

Africa is the blueprint



Thoughts
Yvonne C. Mtengwa

Africa boasts the great honour of being the youngest continent in the world, with a reported more than 75% of its 1.2 billion inhabitants under the age of 35. But while this may be a beacon of promise for Africa's youth to play an active role in contributing towards a revitalised future anchored by a more youthful narrative, the disparity in our youth leveraging opportunities for advancement in education, technology, entrepreneurship and so on when pitted against Western individuals also under 35, is quite evident.

Can it be said that Africa is ready for the population growth that awaits us over the next 20–30 years? Are governments equipped to necessitate the required transitions of our young populous, from one life stage to the next? What about our infrastructure? Why are goals for Africa's youth always slated to be for the future when our time is now?

November 2019 witnessed the African Union Commission's launch of what would be coined the "1 Million by 2021 Initiative", created with the objective of fostering educational, entrepreneurship, employment and engagement opportunities for one million Africans by 2021. Countless pan-African conferences continue to highlight the need for governments and NGOs to prioritise creating opportunities that develop the pathway towards this milestone. The question begs though, whether these goals should be geared for 2021 as much as they should be part of the current frameworks of governments and youth development stakeholders.

As an African woman living in the diaspora, it's always a complex set of emotions that comes with my pursuing strategic intent against the multiple grains of misunderstanding from my non-African counterparts. If it's not a case of limited knowledge on the intricacies of Africa's political and socio-economic landscapes, it's a sense of Africans not being valued as equals in the context of humanity. Ours is peddled as a story of strife and hardship, with our continent deemed as one that's eternally ripe for exploitation. But my experiences in attending networking groups and conferences organised by African entrepreneurs and key institutional decision makers illustrates the great belief we as Africans have in our continent, notwithstanding the difficulties we face. We truly believe in our time being now and not in the future. We are the youth of today and are on an active campaign to identify initiatives tailored to



There is no blueprint or standard that we are held to. We are the blueprint.

support the ambitions of the youth, thereby bridging the gap between status quo and the implementation strategies we all hope for.

Gloria Mkushi, a 36-year old lawyer, splits her time between the Netherlands (where she studied and later registered her company InterDev Consulting) and South-East Africa. She facilitates the mobilisation of financial resources from the global North intergovernmental organisations and their partners for projects on our continent, checking for compliance with EU law, while ensuring harmony between the laws of the African nations she is advocating for projects within. Because she works with grants, foundations, youth organisations and NGOs, advocating for gender equity, environmental conversations and good governance in Southern and Eastern Africa, the case of the progressive African youth is a subject in which she is fully versed.

"Our rapidly developing economies, emergence of the middle-classes and the leaps and bounds Africans are making in technology, healthcare, fashion and culture, are a testament that Africa is really not a continent still characterised solely by war, corruption and other stereotypes. Of course, the continent has many issues, but all continents do," Mkushi says when asked about what contributions the African youth can and should be making to the advancement of our continent's progressive agenda.

A good number of us under 40 and living far from the coastlines of Africa or perhaps like Mkushi, are stationed on the continent but are away from our countries of origin, carry a sense of urgency in collectively redrafting our continent's narratives through knowledge and experience sharing, ideation and project execution. Perhaps this explains just how many young Africans are making global lists of people to watch in technology, science, media, entrepreneurship and other sectors. We desire to be counted in the one million youths thriving in these African Union commission 4 Es; education, entrepreneurship, employment and engagement. But can we wait for politics to dictate how that will happen?

There is no country in Africa void of political and socio-economic challenges, and so it remains our collective effort to change the game by becoming a part of the agenda that will contribute towards the Africa we want to see. Our voices are getting louder and the progressive nature of



our exploits is coming to the fore more than ever. The new decade brought with it continued evolution and heightened positioning for the shift that's desperately needed for Africa's youngest citizens.

"The aspect of youth goes without say. Africa is the youngest continent on the planet and that is extremely exciting. We are young now; our present is what drives us and should inform how we formulate policies on the continent. We are in an age where more equity between males and females can be achieved and there is no blueprint or standard that we are held to. We are the blueprint," Mkushi asserts.

"We are not waiting to experience anything. We are constantly 'hustling' to get by. I also think this lends itself to the number of entrepreneurs in Africa. Necessity is the mother of invention. I would consider myself far more privileged than the average African and even with all this education, I decided to start a business because I could not find formal employment for so many years. Knowing that the job prospects are bleak for most Africans, many of us head into SMEs and sole proprietorships. There certainly is a market for that; a young market who should be able to support those businesses for years to come!"

Like Mkushi, living in the diaspora and still carrying a strong inclination to be a part of Africa's entrepreneurship discourse,

challenged me to start my business in PR, Communications and now Publishing. I felt that more of our stories needed to be told by us and for us. The excitement of being able to do so in an environment where prospects in Africa spell intrigue is what keeps me and other professionals and entrepreneurs of African descent on a quest to define how we too can be a part of this fast evolving story of our youth taking their place on regional and international podiums.

The struggles ahead may be significant, but we ought to also remember that it was the same fight and desperation for change that has resulted in the progress we've witnessed on our continent in decades past. Members of our political, economic, medical, technological, media and engineering fraternity were once youth too. While we learn from them, perhaps now is a better time as any to raise our hands and highlight our readiness in receiving the batons that are in some cases, long overdue to be passed on.

– Yvonne Chiedza Mtengwa is an international speaker, publicist and the author of "Reinvented: Challenging insecurity to live authentically through faith", a book encouraging women to confront their issues with relationships, insecurities and self-fulfilling prophecies, in an effort to truly discover who they were created to be. Visit and subscribe to her website on ReinventedToday.com or check out her Instagram @[quintessentially_yvonne](https://www.instagram.com/quintessentially_yvonne) ●