILLIAM RUTO

status quo of Africa as little more than the victim of climate change, looking for salvation from outside powers.

Instead he posited 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 is not only good for Africa, but the rest of the world."

Ruto has been named by *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 Kenya 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*, he reiterated Africa's position, saying: "Africa can offer climate-positive growth: it can be a globally cost-competitive climate action powerhouse, greening global supply and manufacturing chains and removing carbon."

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



NIGERIA

NGOZI OKONJO-IWEALA

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 trade.”



NIGERIA

BOLA TINUBU

No longer business as usual

Bola Tinubu, who swept to victory in Nigeria's Presidential election in March 2023, 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.

GUINEA

MAMADY DOUMBOUYA

A new-age military leader?

Since assuming the reins of power in Guinea in 2021, Colonel Mamady Doumbouya 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 Chalco 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,” he thundered.

Doumbouya has, in renewed engagement with the Economic Community of West African States

(ECOWAS), agreed to return his country to civilian rule. While there are few indications of this happening so far, if he can return Guinea to a more stable political dispensation, whether of a more African flavour or the conventional Western-style democracy, it will cement his legacy and place him among a rare pantheon of military interventionists who keep their promises to return their countries to stability.

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

– COLONEL DOUMBOUYA
AT THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY



CÔTE D'IVOIRE

TIDJANE THIAM

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 scion of a prominent Ivorian family, he is a descendant of Queen Yamouso, 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.



MOROCCO

NADIA FETTAH ALAOUI

High-flying financier

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, health, 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.



ZIMBABWE

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 progress 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.



SENEGAL

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 rip 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.

NIGERIA

AKINWUMI ADESINA

Speaking straight from the shoulder

When the president of the African Development Bank (AfDB) speaks, the world listens. The slick Nigerian operator has the knack of commanding headlines wherever he goes, but beneath the publicity blitz is a firm commitment to advocating for Africa's interests at every available opportunity.

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 COP28 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 Africa's trade and industrialisation progress.

Yet Adesina's honesty and forthright opinions are clearly 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 day job of disbursing loans and crowding in investments, Adesina is fighting hard for the disbursement of SDRs. He is also campaigning strongly in other areas, becoming the de-facto global spokesperson for numerous Africa-related issues.

With his current term running to 2025, we can expect more from a man who is growing increasingly impatient and on whose shoulders much responsibility lies.



When it comes to setting the agenda, Africa's foremost development banker is rarely afraid of ruffling a few feathers.



TOGO

DIDIER ACOUETÉY

Fitting seekers to jobs

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 one of the founders of the Youth Excellence Programme, dedicated to building a corps of young African leaders.

In 2014 he launched the inaugural African SME Financing Forum, in collaboration with leading DFIs bringing a cohesive approach to really supporting this ecosystem.

He also co-founded, in 2012, the first Africa-South East Asia Chamber of Commerce in Singapore.

A graduate of the Arts et Métiers school and ESCP EAP Business School, both in France, Acouetey believes strongly in the role of private enterprise to catalyse growth. Through his work and his advocacy, he is contributing to building this thriving private sector.

MOROCCO

BAHIJA JALLAL

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 2023 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'.



SOUTH AFRICA

ANDRÉ DE RUYTER

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.

He claimed that he had been thwarted at every turn by vested interests in the government, and estimated that Eskom is losing well over \$55m 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 his tale adds weight to the saying that 'democracy dies in darkness'.

NIGERIA

PROF. BENEDICT OKEY ORAMAH

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.

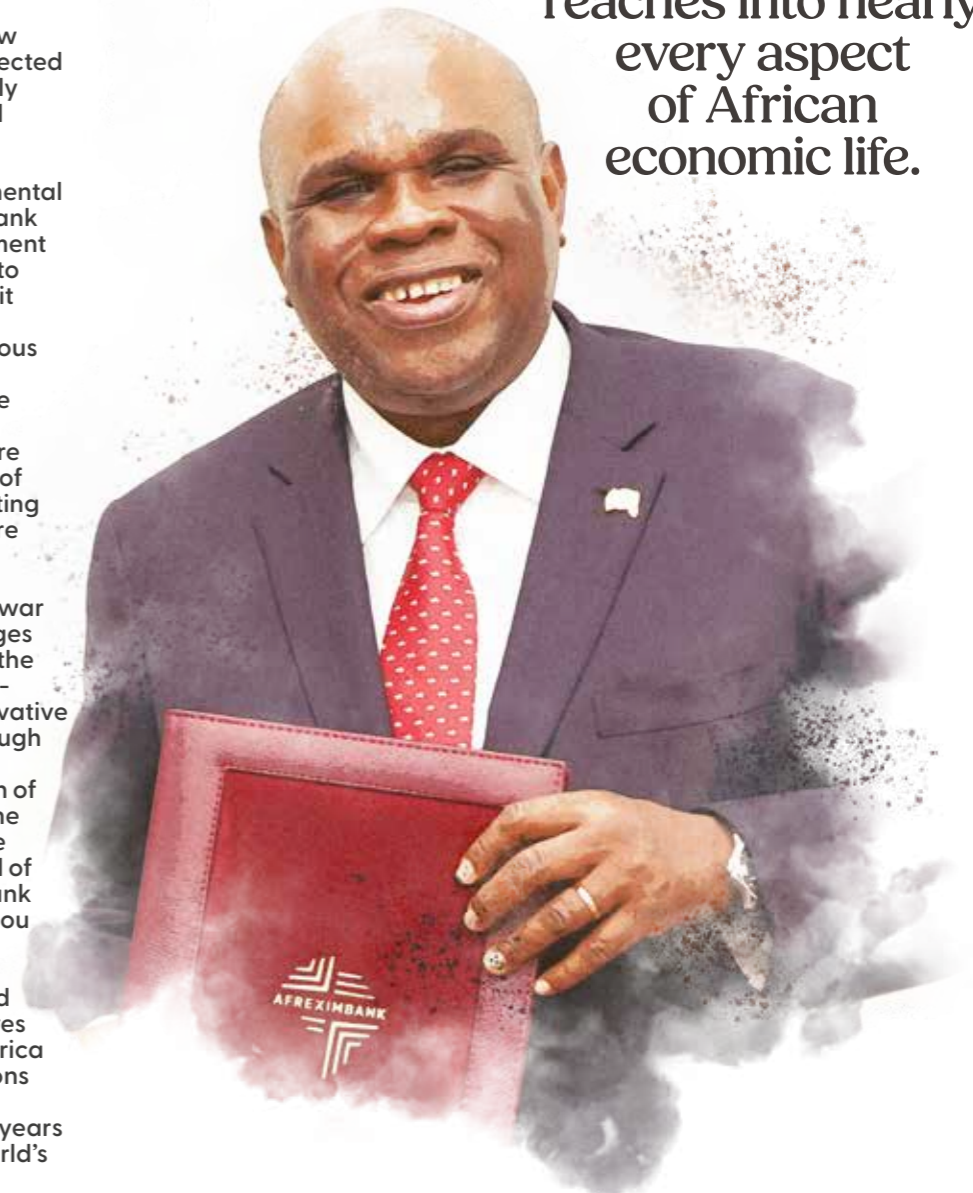
Its other initiatives include the Transit Guarantee Scheme, the African Quality Assurance Centre and the African Medical Centre of Excellence in Abuja, supplementing the continent's creaky healthcare system.

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 under-achievement in the world's most resource-rich continent.

Afreximbank, which Oramah has led since 2015, has grown into a behemoth that reaches into nearly every aspect of African economic life.





NIGERIA

SAMAILA ZUBAIRU

The go-to partner for African solutions

Samaila Zubairu and Africa Finance Corporation (AFC), which he has led since July 2018, are pursuing an increasingly muscular approach to funding the continent's development, based on a conviction that African challenges can only ever be properly addressed by African solutions.

Part of the solution is providing innovative financing for infrastructure around the continent, and showing that Africa is investible. In November 2023, for example, it successfully divested its 35% equity investment in Atlantic Terminal Services Limited, the concessionaire responsible for expanding Ghana's Takoradi Port, to Yilport Holding, demonstrating its capacity to attract international third-party capital and to strategically exit infrastructure assets.

AFC has become a powerful player in renewable energy, supporting projects such as a 60MW wind project in Djibouti. Thus under Zubairu's leadership it is a leading voice and partner for Africa's energy transition, supported by the acquisition of Lekela Power, Africa's biggest renewable energy company.

It has partnered other financial institutions to support local beneficiation of minerals and metals crucial to the energy transition, notably the joint effort by the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zambia to process their copper and cobalt deposits. "It doesn't make sense for processing to happen anywhere other than in Africa," Zubairu told African Business, asserting that local production is good for the environment as well as for the bottom line.

Zubairu's vision for AFC and for Africa stands at the nexus between climate solutions and unleashing green growth in the continent. He's increasingly becoming the go-to partner around climate and Africa-led solutions.

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



EGYPT

RIHAM ELGIZY

Creating a new paradigm for carbon trading

Riham ElGizy, the CEO of Saudi Arabia's Regional Voluntary Carbon Market Company, is a pioneer in the carbon credit market in Africa and the Middle East. The company is responsible for the first carbon credit auctions in the region, including the sale of a record 2.2m tonnes of carbon credits from Kenya to Saudi firms in 2022. Sixteen Saudi and international companies participated in the landmark auction, with Aramco and Saudi Electricity Company purchasing the largest number of carbon credits.

"This pragmatic and action-oriented approach is a clear manifestation that a South-to-South partnership in climate action is really possible," said Kenya's President Ruto in reference to the transaction.

ElGizy is a bold agent of change who is contributing significantly to the global fight against climate change by promoting sustainable practices and technologies. She is a global leader in impact investing, with over 20 years' experience in the energy, clean technology, and renewable energy sectors. She has advised on and executed mergers and acquisitions for Saudi Aramco, BP, and many other institutions.

She holds a Sloan Fellow MBA from MIT Sloan School of Management, and during her time at MIT worked on projects promoting sustainable economic growth in emerging markets through the deployment of innovative technology solutions and climate change simulations.



UGANDA

HAM SERUNJOGI

Plugging a yawning market gap

The Chipper Cash company is the result of two young Africans studying in the US asking why it is so difficult to send money from one country on the continent to another.

Ham Serunjogi, chief executive of the company and one half of that questioning duo, remembers his father literally having to travel from his native Uganda to South Africa to pay fees for a swimming meet he was participating in.

Recognising the opportunity to fill

a yawning gap in the market, they set up Chipper Cash in 2018 with \$30,000 in joint savings, pitching the service to over 50 venture capital funds before earning the attention and support of a sceptical investor community.

Since then, Chipper Cash has raised over \$300m in funding from investors including Bezos Expeditions – the investment vehicle of Jeff Bezos, founder of Amazon – and earned itself unicorn status, with a peak valuation of \$2.2bn in 2022.

The user base has also grown, to over 5m across seven African countries and the US. Users are not only able to send money with minimal charges, but can also trade in cryptocurrencies, buy airtime, pay bills and shop online.

Despite recent challenges in the sector, Serunjogi has managed to keep his company profitable, owing to nimble responses. "In Africa, you're in problem-solving mode all the time," he has said of his capacity to respond to market turbulence.

Recognising his abilities and impact, US President Joe Biden appointed Serunjogi to his Advisory Council on African Diaspora Engagement, providing another area where he can exert his positive influence.

BURKINA FASO

SIMON TIEMTORÉ

Stepping into the banking breach

Simon Tiemtoré is the Founder, Chairman, and CEO of Lilium Capital, an international investment firm focused on Africa. He has a strong background in legal, tax, banking, and financial services and has successfully led several high-profile investment bank and debt capital markets transactions across the continent. His latest exploits at Vista Group, the banking group owned by Lilium Capital, have seen him play an integral role in the lender's journey to become a pan-African banking powerhouse.

Tiemtoré, as Chairman of Vista Group, oversaw the lender's years-long acquisition of Oragroup. With this deal, Lilium Capital now has a presence in 16 countries, compared to three previously. It also takes the firm's banking assets from \$2bn to over \$10bn. The deal gives the group a presence across the West African Monetary Zone, West African Economic and Monetary Union and the Central African market. "We saw it as a huge opportunity to acquire a 12-country bank spanning three economic markets and which, from an organisational standpoint is similar to Vista, and so would be easy for us to integrate," he says.

The acquisition comes at a strategic moment as several French banks have withdrawn from West Africa amid rising diplomatic tensions. Tiemtoré is taking advantage of this and is applying his world-class deal-making skills in a complex banking environment.

Since 2018, Chipper Cash has raised over \$300m in funding from investors and achieved unicorn status, with a peak valuation of \$2.2bn.





TUNISIA

KARIM BEGUIR

AI pioneer

Karim 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 initiatives around AI-powered drug and vaccine discovery.

"One of the reasons we founded InstaDeep was to show that there was real potential and opportunity for AI in Africa. So we want people to see us as a deep tech African start-up gone global, which sends a powerful message of hope for the space," he says.

Beguir is also a highly respected voice in the global AI community, having participated in important events such as the first ever AI Safety Summit at the UK's Bletchley Park.

He is a member of the World Economic Forum Council on the Future of AI, a Google Developer Expert and a steering committee member of the Deep Learning Indaba.

Like many entrepreneurs, Beguir faced the challenge of scaling a start-up with limited funds. InstaDeep was launched in 2014 with \$2,000. After achieving external funding in 2019, the firm landed a huge \$100m Series B funding deal in 2022, before being sold to BioNTech in 2023.

ZIMBABWE

RALPH MUPITA

Reshaping the digital future of Africa

From the finance industry to telecoms, Ralph Mupita has shown remarkable leadership and achievement as a senior business executive.

He became the CFO 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 Ghana Revenue Authority in January 2023.

The company challenged the 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.

Before joining MTN, Mupita had been the CEO of Old Mutual Emerging Markets.

He is a member of the World Economic Forum's Council on the Future of AI.

"The connectivity gap in Africa needs to be tackled. We believe that everybody deserves the benefits of a modern connected life."

RALPH MUPITA



NIGERIA

ALIKO DANGOTE

Bittersweet year for an African icon

For the 66-year-old Aliko Dangote, easily Africa's greatest-ever entrepreneur, 2023 has been a bittersweet year. For the first time in over 12 years, Dangote has lost his position as Africa's richest man; but the disappointment has been mollified by the fact that his long-cherished petroleum refinery is finally up and running.

Dangote's fall from his top perch came suddenly and over one dramatic day. On 14 June 2023, Bola Tinubu, Nigeria's new President, made the shock decision to abandon the naira's fixed exchange rate against the US dollar, sending the value of the naira plummeting to below half its former value.

This wiped \$3.7bn from Dangote's net worth, leaving him holding \$10.4bn and thus trailing South African luxury goods entrepreneur Johann Rupert, who has an estimated net worth of \$11.7bn.

Many Nigerians, who consider Dangote their hero and business icon, say they felt the blow 'personally'. Nigeria has the highest GDP in Africa and Dangote's domination of the 'richest spot' has been a source of great pride to not only Nigeria but much of Africa.

However, his fans say he will soon recoup the losses – brought about by external factors – when his \$18.5bn petroleum refinery, which was officially opened by former President Muhammadu Buhari in May 2023, begins to roll out its products early in 2024.

The refinery has been one of Dangote's pet projects since 2013 and was designed to be the solution to Nigeria's perennial fuel shortages, since one of Africa's biggest crude oil producers had no functioning refinery and had to import virtually all its fuel needs.

The refinery project, alongside a fertiliser factory and power plant at the Lekki Free Zone in Lagos, faced numerous obstacles, many arising from vested interests and others from technical issues, driving up the cost from an estimated \$8bn

to \$18.5bn. During the inauguration ceremony,

Interestingly, Dangote is also paying close attention to the environmental credentials of his group. They are shifting to greener sources of energy around their cement plants.

They are transitioning away from diesel operated trucks to cleaner forms of fuel. This will undoubtedly drive a shift in the expectations of businesses in Nigeria and further afield to become more aligned with a greener growth agenda.



CÔTE D'IVOIRE

MOHAMED KANDE

Breaking down barriers to rise to the top

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 misperceptions 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 – in corporate America was far from preordained, to say the least... I was asked recently what people might learn from my journey. My answer is simple: Don't judge people, and trust in yourself."



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

SENEGAL

IBRAHIM SAGNA

Catalysing Africa's creative industries

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 also invests 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 multilateral institutions such as the International Finance Corporation, Africa Finance Corporation and Afreximbank.

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

Known for his 'Midas touch', Sagna has in the course of his career shepherded over \$30bn of capital flows into African-related investments.



NIGERIA

SHOLA AKINLADE

Setting fresh enterprise goals

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 Precurio, making open-source collaboration software designed for businesses in emerging markets.

In 2016 Akinlade, alongside Ezra Olubi, founded Paystack, a company that swiftly gained recognition and acceptance into the Y Combinator accelerator, the first Nigerian company to do so.

Y Combinator Management is an American technology start-up accelerator used to launch companies. Only 3% of applicants are accepted.

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.

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.

BENIN

SERGE EKUÉ

Bringing a fresh approach to development

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, Serge led the capital markets activities of Natixis in the Asia-Pacific before becoming the MD of the Hong 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.

Ekué represents the new generation of bankers – confident and with a clear vision of what is possible.



CAMEROON

JULES NGANKAM

Finance whiz championing women and SMEs

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.



MADAGASCAR

HASSANEIN HIRIDJEE

Building on generational legacy of success

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.

Hassanein Hiridjee has been one of the most active business leaders in Africa this year.



CÔTE D'IVOIRE

BERNARD KONÉ DOSSONGUI

Dealmaker supreme

Bernard Koné Dossongui wields significant influence in various sectors such as banking, insurance, telecommunications, agro-industry, and cocoa through the Atlantic Cocoa Corporation.

He is the founder and majority shareholder of the Atlantic Financial Group (AFG), which holds stakes in several major banks and insurance companies in Francophone Africa.

Dossongui has played a crucial role in transforming the banking landscape in Francophone Africa through his ability to strike strategic deals.

He is the founder of Banque Atlantique Côte d'Ivoire, which he later sold to the Moroccan Banque Populaire. This move paved the way for his next ventures, including the strategic acquisition, in 2020, of BNP Paribas' subsidiary in Mali, as he seeks to build a new banking franchise.

He is also consolidating his position in the cement industry through Société de ciment de Madagascar, a subsidiary of AFG.

Dossongui's impact extends beyond the private sector. He was the Minister of Technical Education and Agriculture in 1989 and has been a deputy since.

Insiders describe his main assets as his far-sightedness, his ability to strike strategic deals, and his commitment to the economic development of the region.



SOUTH AFRICA

SIM TSHABALALA

Captaining a banking giant in choppy waters

It was a strong start to the year for Sim Tshabalala, CEO of Standard Bank, the continent's biggest lender. In March, the South African giant reported a 33% increase in profits from R15.73 (\$0.87) per share to R20.87 per share for the year to the end of December 2022.

The bank's net profit of \$2.3bn in the year to December 2022 was up from \$1.8bn a year earlier, leading to a number one ranking in *African Business's Top 100 Banks 2023* listing.

Standard Bank is active in many rapidly expanding economies and is riding the fintech wave, with new digital channels and partnerships helping it reach the unbanked.

It also helps that it is diversified beyond its struggling South African base – African regions contributed 36% to its full-year 2022 group headline earnings.

Tshabalala has enhanced ties with China – in August 2023, the bank signed a new five-year strategic partnership agreement with Industrial and Commercial Bank of China, its biggest shareholder. The partnership facilitated \$600m of trade flows in 2022 between Africa and China.

The next year could be tougher – Tshabalala warned back in March 2023 that the war in Ukraine, food shortages, and the risk of more sovereign debt default on the continent pose risks to profits. But Standard Bank has weathered many previous storms and Tshabalala has the nous to help it do so again.



SENEGAL

COURA SÈNE

Riding the fintech wave

Coura 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 \$200m 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, she 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."



TOGO

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 \$800m to Congo's state mining firm, Gécamines, as part of a settlement over the Tenke Fungurume Mining operation in Congo, some of the credit was rightfully given to Agboyibor and his firm. The deal, which also includes a commitment from CMOC to pay a combined \$1.2bn in dividends to Gécamines, is emblematic of the ethos that drives a firm named after the military units 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.



NIGERIA

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 swelled its war 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.

KENYA

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 and advocate for education. He founded the Wings to Fly scholarship programme, which has supported thousands of talented, disadvantaged students to get quality education in Kenya.





TUNISIA

MOUNGI BAWENDI

Tunisia's 2023 Nobel winner

Tunisia's Professor Mounqi Bawendi has joined Africa's cast of Nobel laureates by winning the 2023 Prize for Chemistry, along with Louis E. Brus and Aleksey Yekimov, for work on quantum dots. In his acceptance speech Bawendi explained the importance of this work: "Wondering about how the atomic world evolves into the macroscopic one inevitably leads us through a wonderful new world, the nano-world, which we now call the realm of nanoscience and nanotechnology."

"Quantum dots, for which we are being honoured here today, were at the birth of this new realm. They shine brightly on its future and the yet-unimagined possibilities it offers. So tonight, let us raise a toast to the human drive for exploration, and to the future of nanoscience."

Quantum dots are semiconducting crystals whose nanoscale size gives them unique optical and electronic properties. Bawendi's pioneering approach made it possible to 'tune' them according to size and to achieve predictable properties. Quantum dots are now used in LED displays, photovoltaic solar cells, photodetectors, biomedical imaging and biosensing, among other areas.

Bawendi was born in Paris, France, the son of Tunisian mathematician Mohammed Salah Baouendi. He obtained a PhD in chemistry in 1988 from the University of Chicago and is now Lester Wolfe Professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).



EGYPT

NEMAT TALAAT SHAFIK

First female president of Columbia Uni

The soft-spoken and generally unassuming Baroness Shafik has registered one of the world's most glittering careers in high-level economics and academia. In July 2023 the Trustees of Columbia University in the City of New York appointed her the 20th President of the university: the first woman to hold this post.

Before that she was Director of the London School of Economics and Political Science. Prior to that Shafik held positions of high responsibility in public service. In 2004, at the age of 36, she became the youngest-ever Vice President of the World Bank. She then moved to Britain and was Permanent Secretary of the Department for International Development, from 2008 to 2011. Moving back across the Atlantic, she became Deputy Managing Director of the IMF. She resigned in 2014 to assume the role of Deputy Governor of the Bank of England, where among other duties she was responsible for a balance sheet of over £500bn.

Born in Alexandria, Egypt, to parents involved in education, Shafik attended the American University in Cairo, the University of Massachusetts Amherst, the London School of Economics and did a PhD in economics at St Antony's College, Oxford. In 2020 she was made a cross-bench peer in the UK's House of Lords. She says: "I have always understood equality as not about demanding 'more', but rather being entitled to the same."

ERITREA

TIMNIT GEBRU

Adding the human dimension to AI

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 bias 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 Timnit's voice cannot be understated.



MOROCCO

ISMAHANE ELOUAFI

Piloting a safe course through food crisis

Dr Ismahane Elouafi has always been determined to fly high: she attended Morocco's Aviation High School with the aim of becoming one of the country's first female fighter pilots. But the concept of a woman joining this elite corps was too much for more conservative sections of society and she was forced to look elsewhere. She turned to agriculture and today millions of agriculturalists around the world will be grateful for that.

She spent over fifteen years working in Asia, Africa and the Middle East to find scientific means to combat agricultural attrition due to the climate crisis.

In 2020 she was appointed to the new post of Chief Scientist at the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization, where she worked to promote neglected and underutilised crops, the use of non-fresh water in agriculture, and the empowerment of women in science.

In December 2023 she was selected from a global field to be Executive Managing Director of CGIAR (the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research) – the world's largest publicly-funded agrifoods-focused research network.

Welcoming her to CGIAR, Professor Lindiwe Majele Sibanda said: "Dr Elouafi is a visionary leader in agrifoods-focused research and advocacy, with a track record of developing strategies to deal with some of the world's most pressing environmental and human challenges."

KENYA

CHAO TAYIANA MAINA

Unearthing suppressed African history

Kenya's Chao Tayiana Maina combines a lifelong passion for history with a deep understanding of digital technologies, making her one of the very few African experts in digital humanities.

In the academic world, Africa's past is one of the least researched areas of knowledge and Maina is an eager traveller in this territory, determined to unearth hidden or suppressed African histories and make them available to the public in a form that is accessible.

After gaining a BSc in Mathematics and Computer Science from the Jomo Kenyatta University, she graduated from the Glasgow School of Art with an MSc in International Heritage Visualisation, subsequently embarking on a range of initiatives.

Using digital visualisation, 3D sites and oral history, her Save the Railway project examined and preserved the history of Kenya's disappearing railway infrastructure.

She co-founded the Museum of British Colonialism (MBC), designed to restore the suppressed history of the appalling treatment of people in colonial detention camps during the Mau Mau struggles of the 1950s.

She also founded African Digital Heritage to encourage a more critical, holistic and knowledge-based approach to African heritage. In 2020 she co-founded Open Restitution Africa, an open data project putting together information and knowledge to aid restitution processes.

In 2023 she was one of the winners of the Dan David Prize, at \$3m the largest history prize in the world, for her work in expanding the knowledge of African history and culture.



NIGERIA

ANNA ADEOLA MAKANJU

Taming the AI beast

Few new technologies have evoked so much controversy as Artificial Intelligence (AI). Its ability to think and express itself like human beings but at a much faster rate has generated both admiration and loathing – with some fearing that its misuse could be catastrophic for the human race.

Now, thanks to companies like OpenAI, rapid advances have been made and it is accessible to virtually everybody. Regulations to control it and make it safe are in full swing at national, regional and global levels.

In the thick of this is Anna Makanju, Vice President of Global Affairs at OpenAI. Anna and OpenAI CEO, Sam Altman have been criss-crossing the world discussing the technology and its regulation with political and social leaders and technology czars.

Makanju was on this year's *Time* list of the 100 most influential people in AI. "There's a good chance that whatever AI regulations emerge across the world in the next

few years, they will bear her fingerprints," says *Time's* citation.

After gaining her law degree from Stanford University, Makanju worked for the International Criminal Court and the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. Her other posts since have included Director for Russia at the US National Security Council and Chief of Staff for European and NATO Policy in the Office of the Secretary of Defense. She worked on regulatory aspects at Facebook before joining OpenAI.

NIGERIA / GHANA

RASHID SUMAILA

Global champion of the oceans

Professor Rashid Sumaila, the Canada-based research chair in interdisciplinary 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 *End of the Line* as well as *Change Makers: The Global Race to Save our Seas*, a film on 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.



KENYA

JAMES IRUNGU MWANGI

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 2021 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, hapless, helpless climate change victim," he says. "Instead Africa and its people have the potential – they can, and they should, be the world's climate vanguard."

Before becoming an independent climate action advocate, Mwangi was the Executive Director of the Dalberg 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 Dalberg 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.

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



Mrema believes that despite climate change and biodiversity loss being connected, the latter has received less global attention.



TANZANIA

ELIZABETH MARUMA MREMA

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 biodiversity, and influenced the work she does today.

Regarded as one of the world's most prolific biodiversity champions and activists, Mrema took up the UNEP position in early 2023 – an apposite role given the current discourse on climate change, which is one of the key drivers of biodiversity loss.

UN Secretary-General, António Guterres says biodiversity is humanity's life-support system. "From the air we breathe and the food we eat, to the energy that fuels us and the medicines that heal us, our lives are wholly dependent on healthy ecosystems... Yet our actions are devastating every corner of the planet," he stated on 22 May, the International Day for Biological Diversity.

Mrema also 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.

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AT THE SERVICE
OF THE CONTINENT
1974 - 2024



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AA2
AA/A-1+



Rated AAA by Japan Credit Rating Agency, Aa2 with positive outlook by Moody's Investment Services and AA/A-1+ with Positive outlook by S&P Global Ratings



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ZAMBIA

DR MUSONDA MUMBA

Shining a spotlight on wetlands

Wetlands are vital for human survival, and are indispensable for the countless benefits and ecosystem services provided to humanity – from freshwater supply, food, building materials and biodiversity, to flood control, groundwater recharge and climate change mitigation.

Yet studies show that wetlands and their quality continue to decline in all parts of the world. As a result, the ecosystem services they provide to people are compromised.

The importance of wetlands and the responsibility of managing them is therefore critical, and so is the responsibility on the shoulders of Dr Musonda Mumba as Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands.

Twenty-six years after working as an intern for the Convention, she heads the organisation at its headquarters in Gland, Switzerland. Holder of a PhD in Wetland Conservation and Hydrology from University College, London, Dr Mumba spent over 12 years at the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), working on climate change adaptation and diverse environmental issues linked to nature-based solutions.

She is also the founder of the Network of African Women Environmentalists (NAWE).

Among other accolades, she has been named by the Global Landscapes Forum (GLF) as one of the 16 key women 'restoring the earth'.



ZAMBIA

EPHRAIM MWEPYA SHITIMA

Tough negotiator on climate change justice

As chair of the powerful and influential African Group of Negotiators on Climate Change, Ephraim Mwepya Shitima led tough negotiations for a much fairer deal for Africa from the developed world during the 2023 COP28 in the UAE.

Shitima, who is also the Director of the newly-created Department of Green Economy and Climate Change in the Ministry of Green Economy and Environment in Zambia, outlined six priority areas around which negotiations were conducted.

These included: climate finance; operationalisation of the Loss and Damage Fund; the just energy transition; and Africa's quest to be granted the 'special needs and circumstances' status.

Leading the Africa Group, Shitima demanded that the rich nations provide between \$200bn and \$400bn a year by 2030 for loss and damage and \$400bn a year for adapting to climate change. This was in addition to funding efforts geared towards emissions reduction.

Following the very successful Africa Climate Summit in Nairobi, Kenya, where Africa took leadership on finding solutions to decarbonisation and energy transition, the continent is now punching at its right weight and Shitima is proving himself a determined and perfectly well prepared negotiator, drawing on 15 years' experience in policy formulation, implementation, and negotiations in the UN process.



KENYA

WANJIRA MATHAI

A force of nature on climate

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 got 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.



KENYA

ALI SAID ALAMIN MANDHRY

Cooking up a storm

Ali Mandhry, also known as Chef Ali L'artiste, 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 cuisine cultures.

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.

Mandhry, who was born and raised in the culturally rich, historical city of Mombasa, says the delicious cakes, known as mahamri, that his grandfather produced, inspired him to try his hand at cooking. He was soon producing and selling the 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. Mandhry is changing all that and food lovers from all corners of the globe can now share in the region's exquisite delicacies.

NIGERIA

TEJU COLE

Tapestry of creative brilliance

A literary luminary, Teju Cole's career spans fiction, non-fiction, and photography. Born in the US and raised in Nigeria, Cole's unique global experience and perspective is reflected in his thought-provoking and socially engaged work.

Cole has garnered international acclaim for his novels, essays, and critiques. His debut novel, *Open City*, received widespread praise for its exploration of identity, memory, and the interconnectedness of global experiences.

His writing is characterised by its elegance and intellectual depth, earning him a reputation as a literary force with a keen eye for human complexities.

His essays, published in prestigious outlets such as *The New Yorker* and *The New York Times*, touch on a range of topics including art, politics, and culture. Cole's ability to blend personal reflections with broader societal issues showcases his mastery of the form.

Beyond the written word, Cole, who is also Gore Vidal Professor of the Practice of Creative Writing at Harvard, and has lectured elsewhere, is an accomplished photographer, adding a visual dimension to his storytelling.

His evocative images, often shared on social media, offer a poignant and contemplative view of the world, complementing his written narratives.

A unique, multifaceted talent, Cole has left an indelible mark on the cultural landscape, inspiring readers and thinkers alike.



ALGERIA

DJ SNAKE

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.



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.



GHANA

NANA DARKOA 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, perspectives, and experiences 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, Omyemi 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*.

Omyemi 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.

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* (*Frère 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 African soldiers 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."

DAVID DIOP,
IN AT NIGHT ALL
BLOOD IS BLACK



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, gender, 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 artistic contributions, Aïda is recognised for her dedication to mentorship 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.

Aïda's extraordinary career, artistry, advocacy, and commitment to fostering a vibrant photographic community in Africa, are testament to the transformative power of visual storytelling and cultural representation globally.

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

AÏDA MULUNEH



NIGERIA

TEMS

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 recognised 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 about well-being and authenticity.

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



SENEGAL

PIERRE THIAM

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 to explore the richness of African culinary traditions.

Thiam's impact also extends beyond the kitchen, as he actively works to promote sustainability and ethical sourcing in the food industry. His commitment to using locally sourced, seasonal ingredients aligns with his belief in preserving the environment and supporting local communities.

"OUR PERCEPTION OF OURSELVES STARTS WITH THE FOOD WE EAT," SAYS THIAM.

GHANA

SERGE ATTUKWEI CLOTTEY

Repurposing waste into glowing art

Ghana-born Serge Attukwei Clottey is a visionary artist whose career transcends traditional artistic boundaries, combining contemporary art with social activism and environmental consciousness.

He has grown to become a prominent figure in the global art scene, celebrated for his innovative approach and commitment to addressing pressing societal issues.

At the core of his artistic work is the transformative use of plastic waste. He founded the GoLokal performance collective which sees him and fellow artists create striking sculptures, installations, and performances using discarded plastic materials. By repurposing these materials, Clottey not only highlights the environmental impact of consumerism but also sparks conversations about waste, sustainability, and the potential for artistic expression to effect positive change.

One of Clottey's most notable works is the *Afrogallonism* series, which features large-scale installations made from recycled, yellow gallon containers. These installations serve as a commentary on the global water crisis and the commodification of basic resources, drawing attention to issues of access, privilege, and environmental responsibility.

Clottey's art is deeply rooted in his cultural identity. He draws inspiration from the traditions of the Ga people of Ghana, incorporating elements of their spirituality and history into his work. This fusion of cultural heritage and contemporary expression adds layers of depth to his art, making it both visually compelling and intellectually rich.

Clottey's far-reaching impact extends beyond the art world as he actively engages with his local community and beyond. He 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.



EGYPT

BASSEM 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.

Bassem 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 views. 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.

In October and November 2023, he spelled out the facts about the Middle East in front of British viewers in two interviews on the *Piers Morgan Uncensored* TV show, the first of which drew 20m views – the most in the history of the programme.

“When they see you as a purchasing power, their perception changes.”



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-orientated 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.

NIGERIA

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.

Burna Boy's trailblazing achievements in 2023 underscore his status as a musical powerhouse and a cultural icon on the global stage.



SOUTH AFRICA

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 swaying. 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 achieved this with his song *Grazing in the Dark*. Perhaps inevitably, this level of visibility has not come without controversy.

Most prominent has been Tyla's self-description. Her origins include Zulu, Irish and Indian ancestry – lending itself to her describing herself as 'coloured', a term whose meaning in South Africa is quite different from the US. The discussion over this is not likely to be resolved any time soon.

Still, it is undeniable that the fresh-faced South African beauty has claimed her rightful space and power as a force to reckon with in the global music industry. Tyla's star is just rising, and we are ready!



Tyla is the first South African to debut on the Billboard Hot 100, more than five decades after Hugh Masekela.



SENEGAL

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 projects on the outskirts 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 International Best 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.



TUNISIA

KAOUTHER BEN HANIA

Filmmaker pushing boundaries

Kaouther 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 prize for best documentary 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.



DRC

GIMS

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 groundbreaking 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 Fléau* in 2020, accompanied by two reissues in 2021, followed by *LDVM*, released in December 2022.

He has had similar success with his singles, including *La Môme* 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.



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 Franca 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 it to be a way to tell stories, histories and cultures that I think run the risk of being forgotten. Every capsule that I do, is to preserve that. Fashion is a beautiful industry that can inform and educate in the same breath as beauty," he said at the award ceremony.

The prize marks a year in which Magugu has continued to make his mark on the fashion scene and to use fashion as a tool for memory. His most recent collection honours Sarah Baartman, a Khoikhoi woman who was exhibited as a freak-show attraction in 19th-century Europe.

In October, he launched the Heirloom Shirt Project, which uses fashion as a vehicle to remember loved ones. Its first clients included Michelle Obama, who sported an outfit incorporating the image of her late mother, Marian Shields Robinson, during a visit to Cape Town.

Thebe also designed the official kit for the Orlando Pirates Football Club SA in collaboration with Adidas. In March, he was the first African-based designer to take over Spotify's Fashion Forward playlist.

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 she is also an accomplished playwright. Her play *Eclipsed* made history as the first Broadway production to feature an 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.

Beyond 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 many talents 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.



ZAMBIA

MULENGA KAPWEPWE

Unwavering protector of history

Born into a family who played a significant role in Zambia's independence struggle, Mulenga Kapwepwe has been an unfaltering champion of her country's cultural history.

Her work has attracted renewed attention all over Africa as interest in the continent's past has increased as part of the youth's desire to establish a historic identity.

She began her illustrious career by writing acclaimed plays and books. Her late 90s works, *Heart of the Cyclone* and *Chiti My Luba*, both won prestigious Ngoma awards, Zambia's only official national artistic honours.

She has dedicated her life to ensuring that Zambia's history is never lost and has given much of her time to projects for Zambian youth.

From 2004-17 she chaired the Arts Council of Zambia. She has also worked as a technical advisor to the European Union's Zambia Sector Support Programme and has sat on the board of the Zambia National Commission for UNESCO.

In 2016, she co-founded the Zambian Women's History Museum to "research, preserve and restore African indigenous knowledge and living histories focused on women".

The BBC named her as one of its 100 inspiring and influential women from around the world in 2020 and today she continues to dedicate her life to ensuring Zambian culture is firmly placed on the world stage. Her legacy will be one that is always remembered.

RWANDA

NCUTI GATWA

African Dr Who is the new Time Lord

Rwandan-Scottish actor Ncuti Gatwa gained millions of ardent fans of the long-running and iconic TV sci-fi series *Dr Who* when he was selected to play the 15th 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 dizzying 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 its authenticity and representation. His nuanced performance not only resonated

with audiences worldwide but also contributed to discussions about diversity and inclusivity in the entertainment industry.

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 the way stories are told and characters are portrayed on screen.

"I'm most proud of my heritage; being able to shape people's perception of Rwanda or Rwandans. You make your own destiny," he says.

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





SOUTH AFRICA

PRETTY YENDE

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 it is apt that a young girl from there should have shone her dazzling rays of talent across the world.

Since winning Plácido Domingo's famed Operalia world opera competition in 2011, her rise to fame has been extraordinary. Her stunning voice and charismatic stage presence have been sought after by the world's major operas.

Bestowed with South Africa's Silver Order of Ikhamanga for her contribution to singing in 2013, she has gone on to receive numerous other accolades.

In 2023 she was asked to perform at King Charles' coronation in Westminster Abbey, the first African to sing solo at a British coronation.

Singing a piece by British composer Sarah Class especially for the occasion, Yende's nerve did not fail one bit as the eyes of the world watched her, giving her the biggest audience of her career.

Although a few called for her to boycott the event as a protest against Britain's colonial past, she eloquently responded, "I see each and every opportunity I get as a possibility for my gift to reconcile, to heal, to love, to give joy, to give hope and to give dreams for the future. We cannot change the past but each generation... with a small action can give hope for tomorrow."



SOUTH AFRICA

BLACK COFFEE

South African dreamer on the global stage

It's been a whirlwind year for Nkosi Maphumulo – or Black Coffee, as he is known. Most notably, on 7 October he made history as the first South African DJ and producer to headline a sold-out show at New York City's Madison Square Garden.

The Grammy-award winner selected his line-up as a tribute to artists and musicians who had played key roles in different phases of his career. Performers included Major League DJz, Maxine Ashley and Zoe Kypri, 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.



NIGER

MARIAM ISSOUFOU KAMARA

Architect in a league of her own

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, and featured as one of the top six female architects advocating for sustainability in design by *Cultured Magazine*.

2023 also saw the unveiling of Atelier Masōmī's design for the Ellen Johnson Sirleaf Presidential Centre for Women and Development in Liberia. Anchored in local architectural traditions, it has been hailed as a model for sustainable design in West Africa.

KENYA

WANURI KAHIU

Leading Africa's new generation of bold filmmakers

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.

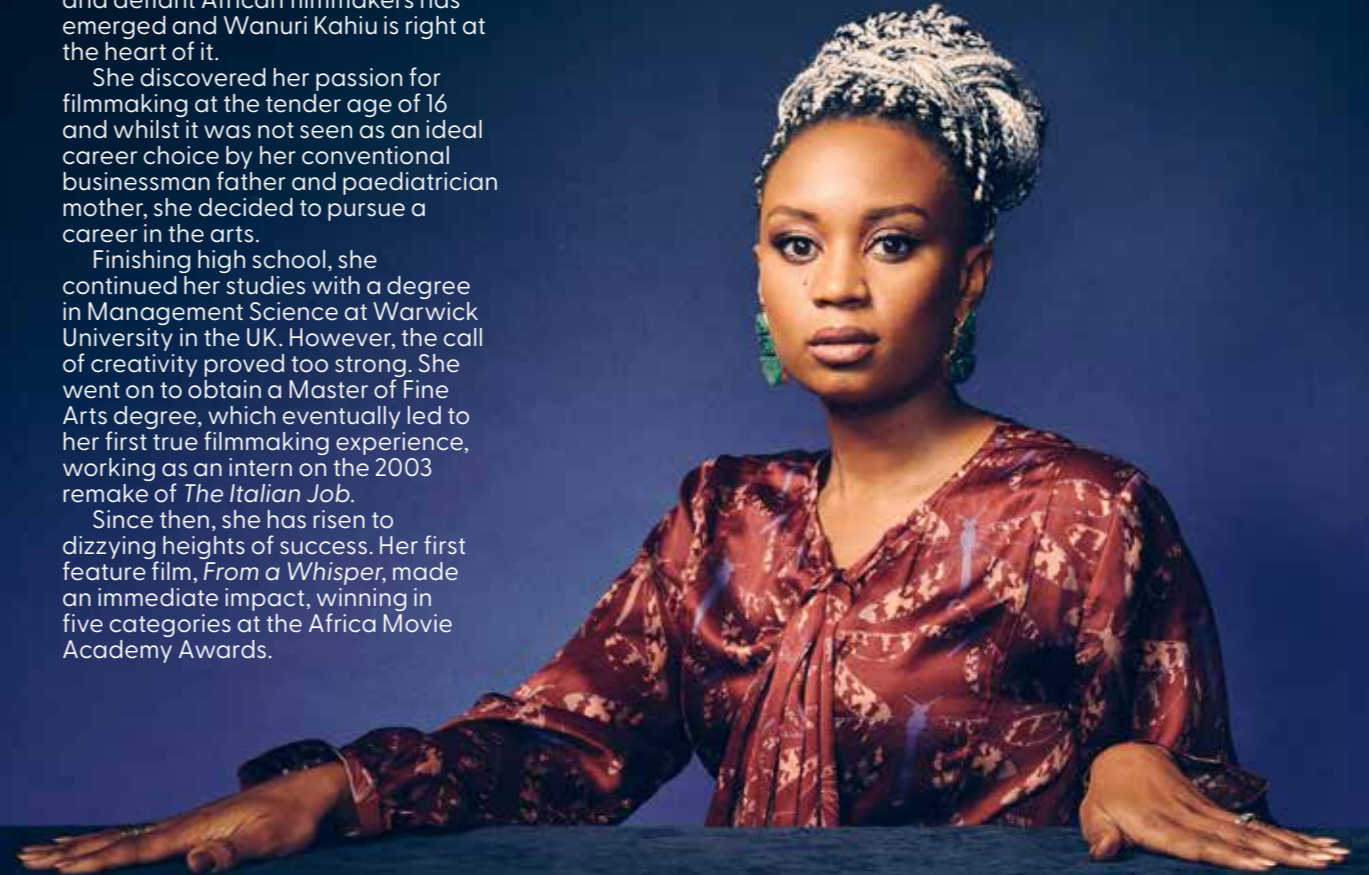
The versatility of this multi-talented lady has been shown repeatedly, from the publication of her first children's book, *The Wooden Camel*, to co-founding Afrobubblegum, a platform to promote Africa's creatives.

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. Kahiu sued 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 invigorates 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.





ZAMBIA

MALENGA MULENDEMA

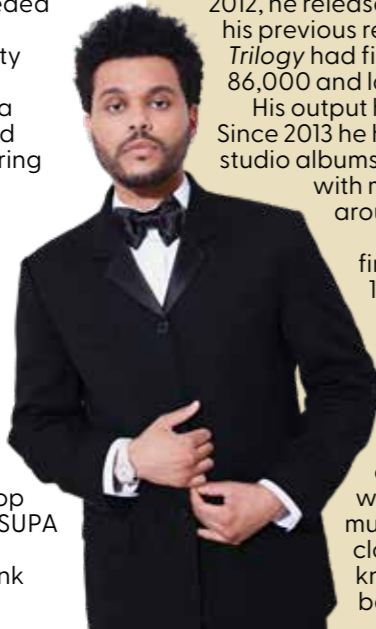
A remarkable African animation producer

Inspired by her roots and love of the R&B and hip-hop girl group music she grew up listening to, Malenga Mulendema got the impetus to create *Supa Team 4*, streaming giant Netflix's first African original animated series.

Sometimes the road to success is a long one. She first pitched her idea in a 2015 pan-African talent search organised by Triggerfish Animation, a studio based in South Africa. In 2017, Triggerfish and CAKE (a UK-based independent entertainment company) began developing the series, but it was not until 2019 that Netflix came on board as producers.

Mulendema finally succeeded in bringing her imagining of friendship, community, identity and leadership through four strong young African girls to a global audience when it aired for the first time in 2023, inspiring African animation creatives currently on the sidelines.

But her tale does not end there. In 2023 she was contracted by Newmation, a management company for animation creatives on film and TV. CEO David Neumann summed up her talent when he said, "She is a visionary and impressive creator and having seen her, for her first time, write, develop and create an inventive and SUPA FUN series with fresh African allure and enchantment, I think she is quite remarkable!"



ETHIOPIA

ABEL TESFAYE

The most streamed musician in the world

Abel Tesfaye, professionally known as 'The Weeknd' (spelt without an 'e' to avoid trademark problems), is a talented singer, songwriter and record producer whose life would make a true rags-to-riches movie.

The only son of Ethiopian immigrants, he was brought up by his mother and grandmother as his father left the family shortly after their arrival in Canada.

At the age of 17, he packed his bags one weekend and moved out of the family home. Life was tough, but he emerged from bouts of homelessness and drug abuse to become one of today's greatest musicians.

His musical career began in 2009 when he started to release his songs anonymously on YouTube. He began gathering followers and in 2011 undertook his first live performance, where he was seen by the already famous musician, Drake.

This serendipitous moment led to collaborations and an appearance at the OVO Festival. From there his career took off.

Signed by Republic Records in 2012, he released a compilation of his previous recordings that year.

Trilogy had first-week sales of 86,000 and later went platinum.

His output has been prolific. Since 2013 he has produced five studio albums and collaborated with musical greats around the globe.

He became the first artist to acquire 100m monthly listeners on Spotify, and in 2023 Guinness World Records officially declared him the most streamed artist in the world, with no other musician coming close. It is hard to know what can be better than!

NIGERIA

VICTOR EKPUK

One-person African art supremo

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 Efte 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 *Isofen* – 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 Scatter*, 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."

"I love women who lead unconventional lives, who travel paths uncommon and dare to follow the calling of their soul."

JADESOLA OSIBERU



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 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 giddy new heights when in October 2023 she broke auction records for an African artist when her piece, *Untitled (2021)*, sold for a staggering \$9.32m 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 \$10.7m.

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 ascendance 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.

Lokko's work centring African narratives – whether through architecture or literature – remains essential.





CÔTE D'IVOIRE

FABRICE SAWEGNON

Sprinkling 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 of Yamoussoukro, 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, *Transcender la théorie du miroir* ("Transcending the Mirror Theory") 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.



GHANA

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.

GHANA

EDWARD ENNINFUL

Leaving an indelible mark at *Vogue*

Fashion industry insiders responded with surprise to the news that Ghanaian-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 a 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 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 a global 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.



NIGERIA

CHARITY EKEZIE

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 from a tree to 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 cheeky 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.





UGANDA

UNCLE MO

A garage full of laughter

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 cajoled 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.

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.



GABON

NICOLAS POMPIGNE-MOIGNARD

Dominating the African PR landscape

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 Dangote 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 Canada-Africa Chamber 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.



UGANDA

ALAN KASUJJA

A voice of journalistic integrity

As a presenter on the BBC World Service with its daily audience of millions, Alan Kasujja 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.

Kasujja 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.

Kasujja 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.

SENEGAL

KHABY LAME

Still the king of TikTok

Khabane Lame, widely known as Khaby, is a Senegalese-Italian content creator and social media sensation celebrated for his unique approach to humour and his rise to fame on platforms such as TikTok, where he has 160m followers, more than any other creator there.

Khaby's content primarily revolves around his deadpan reactions to life hacks and questionable DIY (Do It Yourself) solutions. His humorous take on these situations, often characterised by his signature raised eyebrow and minimal words, seems to have struck a chord with viewers,

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

Khaby is celebrated for his unique humour and his rise to fame on platforms like TikTok, where he has 160m followers.

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 becoming the face of 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.



NIGERIA

CHIOMA NNADI

Keeping the African flag flying at *Vogue*

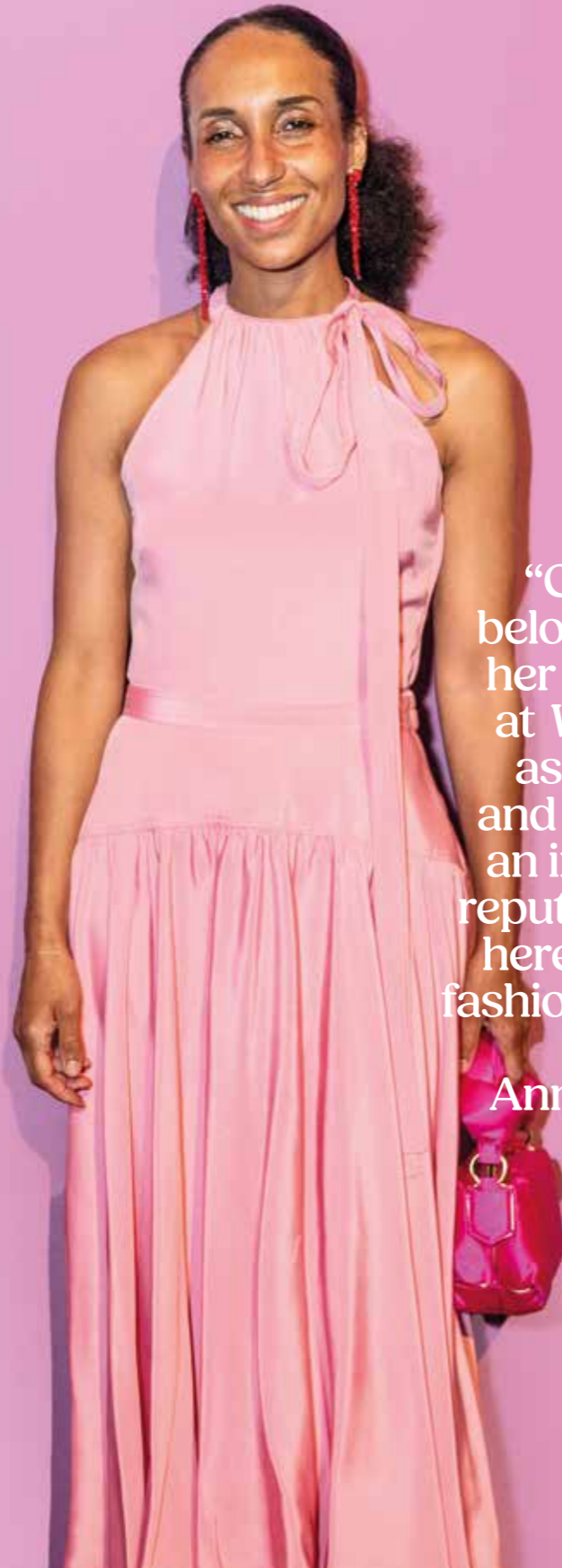
In October, Chioma Nnadi took over from Edward Enninful as British *Vogue's* Head of Editorial Content. The appointment marks the first time that the iconic publication has been led by a Black woman, a major fact at a time when the world is continuing to demand greater diversity in the bodies and faces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



SOUTH AFRICA

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.

CÔTE D'IVOIRE

DANIEL AHAOUSSA

Spinning a wide web of Weblogy

While studying in the US, Daniel Ahaoussa and Jil-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 *abamako.com*, *jobafrique.com*, *abangui.com* and *adakar.com*, serving a varied and growing list of users in various ways. With the flagship 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.



TANZANIA

MARIE MBULLU

Digitally savvy, creating feelgood news

Marie Mbulu is a Tanzanian-American student and a popular TikTok creator. She runs the account *Habari Njema*, which means "good news" in Swahili, and utilises 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.

Mbulu 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 Tings*. My audience will be able to experience innovation occurring on the continent in real time," she says.

Like many trailblazing content creators, Mbulu 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. Mbulu 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.

NIGERIA

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 been 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



TOGO

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.

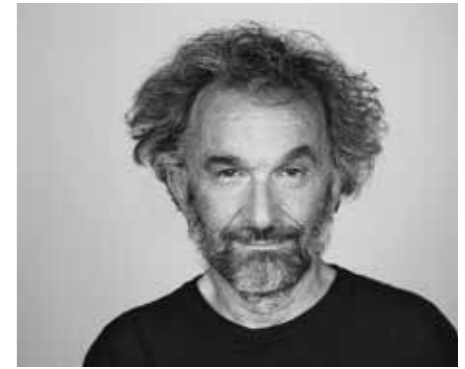
TRACE encompasses a lifestyle publication, television, digital media, and events, and contributes to a more inclusive representation of black cultures in mainstream media. Claude is a true entrepreneur

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

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 fundraise 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.



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.



MOROCCO

YASSINE BOUNOU

Shot-stopper extraordinaire

Goalkeeper Yassine 'Bono' 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 shutout of Spain, saving two spot kicks in the penalty shoot-out, and kept three clean sheets in six games – carried his fine 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.

Bono, who saved one with his legs and saw another effort crash off his post, was named Player of the Match and for the second time, was chosen for the UEFA Europa League Team of the Season.

In August he left the Andalusian outfit to join the ranks of the Saudi Pro League, signing for Al-Hilal, where he now lines up alongside the likes of Neymar, Aleksandar Mitrovic and Kalidou Koulibaly.

He has already picked up two Goalkeeper of the Month awards, claiming more clean sheets than your local Marriot Hotel, which no doubt has contributed to his side sitting top of the league at the time of writing.

He finished 13th in the overall voting for the Ballon d'Or, and despite being the top shot-stopper on the list was beaten into third place, behind Emiliano Ederson of Manchester City and Aston Villa's Emiliano Martinez, for the Yashin Trophy, the award for the best goalkeeper, highlighting issues with the voting system.



CAMEROON

FRANCIS NGANNOU

Different rings, same venom

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 never have 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 words go to 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.



KENYA

KELVIN KIPTUM

Runaway record-breaker

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 astounding 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.

SOUTH AFRICA

PATRICE MOTSEPE

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 elected 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 Ahmed Yahya.

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 and other broadcast rights.

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 Buffet 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.

NIGERIA

VICTOR OSMIHEN

Napoli finds a new 'god' after Maradona

The people of Naples have two fascinations: football and religion. So, for Victor Osmihen 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 was when the Nigerian hitman showed the Italian fans and the wider watching world what he could really do. He ended the season with 26 Serie A goals in 32 league outings to take top goalscorer honours in the Italian league. He added five more in the Champions League to leave him with impressive statistics for the season of 31 strikes in 39 games.

In 2023 he also picked up the Serie A Player of the Year gong, the first African to do so. Once again, he was keeping company with South American footballing 'royalty': past winners include the Brazilian pair of Ronaldo and Kaká.

He also broke the duopoly of Sadio Mané and Mo Salah to claim African Footballer of the Year, and in doing so became the first player since Riyad Mahrez (2016) to stop one of the high-profile pair winning the award. He was top African in the Ballon d'Or, placing eighth.

Osmihen was also top scorer in the Africa Cup of Nations qualifiers, with 10 goals. He will be looking forward to trying to claim silverware with his country in Côte d'Ivoire in early 2024.

He may not have the very top place in the hearts of the Neapolitan population: but to be bettered only by the likes of the 'Hand of God' will do.



Left: Victor Osmihen (r) receiving the African Footballer of the Year trophy from Confederation of African Football President Dr Patrice Motsepe



KENYA

FAITH KIPYEGON

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 49.11 seconds.

Exactly one week later she had added the 5000m fastest time to her already impressive resumé, finishing in a time of 14.05.20 to take the record from another Ethiopian, Letesenbet Gidey, at the Stade Charléty in Paris. (This time was beaten in September by Gudaf Tsegay, to reclaim some national pride for Ethiopia.)

Kipyegon's hat-trick of world records was completed in Monaco when she recorded a time of 4.07.64 for the mile, demolishing Sifan Hassan's previous world-best by nearly five seconds. Hassan's time had, incidentally, been set on the same track four years earlier.

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 the last six World Championships, dating back to 2015.

Unsurprisingly, she was named Female World Athlete of the Year for 2023 and in December was bestowed with the Elder of the Order of the Golden Heart (EGH) award by Kenya's President Ruto.

ERITREA

BINIAM GIRMAY

Opening global doors for African cyclists

Biniam Girmay is a professional Eritrean cyclist who currently rides for Intermarché-Circus-Wanty – labelled by 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 Gobert 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.

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 in international competitions. His dedication to the sport and his breakthrough victories serve as an 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.



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

SOUTH AFRICA

THE SPRINGBOKS

Undisputed kings of the rugby world

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 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-soaked minutes everything you thought you knew about rugby was upended as England outfought, 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.

This South African side demonstrated that rugby is the ultimate team sport, but special mention must go to Pieter-Steph du Toit.

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.



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 redenomination 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,



‘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 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. Now we have issued the Ghana Card, the national ID, to everyone – and we came up with the idea of associating that number to the tax identification number for everybody.

Once we did that, we went up from 4% of the adult population with tax identification numbers to 85% of the adult population with tax identification numbers. They can file their taxes online, on their mobile phone, and they can pay online because of mobile interoperability. Today, anybody who wants to buy electricity doesn't have to wait and go to the electricity office to buy electricity, they can do it on their mobile phone; if your electricity runs out in the middle of the night, you can just reload it.

We have started issuing the national ID number to all newborns, so we can start collecting data from birth. That number will track you all the way through. The same number that is your national ID number, it's also your social security number. Your national health number is also your tax and education number. We have linked all the data.

Looking at the passport office, we have digitalised the process. As a result, the number of passports that have been applied for has increased. Before the digitalisation the passport office used to generate a revenue of 1m Ghana cedis (\$89,000) a year. Since digitalisation they are generating 56m Ghana cedis (\$4.9m) a year.

We went to the electricity company and digitalised their collections. Previously they were generally collecting 450m Ghana cedis (\$40m) a month. Now they are doing 1.2bn a month (\$106m), a 167% increase.

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 transformation of society. All the research that we have shows 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 for the transformation of Ghana.

We are having too many children dropping out 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 inclusion to a lot of people who were not included. It's a bold move and it's not an inexpensive move – so we had to make sure we budgeted for the free senior high school education, costing roughly 1bn cedis (\$88m) a year. There was also the problem of lack of adequate infrastructure for the students in terms of classrooms.

There are two things that I have been very impressed with about what

'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...'

has happened in education, as far as the free senior high school policy is concerned. Number one, we've seen a 75% increase in enrolment over the last six years, from 800,000 students to 1.4m students. That's the largest increase we've seen since independence.

What is also very interesting is that more and more girls have gone into school. There used to be a lot of gender disparity – now there is gender parity between boys and girls in senior high school.

The second thing that really has impressed me about this is that the performance of the students in the West African Senior School Certificate exams has also exceeded our expectations. We were worried, because normally when you increase access there is a problem of declining performance – but what has happened is that performance has rather improved across the core six subjects. We've gone up from a 41% pass rate to a 64% pass rate. That's a major increase. We are on the right

track. It's not cheap: but we believe that down the road education pays off. We believe that, looking at the country, you need this investment in education for Ghanaians to participate fully in the global economy.

Tell us about the next instalment in your education programme, the one child one laptop programme...

When we were growing up, for me at least, growing up in the northern part of the country at a time when things were very tough, even getting textbooks to read was a problem. Today, we have increased availability of textbooks and of the libraries. We've 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 cannot contain 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 – this is where the world is heading.

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

It's not a luxury to me: when you 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 we had wi-fi in senior high schools. Not only did we do the senior high schools, we did the colleges of education, and we did the district education offices, because the teachers and those who manage must also be able to be online. Across 13 public universities, we provided wi-fi. It's not just the senior high school – we are looking at the whole commitment across 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 had. 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 the best schools are teaching and the best teachers [are teaching], their notes and all of that. Even teachers can find out what their colleagues are teaching. Students can also see what is being taught in some of the best schools in the country, how these lectures are

being delivered.

This initiative bridges the gaps between the less well-off schools and the much better-off schools. All these schools are publicly funded. We should allow cross-fertilisation of ideas. Lectures should be made available to everybody, if they are the best in the country. We are doing this to give our students a big lift in being competitive globally. Today if you go to many developed countries, even kindergarten students are using laptops: this is where the world is heading.

What is also important when you look at it in this regard is the budget. We believe that we are going to make savings through this.

How are teaching methods changing?

It's important that if you are going to bring this country towards an education system that is ready 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 attitude has seen two high schools win the world robotics competition in America. They beat countries like Germany, like the US, it was just amazing. One was a girls'

school and one was a boys' school and they won the world robotics competition... from Ghana; who would have thought? You give [kids] the opportunity and they will lead the world in many of these areas.

What are the lessons learnt that you would take into a new administration?

One of the first things that I did as Vice-President was to set up a delivery unit in my office and that delivery unit has been very key these last six years on making sure that projects are delivered. Many people are surprised how much we have gotten done but I believe very clearly that all the digitalisation works that we have done, and other things, are very much driven by the delivery unit that allows us to bring all the ministries together, many different ministries, and they drive that project implementation for the different projects. The focus on education is one that I believe we should really continue to do because the payoff is quite high down the road.

What will the essential tenet of your campaign be?

There are different areas. Digitalisation and leveraging technology for inclusive economic growth would be one area.

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 I 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's the energy transition, with a focus on renewables. And to unleash the private sector, including in infrastructure. The government can't be doing everything. These are some of the areas I want to really touch on. ■

Below: Vice-President Bawumia (c) visiting the ultra-modern Technology Hub at Akim-Oda in the Eastern Region



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 school 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 at the country's publicly owned senior high schools would not have to pay any fees or charges, including at boarding schools.

This fulfilled an election campaign pledge and, as some have pointed out, a constitutional requirement that also charges the government to make education in Ghana 'progressively free'.

This followed the implementation of Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education, launched in 2005, guaranteeing fee-free education to Ghanaian children up to the junior high level.

Education was central to the election campaign that brought the current government to power.

Nana Akufo-Addo, in his first year as President, stressed that education was the bedrock of a modern society and the key to transformation of the country and its economy.

Countries like America, Singapore, Korea and Malaysia, the latter of which became independent at about the same time as Ghana and used to be poorer, had achieved enviable levels of development through high quality mass education, the President pointed out.

Justifying the high cost of the programme, to which critics had alluded, he said: "The cost of providing free secondary school education will be cheaper than the cost of the alternative of an uneducated and unskilled workforce that has the capacity to retard our

development. Leadership is about choices – I have chosen to invest in the future of our youth and of our country."

Prior to the implementation of the Free SHS policy, an estimated 100,000 students were dropping off the educational ladder between junior and high school every year, mostly due to the inability of parents and guardians

to fund their way after exiting from the free basic schools.

With its implementation, enrolment at the senior high level has improved significantly. Between 2017 and 2022, enrolment increased by 50%, reaching a gross figure of 1.2m.

Government expenditure on the programme has also grown from \$400m

in its first year to about \$1bn annually. An improvement in the results at the West African Senior School Certificate Examination posted by the first batch of students to go through the Free SHS programme was touted by policy makers as further justification, especially as there had been concerns about the impact the plan would have on quality.

In 2020, the first batch recorded a 54.08% pass rate in English; 65.70% were successful at Integrated Science in 2021 and 54.11% passed Maths – all better figures than in previous years.

However, without a corresponding expansion of educational infrastructure, there were initial problems. To deal with the issue of a shortage of classrooms and other

facilities, the government introduced a double track system where students attended in batches, rotating through the year. Permanent solutions have however now been put in place. Under a Free SHS Intervention Programme, some 800 infrastructure projects were undertaken around the country, adding to the classrooms, dormitories, science laboratories, dining halls and other facilities for the use of students.

With the expansion in facilities, the policy has now been phased out and school terms have now reverted to the regular schedule.

Overhaul of entire education system

The government has also taken steps to overhaul and improve the entire education system. The reforms are broadly focused on a new standards-based pre-tertiary curriculum, tertiary education, teacher education, technical and vocational education as well as the management of institutions within the sector. These efforts aim to enhance teaching and learning and ultimately improve educational outcomes. The Education Strategic Plan (ESP 2018–2030), which received approval from the cabinet in November 2018, serves as the guiding document for these reforms.

The primary objectives are, the government says, aligned with UN Sustainable Development Goal 4, which focuses on achieving better learning results, fostering accountability, and promoting equity across all educational levels, especially pre-tertiary education.

The overarching purpose of embarking on these key reforms is to adapt the country's education system to evolving national development priorities and aspirations. They aim to set clear performance standards that will effectively guide the processes of teaching, learning, assessment, and

student grading. Also included is the professionalisation of teaching and the application of standards in the classroom.

Other reforms have focused on the structure and content of education in the country. Kindergarten, primary school, junior high school (JHS) and senior high school (SHS) are now all considered basic schools.

Students in JHS 1 to SHS 1 follow a Common Core Programme consisting of nine subjects, including, among others, mathematics, languages, science, career technology, computing, and creative art and design.

Students at primary 2, 4, 6 and

or high school diploma programmes in science, business, or arts.

The West African Senior School Certificate Examinations are being scrapped and will be replaced by a high school diploma presented on completion of the third year of senior high school.

The government says the education system now emphasises research, community engagement, and project-based learning with reduced content.

Computer literacy is a major focus in the CCP programme, with all educational stakeholders expected to provide adequate IT facilities for students.

Television Institute have merged to form the University of Media, Arts, and Communications, a dynamic institution catering to the growing demand for skilled professionals in the media and creative industries.

As of 2022, the gross enrolment ratio at the tertiary level stood at 20%. The President, in his 2021 state of the nation address, charged stakeholders to aim to hit a target of 40% by 2030.

Expanding access, improving quality and bringing Ghanaian education in line with modern standards and practice must necessarily entail the deployment of digital tools.

Many schools at the senior high level have long had ICT labs, some of which have been retrofitted and upgraded. More recently, there have been efforts to provide wi-fi connectivity on school campuses.

According to Vice-President Mahamudu Bawumia, over 80% of the high schools and colleges of education in the country are currently fitted with wi-fi capability, as part of broader efforts to ensure that learners are equipped with the skills they need to participate in the digital revolution.

The Ministry of Education is also collaborating with the United Nations Children's Fund's Ghana office to get more than 35,000 schools around the country connected to the internet in order to enable digital and distance learning in those schools.

In September 2021, the Vice-President launched the one laptop per teacher policy, moving the digitalisation of schools agenda beyond infrastructure to equipment.

The policy, by which the government bears 70% of the cost and teachers pay the rest through monthly deductions, was accompanied by training sessions for teachers to ensure that they are able to make optimum use of the computers in their work and for the benefit of students.

Students themselves are not to be left out. Government is currently preparing to roll out a programme that will see hard copy textbooks replaced with laptops and tablets in senior and junior high schools.

Distribution is expected to commence at the beginning of the academic year in September, while the migration to digital teaching and learning is expected to be fully completed by the end of the year. If successful, the programme will complement the government's general digitalisation efforts and place Ghana firmly within the digital revolution, as Vice-President Bawumia has often called for. ■



JHS 2 will have to sit for a new examination, the national standard assessment test, while the basic education certificate examination which used to determine whether students qualified for senior high, will now be replaced by a placement examination, with all students promoted to senior high, vocational or technical institutions.

During the first year of SHS 1, all students will continue to follow the Common Core Programme (CCP), without selecting specific science, business, or arts programmes.

After sitting a Common Core Examination at the end of the first year, students will be required to choose between career-related vocational and technical programmes

Wider breadth of specialisation

At the tertiary level, reforms have been centred on expanding and diversifying opportunities to cater for a wider breadth of specialisation, while improving quality.

For example, in a strategic move to elevate the status and relevance of technical education, polytechnics have undergone a transformation, becoming technical universities. This conversion aims to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world applications, equipping students with hands-on expertise and ensuring they are well-prepared to tackle real-life challenges in their respective fields.

More specifically, the Ghana Institute of Languages, Ghana Institute of Journalism, and National Film and

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FOCUS ON GHANA

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 *waakye* (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 a requirement for official forms and formal communications to bear the addresses. Since then, invitations to parties, funerals and other social events invariably bear the 11-character designations. For the first time, Ghana seems to have cracked the address conundrum and is, by some measure, enjoying the benefits.

The novel solution to resolving an ages-old problem using digital technology was an indication of the approach that the government intended to take. Government pointed out that this was only part of a wider effort to deploy digital tools to address pressing national challenges. Another approach was that of

national personal identification. Without a robust system to register and record citizens and residents, policy making had lacked a vital component.

You cannot grow what you cannot measure and with the national identification system (the Ghana Card) now being rolled out, the government of Ghana is getting a grip on the number and demographic distribution of the people in the country, enabling it to better plan and develop policies.

A clear benefit is that with each citizen now mapped to a unique, digitised identity, it is much harder for people to have double identities or to avoid their statutory responsibilities to the state or private institutions.

So far, over 18m Ghanaians have registered for the Ghana Card and it has become the foremost identification document. Banks require it for transactions, leading to hopes that with concerns about identity

mitigated, some risk in lending can be obviated, thus increasing financial inclusion, increasing lending, and with better risk profiling, reducing lending costs.

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.

Below: President Nana Akufo-Addo displaying his own Ghana Card



“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 reducing 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 require their physical presence for tests and 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 connived with officials to prioritise applicants who paid the highest backhanders.

Similarly, revenue collection and payments have also been digitalised. On the ghana.gov platform, payments can be made via mobile money, while at a number of offices, cash is no longer accepted; payments can be made either by cheque or to an onsite bank and a receipt presented to the relevant official.

The Ghana Card has also replaced the tax identification numbers introduced earlier. This means that citizens now access public services with the same identification with which they pay taxes. The same number is also replacing social security numbers that identify contributors to and beneficiaries of the national pension scheme, the Social Security and National Investment Trust.

Digitalisation of the country’s ports, also begun in 2017, has boosted

traffic and revenues. According to Nana Esi Soderberg, Deputy General Manager in charge of marketing and corporate affairs at the Ghana Ports and Harbours Authority, containerised traffic at Tema port continued to rise even at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, recording a 24% increase, which she ascribes to the effectiveness of the paperless ports policy.

In the first year of implementation, the Minister of Finance, Ken Ofori-Atta, informed parliament that the system had cut the average transaction time at the port from two days to eight hours, while increasing government revenue by 35.5%.

Health systems get welcome boost

Not all the state’s technological efforts, however, have been met with universal approval. Perhaps one of the more controversial initiatives was to employ drones to deliver blood and medical supplies to the more remote parts of the country.

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 12m deliveries over 278,936 flights. So 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 service records have been digitalised, making it easier to store and locate medical records.

The country’s public hospitals are also being placed on a single database under the Lightwave project. For patients, this will mean that when they enter a hospital anywhere in the country, it will be possible for carers to find their medical records and history and be able to treat them 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 mobile application.

The country’s justice system has also been given the digital makeover. The e-justice project, under the e-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



Top: The Ghana Health Service is working with drone service provider Zipline. The fast delivery of medical supplies to remote parts of the country is expected to impact outcomes including maternal and infant mortality rates

Above: A cashier from a local bank (R) pays social grants to farmers using e-zwich, the national smartcard payment system

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 has been operational in the country for close to two decades but after the implementation of interoperability, which enabled seamless transactions between users on different networks, as well as between mobile networks

and bank accounts, usage exploded.

Mobile money is now used widely to remit money to friends and family, to pay for goods and services and even taxes and government levies. In a video that was widely shared, Vice-President Bawumia was seen demonstrating the use of mobile money for payments at a popular *waakye* vendor in the capital.

The increase in e-commerce services and other remote services can be ascribed to the mobile money phenomenon.

The increasing number of active mobile wallets is evidence of expansion in financial inclusion, with users in even the remotest parts of the country suddenly able to participate in the financial system.

It also means that more people are able to purchase financial products, from insurance to treasury bills, via their mobile phones. Two of the largest providers, MTN and Vodafone, offer micro loans on their networks with a rapidly expanding asset base and a growing number of clients.

In its 2022 budget, the government introduced a levy on electronic transactions above GHc100 (\$8.74), which was met with stiff public resistance. After several contentious hearings, the parliament of Ghana passed the bill in May 2022.

Despite widely held apprehensions, 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 networks in the country, up from the Ghc902.5bn (\$78.86bn) 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 is critical to building the systems that have served Western, developed economies so well, while acknowledging that there might not be immediate political gains from these initiatives, as compared to large-scale infrastructure projects.

A sustained programme will be essential to realising the full benefits and luckily, there seems to be as much political will as there is public enthusiasm. No one wants to go back to using the *waakye* seller as a directional tool – she may be delivering 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 together 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 Comoros President and AU Chair, President Akufo-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 kidnapping, trafficking and enslavement of Africans that constituted the so-called 'slave trade', as a crime against humanity; and the 1993 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-vectored fronts – the return of cultural museums 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

Back to the Future

Onyekachi Wambu



Glasgow 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 1958 All Africa Peoples' Conference, gathering leaders from across Africa, with diaspora participation in the 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 1963 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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