

# AfricaRenewal

April - July 2019

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**EQUALITY  
AFRICAN WOMEN  
MARCH ON**

**Meet Botswana's  
youthful minister  
Bogolo Kenewendo**

**Preparing  
graduates for  
today's jobs**

**Paying a high  
price for skin  
bleaching**





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Cover photo: *Botswana's youthful minister, Bogolo Kenewendo.* Alamy Photo

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A female worker performs on-site monitoring of cargo in Seychelles. UN Women/Ryan Brown

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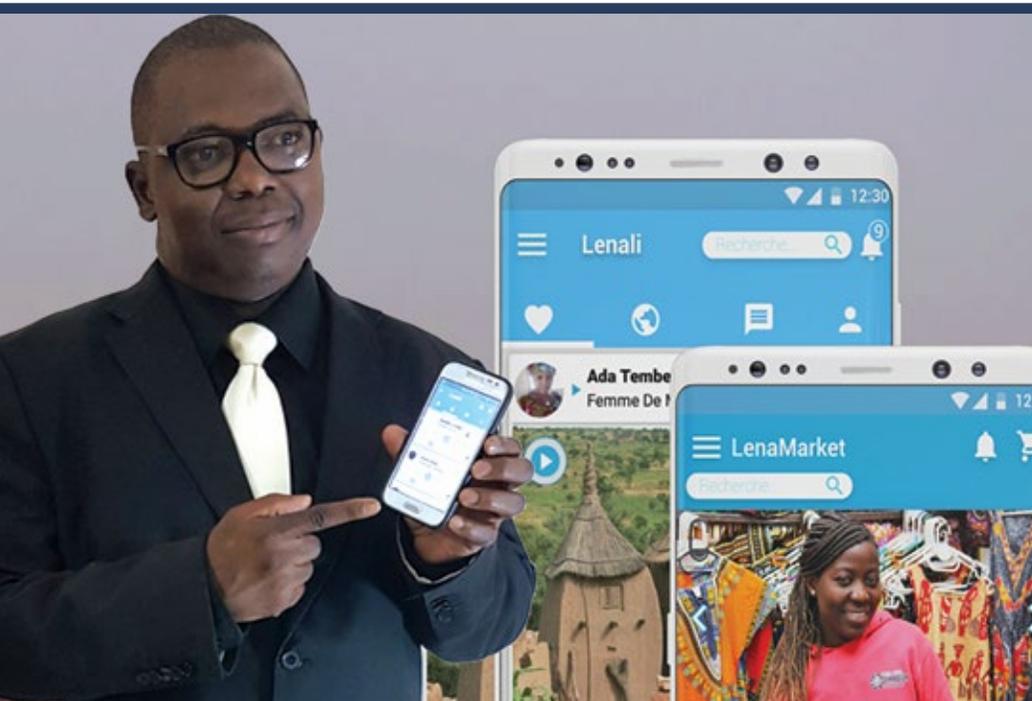
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Mamadou Gouro Sidibé displays the Lenali app. Lenali

## Innovative messaging app tailor-made for Malians

By Caroline Dubois

Mamadou Gouro Sidibé of Mali could have continued his comfortable life working for the French National Center for Scientific Research, but in 2017 he decided to return to his country to develop Lenali—a voice-based social network app.

Unlike Facebook, Instagram and Viber, apps that rely on written posts, Lenali works with spoken language. Already it boasts 60,000 users—and counting.

Lenali integrates local languages such as Bambara, Soninke, Songhai, Mooré and Wolof, as well as French, making the app accessible to people without formal education, including those in rural areas. Anyone can download the application, register online and use it.

On Lenali, users can select their language, type in or record their name, post and comment vocally without having to read anything. Posts could be anything

from personal updates to photos to news. Mr. Sidibé even thinks people could use Lenali to boost their businesses.

A mango vendor could post a photo, add audio that tells his or her location and ask people who want more information to comment by voice posts. “Everything is done without the need for writing skills,” Mr. Sidibé says, though the app does accept written posts as well.

For the entrepreneur, the app is a tailor-made solution to a local problem. The literacy rate in Mali is less than 50%, according to UNESCO, which may be why the number of Facebook users in the country has stagnated at 9% despite the falling price of mobile phones and increasing internet access.

Mr. Sidibé says his goal is to boost digital inclusivity, first in Mali and later in other countries in Africa, “because the problems in Mali are the same in the majority of countries in Africa, the app

see page 11



UN Women/Kea Taylor

**If not us, who? If not now, when? We cannot fail the women and girls in Africa.**

Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of UN Women

**Africa will produce scientists, engineers, entrepreneurs whose names will be one day famous in every corner of the world. And girls will be a huge part of this story.**

Peter Tabichi of Kenya, on winning the \$1 million Varkey Foundation Global Teacher Prize 2019

**We are trying to build a drone to dispense medicines in the rural areas.**

Eno Ekanem, 15-year-old Nigerian

**Only 20 UN member states have a female leader. Less than a quarter of parliamentarians are female. And last year, just 24 Fortune 500 companies were led by women.**

María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés, President of the UN General Assembly





Women's empowerment advocates in Africa are making their voices heard, with the full backing of international organisations such as the United Nations and the African Union. In this edition, we identify the many obstacles in women's way and highlight the benefits countries are deriving from empowering women.

# African Women in politics: Miles to go before parity is achieved

BY ZIPPORAH MUSAU

In the fight for gender equality, women around the world have advanced in small and large ways. Yet for women in Africa, progress is measured in micro steps, and the struggle has a long way to go.

The good news is that women's representation in political decision making has been on the rise globally. The not-so-good news is that the increase has been stubbornly slow, barely 1% in 2018

compared with the previous year. In 2018 the number of women ministers worldwide reached an all-time high at 20.7% (812 out of 3922).

In sub-Saharan Africa, the number of women seated in parliament grew in 2018, with a regional average share at 23.7%, according to the just-released 2019 edition of the biennial Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Map of Women in Politics.

The IPU, made up of more than 170 national parliaments from around the world, tracks the number of women elected to parliaments globally every year and produces an analysis that helps to monitor progress, setbacks and trends.

Djibouti, which in the year 2000 had zero women in parliament, saw the most dramatic gains globally among lower and single chambers. The share of women in



parliament rose in 2018 from 10.8% to 26.2% (a 15.4-point increase), a total of 15 women, states the report, which was launched during the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) at the UN headquarters in New York in March 2019.

Ethiopia saw the largest increase in women’s political representation in the executive branch, from 10% women ministers in 2017 to 47.6% in 2019.

On ministerial positions, the report highlights another striking gain—more

women in Africa are now in charge of portfolios traditionally held by men than in 2017. There are 30% more women ministers of defense, 52.9% more women ministers of finance, and 13.6% more women ministers of foreign affairs.

The usual practice is to appoint women to “soft issue” portfolios, such as social affairs, children and family.

“We still have a steep road ahead, but the growing proportion of women ministers is encouraging, especially where

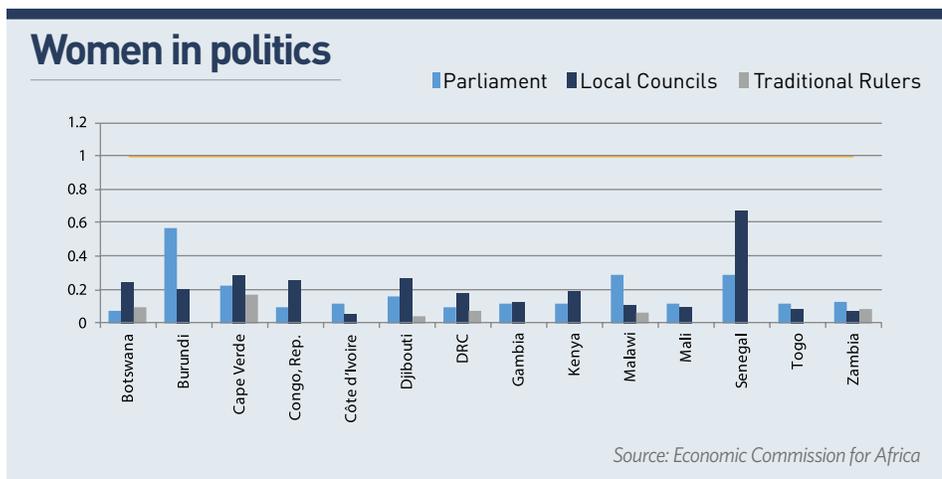
**Women discuss politics at a women’s conference in Darfur, Sudan.** Alamy Photo/Richard Baker

we see a rise in the number of countries with gender-balanced ministerial cabinets,” said Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, UN Women Executive Director, at the launch of the report. She urged countries to make bold moves to dramatically increase women’s representation in decision making.

More women in politics leads to more inclusive decisions and can change people’s image of what a leader looks like, added Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka, formerly a minister and Deputy President in South Africa.

Among the top African countries with a high percentage of women in ministerial positions are Rwanda (51.9%), South Africa (48.6%), Ethiopia (47.6%), Seychelles (45.5%), Uganda (36.7%) and Mali (34.4%).

The lowest percentage in Africa was in Morocco (5.6%), which has only one female minister in a cabinet of 18. Other countries with fewer than 10% women ministers



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GENDER

# Economic empowerment of women good for all

Countries make progress lifting endemic obstacles

BY KINGSLEY IGHOBOR

**G**overnment staffer Souhayata Haidara enjoys talking about her life in a patriarchal society. Her career is a triumph of patience and perseverance, she tells *Africa Renewal* with a smile and a wink.

Ms. Haidara, currently the Special Adviser to Mali’s Minister of Environment and Sustainable Development, says she was lucky not to be married off at age 14 like some of her peers. Her father resisted pressure from suitors and relatives and insisted that the teenager be allowed to complete high school before getting married.

“In our culture, people believe education is for boys and that the women must marry and stay at home,” she says.

Women’s economic empowerment is anchored by education, maintains Ms. Haidara, who earned a degree in environmental science in the US on a scholarship from the United States Agency for International Development. “I couldn’t be where I am today without education. I earn an income. I educated my three children—a boy and two girls, now grown. I have a six-year-old granddaughter who is getting the best grades in class. That makes me very happy.”

Attendees at an FAO sub-regional training workshop on gender and livestock in Harare, Zimbabwe. FAO/Believe Nyakudjara

But Brandilyn Yadeta, a 32-year-old Ethiopian, missed out on education. “I had a baby at 19 and the father traveled abroad without letting me know. Since then, I continue to struggle to take care of my child, which is my priority, above my education.” She is a small-scale trader.

If the father refuses to pay child support for his child, what options does a woman have? “What can I do?” Ms. Yadeta asks with frustration and regret.

Ms. Yadeta and others like her in Africa are unsung heroes—taking care of the family, a job mostly unrecognized by their society. Yet in monetary terms, women’s unpaid work accounts for between 10% and 39% of GDP, according to the UN Research Institute for Social Development, which provides policy analysis on development issues.

The International Labour Organisation states that women are disproportionately

laden with the responsibility for unpaid care and domestic work. It highlights this issue to make the case for economic empowerment of women, which is now a front-burner topic in development literature.

### Countries making reforms

A World Bank report titled *Women, Business and the Law 2019: A Decade of Reform* states that sub-Saharan Africa “had the most reforms promoting gender equality [of any region].” In fact, six of the top 10 reforming countries are there—the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea, Malawi, Mauritius, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Zambia.

Despite a protracted political crisis, the DRC made the most improvement based in part on “reforms allowing women to register businesses, open bank accounts, sign contracts, get jobs and choose where to live in the same way as men,” states the report.

Mauritius introduced civil remedies for sexual harassment at work and prohibited discrimination in access to credit based on gender. Among the civil remedies, employers are prohibited from sexually harassing an employee or a job seeker while an employee must not sexually harass a fellow employee. Mauritius also mandated equal pay between men and women for work of equal value.

São Tomé and Príncipe equalized mandatory retirement ages and the ages at which men and women can receive full pension benefits—a move that increased the country’s female labour force participation by 1.75%.

The World Bank’s report by no means suggests that all is well with women in these countries. The report merely highlights the positive incremental changes that these countries are making.

The DRC, for example, may have implemented some pro-women’s empowerment reforms, but women in that country still have no land or inheritance rights, according to the Global Fund for Women, a nonprofit.

Theodosia Muhulo Nshala, Executive Director of the Women’s Legal Aid Centre, a nonprofit in Tanzania, tells *Africa Renewal*

**\$95 billion**  
is the amount that  
sub-Saharan Africa  
loses yearly because of  
the gender gap in the  
labour market

that “men and women [in Tanzania] have equal rights to land ownership, thanks to the Village Land Act of 1999; however, customary laws exist that prevent women and girls from inheriting land from their husbands and fathers.”

While women’s participation in the labour force (mostly in the informal sector) is high in many sub-Saharan Africa countries—86% in Rwanda, 77% in Ethiopia and 70% in Tanzania—only in eight countries (Gabon, Ghana, Kenya, Libya,

Namibia, South Africa, Uganda and Zimbabwe) do more than 50% of women own bank accounts, according to the Global Financial Inclusion Database, which regularly publishes country-level indicators of financial inclusion.

### Not a zero-sum game

Economically empowering women is not a zero-sum game in which women win and men lose, notes Urban Institute, a policy think tank in Washington, D.C. Rather, McKinsey Global Institute, a US-based management consulting firm, forecasts that, “A ‘best in region’ scenario in which all countries match the rate of improvement of the fastest-improving country in their region could add as much as \$12 trillion, or 11 percent, in annual 2025 GDP.”

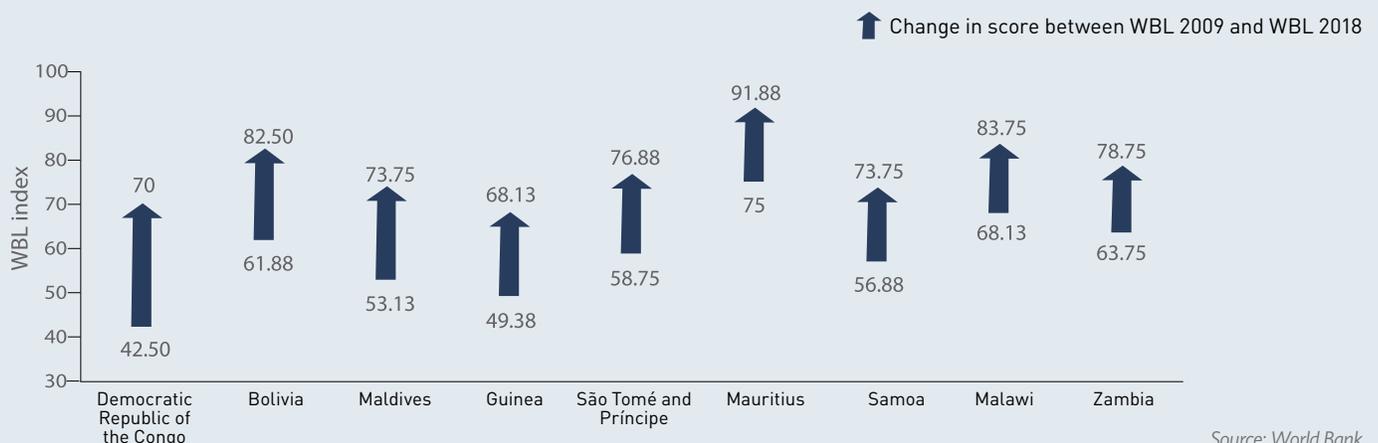
And UN Women, an entity for gender equality and women’s empowerment, states: “Investing in women’s economic empowerment sets a direct path towards gender equality, poverty eradication and inclusive economic growth,”

On the flip side, since 2010 sub-Saharan African economies have lost about \$95 billion yearly because of the gender gap in the labour market, says Ahunna Eziakonwa, Director of UNDP’s Regional Bureau for Africa (see interview on page 22). “So imagine if you unleash the power, talent and resolve of women.”

Experts believe that women’s economic empowerment is the key to achieving the African Union’s Agenda 2063, a

**see page 11**

## Gender Equality: Top reforming countries



## YOUTH PROFILE

# Youthful minister opening doors for women and girls

Bogolo Kenewendo of Botswana is also adviser to the UN Secretary-General on digital cooperation

BY BABOKI KAYAWE

**B**ogolo Kenewendo describes herself as having been “an ordinary Botswana child with an ordinary upbringing.” Ms. Kenewendo, poised and focused beyond her years, is being modest. At 32 she is Botswana’s youngest minister, in charge of investment, trade and industry.

She holds bachelor’s and master’s degrees in economics, specializing in macroeconomic policy, public debt management, export development and other trade-related fields.

As a child in Motopi, a small village in central Botswana, Ms. Kenewendo envisioned playing a role in Botswana’s development.

In 2011 she met former First Lady Michelle Obama in Washington D.C. as a participant in the Young African Leaders Initiative, a fellowship begun in 2010 by the US State Department.

Her forays into politics began in 2017 when Botswana’s former President Ian Khama appointed her to a High-level Consultative Council charged with helping to address the challenges facing the private sector in Botswana.

Later that same year, President Khama appointed her to parliament in line with a constitutional provision allowing the president to make such an appointment to the country’s legislative body.

After completing her studies in the United Kingdom and obtaining a master’s degree in international economics from the University of Sussex, Ms. Kenewendo qualified to be an economist in the Ministry of Trade and Industry in Ghana. Prior to that position she had been an economic consultant at Econsult Botswana, a policy research organisation.

“I am a pan-Africanist; I enjoyed working in Ghana, where the history of pan-Africanism is rich,” she told *Africa Renewal* in an interview.

When Mr. Khama handed the presidency over to Mokgweetsi Masisi in April 2018, the new president appointed Ms. Kenewendo to

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GENDER



# Good education is the foundation for effective female leadership

—Togolese politician and former presidential candidate Kafui Adjamagbo-Johnson

BY FRANCK KUWONU

**A**frican women's restricted access to quality education, knowledge and resources is preventing them from gaining leadership positions on the continent, says Kafui Adjamagbo-Johnson, a veteran West African women's rights activist. Another problem is that women—especially rural women—are allowed only limited control over finances, means of production and land.

Consequently the pace of women's empowerment remains slow, Ms. Adjamagbo-Johnson says.

In an interview with *Africa Renewal*, Ms. Adjamagbo-Johnson reflected on decades of women's political leadership, gender activism and professional engagement in Togo, her home country, and West Africa in general.

Ms. Adjamagbo-Johnson works with Women in Law and Development in Africa (WiLDAF), a pan-African women's rights advocacy group with headquarters in Harare, Zimbabwe. The group operates in 27 countries across the continent.

In addition to her work with WiLDAF, she leads the largest coalition of political parties in her home country. Four years ago she vied for the presidency of Togo, but failed to achieve the post.

WiLDAF's mission is to empower women by promoting their rights and increasing their participation and influence at the community, national and international levels through initiating, promoting and strengthening strategies that link law and development. Ms. Adjamagbo-Johnson has over two decades' experience working with national networks of women's rights organizations on advocacy and empowerment.

On the current state of women's rights and leadership in Africa, she says, "I like to think of stairs, if I may. Stairs because we have climbed a few steps, but a lot more



steps remain to be climbed on the way up to the top."

She believes that despite political advances such as women acting as heads of state or participating in government in a few countries on the continent, women's rights are still not fully recognized, and their leadership is not promoted enough. There is currently no female head of state in Africa.

"There cannot be an alternative to access to education or knowledge," she says, adding, "It is a very good thing that parents have recognized that both boys and girls deserve the same chance at formal education."

*Kafui Adjamagbo-Johnson.*

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) estimates that sub-Saharan Africa accounts for half of the 130 million girls aged 6 to 17 who are out of school globally and half of another 15 million school-age girls who may never enroll.

"Getting girls into a classroom is not enough in itself; girls have to be able to stay in school and get proper education once enrolled," Ms. Adjamagbo-Johnson says.

UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore echoed those same concerns: "When

[a] girl reaches school age, will her family be able to afford to send her to school—and keep her there? Or will they keep her home to do chores, while her brothers learn?”

Ms. Fore continued, “If lucky enough to go to school, will she have access to separate toilet facilities and the information and facilities she needs to manage her menstrual cycle?”

“And when the now young lady is thinking of entering the workforce, will she have access to skills training—including digital skills? Or science, technology, engineering and math-based skills? Or will she

be left out of these opportunities because of her gender?”

Having made it closer to the top of political leadership in her country, Ms.

**Getting girls into a classroom is not enough in itself; girls have to be able to stay in school and get proper education once enrolled.**

Adjmagbo-Johnson considers herself one of the luckiest of her generation. On her

experience in politics, she cites entrenched patriarchy. “None of my political colleagues thought of me as not being qualified enough to be a political leader,” she says. “They accepted me as an equal partner,” yet “they were oblivious to the fact that as a woman, I have specific needs that needed accommodation.”

Political and social participation in society require women to balance family and work life, she says. Together with the need for education, “That could be the single most challenging aspect of effective political leadership for women in Africa.” 🇳🇬

## Botswana minister opening doors ... from page 8

Botswana’s cabinet to take charge of investment, trade and industry—a move gender activists in the country considered a well-deserved promotion.

As a parliamentarian, Ms. Kenewendo advocated on behalf of children and women, paying particular attention to women’s representation in all sectors. One of her accomplishments was to sponsor a motion to increase the age of sexual consent in her country from 16 to 18 years.

Under her leadership, Botswana’s Ministry of Investment, Trade and Industry will in May this year finalize the digitization of business registration, enabling companies and small businesses to register online. The goal is to improve the ease of doing business in the country.

She says her mother is her role model, as “she taught me to be tough in the face of adversity.”

On her future, Ms. Kenewendo says she plans to establish a virtual community where African youth can interact and share their experiences. The project will complement Molaya Kgosi Trust—her current women’s leadership and youth empowerment programme in Botswana schools.

For her efforts in various endeavours, Ms. Kenewendo has received several awards, including one given in 2012 by Junior Chamber International Botswana,



a nonprofit, honoring her as one of “Ten Outstanding Young Persons” in Botswana. In 2016 she received the Botswana Change Makers Award and the Formidable Woman award for her contributions to business and leadership.

Internationally, Ms. Kenewendo is a member of the High-Level Panel on Digital Cooperation, established by UN Secretary-General António Guterres to propose ways for governments, the private sector, civil society and others to collaborate in the digital space. The panel is chaired by Melinda Gates, of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and Jack Ma, Executive Chairman of Alibaba Group Holding.

**Ms. Kenewendo signs a joint statement with Mr. George Hollingberry, Minister of State for Trade Policy of the UK.** 📷 [Twitter/DIRCO South Africa](#)

In 2009 she was a youth delegate representing her country at the 64th Session of the UN General Assembly. She was nominated to present a statement at one of the events on behalf of African youth to the Secretary-General.

Her advice to young people? “Step up your game. If you look at history closely, you will realize that youth leadership in Africa is not new. Most revolutionaries were young people,” quips Ms. Kenewendo.. 🇳🇬

## Economic empowerment of women ... from page 7

continental framework for socioeconomic transformation of the continent, and several goals in the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. That includes Goal 1, ending poverty; Goal 2, achieving food security; Goal 3, ensuring good health; Goal 5, achieving gender equality; Goal 8, promoting full and productive employment and decent work for all; and Goal 10, reducing inequalities.

Aspiration 6 of Agenda 2063 envisages an "Africa whose development is people driven, relying on the potential offered by people, especially its women and youth, and caring for children."

### Taking action

What can countries do to empower women economically?

In a blog for the World Bank, Cape Verde's Minister of Finance, Planning and Public Administration Cristina Duarte and the World Bank's Vice President for Infrastructure Makhtar Diop recently encouraged "support [for] young women during adolescence—a critical juncture in their lives." The Empowerment and Livelihood for Adolescents programme in Uganda, which "uses girl-only clubs to deliver vocational and 'life skills' training," is a good example, according to Ms. Duarte and Mr. Diop.

The World Bank recommends, among other actions, the passage of laws that foster financial inclusion. Ms. Eziakonwa believes that countries must expunge laws that are obstacles in women's way, including those that prohibit them from owning land. South African journalist Lebo Matshego is urging women's rights activists to use social media to lobby against those customs and traditions that infringe on the rights of women.

Vera Songwe, head of the Economic Com-



**Empowerment is limited when women enter the labour market on unfavourable terms.**



mission for Africa, the first woman to lead the organization, says women, especially in rural areas, need access to the internet to be able to take advantage of new technologies.

The UN Secretary-General's 2018 CSW report titled *Challenges and Opportunities in Achieving Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Rural Women and girls* advises countries to "design and implement fiscal policies that promote gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls by investing in essential infrastructure (ICT, sustainable energy, sustainable transport and safely managed water and sanitation)."

According to Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, a former president of Liberia, affirmative action is the way to go. She says that "now

is the time for preferential treatment of women," such as quotas on jobs and access to credit.

UN Women supported a review of Kenyan public procurement in 2013, and Kenya now reserves a minimum of 30% of annual government spending for women. In 2017, through its Women's Economic Empowerment programme, UN Women reported successfully training 1,500 women vendors in Nairobi to participate and benefit

from the government supply chain. This is one example of an action in line with Ms. Sirleaf's suggestion.

The quality of jobs that women do also matters, writes Abigail Hunt, a researcher with the Overseas Development Institute, a UK-based think tank. "Empowerment is limited when women enter the labour market on unfavourable terms. This includes women's engagement in exploitative, dangerous or stigmatized work, with low pay and job insecurity." In other words, women need access to high-paying, safe and secure jobs.

"The road to women's economic empowerment is irreversible," maintains Ms. Sirleaf. "It's taking a while to get it, but it's coming; no one can stop it." 🦋

## Innovative messaging app tailor... from page 3

could work anywhere, and in the future, we can add many languages."

Lenali was improbably conceived in a supermarket, the 44-year-old Mr. Sidibé recalls, when someone asked for his help to use the online messaging app Viber. That planted a seed for the computer entrepreneur, giving him the idea to create a platform that caters to people who cannot use text-based messaging apps, Mr. Sidibé tells *Africa Renewal*.

Currently some local nongovernmental organizations, such as the National

Network for the Development of Young Girls and Women of Mali, are using Lenali for social mobilization.

"An essential part of the information we publicize is about reproductive health, gender-based violence and literacy," say Hawa Niakate and Aminata Camara, who work for the organization. "We use Lenali social network to reach everyone."

Two Lenali users, Ada and Ladji, say that they advertise services and produce such as vegetables on the platform, as well as use it to host their CVs. The process is simple: they record their voices in a local language and post the messages on the platform, hoping to reach tens of thousands of users.

Starting up Lenali was not without its difficulties, Mr. Sidibé recalls. "When I was creating my first two businesses in 2014, there were no incubators in Mali. Perhaps my projects would have been more successful with the support of an incubator." Incubators are companies that support start-ups with office space, management training, funding and other help.

Perseverance, Mr. Sidibé explains, is what drives his entrepreneurial spirit. "Once you have a good project, you need to be motivated and give yourself the means to succeed." He urges all young entrepreneurs in Africa to explore opportunities in the digital industry. ●



GENDER

# Technology is a liberating force for African women

Innovative projects tackle entrenched gender inequality

BY CHARLES ONYANGO-OBBO

**A**s ride-hailing apps proliferate the globe, the year-old An Nisa Taxi in Kenya is one of the standouts in Africa.

Developed by 33-year-old Mehnaz Sarwar, An Nisa is run by women and serves female passengers and children exclusively.

Ms. Sarwar sought to overcome two obstacles: limited job opportunities for women in a male-dominated industry and the reluctance of women to hail taxis, because physical abuse from drivers—including sexual abuse—is known to take place.

“An Nisa Taxi’s priority is to offer safe, reliable, and trustworthy drivers, whether it’s taking you home after a night out, starting your day with a ride to work, or

picking up your children after school,” the company states on its website.

In an article for Quartz, an online business publication, journalist Osman Mohamed Osman observes: “Unlike others in the market, which collect 25% of the driver’s earnings, An Nisa charges just 10% of what the drivers earn from trips.” Mr. Osman quotes Ms. Sarwar as saying she wanted to empower women who need “financial freedom.”

## New possibilities

An Nisa’s successful launch demonstrates the possibilities new technologies offer African women in male-dominated industries. It also conveys a new ethos regarding how earnings are distributed and shows how services can be deployed to address

*Yetunde Sanni co-founded Tech in Pink, an organization that teaches young girls how to code. [@Andela/MohiniUfeli](#)*

important needs of women—safety in this case.

In Uganda, Brenda Katwesigye, a graduate of Makerere University, founded Wazi Vision, a company that provides eye-testing services and glasses. Ten percent of the money paid for each pair purchased online or through direct sales channels goes to helping a child in need acquire a pair of glasses. “To make this possible, we go directly to our communities, perform eye-testing exercises and give away eye-glasses to children whose parents cannot afford them,” says Ms. Katwesigye.

The glasses, made from recycled plastic, are designed in Uganda and manufactured in Switzerland.

A virtual reality testing kit brings eye testing to communities that do not have optometrists or access to affordable eye-care services.

The company’s operations reflect the sensibilities of female innovators as well as their concern for the environment, children

## By the numbers

### 1.7 million

Members of Female IN, a private Facebook group that acts as a support network for women worldwide.

### 600,000

Members of Healing Naturally Together (HNT), a group of herbal medicine enthusiasts who use natural remedies for health conditions.

### 5,000

Children that Young at Heart Ghana has engaged since 2013 through learning hubs, digital learning clubs, fairs and e-learning platforms

### 500

Vetted caregivers with Greymate Care, an online platform that renders service to the elderly.

and women. Wazi Vision's glasses cost 80% less than similar competing products.

Turning to Nigeria, Chika Madubuko identified another vital service, that of caring for the elderly—a stressful and time-consuming task that African women are traditionally expected to perform for their family members.

Madubuko's Greymate Care is an online platform with over 500 experienced and vetted caregivers and 130 doctors and nurses. Services for the elderly are easily booked on the company's website, freeing up time for women to concentrate on their work and earn an income. The company uses GPS to monitor the movements of staff in the field.

Ms. Madubuko expects the company to grow beyond her country and to provide thousands of jobs on the continent in the future.

Temie Giwa-Tubosun, also from Nigeria, founded LifeBank (initially called One Percent Project), a blood sourcing and

**Tech company Andela developers at work in Nairobi.**   [Andela.com](https://www.andela.com)

delivery service. LifeBank uses mobile and web technology and smart logistics to deliver blood from labs to patients and doctors in hospitals across Nigeria.

Nigeria needs about 1.8 million pints of blood every year, but its Ministry of Health can only collect 500,000 pints. LifeBank's intervention is timely, reports Nigeria's *The Guardian* newspaper. The company has 40 blood banks and services 300 hospitals. Blood boxes delivered by riders can only be opened by recipients via a preset Bluetooth connection.

"We're like Amazon for blood banks," Ms. Giwa-Tubosun says. "Once we have their order, we deploy it where it's needed, using motorbikes and trucks." Since 2015, LifeBank has delivered 11,000 pints and saved at least 2,500 lives. Ms. Giwa-Tubosun has already expanded into oxygen delivery and hopes to add vaccines and antivenins.

In nearby Ghana, social entrepreneur Josephine Marie Godwyll is on a mission to bring engaging learning experiences to children, especially those in rural communities. Her company, Young at Heart Ghana, uses digital platforms to create such experiences.

The company has engaged over 5,000 children since 2013 through information and communication technology (ICT) outreaches and learning hubs, digital learning clubs, fairs and e-learning platforms.

### Social media

Finally, social media has become a launchpad for successful initiatives led by women. Temraza Haute Couture is an

award-winning Egyptian fashion house specializing in handmade evening and bridal dresses. Farida Temraza, CEO and designer in chief, has successfully used Facebook advertising to promote her company's brand internationally.

Temraza Haute Couture's video ads have gained thousands of views, enough to drive thousands of clients to her website. Her sales increased by 55% in six months.

Nigerian-American activist Lola Omolola founded Female IN (FIN), a private Facebook group that acts as a support network for women worldwide, shares stories of domestic violence, sexual assault and other issues. Popular posts often get as many as half a million views.

**1.8 million**  
pints of blood needed by  
Nigeria every year

Ms. Omolola started FIN in 2014 when nearly 300 girls were kidnapped from a boarding school in Chibok, northeastern Nigeria, by the Boko Haram militant group, triggering the global #BringBackOurGirls campaign. The group currently has about 1.7 million members.

Equally notable is what Christine Anyumel is doing with the Facebook group Healing Naturally Together (HNT), which

**see page 33**



# Preparing Africa's graduates for today

Experts call for modernising school curricula to match a rapidly changing labour market

BY RAPHAEL OBONYO

**M**any Africans with advanced qualifications are finding their university degrees are just not enough to land a job in the current market.

Ruth Rono graduated from Chuka University, Kenya, in 2015 with first-class honours. Without a job after many years of trying, Ms. Rono was forced to take menial jobs such as working on people's farms.

Down south, Banji Robert bagged a bachelor's degree in economics and mathematics from the University of Zambia in 2016 and would have gladly accepted an entry-level job in one of those fields. Two years later, without success, a frustrated Mr. Robert is now a cashier in a grocery store.

"It is not easy to pay bills, let alone start a family," Mr. Robert, 25, told *Africa Renewal*. "The pressure is too much when you have education but no job."

A graduate of development studies, Robert Sunday Ayo, 26, finds himself in a similar situation. "It is sad and very frustrating that it is not possible to find work, even with my kind of résumé," he says regretfully, adding that he now drives a taxi in Abuja, Nigeria.

*Africa Renewal* interviewed dozens of young people across the continent who expressed dismay that their education is not propelling them toward their career aspirations.

## Basic skills

One of the reasons for graduate unemployment is that "far too many youths across sub-Saharan Africa emerge from school without the basic skills to advance in their lives," says Siddarth Chatterjee, the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Kenya. "It means there is something not working regarding investment in education."

In general, some 60% of Africa's unemployed are youth, according to the World Bank, and many are resorting to crime,



radicalisation, or the often-perilous migration journey across the Mediterranean to Europe in search of greener pastures, says Mr. Chatterjee.

And because of increasing automation, the situation for graduates could worsen in the coming years.

According to the Accra-based African Center for Economic Transformation, a policy think tank, almost 50% of current university graduates in Africa do not get jobs.

The root cause of the problem is a mismatch between the education they are getting and labour market needs, maintains Sarah Anyang Agbor, the African Union (AU) Commissioner for Human Resources, Science and Technology.

Joseph Odunga, who has taught mathematics in Kenya and Botswana, agrees. "The lessons we used to teach in the 1990s are the same course content we are

teaching today," he says, implying that current education curricula for some subjects are outdated.

That view is shared by Ms. Agbor, who says that, "It is generally true that in most countries [in Africa], education systems have been geared toward getting a qualification rather than acquiring skills and competences that will enhance successful integration into the world of work."

## Promising sectors

While some complain of the difficulty in finding a job, sectors such as construction, manufacturing, digital economy, transport, banking, medical care and engineering continue to need skilled candidates, says Anne-Elvire Esmel, a strategic communications officer with the AfroChampions Initiative, which promotes Africa's homegrown companies.

# y's jobs



**Students of the Africa Leadership University School of Business graduate in Kigali.**

📷 Office of President Paul Kagame

The mismatch between labour market needs and the skills of many graduates in Africa is underscored by the Kenyan government's recent launch of the "Competency-Based Curriculum," which integrates digital technologies to teach students inclined toward information and communications technology the skills they will need to enter the digital apps industry that is expanding rapidly in the country.

Ms. Esmel would like countries to develop "more theoretical courses adapted to problem solving with regards to economic challenges, providing graduates with practical skills for the labour market

and investing in STEM—sciences, technology, engineering and mathematics—which is not sufficiently done at present."

Her organization proposes an Africa-focused infrastructure plan that uses local skills to implement projects.

"We have massive infrastructure needs and ought to provide opportunities to a huge young population over the next decade," Ms. Esmel says. She stresses the need for competent artisans and technicians in the building and construction industry and in power and energy plants.

The snag, however, is that "technical vocational education and training [TVET] is stigmatized as a second-rate learning track, despite its capacity to promote the acquisition and development of entrepreneurial and innovative skills for self-employment," laments Mr. Chatterjee.

With adequate allocation of resources, he says "modernizing teaching and learning facilities in TVET institutions, as well as training and continuous professional development of TVET teachers" will be possible.

Overall, sub-Saharan Africa spends 5% of its GDP on education. In 2015, in Incheon, South Korea, the World Education Forum adopted a declaration that requires countries to commit 4%–6% of their GDP or 15%–20% of their public expenditures to education. UNESCO organised the forum with the support of other UN entities and the World Bank.

A recent report shows Zimbabwe, Eswatini (formerly Swaziland) and Senegal have met or surpassed the 6%-of-GDP target, while South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea-Bissau, Uganda and Madagascar, among others, spend less than 2.5% of their GDP on education.

A concern is that a high proportion of education spending (an average of 85%) is recurrent, including 56% expended on wages.

Kenya's former Cabinet Secretary for Education and current Cabinet Secretary for Sports, Amina Mohammed, is less critical of Africa's education systems, saying, "Most education systems have inbuilt skill development curricula. That is why over the years most African countries have developed human capital that is driving the development agenda."

In an interview with *Africa Renewal*, Ms. Mohammed said, "Unemployment

itself is not a function of the education systems and skills alone. There are many other factors that lead to unemployment, ranging from sociopolitical stability, economic structures, and global dynamics, together with the general economic growth of the countries."

## Africa needs job creators

Ms. Mohammed suggests Africa mostly needs job creators—namely entrepreneurs. "We need African Silicon Valleys sprouting across the continent. Economies that thrive around the world are built on the foundation of an enabling environment for entrepreneurship to flourish.

"Global multinationals such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and WhatsApp employ hundreds of thousands of people, directly and indirectly," adds Ms. Mohammed.

Many are looking forward to an African Continental Free Trade Area, a single pan-African market for goods and services expected to go into force in the coming months, which will enable skilled young Africans to move freely within markets in search of jobs.

Still, Aya Chebbi, the AU's youth envoy, says that without the right skills, the youth may reap little from the continent's economic integration. She echoes others calling for the continent's education curricula to be updated to align with the current labour market.

Ms. Chebbi says young people can hone their entrepreneurial skills if they focus on science, technology, engineering, entrepreneurship and mathematics and have access to on-the-job training.

In December 2018, Morocco hosted the first African Forum on Vocational Training. The aim was to create a model of partnership among African countries to promote access to vocational training for youth. The forum signaled that African countries are attaching increasing importance to vocational training.

The private sector must complement governments' efforts, advises Ms. Esmel.

Ms. Agbor agrees: "The private sector needs to be strongly linked to the education and training systems to meet labour market needs." He encourages companies to offer young people apprenticeships, internships, mentorships and even skills certification programs. 🐾

# Young people can capably lead Africa into the future

— Aya Chebbi, African Union Youth Envoy

**A**ya Chebbi of Tunisia is the first-ever youth envoy of the African Union. Her appointment in November 2018 boosts the AU's efforts to include the talents and skills of the continent's bulging youth population in achieving its Agenda 2063, a framework for Africa's socioeconomic transformation. Ms. Chebbi is expected to promote, among other issues, youth leadership and participation in governance, gender equality, safe migration, employment and climate change action. **Raphael Obonyo**, a youth activist, interviewed Ms. Chebbi for *Africa Renewal* on a range of issues affecting Africa's young people. These are excerpts.

## What do you hope to achieve during your tenure?

I have a mandate to advocate for the implementation of the African Youth Charter, the Demographic Dividend Roadmap and Agenda 2063. I see my role as a bridge builder, building trust by closing the information gap between the AU and the African youth, which can be achieved with a strong and bold communication strategy and by establishing accessible and inclusive spaces for conversations that matter to youth at the African Union Commission (AUC). In addition, I aim to foster intergenerational dialogue, starting from the community level, to address the gap between the elders and African youth. I also plan to help mobilize young people around pan-Africanism, bringing them closer to our pan-African vision, which is to lead in efforts at achieving the aspirations of Agenda 2063.

We can achieve these through partnership, support, participation and coordination with young people themselves. This is a “working together” process—listening, sharing and acting to amplify youth voices.

## What are your top priorities?

I will say, first, the four pillars of the Demographic Dividend Roadmap: economy, education, health and governance (especially

for young women). As well, I will focus on issues affecting refugees, returnees and internally displaced people. As you know, the AU theme for 2019 is “Refugees, Returnees and Internationally Displaced Persons.”

## The youth constitute about 60% of Africa's unemployed. How can we tackle youth unemployment?

We need to start a discussion soon with member states on the future of work in Africa. As much as there is an effort to address job creation, we seem to be creating jobs that will disappear in a few years. There is a need for these conversations, in parallel with urgent action for creating livelihoods for youth. I would like to see the AUC activate the AU Youth Development Fund to support youth-led entrepreneurial initiatives. Youth development funds set up at subregional and national levels can also support youth employment. In addition, supporting the youth with internships, professional programs, trainings and positive experiences is vital.

## The 2006 African Youth Charter is a framework for consolidating efforts to empower young people in driving development on the continent. How is its implementation going?

First, we still must make sure that all countries sign and ratify the Charter. Regarding





implementation, we have a lot of work to do in many areas, including providing employment, sustainable livelihood, education, health, youth participation and so on.

#### **How can the youth participate effectively and benefit from the African Continental Free Trade Area?**

As part of the economic integration project, the AfCFTA is a step forward. Creating jobs through intra-African trade may discourage the youth from migrating out of Africa in search of better opportunities. The AfCFTA requires African states to add value to their primary commodities and boost their services sector. For young people to benefit from a huge pan-African market, countries must revisit their education curricula to ensure that acquired knowledge and skills are adapted to market needs. Young people must develop the capacity for entrepreneurship. There is a need to promote science, technology, engineering, maths and entrepreneurship in schools. The youth are better placed to participate in the digital economy.

#### **How do you plan to promote the AU and its Commission to young people?**

The AU is an institution that was formed on the values of pan-Africanism, and we should not give up on it. The union holds the legacy of our collective liberation and collective future. Besides, it is important to understand how the AU is organised so that we can manage expectations of what it can achieve. The AU as a regional body does not have the power to implement or enforce policies in individual countries. This remains a key challenge in the implementation of policy frameworks and themes adopted by the AU Assembly. We should strengthen and reform the AUC to be more effective. Young people should be encouraged to lead some of its organs. I accepted the appointment because of a strong conviction that the AU will always remain relevant to Africa's unity.

#### **How did you get to be appointed the AU's youth envoy?**

I was appointed through a transparent process. There was an open call online for youth to submit their applications for the position. I applied and was among the 706 applicants, of which a shortlist of 17 was made and then four of us were invited for interviews. A panel of 14 members interviewed me. It was the biggest panel I have ever faced. Every member of the panel had to score the candidates according to the set criteria. I scored the first.

#### **What is your final message to African youth?**

My message is, you can be whatever you want to be. There are only two things you need to do: find your identity and live your mission. You need to know who you are and what you stand for. Once you know your identity, know why you wake up every day and why you do what you do, that's your mission. I want my appointment to be an inspiration to other African youths to pursue leadership positions wherever they are and in whatever they do. I would like to add that young people should aspire to be pan-Africanists. We have been talking a lot about the '60s and the liberation movements that inspired us. Now we need to be the pan-Africanists of the 21st century, to lead this continent to where it deserves to be. The future of Africa is certainly bright if we unite around this collective pan-African vision that my liberation is your liberation. 🇳🇬

# African music on a round trip —from Cotonou to Cuba and back

Caribbean influence leaves its mark as popular Afro rhythms develop

BY FRANCK KUWONU



It's Sunday night at Aba House, an open-air bar in Lomé, Togo's capital, and stylish young men and women in modern African dress fill the dance floor as the bass guitarist pumps up the tempo. Powerful! Soulful!

The lyrics are in Mina, a local language in southern Togo and parts of neighboring Benin, but the music is unmistakably Afro-Cuban, a genre with global acclaim.

The weather is cool, the air filled with a misty marine breeze coming from the roaring Atlantic Ocean.

Across the street, onlookers marvel at the colorful dresses and practiced dance moves and watch as patrons nibble on finger

food and wash it down with beer, whiskey and soft drinks.

A few minutes earlier, the band had played an up-tempo reggae tune and a high-life rendition of a Christian hymn, but it was the sound of the Afro-Cuban rumba that got people spinning, shimmying and swinging their hips on the now-crowded dance floor.

"This is my father's bar and we play here every Sunday evening," George Lassey, the bandleader, told *Africa Renewal*. "We play all kinds of music: reggae, gospel, salsa and others."

However, Mr. Lassey says, salsa is "by far the most requested during our live performances."

**Angélique Kidjo performs in a concert.**

 North Carolina Museum of Art

Salsa music has remained popular in West Africa since it was introduced in the region in the 1950s, reportedly by sailors.

From Lomé to Bamako in Mali, Conakry in Guinea, Cotonou in Benin and Dakar in Senegal, live bands have gained international fame playing catchy Cuban dance tunes.

Among the well-known bands incorporating the Cuban groove are Orchestra Baobab and Le Super Etoile de Dakar, the latter famed for mbalax and

Latin-influenced dance music, in which Senegalese superstar Youssou N'Dour, who is also a UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador, shot to fame. Others include the Rail Band in Bamako and Orchestre Poly-Rythmo de Cotonou.

### African-flavored salsa

In early 2010, some of Africa's renowned salsa vocalists joined forces with New York-based musicians to form Africando, a group that successfully brought African-flavored salsa to the global music market.

Growing up in Benin, Angélique Kidjo, now an internationally acclaimed artist and another UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador, felt a strong connection to salsa.

"As I was listening to Celia, I could hear Africa," Ms. Kidjo remembers, referring to Celia Cruz, often called the "Queen of Salsa."

In July 2016, Angélique Kidjo teamed up with several New York-based Cuban musicians to perform a tribute to the late Celia Cruz before taking the show on the road across the US, Europe and Asia.

The enduring popularity of salsa and the recent emergence of genres such as AfroSoca in the Caribbean signal the resilience of African and Africa-inspired arts and culture throughout centuries, sometimes amid challenging circumstances.

"It is well known that salsa and Caribbean rhythms have African roots. But it is also true that a lot of modern African music owes a lot of its influences to salsa and *el son cubano*," says Angel Romero Ruiz, founder and senior editor of World Music Central, a US-based online magazine dedicated to world music. *El son cubano* is a quintessential Afro-Cuban song style (the term can refer to a dancing style as well).

### A round-trip phenomenon

Music experts have coined the phrase "round-trip phenomenon" to refer to rhythms and sounds that travel before returning to their source.

The Congolese rumba is an example of the round-trip phenomenon. It is derived from *el son cubano*. Son originally played the function of telling the news of the countryside. Among its fundamental

Hispanic components are the vocal style and lyrical poetry of the songs. Its call-and-response pattern comes from African Bantu tradition.

"Indépendance Cha Cha," performed by Joseph Kabasele (known by his stage name Le Grand Kallé), was composed and performed for the first time in 1960 to celebrate the imminent independence of the former Belgian Congo (present-day Democratic Republic of Congo). The song quickly gained continentwide appeal during a period when several other African countries were in the process of gaining independence from colonial rule. The song is still performed today, and it has inspired other pan-African genres such as soukous, makossa and coupé décalé.

In turn, makossa, a Cameroonian genre popularized internationally by saxophonist Manu Dibango, contributed to the emergence of disco in the US through his song "Soul Makossa."

In the album *Thriller*, released in 1982, Michael Jackson's song "Wanna Be Startin'

Somethin'" includes the refrain, "Mama-say mama-sah ma-ma-coo-sah." Music experts believe Mr. Jackson sampled the refrain from Mr. Dibango's album.

Over the years Congolese rumba, Nigerian Afrobeat, Ghanaian highlife, Caribbean calypso, Antilles zouk, Trinidadian soca and dancehall music gained currency in Africa and in the diaspora, while becoming telling signs of the popularity of African rhythms and their influences around the world.

### Afrosoca genre

In the Caribbean, AfroSoca—a blend of Afrobeat, traditional soca and dancehall—emerged in 2014. The genre, introduced by Trinidadian Olatunji Yearwood, has been growing in popularity on both sides of the Atlantic, and as far away as South Africa.

In West Africa, popular Nigerian artist Flavour N'abania scored a major hit in 2011 with a catchy remix of his 2005 song "Nwa Baby (Ashawo Remix)." The song was a cover of "Sawale," a popular highlife hit from the 1960s. The original "Sawale" and its 2005 cover had a slow beat typical of Ghanaian and Nigerian highlife music.

Yet "Sawale" appears to borrow its rhythmic and melodic base from "El Manisero," also known as "The Peanut Vendor," a popular Cuban piece. Fast forward to 2011, and the original rhythm and tempo have been transformed into a major hit straight out of Nigeria.

Were it not for the lyrics in pidgin English and the nationality of the artist, people in the Caribbean would have mistaken the hit for theirs because of the heavy influence of soca and dancehall.

### Ghanaian Azonto

It is a surprise that the 2017 carnival hit "Bouncing" from Shemmy J & Imran Nerdy, both artists from Saint Lucia, unmistakably reminds listeners of Flavor's "Ashawo" Remix.

Another Nigerian Afrobeat artist, Iyanya, succeeded in blending elements of Cameroonian makossa, Ivorian coupé décalé and Ghanaian azonto into his song "Kukere."

"Kukere" sounds like a soca song, so much so that while rehearsing for a carnival in Port of Spain in Trinidad, dancers



**Youssou N'dour performing in Montreux Jazz Festival in Montreux, Switzerland.**

© Christophe Losberger

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## ENVIRONMENT

# Countries propose a treaty to end corporate impunity

If adopted, companies will be held accountable for human rights and environmental violation

BY HANS WETZELS

**W**hen Ecuadorian diplomat Luis Gallegos first proposed a “Binding Treaty on Business and Human Rights,” many countries and environmental activists welcomed the idea with open arms.

Backed by South Africa, Mr. Gallegos urged the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, Switzerland, to immediately begin negotiations to end human rights violations and environmental damage by transnational corporations. In October 2018, 94 countries drew up

a draft text for the binding treaty, which could address the issue of the complex global supply chain that currently makes it difficult to determine who is responsible for environmental damage or human rights violations. It should also give victims access to justice.

For two decades, Mr. Gallegos’s birth place of Ecuador waged a court battle to hold Chevron (formerly Texaco), a US-based multinational, accountable for oil spills and for allegedly dumping 16 billion gallons of toxic waste into waterways and open pits in the country’s Amazon jungle, affecting 30,000 indigenous people and campesinos in the area. The South American country tried without success to seek redress in American, Ecuadorian, Brazilian and Canadian courts.



Claimant Eric Dooh shows the crude oil that has damaged the banks of the creek through his village in Ogoniland, Nigeria.  [Milieudefensie](#)

Chevron in turn dragged Ecuador before the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague, Netherlands, for violating a 1997 bilateral investment treaty, and was awarded a hefty \$112 million. A binding treaty on environmental damage might have prevented this kind of outcome.

Currently, there are voluntary guidelines for international businesses. One such set of guidelines is the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, which instruct corporations to respect human rights but leaves enforcement in the hands of states. In high-risk sectors such as agriculture, mining and

the garment industry, most companies disregard these principles, says Corporate Human Rights Benchmark, a newly established research initiative funded by the Dutch, British and Swiss governments.

Multinationals easily avoid prosecution because no international legal framework exists to hold them accountable, Mr. Gallegos argues. A majority of UN member states and the African Union concur.

Ecuador is not the only country whose citizens or government is trying to keep multinationals in check. In 2016, some 40,000 Nigerian fishermen took Royal Dutch Shell, an oil company, to a British court over oil spillage in the Niger Delta region. But the court ruled that a conflict with the company's Nigerian subsidiary, Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC), could not be adjudicated in the United Kingdom.

Amnesty International reported in 2016 that SPDC's operations in Nigeria's Niger Delta region in 2015 alone had resulted in about 130 oil spills.

"There are few places on the planet where the impact of multinational companies on the environment are more visible than in the Niger Delta," Nigerian diplomat Hashimu Abubakar told the Human Rights Council in Geneva.

After several rounds of consultations, the first draft of a Binding Treaty on Business and Human Rights was finally presented to the Human Rights Council in July 2018, raising hopes of adoption.

"Big multinationals always use their legal and financial firepower at the cost of people who don't have a lot of resources," Nigerian activist Esther Kiobel told *Africa Renewal*.

Ms. Kiobel is the widow of Dr. Barinem Kiobel, a former government official and one of the nine environmental campaigners executed by hanging in 1995 by Nigeria's military government for protesting against oil pollution in the Niger Delta. She was a plaintiff in a landmark suit against the oil giant Shell.

"A new international treaty might give me the opportunity to get compensation and rehabilitate the name of my late husband," adds Ms. Kiobel.

After fleeing Nigeria and gaining US citizenship, Ms. Kiobel took Shell before an American federal court in 2002. After years of litigation, the court dismissed

the case in 2013, claiming that a conflict between a Nigerian business, the SPDC, and Nigerian claimants cannot be heard in an American court.

Undeterred, Ms. Kiobel has now filed a civil case in a Dutch court. "At this point we're waiting for the Dutch court to set a date. Instead of facing me in court, they have been trying to prevent this case from even being heard before a judge," says Ms. Kiobel.

Although the idea of a treaty draws huge international support, bringing EU countries and others in the West on board may be difficult if not impossible. So far, both powerful players in international diplomacy have yet to back the effort.

European diplomats are concerned that binding obligations for international business could harm international trade, documents retrieved in Brussels through a Freedom of Information request reveal. "We were a little surprised by the vigour of

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## 130 oil spills

in Nigeria's Niger Delta in 2015 were reported by Amnesty International

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European resistance against this treaty," says Jane Nalunga of the Uganda-based nongovernmental organization (NGO) Southern and Eastern Africa Trade Information and Negotiations Institute (SEATINI). SEATINI was established in 1996 to lobby policy makers and consult with western NGOs, the UN and other international organisations to push an agenda of sustainable and inclusive development.

"The problem is that African governments... fear that laws on human rights or the environment might chase away international investors," said Ms. Nalunga.

"In Uganda a foreign company needs to take an environmental assessment. But the outcome is not legally binding. International legislation could make these assessments mandatory on the international level, thus ending the dynamic of African states competing for investment

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# No real development in Africa without regional integration

— Ahunna Eziakonwa

United Nations Assistant Secretary-General **Ahunna Eziakonwa** is the new Director of the Regional Bureau for Africa of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Ms. Eziakonwa had served as the UN Resident Coordinator in Ethiopia, Uganda and Lesotho. In this interview with *Africa Renewal*'s **Kingsley Ighobor**, she discusses key issues pertaining to Africa's socioeconomic development, including the empowerment of women and youth and Africa's free trade area, which entered into force in April. These are excerpts.

**Africa Renewal: In the recently released *World Economic Situation and Prospects for 2018* report, Africa's economic growth for 2019 is projected at 3.4%, a marginal increase of 0.9% from 2018. What do countries need to do to accelerate economic growth?**

**Ahunna Eziakonwa:** Low productivity is a problem. There must be higher uptakes in innovations and new technologies to propel productivity in the agriculture and small-scale enterprises. Agricultural modernization in most countries is low, as it is still rudimentary, not capitalized and not commercialized. This means we have a huge potential there. The continent's economies are vulnerable to the volatility of commodity prices in the global market. That's why diversification is the solution. Africa must diversify its agricultural products, and add value to its primary commodities and exports to avoid exporting its jobs to the rest of the world.

**In 2003 African leaders met in Maputo, Mozambique, and agreed to invest at least 10% of their national budgets in agriculture. Only a few countries have met that commitment. Why are some countries not investing heavily in the agricultural sector?**

Fifteen years after the Maputo Declaration, only seven countries—Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Niger, Mali, Malawi, Senegal and Zambia—have consistently met this target. In fact, countries like Malawi even went beyond the target, achieving as high as 21% in 2013 compared to the average of 3.1% for sub-Saharan Africa. Several factors account for underinvestment in agriculture in Africa. The implementation of the Structural Adjustment Programme in Africa reduced agriculture financing; low international funding of agriculture weakens policy space for agricultural spending; low political will to accelerate input subsidies, expand extension workers, research and rural infrastructure, and high lending rates limit small-scale farmers' access to finance. Land reform is key to address fragmentation and maximize the benefits of

economies of scale in land use. African governments must be given policy space to invest in agriculture and agribusinesses to propel economic diversification.

**Land distribution negatively affects women disproportionately, and there are more women than men engaged in agriculture. Are those consequential factors?**

That's one of the complexities I was referring to earlier. Legislations must be reexamined to correct some of these misfits. As you said, in some countries 80% of those engaging in farming activities are women, but they don't have land tenure, no ownership rights. Studies have shown that Africa's development is not going to transform unless women are integrated into the formal economy. Our *Africa Human Development Report 2016* found that sub-Saharan African economies have been losing about \$95 billion yearly since 2010 because of the gender gap in the labor market. Women are already in the economy, but it's mostly informal and unregulated. So imagine if you unleash the power, talent and resolve of women.

**Specifically, what can countries do to remedy the situation?**

We must abrogate all laws that are obstacles to women engaging and being integrated in the formal economy. Women need affirmative action to be relieved of some cultural duties so they can have time to further their education to compete in the economy. Real financial investment in a deliberate way to systematically support women's education is important. Political empowerment is very important, too. We have seen countries like Rwanda and Ethiopia moving in this direction. This must cut across public and private sectors. UNDP's Gender Equality Seal standardization exercise, which has been launched in countries like Uganda, is geared to promote gender equality in workplaces.

**What unique attributes do women bring to the table?**

Well, when you ask some of the African presidents who have appointed women, they say, “Women are less corrupt, and you get more accountability in the use of resources when you employ a woman.” Plus, women are the ones who are basically managing the lives of their families in many countries. A hands-on leader, who’s in touch with daily reality, is likely to make decisions that favour human development.

**Currently 52 countries have signed the framework agreement for the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), but only 18 countries have ratified the agreement. What could Africa derive from a free trade area?**

Everything. I don’t see the future of development in Africa without successful regional integration. It’s probably one of the most significant steps that the continent has taken to address its market paradox. Even though Africa’s population is over 1.2 billion and it is expected to reach 2.5 billion by 2050, our markets are small and fragmented and don’t stand a chance to compete internationally unless they have the collectiveness. So Africa trading with Africa will increase our competitiveness in terms of global trade.

**What is the UN doing to encourage holdout countries to join AfCFTA?**

The UN, led by the Economic Commission of Africa, supports the free trade area. UNDP firmly believes holdout countries need to get more information on how this will affect them so that they can make informed decisions on how to be fully engaged in the process.

**Tell us about UNDP’s work in Africa currently.**

UNDP is in every single African country. We see ourselves as a companion for countries in their development journeys. We support communities to build better livelihood opportunities, and we support the youth in entrepreneurship and work with countries to de-risk the investment

climate. In 2017 we produced the first comprehensive report on income inequality in Africa, which recommended a development strategy symbolized by a “Tree of Equity” with four main “branches”—population, macroeconomic fundamentals, human development and growth. Over the past five years, our efforts to increase access to electricity have reached 3.35 million Africans in 3,472 communities. We are also helping countries to create the right legislative backbone to deliver services and economic growth. Finally, we are working with African partners to change the development narratives of the continent as the next growth pole of the world.

**Can you name one or two countries where you have recorded outstanding successes?**

Many success stories come to mind, such as Enterprise Uganda, established by UNDP more than 20 years ago. It’s now an independent body with a capacity to help institutions to grow into enterprises. In Ethiopia, UNDP helped establish the country’s first commodities exchange, which has grown into a multimillion-birr [Ethiopian currency] enterprise, and the Ghana Stock Exchange is one of the highest-performing in Africa.

**Given your experience working in Africa, are you optimistic about the continent’s future?**

I am optimistic because Africa is developing at a time of amazing new technologies that can accelerate growth. Take digital solutions, for example: if you want to make identification cards for citizens, you could go digital right away. There are now more opportunities to finance development projects than before. And many African leaders now have a better appreciation of Africa’s potential.





## BUSINESS

# Africa's megacities a magnet for investors

Yet increasing populations will need jobs and modern infrastructure

BY FINBARR TOESLAND

**M**egacities, cities with a population of at least 10 million, are sprouting everywhere in Africa. Cairo in Egypt, Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Lagos in Nigeria are already megacities, while Luanda in Angola, Dar es Salaam in Tanzania and Johannesburg in South Africa will attain the status by 2030, according to the United Nations.

Abidjan in Côte d'Ivoire and Nairobi in Kenya will surpass the 10 million threshold by 2040. And by 2050 Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso, Addis Ababa in Ethiopia, Bamako in Mali, Dakar in Senegal and Ibadan and Kano in Nigeria will join the ranks—bringing the total number of megacities in Africa to 14 in about 30 years.

The number of people living in urban areas in Africa will double to more than

1 billion by 2042, according to the World Bank.

The University of Toronto's Global Cities Institute, which monitors cities' population growth and socioeconomic development worldwide, forecasts that Lagos will be the largest city in the world by 2100, housing an astonishing 88 million people, up from 21 million currently.

In a 2016 paper titled *African Urban Futures*, published by the Institute for Security Studies, an African independent research organization that aims to enhance human security on the continent, researchers Julia Bello-Schünemann and Ciara Aucoin wrote: "The current speed of Africa's urbanisation is unprecedented in history. For some it is the 'single most important transformation' that is happening on the continent." They add that African "cities

and towns will increasingly shape the lives of people living on the continent."

Africa's demographic transition, caused by the "youth bulge," an increase in the population of people between 15 and 29 years of age, will continue to fuel a move to the big cities because "young people are generally more prone to migrate to urban areas" than older people, according to Ms. Bello-Schünemann and Ms. Aucoin.

While millions of rural Africans move to cities in search of high-paying jobs and a better quality of life, these burgeoning metropolises also offer strong incentives to investors foreign and domestic.

### Power of population

Lagos is a prime example of the economic power in Africa's megacities. From its technology hub ecosystem—Africa's largest—to



its successful banking sector and prosperous film industry, venture capitalists see many investment opportunities in Nigeria's commercial capital.

According to a report by the telecom trade body GSM Association, there are 31 tech hubs in Lagos, 29 in Cape Town and 25 in Nairobi. The value of innovative tech spaces to African economies is massive, as investors pump capital into start-ups and hence contribute to countries' GDPs.

In 2017 outgoing Lagos State Governor Akinwunmi Ambode announced that the state's GDP had reached \$136 billion, about a third of Nigeria's GDP (\$376 billion) and more than the combined GDPs of Ghana (\$47 billion) and Tanzania (\$52 billion).

Steve Cashin, founder and CEO of the private equity firm Pan African Capital Group, believes that investors are focusing on Africa's megacities because of market size.

"My firm does a lot of business in Liberia, and one of the main constraints to growing businesses and attracting investment there is the population size and density. When the entire country's population is just about 4 million, and you're likely only to reach a small fraction of that, it is harder to make a compelling business case," says Mr. Cashin.

A single Lagos district can be a market the size of an entire country such as Botswana. Because people in Lagos are concentrated, companies can benefit from lower fixed costs and easier distribution. "The economics are just more attractive," he adds.

### Overstretched infrastructure

But highly populated cities have both positives and negatives. Rapid urbanization strains already overstretched infrastructure and creates complex problems for local governments.

**1 billion**  
will live in cities  
by 2042

For example, the population of Kinshasa is forecast to grow by 61 people every hour until 2030. People will have to look for jobs and use public transport and other social services.

Ms. Bello-Schünemann and Ms. Aucoin elaborates: "Most of Africa's urban residents live in informal settlements or slums, lack

*Sandton Gautrain Station in Johannesburg, South Africa.* South African Tourism

access to basic services, face precarious employment conditions and are vulnerable to various forms of urban violence."

They add: "Global climate and environmental changes, and pressure from water, food and energy insecurities, compound the challenges for human development and the complexities of contemporary urban governance on the continent."

Around 75% of homes in Kinshasa are in slums, and Lagos has dozens of them: places like Somolu, Bariga and the floating slum of Makoko. If infrastructure growth fails to keep up with increasing population, more slums will develop, experts warn.

To address these problems, Africa's fast-growing cities require all-inclusive infrastructure development, advises Mr. Cashin. "The importance of deliberate and thoughtful urban planning cannot be understated, not only for the efficiency and productivity of these cities but also for the safety of its inhabitants."

He adds that "proper urban planning

**see page 34**

# Mechanizing agriculture is key to food security

Governments and the private sector must partner to increase investments in the sector

BY BUSANI BAFANA

**A**n African woman with hoe in hand is the default symbol of agriculture in Africa, according to the late Calestous Juma, African academic and former Harvard Kennedy School professor. Mr. Juma used that image to convey the drudgery-filled farming that women on the continent face.

Women grow 70% of Africa's food on smallholder farms, a task anchored by physical labour.

Now, with Africa's population expected to double by 2050, the continent must ditch the hoe in favour of modern technology, which will complete the same tasks far more efficiently.

A transformation from small-scale subsistence farms to mechanised, more commercially viable farms is essential, say experts at the Ghana-based African Centre for Economic Transformation.

Currently, mechanisation levels on farms across Africa are very low, with the number of tractors in sub-Saharan Africa ranging from 1.3 per square kilometre in Rwanda to 43 per square kilometre in South Africa, compared with 128 per square kilometre in India and 116 per square kilometre in Brazil.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), a UN specialized agency that champions efforts to defeat hunger, Africa overall has less than two tractors per 1,000 hectares of cropland. There are 10 tractors per 1,000 hectares in South Asia and Latin America.

Without mechanized agriculture, productivity suffers drastically, lowering farmers' earnings, notes the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa, an organization funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates and Rockefeller Foundations that seeks to

promote agricultural transformation and improve food security in Africa.

Africa currently spends a whopping \$35 billion annually on food imports, according to the African Development Bank (AfDB), which projects that if the current trend continues, food imports could rise to \$110 billion by 2050. Africa should be the breadbasket of the world, says AfDB president Akinwumi Adesina.

"Technologies to achieve Africa's green revolution exist but are mostly just sitting on the shelves. The challenge is a lack of supportive policies to ensure that they are scaled up to reach millions of farmers," Mr. Adesina adds.

## The Maputo Declaration

African leaders in 2003 adopted the Maputo Declaration on Agriculture and Food Security, which requires countries to allocate at least 10% of public expenditure to agriculture with the goal of achieving 6% annual growth in the sector.

Yet 16 years later, only 13 countries have achieved at least 6% growth in the agricultural sector, stalling Africa's dream of a food revolution. Those countries are Benin, Burundi, Cape Verde, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and Togo.

In addition to the Maputo Declaration, the Malabo Montpellier Panel (MMP), a group of African and international experts, recommended in 2014 that African countries develop national agricultural mechanization investment plans as a critical step to increasing productivity.

In a report in 2018 the MMP listed 12 African countries, including Ethiopia, Malawi, Mali, Morocco, Rwanda, Tanzania and Zambia as having demonstrated strong



growth in mechanized agriculture and consequently achieved higher output.

Successful mechanization will be key to tackling major challenges on the continent, the report concludes, from spiraling food import costs to rampant rural unemployment. The report recommends using public-private partnerships to develop local machinery industries to ensure affordable and appropriate technology is in use. It also recommends incentivizing the private sector to invest in mechanization through tax waivers and smart subsidies.

Finally, thanks to advances in renewable energy and digital technology, Africa can leapfrog the stages of technological development other regions have had to undertake, making its mechanization process both swift and extremely lucrative, according to the report.

Dr. Katrin Glatzel, programme leader of the MMP, who is also a research fellow at the International Food Policy Research Institute, a US-based food research organisation,



points out that over half the fruits and vegetables produced in sub-Saharan Africa are lost, mostly because of inefficient post-harvest handling and lack of processing equipment.

Mechanization, Ms. Glatzel posits, is not only for tilling land, it is also for planting, harvesting, processing and storage of produce.

“Increased levels of mechanization will boost social and economic processes in both on-farm and off-farm roles in rural communities, through reducing drudgery of farm work and improving yields,” Ms. Glatzel tells *Africa Renewal*.

“Not only will mechanization result in increased employment, it will also improve land management and productivity as well as the quality of the crops that are produced,” she adds.

To achieve these goals, farmers in developing countries must spend more on fertilizer, seeds and agrochemicals, says the FAO.

**Factory worker in Ethiopia explaining tractor use to colleagues.**  *IFPRI/Xiaobo Zhang*

### Some laudable initiatives

Some private sector initiatives have stepped into the breach created by unsuccessful state- and donor-led efforts to promote mechanization.

In Nigeria, Hello Tractor, a technology start-up, is a quickly expanding Uber-like programme that gives farmers temporary access to tractors on demand.

Farmers can request a tractor via a text message to an agent, who aggregates requests. A tech platform pairs available tractors with jobs, and then tracks each piece of equipment as it’s used.

With a tractor, a field that might take 40 days to prepare for planting by hand can be prepped in eight hours. It’s also cheaper to rent a tractor than to hire farm workers, says Jehiel Oliver, the 35-year-old founder of Hello Tractor. “It seems

counterintuitive in these markets with relatively low cost of labour, but paying a human being to do this is still much more expensive than a tractor.”

Labor is also increasingly hard to find as more Nigerians move to cities and existing farmers get older. Using a tractor can help farmers plant fields in time for rain. Because planting with a tractor is also more consistent than planting by hand, it can also improve yields.

In Zambia, Rent to Own, a nongovernmental organisation founded in 2010, leases equipment such as pumps, presses, tractors, shellers and bicycles to farmers.

One of the advantages of mechanised agriculture is that it can potentially attract youth to farms and put a dent in Africa’s high youth unemployment, which accounts for about 60% of total unemployed.

The example of Zimbabwe’s young agripreneurs is instructive. Three years ago, the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT) loaned Gift Chawara, Shepard Karwizi and Pinnot Karwizi a planter and a sheller with which they started a business.

Their company is now offering shelling and planting services to almost 150 family farms in Mwangwa village, northwest of the capital Harare.

They had graduated from an agricultural mechanization training programme managed by CIMMYT. Last season, the trio earned about \$7,000 just from shelling over 300 tons of maize, according to CIMMYT.

But these young Zimbabweans could be outliers, asserts Frédéric Baudron, a senior systems agronomist at CIMMYT, who finds mechanization by smallholder farmers in Zimbabwe still low.

CIMMYT’s mechanization training programme is implemented under the Farm Mechanization and Conservation Agriculture for Sustainable Intensification project and supported by the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research. The project has benefitted over a hundred young people from Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania and Zimbabwe.

Such efforts, replicated across Africa, could push the frontiers of agricultural productivity. But governments need to increase investments in the sector.

It’s time for the continent to rethink the hoe. 🇳🇬

# Zimbabwe's beef industry stampedes back to life

After a decade in limbo, beef farmers are back in business

BY RAY MWAREYA

**Z**imbabwe's famed beef industry, which collapsed in the 2000s following outbreaks of foot-and-mouth disease, is now rebounding.

The Southern African country's global beef exports resumed in 2017, 10 years after they slowed to a crawl when the country's economy tumbled. In addition to the foot-and-mouth disease, the beef industry had been hit by crippling economic sanctions imposed on the country by Western nations, which contributed to hyperinflation, huge foreign debts and obsolete transport fleets. Mismanagement of livestock farms worsened the situation.

President Emmerson Mnangagwa, who assumed office in November 2017, is now seeking to revive the nation's most strategic asset by actively wooing investors. The country's top commercial farmers, whose herds of livestock were decimated, are slowly returning.

A joint \$48 million cash injection by private investors from Rwanda, Switzerland and the United Arab Emirates is revving up the beef industry, which in 2018 also benefitted from a \$130 million investment partnership deal between Zimbabwe's state-owned beef processing firm, the CSC, formerly the Cold Storage Commission, which is Zimbabwe's foremost beef processing agency, and the UK-based company Boustead Beef, an international beef processing company.

The country's pension fund, the National Social Security Authority, has also pledged to invest \$18 million in the CSC.

Innovative breeding technologies, including artificial insemination, have been successfully used on a new breed of beef bulls and heifers, scooping big earnings in the global beef market.

Big commercial and rural farmers are dreaming once more of the glory days of the 1990s, when Zimbabwe's beef industry was the envy of its Southern African neighbours.

## Good old days

In those good old days, Zimbabwe's beef cattle herd topped 1.4 million and raked in about \$50 million yearly from exports to the lucrative European market, particularly the UK, Germany and the Netherlands. For most beef-producing provinces of Zimbabwe, commercial beef sales accounted for about 80% of income.

At that time, the state-owned Cold Storage Commission enjoyed the privilege of a whopping \$15 million up-front payment before delivery to countries in Europe.

Isaiah Machingura, Marketing Director of the CSC, connects the rebound to the fact that "the UK has opened up big markets. Our canned product is one of the best. We can slaughter 700 animals a day. We do deboning and packaging ahead of export overseas. Beef in Zimbabwe is one of the best. It only falls second to Scotch beef from Scotland," he says, referring to a popular breed.

A resurgent beef industry is attracting thousands of rural farmers. In the past, a small number of white commercial farmers monopolized the sector.

The CSC's new approach is to expand the beef value chain with five new products: ox tongue, stewed steak, corned beef, hair tails (for brushes) and tallow (for soap).

As a result, local start-up cattle growers and abattoirs are experiencing a change of fortunes. One indigenous beef start-up, the Makera Cattle Company (MCC), manages hundreds of bulls and currently trains 10,000 rural farmers to be paravets, or animal health breeders.



"We began with a pedigree Tuli herd species of cattle. They are indigenous to Zimbabwe and are known to be very fertile," explains Max Makuvise, the MCC's chief executive. A good Tuli cow can calve every 11 months, he says. "Traits like growth and conformation are easy to improve on through selection, but not fertility."

The Tuli takes in little food and needs less space than other breeds, which maximizes earnings.

Mr. Makuvise adds that the Tuli breed is a better value than other breeds also because it has a better meat-to-bone ratio.

"They calve easily, and veterinary costs are minimal. They are usually without horns. This makes dehorning unnecessary—another reduction of expense and handling problems. It's such an easy breed," says Mr. Makuvise.

Although new to Zimbabwean farmers, livestock genetics is bolstering the growth of the beef industry. "On genetics, through the use of bulls and artificial insemination [AI], we have succeeded in helping rural farmers improve the quality of their herds," he adds.



“AI works by inserting semen straws drawn from rich-quality bulls. This produces offspring that resist pests and diseases better, solves low calving problems and produces species that have healthy grazing attitudes.”

The Zimbabwe Agricultural Society, which promotes agricultural development in the country, in 2018 announced plans to use 6,000 high-quality semen straws to inseminate cows and increase the number of herds in the country.

### Lingering troubles

But despite the growth in the beef industry, experts say that the quality of herds is still a worry.

Mr. Makuvise explains that the majority of Zimbabwe’s cattle herds are in rural communities, not in large-scale commercial farms as in the past, and that inbreeding is compromising quality.

Experts advise against inbreeding (father-daughter mating, for example), because it reduces growth rate, fertility and vigour in the herd.

Another problem is that corrupt beef dealers buy up bulls from rural farmers at ridiculously low prices and make huge profits selling to the CSC. The practice shortchanges the rural farmers.

Worse still, the beef industry is grappling with drying weather occasioned by climate change. “We preach productivity. Doubling herd size strains grazing grass and water. Climate change is a reality,” warns Mr. Makuvise.

To address the problem, he recommends innovative measures such as “feeding cattle with crop residues that would have been cut in winter. Also, we are currently doing trials on the use of maize stalks and other grasses that would have been cut during the rainy season. These could be used as supplementary feeding for cattle from September through to November.”

Muhle Masuku, an official at Livestock Zone, a beef startup, cautions farmers to continue to feed herds organic food. “I believe our meat is a niche, not contaminated by any inorganic feeds,” he says.

**Cattle farmer Msinanga produces supplemental feed for his cattle in Zimbabwe.**  *FAO in Southern Africa*

Another huge challenge occurs when Zimbabwean livestock, some diseased, wander into neighboring Botswana and are killed by officials acting on the orders of that country’s agriculture ministry. Botswana, which is a major beef supplier to the EU, wants to comply with international safety standards for beef export.

Simangaliphi Ngwabi, a Zimbabwean government livestock specialist, says, “We can’t blame Botswana for shooting our cattle. They can’t risk foot-and-mouth disease contamination and ruin their EU export license because our farmers let their cattle wander across the border.”

Despite the challenges, the current beef business is incontestably better than it was just a few years ago. And indications are that its growth has only one way to go—upward! 🐾



An ad of a skin whitening cosmetic product in Kumasi, Ghana. © Alamy Photo/Jbdodane

BEAUTY

# Paying a high price for skin bleaching

Huge risks, including cancer and liver damage, accompany the desire for fair skin

BY PAVITHRA RAO

40%

of African women bleach their skin

“I’ve been dark skinned for many years and I wanted to experience the other side. I wanted to see what it would be like to be white and I’m happy,” says South African singer Mshoza, whose real name is Nomasonto Mnisi.

Mshoza is famous for her music—and now for her bleached skin. She initially sought to bleach her hyperpigmentation (dark patches on the skin) but then decided to maintain a light complexion overall.

Skin lightening in Africa is not a new phenomenon. It has been around for decades. Skin-lightening products are sold on Amazon, an e-commerce marketplace.

But the World Health Organisation warns that skin bleaching can cause liver and kidney damage, psychosis, brain damage in fetuses and cancer.

A new skin-bleaching treatment that is catching on is the intravenous application of glutathione—a natural antioxidant produced by the liver. Intravenous glutathione treatments can lighten skin, and the product can now also be obtained in the form of antioxidant supplement tablets, writes Aneri Pattani, in an article on the topic for the *New York Times*.

Lately, skin care companies in Ghana and other African countries are increasingly using glutathione, trying to appeal to pregnant women aiming to lighten the skins of their babies in utero.

Ghana's Food and Drugs Authority warns it has not approved any glutathione products either for oneself or "in the form of a tablet to lighten the skin of an unborn child."

### Injectables are the most dangerous

"It's very dangerous for pregnant women to take bleaching tablets," warns Catherine Tetteh, founder of the Melanin Foundation, a Geneva-based nongovernmental organisation that campaigns against skin bleaching.

Injectables to lighten skin are "the most dangerous available now, partly because you do not know what is inside the injections ... and many are buying from informal markets," explains Shingi Mtero, who teaches a course on the politics of skin bleaching at Rhodes University, South Africa, in an interview with *Africa Renewal*.

The US-based Association of Black Psychologists notes that colourism—preference for lighter skin—may affect an individual's self-esteem, perceptions of beauty and economic opportunities. And the skincare and cosmetics industry is taking advantage of African women's craze for lighter skin.

Statistics compiled by the World Health Organisation in 2011 showed that 40% of African women bleach their skin. In some countries the figure is higher: a staggering 77% of women in Nigeria, 59% in Togo, 35% in South Africa, 27% in Senegal and 25% in Mali use skin-lightening products.

Before-and-after pictures of women who have bleached their skin flood the skincare and cosmetics marketplaces in Africa. Cameroonian singer Dencia operates a thriving business selling skin-lightening creams. She claims that "whiteness means purity."

Hashtags such as #skinwhitening and #yellowbone, advertising skin products that supposedly deliver immediate results and lead to a happier life, saturate social media platforms, especially Instagram.

Most contemporary skin-bleaching creams contain ingredients that inhibit the production of melanin, a body chemical



that darkens skin. One such ingredient is hydroquinone, a depigmenting agent that lightens skin. But WHO warns that hydroquinone's side effects include dermatitis (skin irritation), blue-black discoloration and even blindness.

Some creams contain steroids, compounds that doctors sometimes prescribe to treat skin conditions such as eczema, allergic reactions and dermatitis, which are meant to be used for not more than seven days and only on affected areas. Overuse of steroid creams can cause thinning or weakening of the skin, stretch marks and easy bruising.

Because steroids reduce the number of melanocytes, or cells that produce melanin, manufacturers of skin-bleaching creams recklessly mix steroids into their products.

The continual use of these creams eventually leads to a dependence or addiction because when they are discontinued, the skin returns to its original color, according to researchers Meagan Jacobs, Susan Levine, Kate Abney and Lester Davids in their study *Fifty Shades of African Lightness: A Bio-Psychosocial Review of the Global Phenomenon of Skin Lightening Practices*.

In light of these dangers, African countries, including Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire and

*Skin whitening creams on display in a shop in Yaounde, Cameroon.* 📷 Jasmine Halki

most recently Rwanda, have begun banning skin-lightening products, mainly creams with hydroquinone.

But manufacturers are fighting back. In some cases they may not list the names of banned ingredients on their products' packaging. Skin-bleaching products are

## African countries, including Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire and most recently Rwanda, have begun banning skin-lightening products.

"more and more accessible over the counter in pharmacies and even in the streets and markets," adds Ms. Tetteh.

"We are now educating people and seizing those illegal products," says Francois Uwinkindi, director of the Cancer Diseases Unit within Rwanda's Ministry of Health.

### Why the whitening craze?

The skin-lightening phenomenon is a nuanced one, says Ms. Mtero, adding that "whiteness has been elevated and presented as a universal standard of progress. When people say it's about whiteness, it's not necessarily to physically be white, it's about wanting to access things white

people have easy access to—privileges, economic and social status.”

Ms. Mtero continues: “Light skin is what men want; it makes sense for women to assimilate to the standard that men want in order to increase the chances of getting married. And marriage serves as a form of social capital—being someone’s wife, a child bearer and esteemed member of society. It will elevate a woman.”

She adds, “Proponents of depigmentation maintain the illusion that lighter skin will allow them to find better jobs, and to seduce more easily.”

The better job opportunities and elevated status that people assume lighter

skin brings paint a different picture—a picture of African women making an entirely rational, calculated, businesslike decision.

“This is the reason I believe banning these products will not completely solve the problem,” says Ola Orekunrin, a medical doctor and the founder of Flying Doctors Nigeria, an air ambulance service in West Africa. “We must open up a conversation around skin colour and beauty. The media, particularly the fashion media, must feature other types of beauty beyond the Western ideal, to end this colour bias.”

Following the remarkable success of the global blockbuster movie *Black Panther*,

which featured a predominantly black cast, a growing number of young Africans are taking pride in their complexions, coining hashtags such as #melaninpoppin and #blackgirlmagic to celebrate their dark skin tones.

Internationally acclaimed Kenyan actress Lupita Nyong’o, who featured in *Black Panther* tells *Vogue*, a US fashion and lifestyle magazine, that “I cannot run away from who I am and my complexion or the larger society, and how they may view that.”

She notes that acceptance and contentment in oneself was key to a successful life. 🇰🇪

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## Countries propose a treaty to ... from page 21

and neglecting their human rights responsibilities.”

The Binding Treaty on Business and Human Rights will not immediately lead to the land of milk and honey, argues Lucas Roorda, a policy adviser at the College for Human Rights in Utrecht, the Netherlands. Mr. Roorda wrote a dissertation on the liability of multinational corporations.

“A set of international rules would of course directly impact cases like *Kiobel* versus *Shell*,” he says. “But there’s also a lot of wishful thinking around this treaty. International rules can establish better access to justice for activists but wouldn’t solve the power discrepancy between multinationals and poor communities.”

He doubts that a full-fledged human rights court will be realized through international negotiations. “Setting up an in-ternational tribunal for human rights abuses costs a lot of money, while rich countries in Europe and the US are opposed to such a tribunal.”

Mr. Roorda prefers a treaty that lays out international norms that member states would then be obliged to legally adopt, adding, “That could actually make it easier to bring a case involving the Nigerian subsidiary of *Shell* before a Dutch court.”

While Ecuador’s treaty would make rules binding on an international level (through a tribunal, fines or some other mechanism), Mr. Roorda would like member states to adopt international rules

agreed upon in the treaty but not create an international court.

The long-term impact of international legislation goes beyond the establishment of a tribunal, explains Ms. Nalunga. “Besides adjusting the direct power imbalance between international investors and the poor communities in which they operate, this treaty could end the discrepancy between trade agreements and human rights.”



*Child standing on oil polluted river banks in Ogoni, Nigeria.* 📷 Milieudefensie

Environmental and human rights activists and countries experiencing the impact of the activities of some multinationals may debate the best way to achieve the goal of holding multinationals accountable. What is not debatable is the need to end impunity. 🇰🇪

## Technology is a liberating force ... from page 13

she started to encourage Ugandan women to adopt a healthier, more natural and more sustainable lifestyle. HNT is a vibrant group of herbal medicine enthusiasts who use natural remedies for health conditions, especially reproductive challenges such as infertility, fibroids and obesity.

The group is nearing 600,000 members from all over the world, and provides business opportunities for members to, for example, sell natural juices and organic foods to other members.

Natural remedies have no shortage of critics, and Ms. Anyumel and HNT have endured their fair share of pushback. But she is not throwing in the towel. HNT has now grown into a company that makes homeopathic remedies and organic foods.

In South Africa, home and room rentals app Airbnb has proved a boon for many women hosts, giving an especially welcome financial boost to single mothers, according to recent statistics released by the online booking platform.

“The typical woman host in South Africa earned nearly \$2,000 (R25,917.10) last year, more income than earned by the

*Tech company Andela developers at work in Lagos, Nigeria.*  [Andela.com](https://www.andela.com)

typical women hosts in other countries,” Airbnb reported.

The company added that, “More than 60% of women hosts in South Africa are Superhosts—hosts who are specially designated by Airbnb as hosting guests frequently, receiving a high number of five-star reviews, and being exceptionally responsive to guests.”

In Kenya, Airbnb is providing women with a new way to earn money and build businesses. A report by the platform coinciding with International Women’s Day on March 8, 2018 showed Kenyan women Airbnb entrepreneurs earning about one-third of their annual household

expenditure from the platform and using such earnings to start their own businesses.

The top five countries for women Airbnb hosts among the 14 surveyed were Kenya—where women earned 34% of average household expenditure via Airbnb—India at 31%, Morocco at 20%, China at 19% and Japan at 15%.

All these platforms and innovations showcase how technology can break up the male monopoly over access to the market and society. Clearly modern technology has the potential to be a force for equality. 🍌

*Mr. Onyango-Obbo is the publisher of Africapedia.*



## African Women in politics... from page 5

include Nigeria (8%), Mauritius (8.7%) and Sudan (9.5%).

Notably, Rwanda, the world leader in the number of women in parliament, saw a slight reduction in their number, from 64% in 2017 to 61.3% in 2018. Other African countries with high percentages of women MPs include Namibia (46.2%), South Africa (42.7%) and Senegal (41.8%), according to the report.

Countries achieving the 30% benchmark appear to have adopted a form of affirmative action. For example, Rwanda has constitutional provisions reserving 30% of seats for women in its bicameral legislature while South Africa’s Municipal

Structures Act of 1998 requires political parties to “ensure that 50% of the candidates on the party list are women” and that “women must be equitably represented in a ward committee.” Although there is no pen-

alty for noncompliance in South Africa, the country’s ruling African National Congress voluntarily allocates 50% of parliamentary seats to women.

Two main obstacles prevent women from participating fully in political life, according to UN Women. These are structural barriers, whereby discriminatory laws and institutions still limit women’s ability to run for office, and capacity gaps, which occur when women are less likely than men to have the education, contacts and resources needed to become effective leaders.

As countries strive to implement Sustainable Development Goal 5, “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls,” governments must also strive to embed gender parity in constitutions and legal frameworks. They must realize full compliance with the law, eliminate all forms of violence against women and ensure that girls receive a quality education. 🍌

**61.3%**  
of parliamentarians in  
Rwanda are women

## African music on a round trip... from page 19

had no problem warming up with Iyanya moves while listening to soca.

“Perhaps [he has] brought the commonalities between soca and afrobeats—as well as dancehall—into sharpest focus,” Jesse Serwer, a freelance music reviewer, writes of “Sanko,” a hit from Timaya, another Nigerian artist. “The song seamlessly straddles all three genres; its video features a mixture of dancehall movements and Nigerian steps.”

Timaya responded: “My intention was to develop a unique sound, that when played across continents, the response and the vibe will be the same. And I am very happy to say I achieved that.”

To raise awareness of the human rights of millions of people of African descent living throughout the world while celebrating the important contribution made by them, the United Nations proclaimed



2015 to 2024 the International Decade for People of African Descent. Music is an important contribution made by people of African descent.

A fusion of African and Caribbean contemporary rhythms and sounds, AfroSoca,

*Flavour Live in Enugu free concert on Saturday.*

 [Naijalife Magazine /Amaka Chimezie](#)

is the new roundtrip, continuing the cross-fertilization of African rhythms. 🌍

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## Megacities are magnet for ... from page 25

requires significant upfront investment” and that “local governments also need to harness the potential of these rapidly growing cities by making strides to formalise the economy.”

### Informal economies

In sub-Saharan Africa the informal economy—economic activities that are not regulated and therefore not taxed—represents up to 41% of GDP and provides 85.5% of total employment, reports the International Labour Organisation, the UN body that sets international labour standards and promotes social protection.

Without collecting enough taxes, cash-strapped city authorities cannot finance critical infrastructure such as roads, hospitals and power.

Some local administrations depend on foreign direct investment (FDI) or opt for the BOT system—build, operate, transfer—in which investors finance a project (such as a bridge) and recoup their investments by, for example, collecting tolls for a limited period.

The State of African Cities 2018, a UN report, says that Johannesburg, Lagos and Nairobi are the leading FDI attractions in sub-Saharan Africa.

Private investors often accompany financing with technological know-how. For example, smart city projects across South Africa, such as Melrose Arch in Johannesburg, require a diverse range of talent not often found in that country. Foreign investors with expertise in this field can draw on their own experience and contacts to put a skilled team in place.

In sum, the key to urban planning and attracting investors is to plan with an eye toward future population growth, notes Jonathan Hall, assistant professor at the University of Toronto’s Department of Economics and Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy. He adds that, “People will continue to move to the megacities until unemployment is so high,

and the infrastructure is so overstretched, that their quality of life is roughly the same in the city and the countryside.”

Authorities managing Africa’s megacities have their work cut out for them. Investors who are attracted to densely populated cities are also repelled by a lack of infrastructure and incompetent city authorities.

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**Investors who are attracted to densely populated cities are also repelled by a lack of infrastructure and incompetent city authorities.**

“Cities need strong, competent and democratic governments...[that can] work with their low-income populations, rather than, as all too often happens, evicting them,” says David Satterthwaite, senior fellow with the Human Settlements Group at the think tank International Institute for Environment and Development. 🌍

## BOOK REVIEW

### Making Africa Work through the Power of Innovative Volunteerism

Book by Richard Munang

In this book, author Richard Munang offers practical solutions to Africa's chronic dilemmas. His goal is to make the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development achievable.

But what is "innovative volunteerism"?

Mr. Munang explains: "Innovative volunteerism is pinned on the spirit of selfless commitment towards Africa's socio-economic development."

It should not be confused with volunteerism. "With volunteerism," he writes, "you are offering your skills and labour free of charge," while with innovative volunteerism you do something with your skills that connects the dots or fills the gaps in agro-productivity and you realize economic benefits eventually.

Mr. Munang lists insufficient electricity, hunger, climate change, rapid urbanization and inequality as Africa's top challenges.

Despite over \$15 billion invested in agriculture in the last two decades, he

notes, food insufficiency is rampant on the continent; despite \$30 billion invested in the energy sector, 60% of Africans remain without access to electricity.

"[Climate change] threatens to shrink the economies of developing countries by a whopping 75%," he predicts, "and the continent needs at least \$50 billion annually to counter climate change effects."

But Mr. Munang tempers his dystopian picture of Africa with practical solutions that have been successfully applied across the continent, such as in Rwanda's Geshwati area, where vulnerable communities were relocated away from high-risk areas.

"Considering that agriculture is the backbone of these communities, this plan also takes advantage of ecosystem-based adaptation agriculture techniques that the communities can safely engage in for their livelihoods."

Ecosystem-based adaptation, which is sustainable management of ecosystems, provides the right opportunities for

innovative volunteerism, he writes. In other words, individual citizens must deploy their skills to increase ecosystems' resilience, reducing vulnerabilities of people and the environment to climate change.

Mr. Munang reflects on his experience as an environmental scientist throughout the 96-page book.

At times the book reads like an autobiography; the author details his upbringing in his native Cameroon and the sacrifices he made to acquire a PhD in the UK. He weaves childhood stories into the text to illustrate some of the more complex aspects of climate change.

The book contains a wealth of data on different aspects of Africa's socio-economic development—agriculture, energy and youth employment, to name a few.

Organized in nine chapters, the book is a quick read. It will assist Africa's policy makers in determining development priorities. 🌍

— Pavithra Rao

## APPOINTMENTS



MINURSO

UN Secretary-General António Guterres has appointed **Major General Zia Ur Rehman** of Pakistan as Force Commander of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO). Most recently, Major General Ur Rehman served as the Commander of an Infantry Brigade from 2016 to 2017 and of an Infantry Division from 2017. He succeeds Major General Xiaojun Wang of China.



UN

**Mankeur Ndiaye** of Senegal has been appointed as Special Representative and Head of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA). Most recently, Mr. Ndiaye served as the country's Chairman of the National Committee on Extractives Industries Transparency Initiative in Senegal. He succeeds Parfait Onanga-Anyanga of Gabon.



Leiden University

**Karen Smith** of South Africa has been appointed as Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect. Ms. Smith most recently served as Associate Professor in international relations at the University of Cape Town. Ms. Smith will work under the overall guidance of Adama Dieng, the Secretary-General's Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide. She will succeed Ivan Šimonović of Croatia.



UN Photo/Rick Bajomas

**Ibrahim Thiaw** of Mauritania has been appointed by the United Nations Secretary-General as the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). Mr. Thiaw was most recently Special Adviser to the Secretary-General for the Sahel. He will succeed Monique Barbut of France.



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