

...promoting Africa's dignity and opportunities globally

# African Leadership

£5 \$8 N5000 ZAR100

ISSUE 186

Africa's Place in  
the Global  
Supply Chain:  
Competing in a  
World of  
Protectionism  
and Reshoring



Shifts in  
Geopolitics:  
Africa's Survival  
in Trump's World  
Order

**IMF LOANS TO  
AFRICA: A  
LIFELINE OR A  
TRAP?**

**RETA JO  
LEWIS**

Immediate Past Chair, U.S. EXIM Bank

A Legacy of Championing  
Global Commerce

ISSN 2006-9332



9 772006 933002

86 >



# AFRICA FINANCE LEADERSHIP FORUM (AFLF)

Financing Africa's Development  
in a New World Order



The Capitol Building, Washington DC, USA | 22 April 2025



# African Leadership Magazine

...A Publication of The African Leadership Organization

**Ken Giami**

Founder & Executive Chairman

**King Richard Igimoh**

Group editor

King.richards@africanleadership.co.uk

*Associate Editor*

**Blessing Ernest**

*Staff Writers*

**Blossom Ukoha**

**Joshua Mohammed**

**Solomon Obi**

*Country Representatives*

**Muna Jallow**

The Gambia & Senegal

**Meresia Aloo**

Kenya

**Janet Abena Quainoo**

Ghana

*Editorial Board*

**Peter Burdin**

London UK - Chair

**Nwandi Lawson**

Atlanta USA - Member

**Simon Kolawole**

Lagos Nigeria - Member

**Peter Ndoro**

SABC Editor Johannesburg - Member

**Frenny Jowi**

Nairobi Kenya- Member

**Brig. Gen. SK Usman Rtd**

Abuja Nigeria - Member

**David Morgan**

Washington DC USA- Member

**Furo Giami**

Chief Operating Officer / Executive Director

**Sasha Caton**

Manager, UK & European Operations

**Ehis Ayere**

Group General Manager

**Ngozi Nwokolo**

Executive Assistant to the Chairman

**Samuel M. Elaikwu**

General Manager Africa Office

**Happy Bension**

Director of Operations, North America

**Christy Ebong**

Head, Research & Admin - North America

**Stanley Emeruem**

Head of Sale and Business Development

**Kembet Bolton**

Business Development Manager

**Oluwatoyin Oyekanmi**

Head, South African Bureau

**Benard Adeka**

Head, Nigeria SS/SE

**Simon Ugwu**

Group Head of Events

*Digital Media Team*

**Abayomi Israel Alalade**

**Deborah Olajuwon**

**Gaawa Barivule God'slove**

*Creatives & Graphics*

**John Mutum**

**Ayeni Victor Adegbola**

**Adeiza Okatenwu**

## CORPORATE HEADQUARTERS

3rd Floor, The News Building  
3 London Bridge Street  
London SE1 9SG  
United Kingdom

**T:** +44 20 3051 1883

**E:** info@africanleadership.com

....Identifying, Celebrating &  
Enabling Excellence in Africa

www.africanleadershipmagazine.co.uk

## AFRICAN & REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE OFFICES

Abuja ■ Accra ■ Atlanta ■ Banjul  
■ Bujumbura ■ Freetown ■  
Johannesburg ■ London ■ Monrovia  
■ Nairobi ■ Washington DC

**ISSN 2006 - 9332**

While great care has been taken  
in the receipt and handling of  
materials, production and accuracy  
of content in the magazine, the  
publisher will not take responsibility  
for views expressed by the writer

## JOIN THE CONVERSATION

www.africanleadershipmagazine.co.uk

## FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA

**Facebook:** African Leadership Magazine

**X:** @AfricanLM

**Instagram:** @Africanleadershipmag

**Linkedin:** African Leadership Magazine

**Youtube:** African Leadership Magazine







## FROM THE PUBLISHER'S *Desk*

**Dr. Ken Giami**

Founder, African Leadership Magazine UK

# Africa's Future Rests on Bold Thinkers: The Strive Masiyiwa Example

Across the continent, we see the emergence of a new cadre of visionaries, entrepreneurs, policymakers, and social innovators—who refuse to be defined by historical limitations. They are harnessing technology, reengineering industries, and unlocking new opportunities in ways that would have seemed unimaginable just a few decades ago. They remind us that transformation is not an event; it is a process fuelled by conviction, courage, and a willingness to take calculated risks.

Strive Masiyiwa is one such visionary. His journey from a young entrepreneur battling entrenched opposition to a global business leader and philanthropist offers valuable lessons on what it takes to drive meaningful change. He is a man who saw Africa not just for what it was, but for what it could become. Through sheer determination, strategic thinking, and an unyielding belief in the power of connectivity, he built one of the continent's most influential telecommunications empires, Econet Wireless. But his impact extends far beyond telecommunications. He has played a defining role in shaping

Africa's digital transformation, championing entrepreneurship, and advocating for ethical leadership.

Masiyiwa's legacy is built on a deep-seated belief that Africa's development must be driven by Africans. His work in telecommunications was never just about building a company; it was about connecting millions of people, creating access to opportunities, and dismantling the systemic barriers that once limited progress. That is the kind of thinking Africa needs today: leadership that does not seek mere profit but impact.

And now, as he turns 64, we pause to celebrate not just the milestone but the man himself. Strive Masiyiwa is proof that vision, integrity, and resilience can change the course of a continent. His journey reminds us that leadership is not about power, but about service, about lifting others, about creating possibilities where none seemed to exist before.

As we celebrate Africa's bright minds and remarkable achievements, we must also acknowledge the urgency of action. The continent

faces challenges that cannot be ignored. Economic disparities, infrastructure gaps, governance deficits, and youth unemployment all demand solutions that go beyond rhetoric. It is not enough to talk about potential; we must actively cultivate it. We must nurture policies that encourage investment, strengthen institutions, and promote an ecosystem where innovation thrives.

The continent's GDP has tripled, digital innovation is thriving, and new industries are rapidly emerging. Nations like Rwanda, Kenya, and Nigeria are setting global benchmarks in fintech, digital governance, and entrepreneurship. Africa's creative industries—music, film, and fashion—are commanding international recognition and investment, reshaping the global cultural landscape. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), the largest trade agreement of its kind, is set to unlock \$3.4 trillion in economic potential, further solidifying Africa's role as a global powerhouse.

Africa's young population is its greatest asset. With over 60% of the continent under the age of 25, this demographic dividend is a driving



---

force for innovation, economic expansion, and technological advancement. African startups attracted more than \$5 billion in venture capital funding in 2023 alone, revealing the confidence investors have in the continent's potential. Fintech, agritech, health-tech, and e-commerce are revolutionising markets and improving lives, proving that Africa is not just catching up with the world; it is setting new standards.

The shift from an extraction-based economy to value creation is well underway. Manufacturing is expanding, driven by new industrial policies and investment in infrastructure. The rise of smart cities and renewable energy projects is positioning Africa at the forefront of sustainable development. Across the continent, governments and private sector leaders are forging partnerships

to drive progress, create jobs, and elevate living standards.

The world is changing, and Africa is leading in many key areas. We must continue to embrace innovation, encourage investment, and cultivate a culture of excellence that defines the next chapter of Africa's growth story. The responsibility of leadership, whether in business, government, or civil society, is to sustain this momentum and create an environment where bold ideas thrive and transformative impact is the norm.

As we step into this future, let us take inspiration from those who have paved the way not by waiting for change but by becoming the change. Strive Masiyiwa's journey, and that of many like him, serves as a reminder that bold thinking is the key to Africa's transformation.





# TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

**14**

Africa's Place in the Global Supply Chain: Competing in a World of Protectionism and Reshoring

**22**

How Africa Can Become the New Global Supply Chain Force

**30**

Exclusive Interview with Reta Jo Lewis, Former President and Chair of the U.S. Export-Import Bank (EXIM)

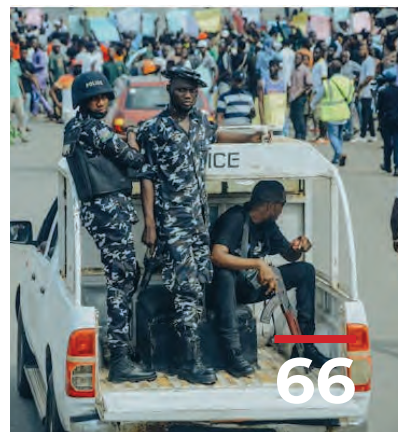
**52**

IMF Loans to Africa: A Lifeline or a Trap?

**56**

Where investors are eyeing Africa for opportunities in 2025 Surge'

---







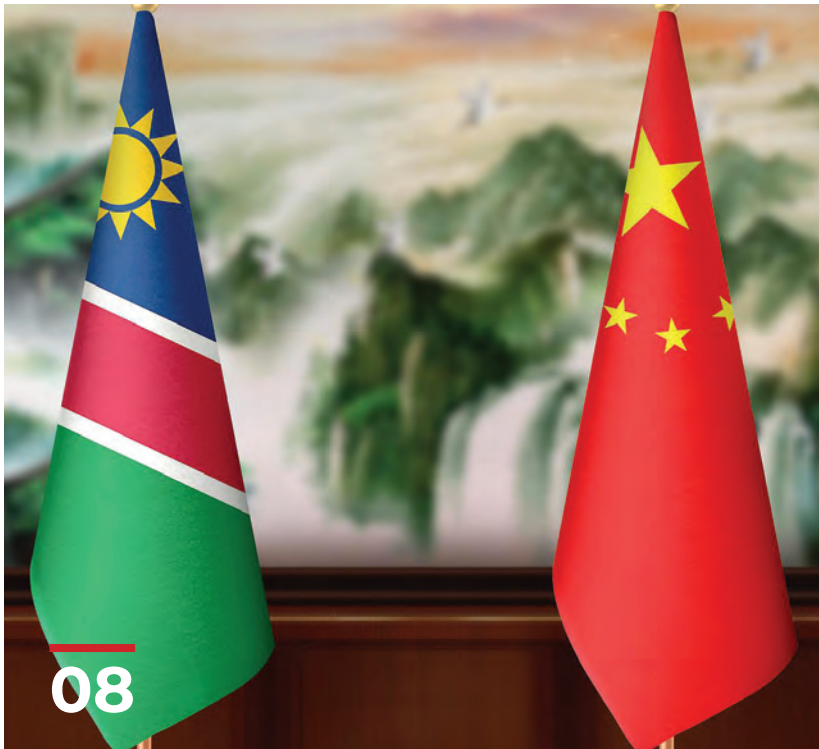
10



38



60



08



42



48

78

International Women's Day  
at 50: Strides, Setbacks, and  
Solidarity



# CHINA-NAMIBIA AT 35: A FRIENDSHIP RENEWED WITH NEW VITALITY



This year marks the 35th anniversary of diplomatic relations between China and Namibia. From the 1960s, when China supported Namibia's fight for independence, to today, the two nations have forged a strong partnership. Cooperation in sectors like infrastructure, agriculture, mining and healthcare has brought mutual benefits. As both countries continue to seek common

development, what opportunities lie ahead for further collaboration? With Nandi-Ndaitwah taking office as Namibia's first female president, what can we expect under her leadership?

In an interview with China Africa Talk, Dr. Penny Tuna Magdalena Uukunde, a regional development economist shares her insights.

China Africa Talk: China and Namibia have enjoyed long-standing diplomatic relations, established the second day after Namibia gained independence in 1990. How would you characterize the bilateral ties? What milestones have stood out to you?

Dr. Penny Tuna Magdalena Uukunde: China and Namibia's relationship isn't just about trade. It's about shared history, strategic cooperation, and mutual growth.

Even before independence, China was a key ally, supporting SWAPO's liberation struggle in the 1960's and 1970's. Chairman Mao's anti-imperialist ideology aligned with Namibia's independence movement, making China one of Namibia's strongest supporters. That's why when we

gained independence on March 21, 1990, China officially established diplomatic ties with us the very next day, not as a new partner, but as a long-standing ally.

In 2018, our relationship was formally upgraded to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Cooperation. This has deepened trade, investment, and infrastructure development. Mining has been a major pillar of our partnership; agriculture





has also seen major progress. In 2018, Namibia became the first African country to export beef to China. In 2024, we expanded our agricultural exports with a new agreement for goat and sheep meat. Negotiations on seafood exports are ongoing, opening new trade doors for Namibian fisheries. Infrastructure remains a key area of cooperation. Through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Namibia is working on transport and energy projects, including the Trans-Kalahari Railway.

Beyond trade and infrastructure, our partnership impacts people's lives. The Confucius Institute at the University of Namibia fosters language and cultural exchange. Many Namibian students study in China each year through scholarships. For over two decades, Chinese medical teams have worked in Namibia, strengthening healthcare collaboration.

At its core, China and Namibia's partnership is about solidarity, development, and long-term cooperation.

**China Africa Talk:** Namibia was the first stop on Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's first overseas trip of the year in Africa. Wang Yi emphasized China's commitment to supporting Namibia's economic development by helping transform its resource advantages into developmental and societal benefits, jointly advancing modernization in both countries. What are your thoughts on this statement? How would you assess China's role in Namibia's modernization efforts? Could you share some specific examples?

**Dr. Penny Tuna Magdalena Uukunde:** Our partnership has evolved from independence support to a comprehensive

strategic partnership, shaping Namibia's global economic position in a multipolar world. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's visit to Namibia in January 2025 as his first stop in Africa was more than just a diplomatic gesture—it was a powerful endorsement of Namibia's strategic role in China's broader engagement with Africa.

This visit reaffirmed China's commitment to advancing Namibia's modernization efforts, not just through investment, but through structural economic transformation. With regards to how I see China's role. It's clear, but Namibia must shape its own trajectory—we must be intentional about how we shape our economic future in this partnership. I would start with industrialization. Chinese investments in uranium are significant. The real opportunity comes from building. China has shown us the way, and we would like to cooperate with them. I also believe a dedicated FOCAC & BRI Representative is needed to ensure that agreements translate into structured, monitored, and implemented modernization outcomes.

**China Africa Talk:** China is focused on high-quality development, with significant advancements in fields such as artificial intelligence, space technology, the green economy. What new areas of collaboration could Namibia and China look into to further benefit their people?

**Dr. Penny Tuna Magdalena Uukunde:** China is leading the world in AI, space technology and green economy. These are industries that will define the next century. Namibia must strategically position itself to extract maximum benefit from these advancements while ensuring that every engagement with China aligns with our national development agenda.

What I can also look at as an asset that is not really being explored is the Walvis Bay Corridor. It connects to Brazil very easily. But due to the situation that is happening within the Gulf, ships have had to redirect their routes. And in redirecting their routes, it has also affected our tourism. So this is something that I can say that is reachable and that can be expanded on.

With regards to the space technology, Namibia is actually a proud host of a Chinese space station. And I would like to hear of Namibians going to space and collaboration in space science education for future Namibian satellite engineers.

**China Africa Talk:** With Nandi-Ndaitwah taking office as Namibia's first female president, how do you envision the future of Namibia-China relations under her leadership?

**Dr. Penny Tuna Magdalena Uukunde:** To be honest with you, I couldn't be more proud because she has decades of experience in foreign affairs, trade, and diplomacy. I've actually looked through the different ministries that she's worked at. I've seen her stance when she was a foreign affairs minister. She stood very passionately for the United Nations Security Council having a chair for Africa. That's one thing that she's definitely going to stand on. She wants to build a legacy. And a person that wants to build a legacy can only be a blessing for the nation and also for relations. She is a woman that has understood the ideology that led us to liberating our country. I believe with that ideology in mind and where she wants to take the nation, the Namibia and China relationship will thrive, pulling into the next level.



A portrait of Olusegun Alebiosu, a middle-aged Black man with a shaved head, smiling slightly. He is wearing a dark blue pinstripe suit jacket over a white shirt and a blue tie with a small gold pattern. A small gold pin is visible on his left lapel. His hands are clasped in front of him.

# **OLUSEGUN ALEBIOSU:** ENGINEERING FIRSTBANK'S MOST AMBITIOUS TRANSFORMATION YET



In the ever-evolving world of finance, leadership defines success. Few embody this principle better than Olusegun Alebiosu, the Chief Executive Officer of FirstBank Group. Having assumed the role in June 2024, Alebiosu brings to the table a legacy of excellence, deep financial expertise, and a visionary strategy for the future.

With over 28 years of banking experience, Alebiosu's journey spans diverse financial landscapes, from credit risk management to corporate banking, financial planning, and project financing. His impressive career trajectory, which includes roles at Oceanic Bank, Coronation Merchant Bank, and the African Development Bank, has armed him with the strategic insight to steer FirstBank through a new era of transformation.

Alebiosu is an alumnus of Harvard Business School and Harvard Kennedy School of Government. He holds a bachelor's degree in industrial relations and personnel management and a master's degree in international law and diplomacy from the University of Lagos. Additionally, he obtained a master's degree in development studies from the London School of Economics and Political Science and completed the Advanced Management Program (AMP) at Harvard Business School. His professional affiliations include Fellow, Institute of Chartered Accountants (FCA), Associate, Nigeria Institute of Management (ANIM), Chartered Institute of Bankers of Nigeria (CIBN), and Member, Nigeria Institute of International Affairs, making him one of the most academically and professionally decorated executives in the financial industry.

Founded in 1894, FirstBank of Nigeria Limited is West Africa's premier financial institution, setting the benchmark for banking innovation and financial inclusion. With a presence across three continents, 43 million customer accounts, and over 820 business offices, FirstBank is a financial titan committed to excellence. Since Alebiosu took the helm, he has intensified the bank's digital transformation strategy, propelling it into the future. Well over 25 million customers actively use digital channels, a testament to Alebiosu's commitment to making FirstBank a technology-driven financial powerhouse. From pioneering ATMs in Nigeria to launching humanless digital banking centres, FirstBank continues to set industry standards.

### **Alebiosu's Leadership Philosophy Shaping the Future of FirstBank**

Alebiosu's leadership is built on innovation, resilience, and financial inclusivity. His vision is to ensure FirstBank meets today's demands and anticipates the financial needs of the future. He firmly believes that digital is the future of banking, which is why he has championed FirstBank's aggressive investment in artificial intelligence, blockchain, and automation, ensuring the bank remains competitive in an era of fintech disruptions. Technology offers the advantage of lowering cost-to-serve, increasing reach, and improving customer access. Under Alebiosu's guidance, FirstBank has implemented AI-powered solutions like Fibani, an enterprise chatbot, that provides round-



**In the ever-evolving world of finance, leadership defines success. Few embody this principle better than Olusegun Alebiosu, the Chief Executive Officer of FirstBank Group. Having assumed the role in June 2024, Alebiosu brings to the table a legacy of excellence, deep financial expertise, and a visionary strategy for the future**



**FirstBank**  
Since 1894





**With Alebiosu at the helm, FirstBank is leveraging cutting-edge technologies such as AI-driven customer engagement, blockchain for secure transactions, and fintech collaborations to enhance efficiency and customer experience**

the-clock engagement and interaction for customers.

### **Revolutionising Risk Management Through Strategic Vision**

Alebiosu's expertise in risk management has been a defining feature of his leadership. His tenure as Chief Risk Officer saw the overhaul of FirstBank's risk architecture, adopting a three-line defence model that enhances financial stability and operational resilience. Since becoming CEO, Alebiosu has expanded FirstBank's risk mitigation strategies, investing heavily in compliance tools, cybersecurity measures, and advanced analytics to safeguard customer assets and ensure operational stability. This proactive approach has significantly reduced risk exposure, reinforcing FirstBank's position as a secure and reliable financial institution.

### **Harnessing the Power of AI, Blockchain, and Fintech Integration**

With Alebiosu at the helm, FirstBank is leveraging cutting-edge technologies such as AI-driven customer engagement, blockchain for secure transactions, and fintech collaborations to enhance efficiency and customer experience. The launch of FirstBank's Digital Xperience Centres (DXCs), which employ humanoid robots and AI-powered chatbots, underscores his commitment to pioneering innovation in African banking. Beyond automation, Alebiosu has led the implementation of robotic process automation (RPA) to streamline over 106 banking operations, reducing errors and improving efficiency. This transformation positions FirstBank as a trailblazer in AI-driven financial services.

### **Financial Inclusion: Alebiosu's Commitment to Banking for All**

As a firm believer in financial inclusion,

Alebiosu has ensured FirstBank remains at the forefront of championing financial inclusion in Africa. Under his leadership, the bank has expanded its multifaceted approach, leveraging both physical and digital banking channels. With a network of over 820 business offices, FirstBank possesses one of the largest physical footprints in Africa. The FirstMonie Agent Banking Network, with over 283,000 agents, plays a vital role in extending access to financial services to the last mile. These agents operate in their local environments, boosting economic activity, job creation, and financial empowerment. Alebiosu has also driven digital accessibility, recognising varying literacy levels among customers. While the \*USSD Quick Banking (894#) caters to those with limited digital literacy, platforms such as FirstMobile, FirstOnline, and Lit App are tailored for the digitally savvy.





## Vision for a Greener Future

Sustainability is a core tenet of Alebiosu's leadership at FirstBank. As climate change and sustainability take centre stage in global finance, he has championed green banking initiatives, pushing the bank to invest in carbon emission reduction strategies, renewable energy financing, and ESG-aligned investment portfolios. His vision is to make FirstBank a leader in sustainable finance, supporting SMEs in the renewable energy sector while ensuring the bank's operations remain environmentally responsible.

## Strengthening Regional Financial Networks

With a vision to be "Africa's Bank of First Choice," Alebiosu has emphasised the need for stronger collaboration among African countries and institutions. He believes regional partnerships can mobilise resources, address infrastructural deficits, and improve currency stability. His leadership is actively driving FirstBank's engagement in initiatives like the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA), ensuring the bank plays a leading role in unlocking shared economic prosperity across the continent.

## Fintech Strategy and A Legacy in the Making

With the rise of fintech disruptors, Alebiosu has positioned FirstBank to integrate advanced digital banking solutions while also forging strategic fintech alliances. He believes fintech partnerships provide an opportunity to expand financial access, optimise transaction processes, and enhance banking efficiency. Under his leadership, FirstBank's proactive collaboration with fintech firms has ensured it remains at the cutting edge of Africa's digital banking revolution.

Olusegun Alebiosu's leadership at FirstBank is not just about banking; it's about transformation. His vision is clear: to position FirstBank as Africa's financial beacon, a digitally savvy bank, financially resilient, and deeply committed to inclusion and sustainability. With his continued push for AI, fintech, sustainability, and financial inclusion, FirstBank is poised to shape the future of African banking. Under Alebiosu's stewardship, the bank will continue to define the gold standard in African banking for generations to come.



**Olusegun Alebiosu's leadership at FirstBank is not just about banking; it's about transformation. His vision is clear: to position FirstBank as Africa's financial beacon, a digitally savvy bank, financially resilient, and deeply committed to inclusion and sustainability**





A large container ship is docked at a port, with a city visible in the background. The ship is filled with colorful shipping containers. A crane is visible on the ship. The water is blue, and the sky is clear. The city in the background has a mix of buildings and greenery.

# AFRICA'S PLACE IN THE GLOBAL SUPPLY CHAIN: COMPETING IN A WORLD OF PROTECTIONISM AND RESHORING

**By Jean Paul Fabri** (Economist, Policy Advisor, and Digital Economy Expert)



The global economy is undergoing a major realignment, with supply chains shifting in response to rising protectionism, economic nationalism, and geopolitical tensions.

The return of Donald Trump to the U.S. presidency has accelerated this shift, as he moves aggressively to impose tariffs on Chinese goods, European exports, and other foreign imports.

In this new trade landscape, Africa faces both a challenge and an opportunity—either remain a marginal player in global supply chains or position itself as a key manufacturing and trade hub.

For decades, Africa has primarily functioned as a supplier of raw materials, exporting commodities that fuel the economies of more industrialised nations. This model has left the continent vulnerable to external shocks, price volatility, and the decisions of major economic powers like the U.S., China, and the EU. But recent trends—particularly Trump’s tariffs, supply chain diversification, and global efforts to reduce reliance on China—suggest that Africa could be well-positioned to benefit from the new trade dynamics if the right strategies are implemented.

Trump’s new wave of tariffs has already sent shockwaves across global markets. His administration is imposing tariffs across a number of goods from various countries. The U.S. is now openly prioritising domestic production over globalisation, a sharp shift that is forcing multinational companies to rethink where they manufacture their goods.

One immediate consequence of Trump’s tariff policies is the accelerated decoupling of the U.S. and China in global trade. American companies are now actively seeking alternative manufacturing bases outside of China, and while Southeast Asian economies—like Vietnam, Thailand, and Indonesia—are absorbing much of this shift, Africa has so far been left out of the equation.

The challenge for African nations is to position themselves as viable alternatives for global supply chains. Africa benefits from low labour costs, abundant natural resources, and expanding trade integration through the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), yet investors remain hesitant due to infrastructure gaps, inconsistent policies, and weak industrial capacity. If Africa does not act swiftly, it risks missing a once-in-a-generation opportunity to become a manufacturing hub for global industries looking to escape trade tensions and rising tariffs elsewhere.

Africa has several structural advantages that could allow it to integrate into global supply chains—if it addresses its key weaknesses. First, its youthful workforce presents a major opportunity. By 2050, Africa’s working-age population will surpass 1 billion, making it an ideal destination for labour-intensive manufacturing. However, without serious investment in vocational training and technical skills, this demographic advantage will not translate into economic gains. Second, Africa is home to many of the world’s critical minerals,



**The return of Donald Trump to the U.S. presidency has accelerated this shift, as he moves aggressively to impose tariffs on Chinese goods, European exports, and other foreign imports**





**On the other hand, Africa risks being sidelined if it fails to act decisively. Protectionism in the U.S. and EU could lead to more restrictive trade policies overall, making it harder for African firms to integrate into Western markets**

including cobalt, lithium, and rare earth metals, which are essential for electric vehicle (EV) production, battery storage, and clean energy infrastructure. The U.S. and the EU are aggressively seeking to diversify their supply chains away from China, yet Africa remains largely stuck in a raw material export model, shipping unprocessed minerals abroad rather than developing local refining and processing industries.

Trump's trade policies present a double-edged sword for Africa. On one hand, U.S. tariffs on China and Europe create openings for Africa to gain preferential access to American markets. Many African countries already enjoy duty-free access to the U.S. through the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). If African leaders strategically negotiate trade deals that promote industrialisation, the continent could attract significant investment in light manufacturing, agribusiness, and energy-related industries.

On the other hand, Africa risks being sidelined if it fails to act decisively. Protectionism in the U.S. and EU could lead to more restrictive trade policies overall, making it harder for African firms to integrate into Western markets. Moreover, if African economies do not move beyond exporting raw materials, they will continue to lose out on the high-value manufacturing opportunities now emerging due to shifting global supply chains.

To seize this moment, African nations must focus on five key areas.

First, they need aggressive infrastructure development. High logistics costs, unreliable electricity, and congested ports remain major barriers to Africa's industrial competitiveness. Governments must work with development banks, foreign investors, and regional trade blocs to build the infrastructure necessary to support large-scale manufacturing.



Second, regulatory and policy stability is critical. Investors seek predictability, and African economies must provide long-term industrial strategies that remain consistent across political transitions. Inconsistent policies, sudden trade restrictions, and excessive red tape discourage businesses from committing to Africa as a production hub.

Third, Africa must strengthen regional integration through AfCFTA. Trade barriers within Africa remain high, making it easier for many companies to import from China or Europe rather than sourcing from neighbouring African countries. A truly integrated African market would allow manufacturers to set up regional supply chains, reducing dependency on volatile global markets. Fourth, investment in skills development and labour productivity must be a priority. Africa cannot compete with Southeast Asia or Latin America in manufacturing unless its workforce





is equipped for advanced industrial jobs. Expanding technical education, vocational training, and digital skills programmes is essential to ensuring that Africa is ready for the industries of the future.

Finally, governments and the private sector must rethink Africa's role in strategic supply chains, particularly in automotive production, pharmaceuticals, agribusiness, and electronics manufacturing. Instead of simply exporting raw materials, Africa must attract investments that build local processing industries, keeping more value within the continent.

The global economy is shifting, and Africa cannot afford to remain a passive player. Trump's tariffs and America's push for economic nationalism will reshape global trade flows, and if African leaders act strategically, they could position the continent

as an alternative production hub for industries fleeing trade wars. But this window of opportunity will not remain open forever.

If Africa fails to act decisively, it will remain a raw material exporter while other regions—such as Southeast Asia and Latin America—capture the wealth of high-value production. If it builds the right infrastructure, strengthens governance, and commits to long-term industrial policies, Africa can become a key player in global supply chains.

Africa's role in the world economy is being rewritten in real time. The question is whether African leaders, businesses, and policymakers will seize this moment to drive real industrial transformation or allow the continent to once again be shaped by external forces. The choice is in Africa's hands.



**Africa's role in the world economy is being rewritten in real time. The question is whether African leaders, businesses, and policymakers will seize this moment to drive real industrial transformation or allow the continent to once again be shaped by external forces. The choice is in Africa's hands**



# BRIDGING AFRICA'S ECONOMIC HORIZONS IN 2025: BROADER STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVES

**Professor Maurice Okoli**

*(Fellow at the Institute for African Studies and the Institute of World Economy and International Relations, Russian Academy of Sciences. He is also a fellow and lecturer at the North-Eastern Federal University of Russia. He serves as an expert at the Roscongress Foundation and the Valdai Discussion Club.)*



The African continent to a very great degree is rich in natural resources encompassing a wide range of both renewable and non-renewable assets. Africa is home to some 30 per cent of the world's minerals, eight per cent of the world's natural gas and 12 per cent of the world's oil reserves. The continent has 40 per cent of the world's gold and up to 90 per cent of its chromium and platinum.

The largest reserves of cobalt, diamond and uranium in the world are in Africa. It holds 65 per cent of the world's arable land and 10 per cent of the planet's internal renewable freshwater source.

For decades, Africa with its vast untapped natural resources has been the world's geographical region of attention and priority, attracting various global players from all over the world for economic and political engagement.

In a quick assessment, China has emerged as the most powerful player with its geopolitical clout and leadership in fostering multifaceted economic growth. These can be interpreted differently and from different perspectives, and their unequivocal implications are also varied in terms of the current Africa's transformations and future directions.

For Africa's future pathway, the year 2025 could perhaps be set as another distinctive new chapter of strategic qualitative development and push for significant growth. The conditions for this expected growth could be linked to the fact that the continental organisation African Union will install a new leadership in February 2025, South Africa chairs the G20, Commonwealth Secretariat and World Trade Organisation are headed by two African women, a Ghanaian and a Nigerian citizen.

These resounding organisational features, at least, make 2025 an African year to facilitate investment and economic development



**For decades, Africa with its vast untapped natural resources has been the world's geographical region of attention and priority, attracting various global players from all over the world for economic and political engagement**







**Raila Odinga's tremendous political experience and pan-African vision underscored the unwavering commitment to reforms as potential steps to advance the basic objectives of uplifting the economic status of the continent under the banner "Africa We Want" incorporated into the Agenda 2063**

opportunities, and through wide multilateral collaborations, both external investors and stakeholders, for remarkable changes.

(i) Kenya's AUC leadership:

As well known, four candidates are slated for the February 2025 polls. Raila Odinga will face off with Djibouti's Mohamoud Youssouf, Anil Gayan (Mauritius) and Richard Randriamandrato (Madagascar) for the African Union Commission chairmanship in the race to succeed the outgoing chairman Moussa Faki of Chad.

The latest development monitored for this article explicitly showed that Kenya's candidate for the Africa Union Commission chairmanship Raila Odinga, highlighted his priorities and strategies to include enhancing intra-African trade by establishing a common market, implementing a broader economic transformation, strengthening regional integration and cooperation, and peace and security.

Undoubtedly, the African Union (AU) is a critical institution for promoting unity, peace, and development across the continent. However, there is a growing consensus that it requires reforms to increase its effectiveness, efficiency, and relevance in addressing Africa's challenges.

Here are reasons reforms are necessary:

- **Structural and Institutional Weaknesses:** The AU has been criticised for its slow decision-making processes and lack of streamlined operations. The relationship between the AU and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) is often unclear, leading to duplication of efforts and fragmented initiatives.
- **Financial Dependence:** Over 60 per cent of the AU's budget comes from external donors, raising

concerns about the organisation's independence and ability to prioritise African-led solutions. Worse, many member states have unsuccessfully been in a position to meet promptly their financial obligations, hindering the AU's ability to execute its programmes effectively. This is most often reflected in the limited success of peacekeeping: Despite efforts, the AU has struggled to resolve protracted conflicts in regions like the Sahel, Somalia, and the Great Lakes.

- **Geopolitical and Global Challenges:** Adapting to a changing world, with shifts in global power dynamics, the AU must reform to ensure Africa's interests are adequately represented on the global stage.
- **Lack of Accountability and Governance:** There have been concerns over deep-seated corruption. Internal mismanagement and corruption have undermined the credibility of the AU. There is a need for stronger accountability mechanisms to ensure compliance with AU protocols and charters by member states.

Raila Odinga's tremendous political experience and pan-African vision underscored the unwavering commitment to reforms as potential steps to advance the basic objectives of uplifting the economic status of the continent under the banner "Africa We Want" incorporated into the Agenda 2063.

Kagame Report (2017): Spearheaded by Rwandan President Paul Kagame, this initiative proposed actionable reforms to address structural inefficiencies and financial sustainability. Efforts to reduce the number of AU departments and improve coordination among stakeholders. Reforming the African Union is essential for building a stronger, more unified Africa capable





**On one hand, it is important to mention here the role of South Africa as it takes the chairmanship of the Group of 20 (G20) in 2025. It is an intergovernmental forum comprising 19 sovereign countries, the European Union (EU), and the African Union (AU)**

of addressing its internal challenges and asserting its position on the global stage.

As frequently reiterated, Africa with its huge human and natural resources can take its rightful position in the current 21st century in the world. But for the realisation of this, Africa still has to coordinate with the Commonwealth Secretariat, WTO, G20 and BRICS in promoting industrialisation, supporting manufacturing, and enhancing innovation through investments in education, technology, healthcare, affordable energy and skills development. These invariably fall within Africa's Agenda 2063.

(ii) South Africa's G20 chairmanship: South Africa is now the biggest economy in Africa, with a GDP of \$373 billion in 2024. (WorldStatistics) In addition to its economic prominence in Africa, South Africa is a staunch member of BRICS+ (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), an informal association joined by Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran and the United

Arab Emirates.

On one hand, it is important to mention here the role of South Africa as it takes the chairmanship of the Group of 20 (G20) in 2025. It is an intergovernmental forum comprising 19 sovereign countries, the European Union (EU), and the African Union (AU). In 2023, during its summit, the African Union joined as its 21st member and was officially represented at the 2024 G20 summit in Brazil.

On the other hand, since its inception, the recurring themes covered by G20 summit participants have related in priority to global economic growth, international trade and financial market regulation – these are issues affecting Africa. South Africa could direct G20's win-win influence in streamlining the beneficial economic sphere considered key to Africa's development and which would unprecedentedly impact on aspects of life of an estimated 1.4 billion people in the 21st century.



# HOW AFRICA CAN BECOME THE NEW GLOBAL SUPPLY CHAIN FORCE

By The Kenyan Wall Street



Recent disruptions in the global supply chain have renewed calls for Africa to build better policies for making the continent more competitive in the supply chain.

Currently, African countries integrate into the supply chain as tier-three suppliers, providing minerals and metals into different supply chains. UNCTAD's Economic Development in Africa Report 2023, however, notes that with abundant mineral resources and a growing consumer market, the continent offers many advantages.

The report recommends policy action in high-technology sectors like automobiles, mobile telephones, renewable energy, and healthcare, which are billed as potential areas in making Africa a major player in the global supply chain.

"Global crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic, war in Ukraine, and climate-related effects impacted businesses and supply chains around the world. Many multinationals decided to look for ways to build resilience against future shocks," noted Habiba Ben Barka, Senior Economic Affairs Officer, UNCTAD.

"Our report explores different strategies, policies, and mechanisms that African countries can put in place to integrate some of the supply chain. We offer recommendations for governments, financing regulators, and the private sector to ensure supply chain financing is well developed within the continent to easily integrate into the global supply chain," she said.

The report shows that the value of the African supply chain finance market rose by 40 per cent between 2021 and 2022, reaching \$41 billion. But this is not enough.

The continent can mobilise more funds by removing barriers to supply chain finance, including regulatory challenges, high-risk perception, and insufficient credit information.

To optimise supply chain opportunities, Africa needs to go digital and improve access to supply chain finance. Countries such as Kenya have made notable progress in this realm, with rising rates of digital skills.

For high-tech and complex products like medical devices and electrical equipment, technologies such as automation, machine learning, artificial intelligence, and blockchain are necessary for production, distribution, logistics, and procurement.

The use of new technologies and digital solutions also enhances supply chain visibility, responsiveness, and compliance with regulations.



**Recent disruptions in the global supply chain have renewed calls for Africa to build better policies for making the continent more competitive in the supply chain**





**African firms can play a larger role in supply chain diversification by integrating vertically or horizontally. Collaboration between large firms and SMEs through mergers and acquisitions can allow companies to streamline operations by acquiring their own suppliers, manufacturers, and distributors**

According to the report, many small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Africa are not part of the global supply chain network due to their limited use of digital technologies. They face challenges such as a lack of skills and funding gaps.

African firms can play a larger role in supply chain diversification by integrating vertically or horizontally. Collaboration between large firms and SMEs through mergers and acquisitions can allow companies to streamline operations by acquiring their own suppliers, manufacturers, and distributors.

Digital technologies could also help address financing needs. Technology-enabled solutions such as blockchain can improve supply chain financing, especially for SMEs, by enabling real-time and verifiable transactions, reducing the need for physical audits.

#### **Action Points in the key industries**

##### **Automobile industry**

- Provide new vehicle-financing mechanisms with lower interest rates to capitalise on Africa's growing demand for automobiles.
- Coordinate regional automotive



strategies and development plans to avoid duplicating efforts and to better integrate low-income countries through, for instance, preferential treatment under rules of origin requirements.

- Set up multi-brand mega-factories in countries with small assembly plants like Ghana, Kenya, and Nigeria to attract the production of parts and components.
- Improve collaboration between African countries and the private sector to fund technical institutes and adapt curriculums to reflect new industry developments, such as electric vehicles.

##### **Health care industry**

Harmonise pharmaceutical product regulation and registration to improve market access, achieve regional certification, and scale up production. Bolster efforts like the African Medicines Regulatory Harmonisation programme.

Increase demand and access to medicine by promoting pooled procurement and financing programmes like the Africa Medical Equipment Facility and the Africa Medical Supplies Platform.

Support cluster formation, such as





Medicine City in Egypt, to ensure access to essential infrastructure for pharmaceutical operations and attract investment.

Encourage collaboration between companies, such as partnerships and joint ventures, to increase access to knowledge and industrial design and facilitate technology transfer and intellectual property exchange.

### Renewable energy technologies

- Stimulate demand for solar panels in Africa through structured renewable energy procurement programmes.
- Prioritise advisory, installation, and repair services in countries unable to manufacture solar panels. Local entrepreneurs can better cater to local needs, and such a strategy would create jobs.
- Ensure local companies are included and local content requirements are considered by development finance institutions in tender procedures, to avoid excluding them from large-scale projects.

### Mobile telephones

- Promote local assembly and manufacturing in resource-

rich countries by creating special economic zones and fostering favourable investment environments.

- Address environmental, social, and governance issues, such as raw materials transparency, to ensure the sustainable development of the sector.
- Adopt circular supply chains that focus on recycling and remanufacturing products and components to enhance supply chain sustainability and attract sustainable investments.

### Mining industry

- Improve access to electricity and finance for local mining firms and provide targeted support to promote domestic participation in extracting critical minerals.
- Provide support to African countries during contract negotiations to ensure they receive fair value for their minerals from the extractive industries.
- Establish a regionally coordinated mining policy to enable disadvantaged countries to supply inputs through a common fund for transporting them from countries with weak infrastructure.
- Bolster the implementation of the Africa Mining Vision.



**Encourage collaboration between companies, such as partnerships and joint ventures, to increase access to knowledge and industrial design and facilitate technology transfer and intellectual property exchange**





# **RETA JO LEWIS:** A LEGACY OF CHAMPIONING GLOBAL COMMERCE



Power has a way of making itself known. It is in the quiet assurance of a woman who walks into a room, unbothered by the weight of history pressing against her. It is in the deliberate way she speaks, each word measured, each pause purposeful. In the case of Reta Jo Lewis, power is not merely exercised, it is contested, negotiated, and, at times, subverted. But one must ask: is it transformed?.

The ascent of Lewis to the leadership of the Export-Import Bank of the United States (EXIM) was heralded as a victory for representation, a disruption of the entrenched hierarchies that have long dictated the direction of global finance. The significance of her appointment as the first Black woman to lead the institution cannot be overstated. History is replete with examples of individuals who, having broken barriers, found themselves hemmed in by the very structures they were meant to reform. Reta Jo Lewis understood early on that leadership is not about holding power over others but about using it to open doors, widen spaces, and create new possibilities.

For decades, the structures of global trade and finance have been defined by those who have always had access—those for whom boardrooms and policy circles were designed. That a woman like Lewis could enter this rarefied space reveals not just political and professional savviness, but the system's increasing need to accommodate a modicum of change, lest it be forced to reckon with demands for more radical transformation. She has redefined what it means to lead in a space where exclusion has too often been the default.

Her journey to this moment was neither accidental nor easy. She built her career at the intersection of economic security and national security, navigating diplomacy with the same confidence she brought to financial policy. As the first Special Representative for Global Intergovernmental Affairs at the U.S. State Department,



**The ascent of Lewis to the leadership of the Export-Import Bank of the United States (EXIM) was heralded as a victory for representation, a disruption of the entrenched hierarchies that have long dictated the direction of global finance**







**Her tenure at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce reinforced this belief. She saw firsthand how minority- and women-owned businesses, despite their innovation and resilience, were often sidelined in conversations about economic growth**

she worked with mayors and governors to create pathways for American businesses in international markets, recognising early on that global trade is not just about multinational corporations—it is about communities, small businesses, and the aspirations of everyday people.

Her tenure at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce reinforced this belief. She saw firsthand how minority- and women-owned businesses, despite their innovation and resilience, were often sidelined in conversations about economic growth. She understood that their exclusion was not just an oversight but a flaw in the system—one that needed to be corrected not with words, but with action.

And action is precisely what she brought to EXIM.

Lewis's work at EXIM was framed as a pivot, an opportunity to redirect capital towards historically marginalised businesses, to infuse U.S.-Africa trade with the logic of mutuality rather than the age-old script of dependency. And yet, one must question whether the machinery of global finance, designed

as it is to preserve the privileges of a select few, is capable of genuine recalibration.

During her tenure, EXIM expanded its footprint in Africa, approving nearly \$4 billion in transactions across 39 sub-Saharan African countries. One of the most defining moments of her leadership was the \$900 million financing for solar power plants in Angola. The \$900 million solar investment in Angola, while remarkable, exists within a broader geopolitical calculus. Positioned as part of the Biden administration's effort to counterbalance China's Belt and Road Initiative, it is difficult to ignore the ways in which Africa, once again, becomes the battleground for competing global powers rather than the primary agent of its own economic destiny. Lewis, to her credit, insisted that these investments were about more than strategy, they were about impact.

Africa has been viewed through a singular lens by Western financial institutions, either as a market of risk or a region in need of aid. Lewis saw neither. She saw potential. She saw a continent where innovation was thriving, where young entrepreneurs were building billion-dollar industries in technology, renewable energy, and manufacturing. And she knew that U.S.-Africa trade relations had to move beyond outdated narratives of dependency and towards mutual prosperity.

Much has been made of Lewis's championing of small businesses, particularly those owned by women and minorities. Under her tenure, EXIM allocated billions to enterprises that might otherwise have been sidelined. What does it mean to "include" historically excluded groups in a system that was never designed with their interests in mind?

In this, Lewis faced a dilemma familiar to many who break barriers: how does one wield power without being co-opted by the structures that necessitate its





use in the first place? Can incremental progress ever be enough when the very foundation of global finance is built upon historical inequalities?

She made it a priority to change that. Under her leadership, over 85% of EXIM's transactions were dedicated to small businesses. In 2023 alone, the agency facilitated \$1.7 billion in small business transactions, with \$281 million going specifically to women and minority-owned enterprises.

But Lewis knew that access to capital alone was not enough. She wanted to institutionalise these efforts, to ensure they did not fade when leadership changed. She launched the Women in Business Advisory Council and the Small Business Advisory Council, creating direct channels for entrepreneurs to have a voice in EXIM's policies. She introduced financial tools like "Equity Express," designed to streamline access to capital for minority-owned businesses.

She understood that the African diaspora in the U.S. held untapped economic power and worked to bridge the gap between them and trade opportunities in their countries of origin. Collaborating with the Biden administration's Diaspora Council, she ensured that African American and other minority entrepreneurs were not just observers of global trade but active participants.

### **A Seat at the Table, or a New Table Entirely?**

Even as Lewis steps away from EXIM, the work she has done will continue to shape U.S.-Africa economic relations. Lewis is not one to dwell on past successes. What matters more is what comes next—who follows, what structures remain in place, and how the doors she has opened stay open for generations to come.

Africa, she has often said, is the future.



Its youthful population, its innovation-driven economies, and its rapidly growing middle class all point to a continent that is not waiting for the world to recognise its value. Africa is already creating it. The challenge, then, is ensuring that international economic structures recognise this reality.

She has been candid about the fact that U.S. engagement in Africa must deepen. The perception that America lags behind other global players in Africa is not entirely unfounded, but it is also not irreversible. She has consistently advocated for stronger diplomatic ties, urging African businesses to leverage U.S. trade delegations and commercial engagements to build direct connections with American investors and exporters. She has also called on African nations to create policies that attract investment—transparent regulatory frameworks, stable financial institutions, and infrastructure that supports international trade. For her, economic development is about creating an environment where businesses can thrive.

Reta Jo Lewis reminds us that leadership is about narrative. It is about who gets to decide which voices matter, whose stories are heard, and whose dreams are allowed to take flight. In her, we see the possibility of a future where ambition is not limited by gender or geography, but only by the courage to imagine more.



**She has been candid about the fact that U.S. engagement in Africa must deepen. The perception that America lags behind other global players in Africa is not entirely unfounded, but it is also not irreversible**



**EXCLUSIVE  
INTERVIEW WITH  
RETA JO LEWIS,  
FORMER  
PRESIDENT AND  
CHAIR OF THE U.S.  
EXPORT-IMPORT  
BANK (EXIM)**

Conducted by Dr. Ken Giami, Publisher, African Leadership Magazine, and Ms. Alison Kingsley Hall



*In this exclusive session, African Leadership Magazine speaks with Reta Jo Lewis, the first African-American woman to serve as President and Chair of the Export-Import Bank of the United States (EXIM). This conversation, held just days before she stepped down from her position in January, explores her historic tenure, key initiatives, and the future of U.S.-Africa trade relations.*

**As the first Black woman and person of colour to lead EXIM since its founding about 90 years ago, how would you say your life and work experiences prior to this period prepared you for this historic role?**

I would say that my career has been shaped by a combination of experiences at the intersection of economic security and national security. The roles I have played in various organisations, particularly at the U.S. State Department, where I served as the first Special Representative for Global Intergovernmental Affairs, have been instrumental in preparing me for this position. During my time in that role, I engaged with U.S. state and local leaders, including governors and mayors, and connected them with foreign leaders. This experience gave me a deep understanding of the importance of localisation in foreign policy and the need to bring new actors into these discussions.

One of the key lessons I learnt early in my career, especially while working with Secretary Clinton in the Obama administration at the State Department, was the importance of inclusivity in statecraft. It's about bringing in women's voices, minority voices, and people of colour, ensuring representation from a broad spectrum of communities. Modern statecraft, particularly in the 21st century, extends far beyond just nation-to-nation conversations. Being at EXIM at this time has afforded me the opportunity to continue putting these principles into practice.

I also started early in my career as the first female Vice President at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in its 90-year history. I had previously worked with the Chamber's foundation board, and when the organisation sought to expand its efforts around small business, I was asked to lead an outreach initiative. The data clearly shows that minority- and women-owned businesses are growing at two to four times the national average. My task was to ensure that business leaders, entrepreneurs, and business organisations were actively engaged in the national Chamber of Commerce movement. These businesses,

“

**My tenure at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce also played a crucial role. As the first African American woman to serve in a leadership capacity there, I spearheaded efforts to bring minority and women-owned businesses into the national business framework. The data shows that these businesses grow at rates two to four times the national average, so inclusion in trade is imperative**







**EXIM has a long-standing commitment to Africa, as mandated by Congress in 2019. We have been active in 39 of the 49 sub-Saharan African countries, approving approximately \$4 billion in transactions during my tenure**

like any other small businesses, faced similar challenges, and addressing those challenges was critical.

Additionally, I am a practising attorney, and my legal career has involved representing both domestic and international clients. I have been a shareholder and of counsel at major international law firms, working extensively in municipal finance and advising business clients on navigating Washington and global markets.

Right before taking on this role at EXIM, I served as the Director of Congressional and Intergovernmental Affairs at the German Marshall Fund of the United States, a leading think tank. In that role, I led efforts in congressional affairs and subnational relations, focusing on strengthening the bilateral relationship between the U.S. and Germany, as well as the broader multilateral relationship between the U.S. and Europe. I worked closely with U.S. Congressional leaders, both in the House and Senate, who served on committees focused on foreign policy. This involved extensive travel and collaboration with U.S. and European leaders on a wide range of global issues.

Beyond my professional career, this job is also personal to me. When I testified before Congress, I shared that I am the daughter of small business owners. My parents, both entrepreneurs, ran multiple businesses, including one of the first Black-owned moving companies in our community. They successfully expanded their operations from local to statewide and eventually to the national level. In addition to their business ventures, they were influential community leaders in religious, civic, and business circles. From an early age, I learnt that success isn't just about working within your own family unit; it's also about serving your community.

I believe that all of these experiences have led me to my current role at EXIM. Our mission is to facilitate exports and support U.S. jobs. Growing up, I saw my parents, as small business owners, put people to work every single day, reinforcing how vital small businesses are to the lifeblood of a community and the economy. The work I did at the Chamber of Commerce, along with the Chamber's commitment to supporting U.S. businesses and collaborating with foreign entities, has given me a well-rounded perspective. These collective experiences have brought me to this moment at EXIM, where I continue to advance these principles in support of economic growth and job creation.

**The last time we were on a webinar together you were still at the German Marshall Fund at the time. What were the lessons learnt from your experiences there?**

The German Marshall Fund (GMF) is a U.S. think tank established to honour America's support for Europe, particularly through the Marshall Plan. It was created as a way for Europeans to express their gratitude and to strengthen transatlantic ties.

At GMF, our focus was on fostering strong alliances between the U.S. and Europe, ensuring continued





collaboration on key policies and programs in a bipartisan manner. A significant part of my role involved leading bipartisan exchanges and leadership initiatives, ensuring that allied nations shared best practices and worked together to address global challenges.

Regarding Africa, similar institutions could play a crucial role in strengthening partnerships between African nations and their allies. Lessons from my time at GMF highlight the importance of sustained engagement, knowledge-sharing, and collaborative problem-solving between nations that share common values and aspirations. Establishing dedicated African-focused institutions could enhance policy coordination, economic growth, and regional stability, much like GMF has done for U.S.-Europe relations.

The German Marshall Fund (GMF), which has offices across Europe, worked on a wide range of issues, including those related to Africa. As we see today, both the U.S. and Europe are increasingly focused on Africa, recognising its strategic importance. It's encouraging to witness how partners are coming together, not only to address challenges but, more importantly, to seize the vast opportunities that exist for all our countries.

**Let me take you back to the recent \$900 million direct loan for the construction of solar energy power plants in Angola, which has been seen as the largest renewable energy project in that part of the world in Exim history, so to speak. How do such projects, would you say, align with the broader strategy of the U.S. to create jobs, and is there hope that such projects will continue?**

Absolutely. I think what we have seen, even with Exim, is that it has a long and deep history of doing transactions and work in Sub-Saharan Africa and throughout the continent. We have a deep commitment to the continent. It's been part of our founding charter. When Exim was reauthorised in 2019, Congress also asked us as an institution to take on four additional mandates. One of the mandates, of course, is to do more financing in Sub-Saharan Africa, and I think, you know, we've been active now in 39 of the 49 countries in the region. You know, I have travelled in this position. In the last three years, I have travelled to over nine African countries, everywhere from Angola to Zambia to South Africa.

During my tenure, we've authorised approximately \$4 billion in Sub-Saharan Africa, and we also now have reached a historic high in our appropriation, on our transaction dollars, of about \$10 billion. But you know, we can't rest on our laurels, because we're constantly looking for new opportunities to finance U.S. exports. We're also looking for opportunities to promote and share our shared economic growth between the U.S. and our African nations.

I think what is so exciting about that particular project that was done in Angola is that it was also a part of President Biden's PGI initiative that he formed with his G7 partners, where they all came together in support of the work that needed to occur in emerging markets. The thing that's so exciting about that project is that it is a direct loan to support the construction of two solar energy power plants in Angola. Congress also asked us during that time to make more financing available in the renewable energy space.



So, you know, hitting that type of mandate is very strong—whether it was our renewable mandate, our Sub-Saharan Africa mandate, or our small business mandate.

So, you know, that project is going to create thousands of jobs. It is going to support working with so many small businesses in the U.S. So we're really glad to have been a part of that, and we're very passionate, you know, about how we can do the work that we need to do, not just as Exim, but also working with our other government institutions around the support of more financing in Sub-Saharan Africa.

**Your tenure, I believe, which is rounding up soon, would be seen as a watershed moment for women, especially. You know, it's a point of reference to say we had one of our own right at the very helm of affairs there. Looking back, is there a proud moment for you in terms of interventions for women-owned businesses? Are there African American minority businesses? Are there examples you're very proud of in the coming days as you leave?**





**We are very proud of the work that we have done on the small business side, especially with women entrepreneurs. You know, one of the things that we always like to let folks know about ExIm is that over 85% of our transactions are in the small business space**

We are very proud of the work that we have done on the small business side, especially with women entrepreneurs. You know, one of the things that we always like to let folks know about ExIm is that over 85% of our transactions are in the small business space. Last year alone, we did about \$8.4 billion in transactions, and about \$1.7 billion of that was with small businesses. And of that, I think a little less than \$281 million was with women and minority entrepreneurs. So we're very serious. As I say, we take the numbers very seriously because, at the end of the day, it is about how we can expand into communities that have traditionally not understood or have not known about the fact that they can use the types of programmes and financing that we have to help them grow and expand their businesses.

Our products include everything from direct loans to working capital guarantees to export credit insurance products, and we are constantly reaching out to communities and networks to educate them on how to use export financing.

We are also excited about the women's front. We instituted a new Advisory Council on Women in Business. At ExIm, there were originally two standing committees and an advisory council,

one of which was on Africa and was mandated by the U.S. Congress. But to be able to bring on and add a Women in Business Council and a Small Business Council is something I'm very, very proud of.

Not only do we value the advice and counsel that we get from those experts who sit on those committees, but we also appreciate their expertise and experience because they are small business owners and women leaders who have been focused on expanding networks and increasing business owners' knowledge of how to use the tools and products we provide to help their businesses, whether large, medium, or small.

One of the things about ExIm is that we also fund goods and services. A lot of the women- and minority-owned businesses, according to data, are in the services arena. So we want to make sure that we are broadcasting this information far and wide, in as many networks as possible, and reaching beyond the traditional networks we have engaged with. We are not just focusing on Washington but also on what we are doing within the United States and internationally.

That is why we work very closely with our embassy teams. We are an agency of about 400 people, with fewer than 313 regional offices and only 18 people located throughout the United States. So we have to collaborate with embassy teams that are on the ground daily in various communities, especially throughout Africa, working with organisations to discuss the tools that U.S. government entities like ours offer.

Another initiative I am very excited about is our collaboration with the African diaspora community and the Caribbean diaspora community. We have worked alongside President Biden's Diaspora Council to ensure that we could be a resource for that community when they seek to engage with businesses in the countries of their



heritage. These initiatives present significant opportunities.

When working across African countries and worldwide, it is beneficial for us to establish relationships with other ECAs. From a woman's perspective, I can tell you that among the financing agreements we signed in Africa, over eight MOUs and co-financing agreements – almost every one of them – included a focal point on women's entrepreneurship.

Globally, not just in Africa but across the North, South, East, and West, people recognise that women entrepreneurs are a vital part of economic growth and community development. They want to learn from us. ExIm Bank recently celebrated the 25th anniversary of our MWOB (Minority- and Women-Owned Business) programme.

As we introduce new products like Equity Express, we ensure that every small business, particularly those in minority communities, has the tools to become more competitive.

**From your various roles you've served, you worked with African leaders at various levels, not just at Exim. Based on your experiences over the years, what would you consider some of Africa's critical challenges that, if addressed, could be the game changer? And what recommendations would you have, you know, in fostering stronger ties if these things are addressed?**

I think some of the biggest opportunities that are out here, that we are all addressing, are how we can provide more financing, especially in what we call the transformational exports area. All of our countries, our companies,

are trying to grow and expand, and they need different financing tools to make them competitive on the world stage. As they compete for opportunities in everything, whether it's AI, biomedical, biotech, wireless communication, semiconductors, renewables, you know, and so much more. And so, with a programme I think that we offer, what we call C-TAP, which is our China Transformational Export Programme, it can also help African companies, just as it is helping American companies, you know, continue to capture some of these massive opportunities.

What we've definitely seen in working with countries around the world is that the PRC has been very, very active, and what we have been especially proud of is the work of that programme. Because in those key sectors, and then you add and include, you know, areas like critical minerals, we need to make sure that we provide our companies with the financing tools they need in order to compete for these global sales. And so, I think programmes like that help them do that.

We also just recently introduced a new initiative that we're very proud of, called Supply Chain Resiliency, and we're proud that it has not only strong bipartisan backing but that it is one that will catalyse growth and innovation across critical industries. And so, it's one that we're very committed to, to help our companies reduce risks and to ensure that they have the tools they need to compete.

**I think you almost answered my next question in terms of how African nations can better position themselves to attract greater investment from U.S. businesses as well as financial institutions. We think Africa**

**represents a tremendous opportunity. We see other regions in the world really trying to, and when you speak to African leaders, they tell you the Americans are not really coming in. So, while there is a gap, I don't want to mention the names of other regions, but others are swooping in. What would you say American companies should do more of, and what can African nations do more to attract this business?**

One of the things that Exim does, and we've done this throughout the countries that I've travelled to in Africa, is that we continue to encourage folks to build very, very strong relationships with the embassy teams, particularly the foreign commercial officers overseas. They are some of the best advocates for business in Africa, and they can talk about what's going on in the country in terms of opportunities. They can also discuss the different government agencies that might be able to assist and help.

Building relationships with chambers of commerce and business councils in these different countries is also crucial. Every







**Building relationships with chambers of commerce and business councils in these different countries is also crucial. Every country has one, and they are made up of large, medium, and small businesses**

country has one, and they are made up of large, medium, and small businesses. I was just in Guyana recently, and you do everything from working with the chambers to collaborating with private sector initiative-based councils that focus on specific countries.

So, I encourage businesses to take part in trade delegations that the U.S. Department of Commerce and others sponsor. These are very important to participate in, but it's also essential to know and understand what tools are available before you go. That way, when you are out searching for opportunities, you can maximise those trips, which not only provide a wealth of information but also create valuable business prospects. You want to be able to take advantage of them efficiently.

Additionally, I encourage building ties with the diaspora community in the United States. I think that's also very important; there are so many ways that people can engage with government

agencies.

For example, if you're looking to conduct feasibility studies, you have the USTDA. If you're working on exports, you have Exim Bank. There is a wide range of agencies. Then, of course, our own U.S. Department of Commerce serves as the principal entity advocating for U.S. businesses. We work hand in hand with these government agencies on the economic side to assist American businesses.

**Question: I think you've actually answered most of the next question, but I'd like to just dig slightly deeper. I mean, it's really looking at the end of your tenure at EXIM and your achievements within minority communities and female communities, which you did touch on. But perhaps what I'd like to ask, then, is how much work still needs to be done within a lot of these communities, and where you see that?**

There is still so much work to be done, and the government definitely cannot do it by itself. We have to have strong collaborations through public-private partnerships. I think that really is going to become the watchword going forward: how can the government and the private sector work together to support their businesses, especially women entrepreneurs?

There are so many programmes out there that are designed to help women grow and expand their businesses. EXIM Bank is just one of the institutions that I believe will continue to walk and work alongside them. That's why, when we introduce new products like Equity Express Select, we ensure that our customer service team is right there, providing the tools and guidance companies need every step of the way when they submit applications to EXIM. We want to be able to explain the benefits to them, evaluate their qualifications, and involve them in a streamlined application process.





One of the main reasons you hear for why women, minority communities, or small businesses do not export is the fear of non-payment. That's why we offer programmes that specifically address these concerns. We have initiatives like Equity Express, which can assist them as they look to increase sales, reduce risks, and gain more access to cash. We believe this new effort will be a significant help.

I think the future is bright because there isn't a single country, on any continent I've been to, that hasn't talked about the importance of supporting women-owned businesses. Many entities are passing initiatives and programmes aimed at increasing outreach to women, ensuring they remain one of the strongest lifelines of any community they're part of.

**My next question is really around this huge demographic we have on the African continent, young people, and it's growing. It's going to be one of the biggest demographics globally, I believe, in terms of young people. I'm interested in how these young African leaders coming forward can help shape the future of international trade and economic development and how you see the bank's role in that or how you see the future of that.**

You know, I also see the future of that being very bright. We know the average age across the continent is very young, and we are seeing a lot more youth entrepreneurship programmes being introduced in different countries.

We were really glad when we went to Angola on the President's trip to look at the projects

there, particularly as part of the Lubito Corridor. One of the things we did was participate in university gatherings with young professionals who are eager to begin entrepreneurship careers. It was great to have representation from a broad range of industries, companies, and government agencies, allowing young people to engage directly with experts.

I believe that as work continues on the growth of small businesses, the support for youth entrepreneurs is only going to expand.

**With just a few days to go, as we begin to reflect on what your legacy has been and what the future holds, what's your take on the future of U.S.-Africa trade financing? Is it going to grow? Is there hope for the future?**

It can only grow, and there is a significant amount of hope. I think people are increasingly recognising that trade will be a key driver of economic growth, and Africa is one of the most important frontiers in global trade.

No matter who they are, when they see institutions like Exim Bank approving historic transactions, such as the \$1.6 billion deal to support the construction of 65 energy mini-grids with energy storage facilities, they realise how critical these efforts are. You also see major companies involved, from ING Capital in South Africa to Monte Parlo, supporting over 3,000 jobs. This kind of financing represents some of the most impactful work happening across the continent, and it will undoubtedly continue.

There is both a great deal of need and a great deal of opportunity. As more American businesses look to work and form partnerships in

Africa, this momentum will only grow. The transactions Exim Bank has completed over the last three years have sent a strong, positive signal to the market, demonstrating that American companies are present and engaged.

We want to continue supporting them in these markets. However, we don't have to go it alone. We can co-partner and co-finance with other ECAs (Export Credit Agencies) in these countries. We can also collaborate with allies and friends in the G7, the Quad, and other international trade agreements to drive even greater investment and economic development.

**As an African American, there has been a perceived divide between Africans on the continent and African Americans. Do you think there needs to be greater collaboration? What would be your message as a notable African American leader in the U.S.?**

I actually do not see a divide; I see stronger collaboration. When we travelled as part of the president's delegation to Angola, there were African Americans and individuals from all walks of life on that trip, all there to collaborate with business owners and leaders on the continent.

There is a growing recognition that by working together, we can achieve much greater success. Across the diaspora, there is a strong sense of respect and connection with colleagues around the world, and I believe this will only continue to grow.

I firmly believe that the opportunities ahead are vast, and as the saying goes, "We are better together than we are apart."



A photograph of two men working in a lush green field, likely a banana plantation. The man on the left is wearing a grey t-shirt and brown pants, looking down at his work. The man on the right is wearing a black tank top and brown pants, looking towards the camera with a slight smile. They are both using long-handled tools to work the soil. The background is filled with dense green foliage and trees under a bright sky.

# TRANSFORMING AFRICA'S AGRICULTURE NEEDS SUBSTANTIAL INVESTMENTS IN INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

**Hamady Diop** (CEO and Founder at DnS Consulting,  
CAADP Post-Malabo Process and Program Coordinator)



Since 2003, the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) has been a key driver of agricultural transformation in Africa, shaping policies, mobilising resources and fostering regional cooperation. Despite progress, challenges like low productivity, climate change and insufficient investment hinder the sector's potential.

The CAADP Strategy and Action Plan (2026-2035), developed through an inclusive process, aims to create more sustainable, resilient and inclusive food systems in Africa. CAADP implementation over the past two decades has revealed both successes and gaps. As of September 2023, 42 countries had updated their National Agricultural Investment Plans (NAIPs), and 28 established mechanisms for mutual accountability and peer review, primarily through Joint Sectoral Review. Additionally, 36 countries were implementing evidence-based policies, 31 had functional multisectoral coordination bodies, mainly through agricultural sector working groups, and 22 had engaged in public-private partnerships to strengthen specific agricultural value chains.

However, meeting financial commitments remains a challenge. Few countries have met the target of allocating 10 per cent of public expenditure to agriculture. Government spending on agriculture has declined, highlighting the need for innovative financing mechanisms. Despite these challenges, some countries like Ethiopia and Malawi have consistently met the 10 per cent target. The expansion of intra-African trade, particularly through AfCFTA, supports agricultural growth and market integration. However, the reliance on self-reporting and expert assessments in tracking progress underscores the need for stronger accountability frameworks.

The recently unveiled CAADP 2026-2035 Strategy is a comprehensive plan that addresses the evolving challenges confronting the African continent. It is particularly focused on emerging trends such as rapid urbanisation, technological advancements, climate change and the expanding youth population. The Strategy's overarching objective is to foster "Sustainable and Resilient Agri-Food Systems for a Healthy and Prosperous Africa." To achieve this, it aims to intensify sustainable food production, increase investments, ensure food security, promote inclusivity and strengthen governance. By implementing these strategies, Africa can transition from conventional subsistence agriculture to a modern, technology-driven and investment-friendly agri-food system.



**Since 2003, the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) has been a key driver of agricultural transformation in Africa, shaping policies, mobilising resources and fostering regional cooperation**





to high-value markets. While these innovations possess the potential to bring about transformative change, their large-scale adoption necessitates substantial investment and strategic financial support, a challenge that remains significant for the African continent.

### **Bridging the gap in investments**

Despite the stipulations outlined in the Maputo and Malabo Declarations, which commit signatory nations to allocate a minimum of 10 per cent of public expenditure

to the agricultural sector, the majority of African countries fail to meet this benchmark. Cognisant of this shortfall, the CAADP 2026-2035 Strategy aims to mobilise \$100 billion in public and private investments to catalyse the transformation of agri-food systems. Achieving this objective necessitates governmental encouragement of private sector investment in agribusiness and agricultural technology.

Public-private partnerships can drive investment in agro-industrial parks, food processing hubs, and digital infrastructure. Innovative financing mechanisms, such as blended finance models, agricultural insurance and credit guarantees, can reduce risks and attract investors. Africa can also leverage diaspora bonds, development funds and climate finance instruments like green bonds to support sustainable agriculture initiatives.

Additionally, women and youth-led agribusinesses are critical to agricultural growth. The establishment of agripreneurship incubators and innovation hubs has the potential to empower young entrepreneurs while expanding land access, financial services and capacity-building programs for women farmers could help

### **The role of innovation in agricultural transformation**

A fundamental tenet of the CAADP Strategy is the enhancement of access to and investment in agricultural innovation, with particular emphasis on advancements in digital agriculture, climate-smart practices, biotechnology and value addition. The utilisation of smart farming technologies, such as precision agriculture, drones and artificial intelligence, has the potential to optimise resource utilisation and enhance productivity. Furthermore, climate-smart innovations, including drought-resistant seeds and sustainable irrigation, not only assist farmers in adapting to climate change but also contribute to the improvement of soil health.

Biotechnology has been identified as a key catalyst for enhancing agricultural yields and ensuring food security through the introduction of advanced seed varieties, soil nutrient management techniques and biological pest control measures. Additionally, the investment in agro-processing and value chains has been identified as a strategy to reduce post-harvest losses, enhance food safety and increase farmers' incomes by facilitating their connection



**Despite the stipulations outlined in the Maputo and Malabo Declarations, which commit signatory nations to allocate a minimum of 10 per cent of public expenditure to the agricultural sector, the majority of African countries fail to meet this benchmark**



to bridge the gender gap in agricultural productivity. By allocating resources to these key areas, the African continent has the opportunity to unlock its agricultural potential and establish resilient, productive food systems.

### **Strengthening research and extension services**

Investing in agricultural innovation necessitates more than mere financial support; it requires the establishment of robust research institutions and the implementation of effective extension services to facilitate the translation of scientific advancements into practical applications.

The enhancement of collaborative efforts between African universities, research centres and global institutions can expedite the development of technologies tailored to local needs. The expansion of digital advisory services and electronic extension programs can provide farmers with real-time market insights, weather updates and guidance on optimal agricultural practices. Leveraging mobile platforms and farmer networks can empower smallholder farmers to make informed decisions that enhance productivity and resilience. The enhancement of agricultural extension services is predicated on the premise that it will ensure innovations reach farmers at the grassroots level, thereby closing the gap between research and practical implementation.

### **Substantial investments: a call to action**

The transformation of Africa's agricultural sector is contingent upon substantial

investments in innovation and technology. The CAADP 2026-2035 Strategy offers a well-defined plan to achieve sustainable food production, economic growth and resilience. Achieving this objective necessitates robust collaboration among governments, private sector entities, research institutions and development partners. To this end, policymakers must prioritise agricultural innovation by implementing targeted policies that promote technology adoption, research funding and market access.

The private sector must increase investments in agribusiness and value chain development, while international development partners must align their financial and technical support with Africa's long-term agricultural vision. By leveraging strategic investment and innovation to unlock Africa's agricultural potential, the continent can establish a food-secure, prosperous and resilient future. The time to act is now. Through collective commitment and action, Africa can transform its food systems, uplift millions from poverty and establish itself as a leader in sustainable agricultural development.



**By leveraging strategic investment and innovation to unlock Africa's agricultural potential, the continent can establish a food-secure, prosperous and resilient future**







# OUTLOOK 2025: CRUCIAL 'BRIDGE YEAR' FOR AFRICA TO LEAD ON THE GLOBAL STAGE

**Udaibir Das** (Distinguished Fellow at ORF America, Visiting Professor at NCAER, Senior Non-Resident Adviser at the Bank of England, Senior Adviser to the International Forum for Sovereign Wealth Funds, Distinguished Visiting Faculty at the Kautilya School of Public Policy, and Senior Advisor at the Toronto Centre)



For decades, external voices have often narrated Africa's economic story through a narrow lens of challenges: uneven growth, energy deficits, food insecurity, extreme poverty, mounting debt and stalled reforms. While these obstacles are undeniable, they overshadow a more compelling narrative of resilience, innovation and cautious hope.

In 2024, Africa's economic and political importance grew significantly, laying a strong foundation for 2025 to be a transformative year for the continent. With headline economic growth reaching approximately 3.2%, Africa ranked among the fastest-growing regions globally. The continent has been addressing critical issues such as climate change, supply chain disruptions and energy transitions by embracing localised and innovative solutions. At the same time, Africa is proactively reshaping its economic identity, positioning itself as a key player in global trade, finance and sustainability efforts.

Africa's vast renewable energy potential, including solar and wind resources, mineral wealth such as lithium and cobalt, and untapped markets in agriculture and technology, make it indispensable to global efforts towards climate resilience and economic growth. Africa's demographic advantage is also unmatched. By 2050, the continent will house the world's largest working-age population, thus instilling a sense of optimism about Africa's future.

#### Private sector interest

Africa's increasing economic appeal is evident in the private sector's growing interest in the continent. Multinational corporations, financial institutions and venture capital firms recognise the vast opportunities presented by Africa's resource wealth, expanding markets and consumer demand. This private sector momentum can be expected to accelerate in 2025.

Key sectors, such as renewable energy, technology and financial services, attract healthy investor interest. Companies like TotalEnergies and Enel Green Power are scaling up green energy projects, while global financial giants like JP Morgan Chase and Mastercard are establishing a more substantial presence. Africa's fintech ecosystem, now valued at over \$3bn, has emerged as a hub for innovation, with start-ups successfully drawing funding from continental and international investors. These trends reflect growing confidence in Africa's capacity to deliver returns on investment.



**For decades, external voices have often narrated Africa's economic story through a narrow lens of challenges: uneven growth, energy deficits, food insecurity, extreme poverty, mounting debt and stalled reforms. While these obstacles are undeniable, they overshadow a more compelling narrative of resilience, innovation and cautious hope**







### Unlocking growth potential amid challenges

To realise its potential in 2025, Africa must tackle entrenched structural constraints, including fragmented regulatory frameworks, an underdeveloped financial sector, inadequate infrastructure and the burden of unsustainable debt levels.

Operationalisation of the African Continental Free Trade Area is poised to be a game-changer. By establishing the world's largest free trade area by member countries, AfCFTA promises a unified market for goods and services, unlocking regional integration and paving the way for financial harmonisation. The Pan-African Payment and Settlement System, a critical enabler under AfCFTA, is maturing rapidly. It is already facilitating cross-border transactions in local currencies, reducing reliance on foreign exchange reserves and lowering transaction costs. This innovation is particularly impactful in the growing fintech and sustainable finance sectors, where cost efficiency and accessibility are paramount.

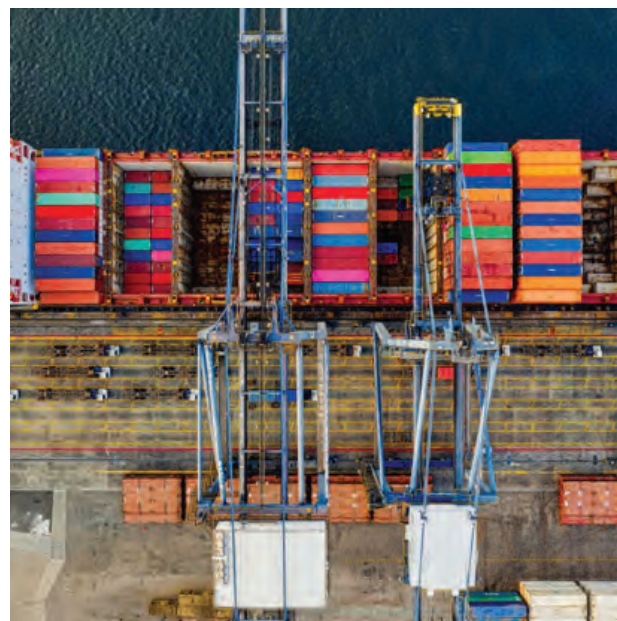
Africa's capital markets are also witnessing notable progress. Egypt and Nigeria have successfully issued green bonds, attracting billions in investments from global investors prioritising sustainability. These efforts signal the continent's growing ability to align with international trends in sustainable

finance. Meanwhile, initiatives to integrate stock exchanges in Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa are improving market liquidity, reducing investment barriers and fostering regional co-operation.

Banks are equally instrumental in driving growth and resilience. Institutions such as Access Bank Group and Standard Bank are scaling operations across the continent, providing much-needed credit to small- and medium-sized enterprises. Since SMEs account for up to 90% of businesses and contribute significantly to African employment, this support is crucial for job creation and economic diversification. These developments reflect Africa's increasing capacity to navigate challenges and build a robust financial ecosystem.

### Africa's digital transformation

Collaborative ecosystems will be crucial in 2025, and the digitalisation of financial systems is instrumental in fostering these ecosystems. Platforms such as Flutterwave, M-Pesa and Chipper Cash are driving the fintech revolution. These platforms facilitate seamless payments, expand credit access and enable financial inclusion, especially in underserved rural areas.



**To realise its potential in 2025, Africa must tackle entrenched structural constraints, including fragmented regulatory frameworks, an underdeveloped financial sector, inadequate infrastructure and the burden of unsustainable debt levels**



Collaborative public-private partnerships are also addressing infrastructure and connectivity gaps. For example, US-backed programmes aim to connect millions of farmers and SMEs to the digital economy, highlighting the importance of integrated solutions over siloed approaches.

### **G20 leadership and global partnerships**

In 2024, Africa solidified its position at the forefront of global climate efforts, becoming a pivotal voice in shaping the sustainability agenda. South Africa's G20 presidency in 2025 now provides an opportunity to amplify Africa's influence on the international stage. Among its key priorities is establishing a Global Cost-of-Living Commission to address the skyrocketing food and energy prices – issues disproportionately affecting vulnerable economies. This initiative could provide a much-needed lifeline to nations grappling with external shocks, including inflation, supply chain disruptions and the economic fallout of climate change. The presidency also underscores Africa's call for more equitable financial governance in institutions like the International Monetary Fund and World Bank to increase voting rights and representation for African countries.

Partnerships with developed nations are evolving from aid dependency towards investment-driven collaborations. The replenishment of multilateral funds such as the International Development Association and the Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust offers critical support for Africa's development trajectory. These mechanisms are set to finance vital infrastructure projects, bolster climate resilience initiatives and underpin social development

programmes, ensuring the continent is better equipped to navigate persistent challenges while capitalising on emerging opportunities.

Strategic initiatives like Italy's Mattei Plan – which advocates for equitable and sustainable partnerships between Europe and Africa – highlight the growing recognition of Africa's global importance. This plan emphasises energy, sustainability and development investments rather than resource extraction, signalling a shift towards mutual benefit and long-term co-operation.

Furthermore, commitments from key partners, including China's Belt and Road Initiative, South Korea's technology transfer programmes and the European Union's Global Gateway strategy, emphasise Africa's rising geopolitical and economic significance. BRICS nations have also demonstrated their support for Africa's growth through enhanced trade agreements, capacity-building programmes and the establishment of the New Development Bank, which increasingly focuses on funding African development priorities.

With strategic leadership and well-aligned partnerships, Africa's role in global economic and governance frameworks is poised for significant advancement in 2025. This is an opportunity for the continent to address its immediate challenges and a moment to shape a more equitable and sustainable global order.

### **Action points for Africa's financial leadership**

To solidify its position in global finance, Africa must prioritise actionable strategies across three

key domains: strengthening its financial sector, fostering continent-wide partnerships, and advancing systemic reforms at the regional and global levels. These efforts will build resilience and position Africa as a proactive agent in shaping its economic future.

By uniting around these priorities, Africa can become a cornerstone of international economic and climate strategies. Bold, co-ordinated action will turn aspirations into tangible achievements, positioning 2025 as a year of transformation and leadership. The narrative is shifting, and Africa's time to lead has arrived.





# **AFRICA** **DEFENSE** **&** **BORDERS** **FORUM** **&** **AWARDS**

## **THEME**

Strengthening Regional Security, Collaboration,  
and Border Management for a Resilient Africa

**22-25 MAY, 2025 || ACCRA, GHANA**

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

[info@africanleadership.co.uk](mailto:info@africanleadership.co.uk)

VISIT OUR WEBSITE

[africanleadershipmagazine.co.uk](http://africanleadershipmagazine.co.uk)



# AFRICA ENERGY LEADERSHIP FORUM

Theme: Pathways to Energy Today, Sustainability Tomorrow  
and Diversifying Africa's Energy Mix.

**07 MAY 2025** Houston Texas, USA

For Further Info Contact: [info@africanleadership.co.uk](mailto:info@africanleadership.co.uk)



# TRADE AND AFRICA'S DEVELOPMENT GOALS: A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY

**Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala** (Director-General of the World Trade Organization)





**In Africa, while most economies have seen growth tick back upwards after the pandemic, many are struggling with burdensome debt, a financing squeeze, and vulnerability to climate change**

“We need to reimagine globalisation to include those parts of the world left on the margins of the global division of labour, making world trade more inclusive, more sustainable, and more resilient.” These are difficult times for global trade. Despite the resilience displayed through successive crises, the world economy continues to be vulnerable to geopolitical tensions, unilateral trade barriers, and regional conflicts.

In Africa, while most economies have seen growth tick back upwards after the pandemic, many are struggling with burdensome debt, a financing squeeze, and vulnerability to climate change. Yet there are opportunities for Africa within these challenges. Structural and demographic trends, ongoing policy initiatives like continental economic integration, and changing geopolitical currents create a window for African countries to use trade to spur the faster growth and better job prospects that our young people deserve.

Two key linked opportunities are important to highlight. First, the transition to a clean green energy economy, and second, the move to de-risk and decentralise supply chains to avoid the over-concentration-related vulnerabilities experienced during the pandemic. The natural resources needed to fuel the clean energy transition are currently subject to similar fears of excessive concentration, particularly with respect to their processing.

Africa has what we term at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) a “green comparative advantage.” Just as countries and regions can reap economic gains by specialising in making and trading what they are relatively good at, they can also reap economic and environmental gains by specialising in making and trading what they are relatively green at.

Africa has over 60% of the world’s solar potential along with wind, geothermal, and other renewable resources such as green







**There is an unprecedented opportunity for the continent to harness its green energy potential and deploy it to the processing of the critical minerals on the continent. To do this, it needs to attract and marry together the value chain investments for both clean energy and critical minerals**

hydrogen. At the same time, Africa houses a substantial percentage of the world's resources of critical minerals needed for the green transition. The continent accounts for over 40% of global production of cobalt (led by the Democratic Republic of the Congo), manganese (South Africa, Gabon, Ghana) and platinum (South Africa, Zimbabwe). But apart from platinum refining in South Africa, these minerals are mostly exported as unprocessed ores.

There is an unprecedented opportunity for the continent to harness its green energy potential and deploy it to the processing of the critical minerals on the continent. To do this, it needs to

attract and marry together the value chain investments for both clean energy and critical minerals. No longer should the development model be extraction and export of raw commodities. Rather, processing and value addition should be prioritised on the continent. That way, trade is boosted, thousands of jobs are created for young people, and supply bottlenecks for these products are eased, all while helping close the continent's energy access gap and meet global targets to ramp up renewable energy.

Attracting investment into these areas and becoming part of globalised supply chains for clean energy products, processed minerals, and lithium-ion





batteries, for example, would make Africa part of the re-globalised world economy that we need to create. We need to reimagine globalisation to include those parts of the world left on the margins of the global division of labour, making world trade more inclusive, more sustainable, and more resilient.

Despite its immense green energy potential, Africa attracts only 2% of global investment in renewable energy. Its share of world trade has stagnated at around 3% for years. It is time for Africa to seize the opportunity to boost both in tandem, creating jobs and prosperity by leveraging its green comparative advantages.



**Despite its immense green energy potential, Africa attracts only 2% of global investment in renewable energy. Its share of world trade has stagnated at around 3% for years. It is time for Africa to seize the opportunity to boost both in tandem, creating jobs and prosperity by leveraging its green comparative advantages**



The background of the entire page is the official seal of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The seal is circular with a metallic, embossed appearance. The words "INTERNATIONAL" and "MONETARY FUND" are inscribed around the top and bottom edges, respectively. In the center of the seal is a map of the world. The continent of Africa is highlighted in a bright yellow color, while the rest of the world map is in a dark, metallic grey. A bright, warm light source, resembling a sun, is positioned behind the right side of the world map, creating a lens flare effect that illuminates the right side of the seal and the text below.

# IMF LOANS TO AFRICA: A LIFELINE OR A TRAP?

By Joshua Muhammed



For decades, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has been a key player in Africa's economic landscape, providing loans to stabilize economies, bolster foreign exchange reserves, and implement fiscal reforms. However, the impact of IMF loans remains contentious. While some view them as a lifeline for struggling economies, others argue that the stringent conditions attached often deepen financial hardship. Critics accuse the IMF of prioritising debt repayment over economic growth, leading to protests and political instability in several African nations. The question remains: are these loans a stabilising force or a financial stranglehold?

The IMF has increasingly pressured African nations to reduce public expenditure and implement wage bill cuts or freezes in the public sector, citing concerns over rising debt distress. Over the past decade, Africa's debt-to-GDP ratio has surged, placing many sub-Saharan countries at high risk of default, with some already in debt distress.

As of 19 April 2024, Africa accounted for 38% of the IMF's total global loans, with an outstanding debt of SDR 42.46 billion (approximately \$55.8 billion at an SDR-to-USD exchange rate of 1.315). Fifteen African nations each owe the IMF over \$1 billion, collectively comprising about 80% of the continent's total IMF debt. Among these, seven countries have outstanding balances exceeding \$2 billion. Egypt remains the most indebted African country to the IMF, with \$14.8 billion in loans, followed by Angola, Kenya, South Africa, and Ghana.

Africa's financial relationship with the IMF dates back to the post-colonial era when newly independent states sought economic stability. From the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) of the 1980s to recent Extended Credit Facilities, the IMF has infused billions into African economies. As of 2024, the total debt owed by sub-Saharan African nations to the IMF exceeds \$150 billion, with Ghana, Zambia, and Kenya among the most indebted.

The SAPs introduced in the 1980s were particularly controversial, mandating deep budget cuts, privatisation, and trade liberalisation, which led to widespread job losses and stagnation in social sectors such as health and education. Countries like Nigeria and Tanzania struggled with the repercussions of these policies, experiencing rising poverty rates despite initial economic stabilisation.

In recent years, the IMF has committed over \$100 billion to African nations through programmes such as the Extended Credit Facility and the Stand-By Arrangement. For instance, in 2023, Ghana secured a \$3 billion bailout to stabilise its currency



**The IMF has increasingly pressured African nations to reduce public expenditure and implement wage bill cuts or freezes in the public sector, citing concerns over rising debt distress. Over the past decade, Africa's debt-to-GDP ratio has surged, placing many sub-Saharan countries at high risk of default, with some already in debt distress**







**In 2024, Kenya found itself at the epicentre of IMF-induced austerity. The Finance Bill, which proposed sweeping tax hikes to meet IMF loan conditions, triggered widespread protests, forcing the government to reconsider its stance**

and address a looming default. Zambia finalised a \$1.3 billion IMF loan package to restructure its debt after defaulting in 2020. While these funds help prevent economic collapse, the repeated reliance on IMF assistance suggests that many economies are caught in a cycle of borrowing and repayment rather than achieving sustainable growth.

### **The Conditionality Debate: Aid or Austerity?**

IMF loans are rarely granted without stringent conditions, often requiring African nations to undertake painful economic adjustments. These include the removal of fuel subsidies, increased taxation, and reduced public spending—measures that disproportionately affect the poor.

In 2024, Kenya found itself at the epicentre of IMF-induced austerity. The Finance Bill, which proposed sweeping tax hikes to meet IMF loan conditions, triggered widespread protests, forcing the government to reconsider its stance. The bill sought to increase VAT on essential commodities, pushing inflation into double digits and sparking national outrage. Similarly, Zambia's IMF bailout required the removal of fuel subsidies, causing transport and food prices to soar.

In Nigeria, the removal of fuel subsidies—also tied to IMF recommendations—led to a 300% increase in fuel prices in 2023, pushing inflation to nearly 30% and triggering a nationwide cost-of-living crisis. Meanwhile, in Tunisia, IMF-backed austerity measures exacerbated public unrest due to rising unemployment and escalating living costs.

Beyond economic policies, the IMF has been accused of influencing governance. In Malawi, the IMF delayed loan disbursement in 2022 until the government implemented anti-corruption reforms. While framed as

promoting transparency, some viewed this as external interference in domestic affairs.

However, not all IMF interventions have led to economic strife. In Rwanda, IMF-backed policies have strengthened fiscal discipline, contributing to a steady GDP growth rate of 6.5% annually since 2018. The key difference lies in how governments balance IMF mandates with local economic realities.

### **The IMF's Controversial Role in Policy Enforcement**

One of the most contentious aspects of IMF loans in Africa is the organisation's influence over national policy decisions. Many governments have implemented drastic economic measures—sometimes against public and political will—to satisfy IMF loan conditions.

#### **Ghana's IMF-Driven Economic Reforms**

As part of its 2023 \$3 billion bailout, the IMF required Ghana to implement strict austerity measures, including a freeze on public sector hiring, subsidy cuts, and tax increases. While these measures aimed to stabilise the economy, they sparked widespread protests, with critics arguing that they disproportionately affected the poor and middle class.

#### **Zambia's Pension and Wage Reforms**

Zambia, another heavily indebted country, faced IMF pressure to reform its pension system and cut government wages in exchange for a \$1.3 billion loan. These conditions triggered public opposition, particularly among civil servants who saw their benefits reduced. The IMF also pushed Zambia to restructure its external debt with private creditors, prolonging economic uncertainty.

#### **Egypt's IMF Loan and Devaluation Crisis**



Egypt's economy has been heavily influenced by IMF-imposed policies. In 2016 and again in 2023, the IMF required the Egyptian government to devalue its currency as part of a loan agreement. The devaluation caused a sharp increase in inflation, making basic goods unaffordable for millions. Additionally, IMF-mandated subsidy cuts led to higher fuel and food prices, further straining household incomes.

### **Tunisia's Political Unrest Over IMF Austerity**

Tunisia has struggled with IMF-mandated reforms that have triggered political unrest. The government has faced pressure to reduce public sector wages, cut subsidies, and implement tax hikes to qualify for additional IMF funding. These measures have fuelled mass protests, with many Tunisians accusing the IMF of undermining national sovereignty by dictating economic policies.

The IMF defends its actions, arguing that these policies ensure long-term financial stability. However, many African citizens and economists contend that these conditions prioritise debt repayment over economic development, leading to stagnation rather than growth.

### **Africa's Debt Spiral: Dependency or Development?**

Africa's total external debt reached an alarming \$1.2 trillion in 2024, with the IMF being one of the largest creditors. While the loans provide immediate financial relief, they often push nations into a cycle of dependency. Countries repeatedly borrow to service existing debts, trapping them in what critics call a modern form of financial colonialism.

By contrast, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) presents an alternative financing model, offering infrastructure loans with fewer austerity conditions. However, even Chinese loans have

raised concerns about sovereignty, as seen in cases where African nations have surrendered key assets for failing to meet repayment schedules. For instance, Kenya's Mombasa port was nearly seized due to default risks tied to a Chinese loan for railway construction.

### **Can Africa Reduce IMF Reliance?**

With the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) promising to boost intra-African trade by over \$450 billion annually by 2035, there is growing momentum for self-sufficiency. Additionally, sovereign wealth funds and improved tax collection mechanisms can help nations reduce dependency on external loans.

Africa's IMF conundrum is far from black and white. While the loans provide crucial economic relief, they also introduce long-term challenges. The true path forward lies in financial reforms that empower Africa to harness its economic potential, reducing vulnerability to external forces. By strengthening internal financial mechanisms and advocating for fairer global lending practices, Africa can work towards economic sovereignty rather than perpetual debt dependence.



**With the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) promising to boost intra-African trade by over \$450 billion annually by 2035, there is growing momentum for self-sufficiency. Additionally, sovereign wealth funds and improved tax collection mechanisms can help nations reduce dependency on external loans**





# WHERE INVESTORS ARE EYEING AFRICA FOR OPPORTUNITIES IN 2025

By In On Africa (IOA), a research and consulting firm specialising in African markets and development.



Investors seeking profits in Africa are centring their focus on four broad sectors: energy, agriculture, healthcare and infrastructure. The application of new technologies is making opportunities in Africa even more appealing for the new year.

This article focuses on four key economic sectors that will drive investment trends across Africa in 2025, emphasizing their Pan-African scope rather than focusing on specific countries. For example, every African country has an agriculture sector in need of expansion, and each has (to some degree) sunshine and wind that can be harnessed as a source for clean and renewable energy, with the consequence that investors are focusing on the development of technologies and energy solutions that may be applied in most parts of Africa. Healthcare is another area whose scope is continental, yet every country has infrastructure requiring improvement.

Africa has two assets in particular that will fuel investment in 2025. The first is demographics. As Africa's population rises, so too expands its economic middle class. With this growth comes an enlarging pool of customers for consumer goods, energy, food and healthcare. Partly, this is inertia that is the result of overall population growth. However, Africa's overall prosperity – measured from GDP to UNDP's classic indicators like who has access to a toilet (indicating improved hygiene) and who has a refrigerator (signalling availability of electricity and improved food storage in a household) – have been steadily rising throughout the 21st century. Additionally, the adoption of new technologies has driven investment in the four fields highlighted in this article. Climate change mitigation is also an important movement, and this appears extensively throughout investment trends as well.



**Investors seeking profits in Africa are centring their focus on four broad sectors: energy, agriculture, healthcare and infrastructure. The application of new technologies is making opportunities in Africa even more appealing for the new year**







**Africa requires US\$200 billion in investment to meet its energy needs, according to the International Energy Agency. Off-grid solutions will continue to be the most active investments in 2025**

## Energy

Africa's swing toward clean energies will see countries' ambitious plans to wean themselves from fossil fuels grow closer to achievement. While Kenya will further expand its geothermal capacity to generate electricity in 2025, all African countries with projects large and small will exploit their abundant natural resources for energy solutions, including solar, wind, and hydroelectric resources. The main attraction for investors in Africa's energy sector is its profitability, particularly as new technological solutions come onto the market, allowing for the expanding reach of energy access.

Africa requires US\$200 billion in investment to meet its energy needs, according to the International Energy Agency. Off-grid solutions will continue to be the most active investments in 2025, enabling greater connectivity for more remote areas. China has targeted 30 clean energy projects to receive a portion of its US\$51 billion investment in Africa's energy sector, and the funds

will flow in 2025. However, private investors are driving the financing the bulk of new projects.

The top ten recipients of public energy finance to Africa received US\$144.41 billion (73% of total public finance). The top ten countries that provided private finance accounted for US\$137.41 billion, (92%, of the total private energy finance). Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2023

## Agriculture

In 2025, as in ancient times, agriculture is the main segment of African economies. While food production remains the primary employer of Africans, the year will see movement of workers from fields to value-added food processing as investment returns are higher on industrial agriculture and manufactured food products. Consumers' changing tastes toward healthier foods will keep this segment innovative as well, as agricultural practices are improved and the cold storage transport system is further developed.

Investment in agriculture in 2025 will stimulate many growth markets. Such stimulus could see the expansion of citrus cultivation in South Africa or greater wheat production in Botswana as new irrigation projects come online. More fish farms will be operating in East Africa. There will also be an increase of the development of local luxury food items like designer chocolates in Ghana, marula fruit cosmetics in Eswatini and caviar production in the highlands of Madagascar (the only place in Africa where this luxury item is made). Whatever the investment type, the result will add to food security – a goal long sought in Africa.

The case for agriculture-led growth; Africa's low agriculture productivity means that returns on investment will be highest in the sector. This low productivity, for the most part, reflects a lack of working capital than fixed





investment. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2023

## Healthcare

Driving growth in Africa's healthcare sector is the increasing size of Africa's middle class, which in turn is motivated by health awareness from campaigns mounted by partnerships of the UN, NGOs and local governments. Private hospitals are proliferating continent-wide, offering improved service to the increasing number of patients who can afford them. Healthcare is one of the most vibrant focuses of technology companies, with resulting cost reductions benefitting patients and creating greater efficiencies, raising the profits of investors.

Among Pan-African healthcare providers in 2025, African Medical Investments, which operates private hospitals in Dar es Salaam, Harare and Maputo, plans to expand into other East African countries and Nigeria. In Kenya's tech hub, Nairobi's healthcare technologists are investing in the use of AI and the internet to treat patients remotely and stage patient interactions with healthcare personnel, using teleconferencing systems, which will make their appearances in 2025.

## Infrastructure

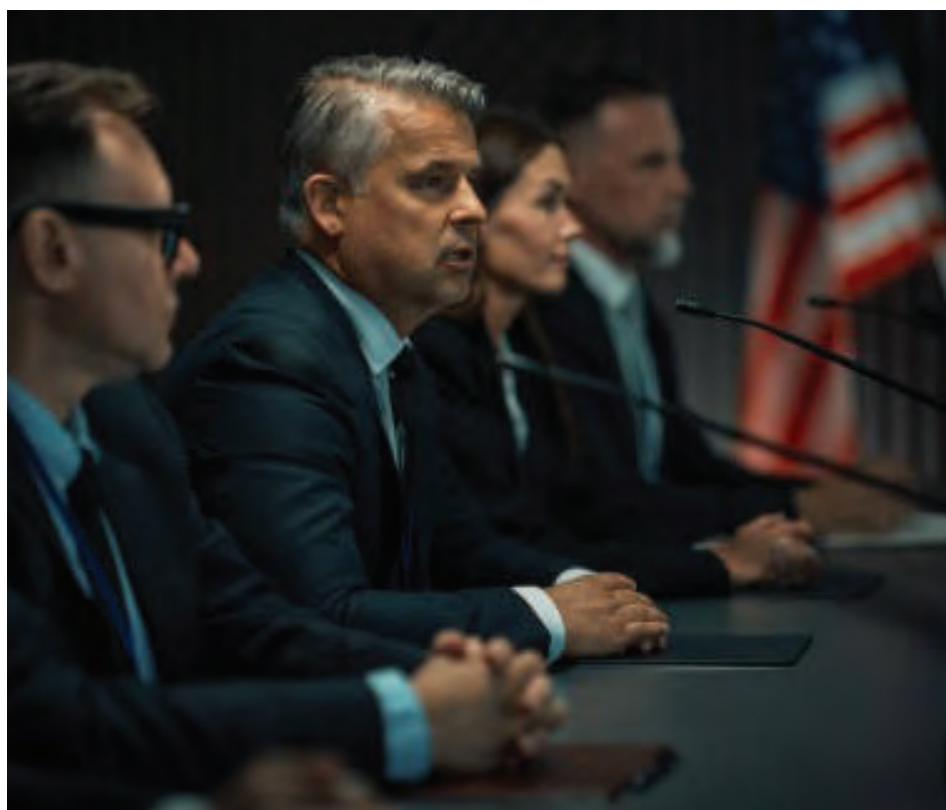
Investment in infrastructure is as varied as the types of infrastructure. However, the majority of investment in this field is in telecommunications, transportation and utilities like water and waste management. Improvement in infrastructure of any kind provides the foundation for broad economic growth as people in 2025 will have more options to communicate, travel and enjoy reliable water supplies. Urban development, particularly housing, is tied to road, water and waste management infrastructure. While urban infrastructure like roads and utilities are state financed, housing is largely a private sector undertaking.

Such investment requires significant capital but offers substantial returns for investment because it supports the unending need for all forms of infrastructure to be persistently maintained and improved. In 2025, key infrastructure developments will include the start of construction on Kenya and Ethiopia's rail link, costing US\$14 billion, the final master plan of South Africa's light rail Gautrain and the start of Morocco's light rail system's expansion to Marrakech, which will cost US\$9 billion. The African Development Bank's African Water Facility will be mobilising US\$320 million to finance 50 sanitation projects, benefitting 15 million Africans in the urban areas of 52 countries, and which is forecast to generate US\$ 7 billion in downstream investment.

The estimated value of international project finance deals in the region declined by 50% in 2023, to \$64 billion, following a 20% drop in 2022. UN Trade and Development, 2024



**Driving growth in Africa's healthcare sector is the increasing size of Africa's middle class, which in turn is motivated by health awareness from campaigns mounted by partnerships of the UN, NGOs and local governments**







# **CELD:** WOMEN, POWER, AND THE QUIET AUDACITY OF LEADERSHIP





Somewhere in the cosmopolitan sprawl of Doha, where glass towers reflect the sun with an indifferent gleam, a group of distinguished women gathered for a retreat—The CELD Women Leadership Development Forum 2024. The Centre for Economic & Leadership Development (CELD) had convened this formidable assembly of leaders from the Defence and Police Officers' Wives Association (DEPOWA), the Nigerian Air Force Officers' Wives Association (NAFOWA), and the Police Officers' Wives Association (POWA).

Over five days, from January 25th to 30th, this distinguished group of women leaders gathered to examine what it truly means to lead both in public and private spheres. The stated goal? To explore the delicate and ever-elusive balance between leadership and personal well-being, all under the theme of "Legacy of Leadership: Women Harmonising Leadership and Work-Life Balance."

This retreat was not an isolated event but rather part of CELD's broader mission. For years, the organisation has been at the forefront of fostering leadership, particularly among women, in regions where



institutional barriers often limit their rise. Through high-level forums, mentorship programmes, and capacity-building initiatives, CELD has created spaces where women can engage in critical conversations about power, influence, and legacy. It is one thing to encourage women to take



**Somewhere in the cosmopolitan sprawl of Doha, where glass towers reflect the sun with an indifferent gleam, a group of distinguished women gathered for a retreat—The CELD Women Leadership Development Forum 2024**





## CENTRE FOR ECONOMIC AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT (CELDO)

Under the guidance of experts like Dr. Ken Giami, the forum's lead consultant, and leadership strategist Dr. Neelam Zaffar, participants were challenged to think beyond their immediate positions and to consider the broader impact of their leadership. Leadership, after all, is not merely about the roles one occupies but about the influence one wields. For many of these women, leadership has historically been linked to proximity, often derived from their

relationships with powerful men. Yet, the real lesson of this retreat was that influence, when wielded strategically, is not dependent on external

leadership positions, but it is another to equip them with the tools to sustain and expand their influence. CELD understands this distinction and has built its work around it.

Set against the backdrop of Doha's gleaming skyline, the 2024 forum was as much about self-discovery as it was about structured learning. Leadership, as CELD has long emphasised, is not just about professional ambition but about the delicate balance between power and personal well-being. The sessions reflected this philosophy, moving seamlessly between technical skills such as public speaking and emotional intelligence, and more introspective explorations of personal vision, legacy, and the psychology of leadership. There was space for strategic learning, but there was also space for quiet reflection. A guided tour of Doha, for instance, allowed participants to see a city that embodies both heritage and modernity, an apt metaphor for their own journeys as leaders navigating legacy and change.

validation.

The closing ceremony was not just a moment of celebration but proof of the quiet but powerful ways in which leadership manifests. As the women received their certificates and leadership awards, there was a palpable sense that this was not the end of something but the beginning. The real work of leadership, as CELD has always insisted, does not happen in grand conference halls but in the everyday decisions that shape institutions, communities, and narratives.

As the participants departed Doha, returning to their respective positions in Nigeria, one thing was clear: leadership is not a moment; it is a continuous act of negotiation and reinvention. CELD remains at the helm of this ongoing transformation, ensuring that women are not just present at the table but are equipped to shape the discussions that define power itself. The question is no longer whether women can lead but how they will redefine leadership for generations to come.



**Set against the backdrop of Doha's gleaming skyline, the 2024 forum was as much about self-discovery as it was about structured learning**



# CELD WOMEN LEADERSHIP RETREAT DOHA - IN PIX













# WHO NEEDS HUMAN RIGHTS IN AFRICA?

**By Ebenezer Obadare** (Douglas Dillon  
Senior Fellow for Africa Studies at the  
Council on Foreign Relations)



As the United States and its allies attempt to steer a new diplomatic course in Africa amid intensifying geopolitical competition with China and Russia, the idea has steadily gained ground that the West should abandon its standard insistence on adherence to basic human rights from its potential partners. Advocates of this idea argue, first, that given the evident commitment of its adversaries to realpolitik, it would be foolhardy for the United States to take a stance that puts it at a disadvantage ab initio. Second, they point out that, even at the best of times, the U.S. commitment to human rights in Africa was never more than half-hearted and trumpeted only when it did not directly conflict with core American interests on the continent.

There is something to be said for this argument. In the first place, there is no disputing that the renewed readiness of China and Russia—never mind middle and regional powers like Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar—to embrace amoral diplomacy presents the United States with a strategic dilemma in Africa. Changed geopolitics calls for a methodological and often philosophical overhaul. Nor is it untrue that the United States itself is far from innocent when it comes to the pursuit of diplomacy without morality. In many instances, human rights have emerged as a ruse, a convenient cover for the U.S. government to get its way under false pretences.

Should the United States embrace an ethics-free African strategy? Would it gain greater freedom to respond to a changed geopolitical environment? Advocates of this approach—let's call them pragmatists—appear to have been emboldened by the election of Donald Trump as the forty-seventh U.S. president. Pointing to Trump's reputation for being "transactional," not to mention his image as a "strongman," they have urged the incoming administration to



**As the United States and its allies attempt to steer a new diplomatic course in Africa amid intensifying geopolitical competition with China and Russia, the idea has steadily gained ground that the West should abandon its standard insistence on adherence to basic human rights from its potential partners**







**To start with, the whole framing of the argument rests on dubious foundations. First is the assumption that human rights are a stumbling block to political progress in Africa. Second is the assumption that only Westerners want human rights in Africa**

jettison human rights and “get real” in its dealings with the continent’s many autocrats—actual and aspiring. The diplomatic stakes in going toe-to-toe with adversaries are so high that to bring up the small matter of the human rights records of certain African leaders is to risk losing them to the other side. Don’t ask, and by all means, don’t tell, and access to untold diplomatic riches shall be yours.

Needless to say, President Trump should do no such thing. Here’s why.

To start with, the whole framing of the argument rests on dubious foundations. First is the assumption that human rights are a stumbling block to political progress in Africa. Second is the assumption that only Westerners want human rights in Africa.

Rather than an obstacle, human rights are a key and inalienable cornerstone of democratic progress in Africa—as they are in other parts of the world. Accordingly, insisting that African leaders respect the fundamental human rights of their citizens is imperative. Failing to do this will align Washington with the forces of reaction on the continent.

The assumption that only the United States and its Western allies need human rights in Africa is contradicted by the evidence that human rights are an urgent and ongoing concern across Africa. Whether in Kampala or Malabo or, more recently, across the Sahelian states where the military is staring down growing opposition, human rights activists continue to risk life and limb in defence of universal ideals.







**Whether or not Washington gives its backing, human rights will continue to be important in and to Africa. President Trump should resist the temptation to place diplomatic expediency over principle.**

The notion that the United States should desist from insisting on human rights as a condition for access to development assistance is not exactly new (the 1990s debate in African political science on the relation between democracy and development comes to mind here). Yet, it has been resurrected and repurposed by those who insist that democratic values and norms are not for everyone, and especially not for Africans. Apart from being wrongheaded, this “you just don’t get it, Africa is different” argument flies in the face of compelling evidence to the contrary, particularly the stiff resistance to despotic rule and the brave push for liberal reforms witnessed in an increasing number of African countries.

No one doubts that the United States faces a changed and challenging

strategic environment in Africa. Nonetheless, for the above-stated reasons and more, Washington cannot afford to close its eyes to human rights violations in Africa. On the contrary, it must be an unrepentant advocate of the message that not only are human rights contributors to African development but also that they are a prerequisite for it.

Whether or not Washington gives its backing, human rights will continue to be important in and to Africa. President Trump should resist the temptation to place diplomatic expediency over principle. Instead, he should welcome and embrace the opportunity to throw down the gauntlet for the sake of Africans across the continent seeking liberation from sundry despotic regimes. The future of Africa and U.S.-Africa relations depends on it.



# SHIFTS IN GEOPOLITICS: AFRICA'S SURVIVAL IN TRUMP'S WORLD ORDER

**By Sulayman Darboe**  
MA Transnational Governance  
Florence School of Transnational Governance  
European University Institute



Will the current geopolitical shifts and what appears as distortion of international liberal and global trade orders disadvantage Africa following the world's 'one man soldier's 2.0 victory'? The recent Trump elections and his sudden isolationist, protectionist and transactional approaches to US foreign policy has made regional blocs restless with many running helter-skelter devising strategies to prevent being disadvantaged through retaliatory measures. Considering these realities, what is the fate of Africa in an arguable 'new world order' dramatically shaped by Trump? Is she a protagonist or a continued victim of circumstance? These are thought-provoking questions often asked by most commentators.

Without doubt, the media fraternity would agree with me that if the word 'retaliate' was a man, he would have won a novel prize for being the most used term by states and blocs as they relate with each other. Survival of the fittest is an enemy to the idea of cooperation but the continuous usage of the term 'retaliate' shows how important survival is to states and regional blocs. But what is the fate of the unfit in the clash of the so-called fittest? The term 'retaliate' is fatally used in trade wars as in the case of China and the US on tariffs. It is also used in legal context as remarked by US's Vice President Pence against EU's bid to regulate Artificial Intelligence.

However, retaliatory measures against every protectionist and isolationist agendas brings into light the question of "power". Either hard or soft, retaliation is only possible with power. Those that have power are those who think of retaliation. It can be economic or political power. It can also take other forms. At a time when the so-called great powers are engaged in war of words, with each promising to retaliate should the other try to disadvantage, what should be the interest of Africa? Does she have the political and economic power to retaliate against critical policy decisions such as trump's anti- migration policies? While there exist no-one-size-fits-all explication to the above, the political and economic power that make regional blocs and specific countries such as China and the United States think of retaliation, is arguably limited with Africa.

The question to ask therefore is: what can Africa do to accumulate both economic and political power that can make her both protective and meaningfully collaborative as an actor in the international system with potentials to survive policy decisions and outcomes of the recent Trump protectionist and isolationist policies, especially around migration. Many commentators see President Trump as being transactional but in contrast, I see him as an intelligent transactional leader who finds his foreign policy direction by causing chaos. While this could be argued, what remains clear is his influence and ability to evidently make every big gun in the international system restless with each thinking of its survival. For example, he seemingly ignites trade war on tariffs with China, demoralized European

democracy, illusionary plan on annexing Canada, South Africa Aids cut, plans on Palestine and Israel conflict, and his aggressive stance



**Will the current geopolitical shifts and what appears as distortion of international liberal and global trade orders disadvantage Africa following the world's 'one man soldier's 2.0 victory'?**





**Creating empowerment and employability for the youth as promised by the foundational principles of the Union and the 2063 agenda, is a sustainable strategy to make youth look inward rather than being continuous victims of deportations**

to end Russia war among others.

Considering the pressures each of these realities exert on the international system which has seemingly confused sister superpowers, what exactly is in the interest of Africa? Are all hopes lost! What should the new African Union leadership do? The new African Union leadership can leverage on the following suggestive recommendations to face the geopolitical realities of our time not as a toothless bulldog or a mere receiver of outcomes of global policy decisions but as a development stakeholder in action who is interested in Africa's long-term economic and political survival, in the ever-growing interest and power-driven international system.

#### **Capacity Development and Employment of Youths**

One policy issue used as a leverage during Trumps campaign which has bearing on Africa is migration. Arguably, one could state that his anti-migration stance has contributed towards his victory. Therefore, new AU leadership should focus on how to change the narratives of African youth looking outward, instead of inward. Young people have both economic and political power which need to be harnessed. The exploitation and accumulation of these individual youth powers are what can help result in the total economic and political power the continent needs to participate in the international system.

Creating empowerment and employability for the youth as promised by the foundational principles of the Union and the 2063 agenda, is a sustainable strategy to make youth look inward rather than being continuous victims of deportations. The saying that Africa is the future which has recently proliferated discussions even in global stages is not a fantasy. This is not to give a skeleton optimism and a shred light to the continent. It

is guided by data which indicates that the continent has a growing young population. For example, According to Ichikowitz foundation African Youth Survey 2020, Africa holds the World's youngest population with 70% of the youth living in sub-Saharan Africa and under 30 years of age. In addition, the same survey projected that by 2050, African youth are expected to account for a third of the world's youth population. But is there a correlation between having a youth population and economic growth that guarantees economic and political power? There is absolutely no correlation between the two without investing in the youth because an unempowered youth cannot offer anything meaningful to meet the development priorities of the region. Therefore, despite widespread enthusiasm that the region houses the world's youngest population, unless this population is made productive, it only provides empty hope.

In contrast to naysayers point of views, African youth are hungry to work. They are willing to be entrepreneurs, learn skills or art so laziness and idleness are contradictory features of the youth including those daily married to the





streets and ghettos across various African countries. They are victims of policy failures, inept leadership and misplaced governance priorities often in disarray. The new African Union leadership must act within its mandate to make African youth busy. They should be meaningfully involved in the critical sectors of the economy but first giving priorities to what Africa has. The land and the sea must be exploited sustainably with the right regulations. As of 2020, Africa had around 1173 million hectares of agricultural land which corresponds to 40% of the total land area of the region according to Statista. Both agriculture and fishing sectors should be sustainably exploited to meet domestic consumption and export demands for foreign exchange

earnings. Youth-led initiatives already in place should be invested with capital to ambitiously take part in these activities.

In addition, more attention should be given to education and skill development as alternative youth empowerment strategies. The new AU leadership should strive towards the complete decolonization of African education sectors by tailoring

curriculums to reflect African realities. The curriculums should promote skills and talents education, both of which should be regulated with a domestic market base that would ensure their outputs are consumed domestically to generate income. The era of students spending years drawing Cockroaches and Agama lizards only aggravates poverty and suffering and further make African minds deficient to respond to societal realities through solutions. Children and youth should be taught these realities to become responsive agents equipped to provide meaningful solutions to societal problems.

### **Urgent Response to Unresolved Conflicts in the Region**

For many decades now, peace, which is instrumental for humanity and the realization of man's aggregate potential, has either been temporal or accidental for some communities and countries in Africa. Sadly, a larger number of the areas in conflict are resource rich. This unfortunate reality has shattered many dreams, many hopes and many minds that could lead to the region's desire to achieve socio-economic power. The new African Union leadership should therefore swiftly prioritize and respond to the ongoing conflicts in the region which has cost many innocent lives. The senseless killing by the two Sudanese Military faction who are both myopic to realize the impact of their action on the lives of beautiful young lives and helpless elderly should be addressed. The powerful negotiation table should be explored again and again and again as no more life deserves to be claimed. This war should end with every means necessary as the fatalities it brings are gross. According to The Africa Center for strategic studies, the war has already led to 6 million cross-border displacement. The recent USAID cut has threatened humanitarian provisions. Furthermore, the rebel group MFDC which is walking freely on water in Congo by violating both the African Charter on Human and Peoples Right



**For many decades now, peace, which is instrumental for humanity and the realization of man's aggregate potential, has either been temporal or accidental for some communities and countries in Africa**





and various international laws should be checked. In all these wars, human lives are lost in gruesome manners. The African standby force should be utilized in line with existing laws to restore peace in these conflicting areas should negotiations fail.

### **End Endemic Corruption in The Region**

Sustained economic growth in the continent if the root causes of corruption are not addressed. The region's drive to accumulate economic and political power can never be realized without corruption being checked. Therefore, the new leadership should advocate for the demise of corruption, especially in government bureaucracies. This is necessary because it has widened inequalities and killed many people who are denied access to services and resources that would have saved their lives. Many public hospitals are turned graveyards with little or no drugs. Furthermore, it has devastated productive sectors of the economy including agriculture and fishing which should ensure the realization of the continent's economic power. In fact, some thieves who stole Corona and Ebola funds are praying for another major outbreak to retake the populations at ransom for their selfish growth. Although, anti-corruption campaigners have registered sluggish progress to their fight, the path is still rocky with many overlapping of interests.

Corruption has made African youth hopeless to an extent many choose to migrate. Recently, a survey conducted in 16 African nations revealed that nearly 60% of youth want to leave their countries because of unchecked corruption. According to Jose Ugaz of Transparency International, while corrupt individuals with political power enjoy a lavish life, millions of Africans are deprived of their basic needs like food, health, education, housing, access to clean water and sanitation. In addition, African development Bank

highlights that "corruption drains an estimated 10 billion Dollars annually from African economies diverting crucial resources from healthcare education and infrastructure development. This illicit financial flow undermines economic growth and erodes public trust in institutions on the continent. The restoration of the lost public trust, especially with respect to the youth, should therefore be a priority for the new leadership. To do this, the new African union leadership should advocate and practice corrupt-free leadership to serve as an example for the heads of state to take crucial reforms on anti-corruption in their countries. There should be special emphasis on the need for the Heads of States to establish anti-corruption commissions, where they don't exist, and be guaranteed independence to operate. Furthermore, police and judicial corruption should be checked with strong political will. Finally, whistle blowers should be protected legally. Addressing corruption will enhance accountability and transparency which are bedrocks for the development of economic and political powers

### **Learning and Growing Through Internal and External Policy Transfer**

Policy transfers scholars such as Dolowitz and Mars, Stone, Evans and Davies, Ousmane and others have all agreed that policy transfer is a way one political setting can learn from the policies, institutions and administrative arrangements of another. Such transfers ensure knowledge and tool sharing. Can Africa's economic growth be realized and sustained without the needed capacity and tool that can turn the current economic power in raw form into a refined economic and political power? This will be difficult to achieve. Africa's drive to accumulate sustained economic and political growth cannot be done in isolation. It requires the continent to draw experiences from successful economic



**Corruption has made African youth hopeless to an extent many choose to migrate. Recently, a survey conducted in 16 African nations revealed that nearly 60% of youth want to leave their countries because of unchecked corruption**



models and policies that work well for other continents by putting into consideration local realities. For example, knowledge-drawing from these successful policies should include those from the emerged and emerging economies. It is often argued that part of the reasons why most policy transfer initiatives fail in Africa is because of the nature of policies and the transfer process and whether these policies reflect the local realities of African societies. Therefore, if effectively done, learning from either internally or externally has the potential of putting the continent on the right economic trajectory without undermining culture, norms, values and dignity or the region.

Earlier in the text, I highlighted how corruption undermines development in Africa. It does not only disrupt delivery of services, but it makes governance institutions and bureaucracies weak and inefficient. Learning from regions and countries such as Singapore could therefore help address endemic corruption in Africa. Furthermore, policy transfer among African states could promote the African Union's drive to integrate African economies which will guarantee economic growth.

Should Africa look inward and outward to learn from others about what worked for them, she could register economic growth.

### **Adopting the Schengen Model**

The Schengen Model ensures economic development for member states. It ensures smooth movement of people, goods and services. It also comes with regulatory and security cooperations among others. Already, the model guarantees free movement of more than 450

million EU citizens making labor easily available. In Africa, such movements are either heavily restricted or limited. This is often caused by factors such as corruption, absence of regulatory cooperation mechanisms, insecurities and language barriers among others. These challenges have undermined the drive to achieve sustained economic growth and integration. The Africa Free Continental Trade Agreements has not done enough to close this gap.

Therefore, the new leadership should learn the ideals of the Schengen Model which has resulted in substantial economic growth for member states. It is important to recall that free movement of goods and services remains a first generational leadership call in Africa. The Schengen model which guarantees this, resonates with the strong aspirations of the continent's first generational leaders especially those who founded the organization of the African Union later renamed African Union. Nkrumah, for example, was smart to understand the utilities such integration comes with. Even though he had mostly echoed this through decolonial lenses, if his desire for a borderless and integrated economy is achieved, the continent would have sustained economic growth but only if corruption is checked. The new African union leadership should work towards learning from the success of the Schengen model as this would guarantee the continent's desire to attain economic power in refined form.

### **Conclusion**

The recent geopolitical shifts should be of interest to Africa as a regional actor in the international system. However, what should be of a bigger interest is to amplify

regional drive to achieve sustained economic and political growth. Accumulating economic and political power will help her think of retaliatory measures against any aggressive isolationist, and protectionist policy. Retaliation, as we know, is only possible with capacity to do so. While the continent remains critical to the survival of the world, gaps in its developments and inability to respond to the needs of her people absolutely make her weak to stand tall in the international system. Is it easy to say no to the person who feeds you? Therefore, Internal challenges of the continent should be checked first. To do this, the new African Union leadership should move towards youth empowerment through education, skill and talent development and further ensure domestic markets exist for them. In addition, peace should be prioritized. The existing conflicts such as the MFDC-Congo and the South Sudanese conflict which are both resource-rich areas should be addressed urgently.

Furthermore, corruption which has already cost the continent should be aggressively addressed with anti-corruption measures. The AU leadership and specific countries should embrace policy transfer to learn from other countries because Africa cannot do it alone. Finally, the best success that could ever be achieved by any African Union leadership is to ensure free movement of labor, goods and services. The AU leadership should therefore embrace the Schengen Model. These recommendations, if employed, would ensure the continent accumulates economic and political power to meaningfully participate in international politics while guaranteeing a decent standard of living.





# **YOUTHS, SPORTS & ENTERTAINMENT:** THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT

By Solomon Obi



When discussing the zeal of youths in Nigeria, it is essential to consider the contrasting narratives that have emerged over time. These stories, often framed within the so-called “Nigerian factor,” paint a complex picture of youth experiences that can be both heartbreaking and inspiring. The term “Nigerian factor” typically refers to the social and economic challenges that shape the lives of millions. This has led to the development of stereotypes that often define Nigerian youth on the global stage. Yet, amid these narratives lies a profound resilience and creativity that deserve to be celebrated.

Africa holds the distinction of having the youngest population in the world, with a staggering 70% of sub-Saharan Africa under the age of 30. This demographic reality presents immense growth potential, provided that young people are empowered to reach their full potential. Youth should not only have a seat at the decision-making table but also be supported through meaningful employment and innovation opportunities. The United Nations defines youth as individuals aged between 15 and 24. Nigeria, with roughly 60% of its population falling within this age group, exemplifies the continent’s youthful vigour. However, despite such promising demographics, unemployment remains a pervasive issue that undermines the potential of this capable workforce.

The narratives surrounding Nigerian youth are not merely clichés; they are a reflection of lived experiences. By putting myself in the shoes of many Nigerians, I have come to realise that these stories, irrespective of how harsh or bizarre they may seem, are valid. They fundamentally revolve around dreaming big and defying the odds in a system that is often rigged against them.



**When discussing the zeal of youths in Nigeria, it is essential to consider the contrasting narratives that have emerged over time. These stories, often framed within the so-called “Nigerian factor,” paint a complex picture of youth experiences that can be both heartbreaking and inspiring**





**This exploration into the lives of young Nigerians will delve into the journeys of inspiring individuals, each exhibiting the entrepreneurial spirit, creativity, and determination that characterise the Nigerian youth narrative**



This exploration into the lives of young Nigerians will delve into the journeys of inspiring individuals, each exhibiting the entrepreneurial spirit, creativity, and determination that characterise the Nigerian youth narrative. Through their stories, we can paint a broader and more nuanced picture of what it means to be young in Nigeria today.

#### **The Rise of Sunday Solomon: From Streets to Basketball Courts**

First, let us consider the story of Sunday Solomon, a quintessential example of the 'rags to riches' narrative. With a background that could easily be perceived as troubled, Sunday has risen from the streets of Nigeria to embrace the world of professional basketball. He currently plays for Titans Basketball Academy in Jikwoyi, Abuja, an initiative dedicated to uplifting street children through sports.

Sunday's journey is a poignant reminder of how stories of perseverance and commitment often go unnoticed in mainstream media. Thankfully, initiatives like "Chess in Slums," spearheaded by Tunde Onakoya, aim to spotlight positive stories of young individuals making significant strides despite their challenges. Such uplifting narratives deserve greater attention within the broader media landscape.



In an interview, Sunday expressed, "Nigerian youths have to take their destiny into their own hands if they want to achieve greatness and make a better Nigeria." His belief in focus and dedication signifies a broader sentiment among the youth: that despite distractions and societal pressures, persistence is key to achieving one's dreams. He emphasised the difficulty of carving a professional path in basketball in Nigeria, where inadequate structures fail to support young athletes. Consequently, many players seek opportunities abroad to realise their aspirations.

For Sunday, the way forward is clear; success lies in taking tangible actions today to shape the future. His optimism embodies a burgeoning hope among many young Nigerians who refuse to succumb to despair in the face of adversity. Such stories, rooted in determination, offer invaluable lessons for the youth, proving that with enough motivation and resilience, success is possible.

#### **FynNonye: Reshaping the Music Landscape**

Next, we turn to Chinonye Ugwoke, more widely known as FynNonye, a fast-rising music executive and talent manager from Enugu State, renowned for her work in the Nigerian music industry. For her, music transcends





mere entertainment; it is a powerful connection to her cultural roots. FynNonye is determined to help her artists navigate the complexities of the industry while encouraging them to innovate and remain true to their heritage.

As she describes, “I often find myself caught between the nostalgia of simpler times and the demands of a fast-paced, globalised world.” Her role involves not just recognising emerging talent but helping them harmonise their cultural identities with contemporary influences. FynNonye believes that the essence of Nigerian music lies in its historical richness, and through her work, she is dedicated to preserving that essence while promoting growth and innovation. Her experiences embody the challenges many Nigerian artists face—balancing tradition with modernity while grappling with the realities of a competitive global market. The key to her approach is collaboration; relationships form the backbone of success in the music industry. She actively cultivates an environment where innovation and tradition can coexist, creating opportunities for unique voices to emerge and thrive.

### **Isaiah Garpiya: The Voice of a New Generation**

Another compelling narrative comes from Isaiah Garpiya, popularly known as “Dimanograph.” A TikTok sensation

from Plateau State, Isaiah uses his platform to deliver incisive commentary on pop culture and social issues, cutting through the noise with his unapologetic cynicism. “The youth are not allowed to be truly fruitful because of the inflation in Nigeria,” he argues, highlighting the struggles that many young Nigerians face in establishing themselves professionally amid economic uncertainty.

Isaiah’s storytelling resonates with a generation increasingly frustrated by systemic obstacles and government policies that stifle creativity. His raw and unfiltered approach challenges the status quo, striking a chord with countless young Nigerians seeking authenticity over manufactured narratives.

While some may see cynicism as a barrier, Isaiah demonstrates how it can catalyse discussion and introspection, offering an avenue for peers to engage critically with their reality. In his words, “People want me to speak on these issues.” This willingness to confront difficult truths positions Isaiah as a remarkable voice for Nigerian youths determined to shape the narratives that define their existence.

### **Samuel Kugbiyi: An International Perspective**

To broaden our understanding of the Nigerian youth experience, we turn

**While some may see cynicism as a barrier, Isaiah demonstrates how it can catalyse discussion and introspection, offering an avenue for peers to engage critically with their reality**



to Samuel Kugbiyi, a media producer currently residing in Canada. Originally from Kogi State, Samuel provides a contrasting perspective on the outlook and opportunities available to Nigerian youths abroad. “Nigerian youths are known to be exceptional people, talented and hardworking,” he remarks, echoing sentiments he has encountered in international circles.

Samuel stresses that while challenges in Nigeria are steep, the obstacles he faces in Canada differ significantly. There, he finds a support system that facilitates growth—opportunities for workshops, grants, and networking that might be scarce in Nigeria. His journey underscores the duality of experiences—while pride and ambition are shared by Nigerian youths, the systemic support critical for success varies dramatically from one environment to another.

Through hard work and resilience, Samuel has capitalised on these opportunities, culminating in his role as the voice of a character in the upcoming animated series *Iyanu*, set to premiere on Cartoon Network and Max in 2025. His story serves as a reminder of the potential within Nigerian youth, given the right conditions and support.

### Amplifying the Voices of Nigerian Youth

The narratives of Nigerian youth, whether rooted in local contexts or explored from international perspectives, weave a rich tapestry of resilience, creativity, and determination. From aspiring athletes like Sunday Solomon to innovative music executives like FynNonye, from the satirical commentary of Isaiah Garpiya to the promising achievements of Samuel Kugbiyi, these stories reflect the multifaceted experiences of youth navigating a complex socio-economic landscape.

It is vital to elevate these voices, acknowledging both their triumphs and struggles while recognising the unique challenges they face in a country often fraught with systemic issues. By celebrating their successes and addressing their needs, we can harness their collective energy to forge a brighter future for Nigeria and the continent at large.

Ultimately, the journey ahead compels us to foster environments that prioritise youth empowerment and encourage innovation, paving the way for a new generation that will redefine what it means to be young in Nigeria.



**Ultimately, the journey ahead compels us to foster environments that prioritise youth empowerment and encourage innovation, paving the way for a new generation that will redefine what it means to be young in Nigeria**





The ALM  
**AFRICA  
SUMMIT**  
• L O N D O N 2 0 2 5 •  
&

**15<sup>TH</sup> AFRICAN  
BUSINESS  
LEADERSHIP**  
★ AWARDS ★

T H E M E

Catalysing Resilience and Global Competitiveness  
in Africa's push for Ascendancy

WED THURS  
**8-9 JULY  
2025**

House of Lords,  
London-UK

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:  
[info@africanleadership.co.uk](mailto:info@africanleadership.co.uk)

VISIT OUR WEBSITE  
[africanleadershipmagazine.co.uk](http://africanleadershipmagazine.co.uk)







# INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY AT 50: STRIDES, SETBACKS, AND SOLIDARITY

**By Megan Rabbitt** (Director, Media and Content at the United Nations Foundation)



Fifty years after the United Nations first commemorated International Women's Day, what has changed for girls and women? We're taking stock of the strides and the setbacks.

The year was 1975, and a movement was growing. Led by and for women, the global women's movement had reached a momentous new milestone after decades of activism.

Thousands of feminists from around the world were heading to Mexico that summer for a conference that would deliver a burst of momentum in the global push for women's equality, development, and peace. Dubbed "International Women's Year" by the United Nations, 1975 also brought long-sought recognition to the women's movement as the UN celebrated International Women's Day for the first time on March 8. Two years later, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution to formalise the observance. And so was born the annual day to commemorate girls and women and the long fight for equality that remains unfinished today.

Because of the courage and resolve of generations of women who came together in solidarity, girls and women have fought for — and won — fundamental rights and freedoms in the 50 years since.

But we can't stop until girls and women are equal everywhere, and in every part of life.



We're looking back at the reality for girls and women in 1975 — recognising how far we've come, and how far we still have to go until every girl and woman on Earth realises their right to equality.



## 1. Women in Leadership

In 1975, just four countries had ever been led by a woman. In the five decades since, over 60 countries have had a woman as their leader. While that's a notable jump, those numbers are less impressive in context. Of the UN's 193 Member States, less than one-third have ever had a woman leader, and right now, just 13 are being led by women. For nine of those 13 countries, this is the first time a woman has been head of the government, which hopefully signals a trend toward greater representation. The real test, however, will be whether the systemic barriers that keep women from having a seat at decision-making tables can be dismantled. Only then will we see equal representation of women in power.

**Fifty years after the United Nations first commemorated International Women's Day, what has changed for girls and women? We're taking stock of the strides and the setbacks**





## 2. Ending Violence Against Women

Fifty years ago, the majority of the world's population lived in countries that did not criminalise domestic violence. Today, 90% live in countries that do. At least 162 countries have enacted laws on domestic violence, and 147 have laws on sexual harassment in the workplace. However, having laws on the books does not always provide sufficient protection for girls and women. It's essential that national laws are compliant with international standards and are actually implemented and enforced.

## 3. Girls and Women on the Development Agenda

Girls and women and their rights, needs, and aspirations were not historically included in global development agendas. That has changed in the past 50 years. The Millennium Development Goals, launched in 2000, and the Sustainable Development Goals or SDGs, in 2015, introduced development frameworks with specific goals and targets on girls' and women's rights, opportunities, and well-being.

SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and

empower all women and girls includes nine targets that strive to end gender discrimination, violence, and forced marriages while ensuring access to healthcare, economic resources, and more. Despite some gains, progress has not been fast enough. About one in four girls continue to be married as children and at the current rate, it will take 137 years to lift all girls and women out of poverty.

## 4. UN Women

In the years and decades following the UN's first celebration of International Women's Day in 1975, the global women's movement steadily gained formal recognition and secured hard-won gains within the UN and broader international system. Just one year later, the UN established the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women. Finally, in 2010, the UN General Assembly voted unanimously to create an entity dedicated exclusively to gender equality and the empowerment of women worldwide. Initially known as the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, today we have UN Women.



**Girls and women and their rights, needs, and aspirations were not historically included in global development agendas. That has changed in the past 50 years**





## 5. Women, Peace and Security

The indispensable role that women play in advancing peace and security was not recognised 50 years ago, nor was the disproportionate toll of conflict on girls and women. That has changed in the decades since, most notably through the landmark UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000, which established what is today known as the Women, Peace and Security agenda. Recognizing the imperative of gender equality and women's rights to national and international peace and security, the resolution "affirms that peace and security efforts are more sustainable when women are equal partners in the prevention of violent conflict, the delivery of relief and recovery efforts and in the forging of lasting peace."

A lot can change in 50 years. What happens in the next 50 will be up to each of us alive today. Progress is possible, but it is not inevitable.

Generations of women acting in solidarity have built a movement for equality. Five decades since the UN first recognised International Women's Day, we can become the first generation to

close the gender gap. It will take girls and women's movements, which have always driven change, and all those in positions of power to dismantle the systemic barriers that still stand in the way of equality, to implement and enforce policies that unequivocally affirm that girls and women are no less human or worthy or equal than boys and men.

Only then will we be able to fulfill the promise of equality for all.



**The indispensable role that women play in advancing peace and security was not recognised 50 years ago, nor was the disproportionate toll of conflict on girls and women**





**CONNECT.  
INSPIRE.  
CELEBRATE.**





Trinity Group, a leading conglomerate with diverse business interests, is committed to transforming industries and making a positive impact on the global economy. Our extensive network spans across multiple sectors, including oil and gas, energy & power, infrastructure, mining, technology, commodity trading, and agriculture.

## Trinity Companies



Revolutionizing mobile money, ICT, and fintech services to empower financial freedom and inclusion.



A driving force in infrastructure development, Amocco Construction focuses on commercial, residential, road, and bridge construction projects in South Sudan.



Delivering cutting-edge ICT solutions to help businesses thrive in the digital era.



An integrated energy company specializing in petroleum, crude oil trading, downstream operations, and energy generation (thermal and solar power)

Trinity Holdings Limited  
No- 11, Amoco Complex,  
Kolelo Road,  
Off American Embassy  
Thongping Area,  
Juba- South Sudan

[Trinitygroupcorp.com](http://Trinitygroupcorp.com)

[info@trinityholdingsrss.com](mailto:info@trinityholdingsrss.com) +211 928887707





# FirstDirect: Your Integrated Online Corporate Banking Platform

Discover a suite of cutting-edge tools, tailored to simplify your business, trade finance and cash management needs.

- Manage local currency, foreign currency and cross-border payments conveniently
- Automate international trade processes with support for regulatory forms
- Receive payment via virtual account and invoice payments
- Set up Direct Debit for FirstBank and other banks' mandates
- Optimize your cash flow with our seamless account receivables solutions
- Perform account sweep and access other liquidity management tools at your fingertips
- Explore Host-2-Host and ERP Integration to third-party solutions
- Pay Federal and State Government taxes and levies



Download the FirstDirect app or scan the QR code to start evolving with us.

**For Corporate customers only.**