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JUNE | JULY 2023

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Improving yield, efficiency and profitability in agriculture comes down to the harvesting of technology. At its forefront are the agritech innovators bringing transformative change to the continent's green economy. FORBES AFRICA profiles some of Africa's biggest agripreneurs, inventors, and agribusiness leaders changing the way we think about farming, food security and climate resilience. They have cultivated a passion for smart agriculture and are leading the charge for social change not only for the sector but for the continent—and for humanity's sustainable future.

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Powering The Green Economy



This issue smells of the earth, of rain-drenched soil and the sweat of the African farmer.

This issue is like a shade card, presenting the myriad brown, green and blue hues of mother nature.

This issue is where we rolled up our sleeves and got our hands dirty to unearth a raft of new innovations unraveling in smart farming in some of the deepest pockets of Africa.

Agriculture is an emotional topic for the continent, because far from the boardrooms and ballrooms of Africa Inc., large swathes of arable land exist, being painfully tilled, cultivated and ploughed to feed a continent of over a billion.

Sustainability tastes of Africa, one agripreneur says in this edition where we profile innovators in agritech.

It's "a nuance of flavors", a congruence of senses and a harmony of heterogeneous earthscapes. With a quarter of the economy of sub-Saharan Africa driven by agriculture, this is a report on the breakthroughs and ideas in farming that are proudly African, as you do need agritech to be more bankable in the business.

Collectively, these agripreneurs are on a mission to come up with ways to beat food insecurity, climate catastrophe and hunger.


But give the earth water and respect anywhere and it will reap rewards. At a fintech summit in Dubai that I attended recently, at one of the stalls in the exhibition space, I spoke to a man in a suit in the agritech sector holding up a cluster of *black* tomatoes grown in the Arabian desert. "With water and electricity, you can grow anything,

even in the desert," he exclaimed. Place vegetation under a solar panel and it will still grow, as agrivoltaic farming is proving.

Recently, I also had a chance to visit the Museum of the Future, an iconic new addition to Dubai's glistening skyline, as I watched in mouth-watering awe an entire floor dedicated to the shape and form of food as we don't know it yet, including genetically modified flowers, fire-resistant trees and pest-free crops that don't create waste. It's the touch, texture and feel of things to come for a still-sentient world.

Even ChatGPT can contribute to developing sustainable agriculture in Africa. So too drones that are eye-in-the-sky tools for improving yields, as we speak about in this issue.

It was a week of more moonshot perspectives, as, at the fintech summit that I was, a full ballroom listened in rapt attention to Brian Armstrong, CEO of Coinbase, the world's leading cryptocurrency exchange platform. He told the audience with a great amount of optimism: "We want to get to a billion people in the world, through international expansion and in the highest populations such as in India and Africa." The most popular demographic for crypto is 25-35 years old, and Africa is beginning to boast its own examples in the crypto economy, such as *Forbes* Under 30 list-maker Chris Maurice of crypto exchange Yellow Card, who launched the company in Africa from a dorm room in Alabama as a college student when he was 19 and has raised a total of \$57 million until now.

He told me that crypto and Web3 are solving Web2 problems in Africa, and he is using it to change the way money moves around the continent. Clearly, the innovation culture is here. Even in our farms and fields. It's a brave new world. 

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Photo by Motlabana Monnkgotla

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Lessons From A Dark Period And The Way Forward

The most welcome news on May 8 was the announcement by the World Health Organization (WHO) that Covid-19 is no longer a global emergency. While the stand-down siren has been sounded, we must remain vigilant and take precautions as there are still thousands of people around the world contracting milder forms of the virus; in some cases still resulting in serious issues for people who have underlying health conditions. Some facts from the WHO website suggest that (as of early May 2023), over the last three years, approximately 756 million Covid cases were recorded with approximately 7 million people who lost their lives. Assuming the global population at about 8 billion, this translates to almost 9.5% of the population being infected and approximately 0.09% of the population having died. Comparing this with the Spanish Flu that started in February 1918 and lasted approximately two years, 500 million people or a third of the then global population were infected and about 50 million people died (3.3% of the global population). Though spread a century apart, these are events, particularly Covid-19, that have prepared us to deal with and overcome adversity together as a global community.

“THE AFRICAN AGENDA NEEDS TO BE FOCUSED ON CONSOLIDATING ITS POSITION BY RAPIDLY STRENGTHENING AND TRANSFORMING INTRA-AFRICAN RELATIONSHIPS.”

There were many lessons from this dark period in human history, the most significant of which was the importance of leadership at all levels. Some countries, with comparable economic, demographic, social and developmental status, managed better than their peers. A trait that was consistent with good leaders was effective, clear and periodic communications.



There is no greater leadership failure in a crisis than delayed, ineffective and inconsistent communications. People understand problems as it's a sad reality of the majority of human existence. Reinforcing problems and assigning blame only spreads uncertainty and creates panic which is synonymous with most politicians; what people want to know is that they are secure and that appropriate, quantifiable and urgent action is being taken to protect them.

What the last three years have further reinforced is that the world is not and will never be an equal place; the disparity between the developed and developing world will continue to grow, particularly if third world countries do not break the shackles of infinite bondage and over-reliance on the first world countries. No one has any interest in seeing Africa become self-sustainable except the people of Africa and the focus now should be on building sustainable ecosystems within geographic prox-

“GUIDED BY A POLARIZED WORLD, AFRICAN NATIONS CANNOT GET SUBMERGED IN FUTILE POLITICS AND THE SELF-SERVING DEFENCE AND ECONOMIC POLICIES OF WESTERN COUNTRIES.”

imity. Never has the need for localization been more critical than now. Never has there been a need for more African unity ever before, than now. Guided by a polarized world, African nations cannot get submerged in futile politics and the self-serving defence and economic policies of Western countries. Even if they plunder their combined resources through a false sense of ego and self-righteousness, the developed world will continue to have sustainable reserves for several generations. The African agenda needs to be focused on consolidating its position by rapidly strengthening and transforming intra-African relationships.

As the threat to life from the pandemic has reduced, people in general have begun to get back to a near normal way of life. Travel and tourism have bounced back with a vengeance and despite high costs, people are making up for the time lost from 2020-22. The war in Ukraine has continued with no immediate solution that has compelled a change in geopolitical alignments. This event, in my opinion, is going to impact the future much more than even the pandemic or any other historic economic crisis. The trust deficit that exists between the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is at its highest. With a deep divide in the UN, no decision or change can ever be made if there is a conflict with any of the permanent members of the UNSC. Changes to the structure of the UN are being demanded by member nations but even as membership is being expanded in key functions of the UN, the final authority and ‘veto’ still rests with the five countries that not only have contradictory interest but also have a deep fissure in ideologies between the United States, the United Kingdom and France on one side and China and Russia on the other.

Sadly, this very aggressive demeanor resulting from the Ukraine conflict has witnessed the dramatic and wasteful increase in defence budgets of all countries around the world. Rather than spending money on green energy, ESG, housing, healthcare, education, and alleviating poverty, resources are senselessly being allocated to defence systems and extremely destructive munitions that will lead to the doom of our future. Paradoxically, the price of this perceived and notional security will be the very reason that people will continue to live in bondage and poverty. The beneficiaries are just a few

countries that are the usual suspects in much that is going wrong with the world. My question therefore remains—‘where does accountability lie in the free world’ where, shrouded in extreme conflicts of interest, the ‘judge, jury and the executioner’ are the same? The smallest issues in governance in the developing world are highlighted and severely dealt with through harsh measures but there seems to be no apprehension about the larger issues that are crippling the world.

These inconsistencies have alarmed and prompted reactions from the oil-rich Arab world. The unilateral imposition of sanctions and freezing the assets of nations by Western countries is creating an insecurity for the future. For perhaps the first time and a marked change from historic conformity, there is an apparent move by Saudi Arabia to sidestep Western-imposed sanctions and build harmony within the Middle East. Syria has been invited back into the Arab League after 12 years and Saudi Arabia has also started playing a pivotal role in settling the various conflicts between Syria, Iran and Yemen. It would appear that with the start of consular services between the Arab world and Iran, and with Iraq largely neutralized, things could gradually return to normal within the Persian Gulf. These developments are happening as China and Russia get closer in a strategic collaboration and China, with its large balance sheet, is starting to play a more active role in the Middle East. These realignments are expected to provide more security, both financial and strategic, to nations in Asia.

European countries have supported various countries in Africa through aid packages for various reasons including a sense of responsibility for historic injustices like colonization and slavery. The source of the aid, by country, can be traced according to the language spoken by the European countries i.e. English, German, Dutch, French or Portuguese. This aid has come at a high cost as a lot of tangible benefits for donors were traded in lieu of the aid. A lot of exploitation has taken place in extractive industries to include oil, gold, diamonds, precious stones, minerals etc. and agricultural products. Very little value addition has happened on the continent and no effort has been made to create an enabling environment. Interestingly, the United States has so far had an erratic and inconsistent policy on Africa that has given the Chinese a headstart on establishing a strong foothold in Africa including but not

“SADLY, THIS VERY AGGRESSIVE DEMEANOR RESULTING FROM THE UKRAINE CONFLICT HAS WITNESSED THE DRAMATIC AND WASTEFUL INCREASE IN DEFENCE BUDGETS OF ALL COUNTRIES AROUND THE WORLD. RATHER THAN SPENDING MONEY ON GREEN ENERGY, ESG, HOUSING, HEALTHCARE, EDUCATION, AND ALLEVIATING POVERTY, RESOURCES ARE SENSELESSLY BEING ALLOCATED TO DEFENCE SYSTEMS AND EXTREMELY DESTRUCTIVE MUNITIONS.”

limited to two permanent military bases that have been established in East Africa and West Africa. These developments, along with Russian and European interests, will polarize the countries in Africa and developing independent bilateral and multilateral intra-Africa partnerships may get adversely influenced. Remaining neutral and non-aligned is a key ingredient to self-determination, self-reliance and enhanced sovereignty; very few African countries have managed to keep this neutrality.

A factor that has remained congruous for financial security is the dominance of the US Dollar (USD) as a reserve currency. A lot of currencies have remained pegged to the USD. However, with the growing mistrust with US policies, the rise of the Chinese Yuan and a distinct move to create mechanisms for the bilateral settlement of payments between countries, it is likely that over the medium term the USD will lose its place as a reserve currency. The Afreximbank's brainchild, the Pan-African Payment and Settlement System (PAPSS) to facilitate inter-convertibility amongst African currencies has yet to be finalized as it still faces several structural impediments although the Afreximbank is providing a \$3 billion settlement cover as an overdraft facility. The greatest saving for Africans will be the \$5 billion paid in transfer fees to international banks.

Less reliance on the USD will give rise to alternative means of storing wealth. While gold is the most likely reserve medium in the short-term, crypto and digital assets will most likely dominate the future of convertibility, transferability and storage in a decentralized and secure manner. While cryptocurrencies are a relatively new area, their mass adaptation will be the most transformative milestone

in the history of financial services. Although there is growing adaptation in Nigeria (eNaira), Kenya, South Africa and Zimbabwe, African countries are trailing in the crypto journey. Education and regulations along with cultural changes and building basic trust in this digital asset will play an indispensable role in the adaptation of this far-reaching and revolutionary change.

Despite the general negativity in current affairs and the economic volatility and correction caused by the failure of the Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank, the general market trends have remained positive. Most countries in Europe and Asia have seen a turnaround post-pandemic. In some countries like the United Arab Emirates (UAE), in particular the emirate of Dubai, the first quarter reports, across all sectors, have been exemplary. The first indication was on the travel and tourism industry where things are getting back to 2019 levels. Despite the high costs of flights and hotels, the tourism sector has been thumping since October 2022. The property market is once again buoyant with prices having shot up and the construction frenzy is back to normal with developers working hard to keep up with demand. Coming from all over the world, enticed by excellent policies, safety, stability and long term visas, there is an exponential increase in the numbers of people making the UAE their residence.

African countries have started making their own recovery post the pandemic. Traveling through some of the countries, one gets the distinct feeling that governments are working to bring about the necessary change. The change in Kenya away from dynasty politics will be a great pilot to see whether the country thrives under a new leadership or will get sucked back into the maladies of power and abuse. There are smaller yet shining stars like Rwanda that continue to give hope and the smaller economies like Botswana that are showing tremendous promise. We have an arduous journey ahead but we must plod along irrespective of the odds and remember the closing stanza of Robert Frost's famous poem: “The woods are lovely, dark and deep. But I have promises to keep. And miles to go before I sleep. And miles to go before I sleep.” 📖

Tapping Into Rwanda's Global Business Services Opportunity



Rwanda – commonly known as the land of a thousand hills – is increasingly a land of a thousand opportunities. In 2021, Rwanda was among Africa's fastest-growing economies, with a GDP growth of 10.9%. This was no surprise. Since the genocide against the Tutsi in 1994, Rwanda has transformed into a vibrant investment destination – its economy quintupled since the 2000s, 25% of its people were lifted out of poverty, and life expectancy has increased by 25 years.

Today, Rwanda is a modern, forward-looking country. First-time visitors are awed by the clean streets, seamless visa-on-arrival (or visa-free entry for members of the African Union, the Commonwealth of Nations, and La Francophonie), and friendly people.

Foreign investors marvel at the ease of doing business. Rwanda ranks 38th globally

in the last World Bank Doing Business index – 2nd in Africa and the only low-income country in the top 50 – it takes a mere 6 hours to incorporate your business, and there are no restrictions on ownership, foreign currency or repatriation of profits.

This visible progress has attracted investors from across the globe, including leading global business services (GBS) operators. While still a nascent industry, Rwanda is home to an emerging GBS sector. International outsourcing operators – including TekExperts and CCI Global – have recently launched operations in Rwanda, and GBS industry rankings highlight Rwanda as an up-and-coming delivery location.

Beyond the world-class investment environment, GBS operators benefit from strong communications infrastructure, a rich and competitive talent pool, and the speed of setting up. Rwanda features 95% LTE coverage and a reliable fibre optic network, as val-

idated by its 6th place in Africa in the 2020 Network-Readiness Index. Most importantly, Rwanda has a wealth of highly motivated, genuinely friendly, and fast-learning youth. Over 70% of the population is under 30, nearly a third is fluent in English or French, and around 50,000 higher education graduates join the labour force each year.

To further facilitate the entry of GBS operators, the Rwanda Development Board (RDB) serves as the one-stop shop for investors doing business in the country. The government has also partnered with ecosystem players like Harambee Youth Accelerator and the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ), who support recruitment, training, and placement of young graduates in GBS companies.

The rapid progress and the abundance of opportunities make Rwanda the ideal delivery location for GBS operators to combine impact with excellence.

THE RWANDA OPPORTUNITY

1. Strong & reliable communications infrastructure

- 2nd in East African Community for network readiness with fast & reliable international fibre optic connectivity (BPO industry-standard communication technology)
- Expansive domestic fibre optic backbone of 7,000km, reaching all districts

2. Rich & growing talent pool

- 30% of Rwandans fluent in English or French, and over 50,000 higher education graduates each year
- Home to many of Africa's top STEM Universities, including Carnegie Mellon University, African Leadership University, Africa Institute of Mathematical Sciences

3. Move-in-ready prime real estate

- Kigali offers high-quality office space in prime locations, with 9000m² of estimated available/constructed office space.

From Liberia To The World: 'A Connoisseur Of The Continent'

After a long and stressful but successful debut at Paris Fashion Week and becoming one of the few designers from Africa to do so, Aryea Kolubah is holidaying in Jamaica when she sits down for this Zoom interview with FORBES AFRICA.

Her eccentric and bold designs wowed the fashion stage in March, and you can tell that her “vibe” is inspired by her West African roots, which translates to bright ethnic prints and vibrant colors to create sartorial statements for the fearless and confident woman.

This is all done with very some specific messaging.

“I’m such a connoisseur of art but also I am such a connoisseur of the continent, and I take that show with me everywhere,” Kolubah says. “...Being from Africa, [there’s so much art that’s being stolen]... but yet still, we are fighting to find our place in the art and entertainment space. And I’m just so fortunate that I am at a pivotal time in my life where I can contribute to society’s demands.”

Although this was her debut on the Paris stage, this is not her first time taking the fashion industry by storm.

Kolubah’s designs have already graced international platforms, including New York Fashion Week, Miami Swim week, San Francisco Fashion Week, Louisville Fashion Nite-Out, and Runway Liberia International.

Born in Liberia, but raised in the United States from 2005, Kolubah was influenced by her father, who instilled in her a thirst

for knowledge, creative expression, a strong work ethic, and a determination to pursue her dreams.

“When I told my father that I wanted to be a designer, he was like ‘but you could be a doctor, you could be a lawyer, all of these things’. But when I told him I love art he got me my very first sewing machine.”

Unfortunately, Kolubah’s father was not able to see her first foray in global fashion as not long after she received her sewing machine, her father died in a tragic fire accident she says could have also taken her life. But she survived.

“My father passed away [because of] the fire in my apartment, [where we both were, but] by the grace of God, I’m here today... Fashion has to be in the therapeutic part of my life.

“The craft does come with ups and downs but I’ve always dreamed that this particular gift of mine would take me places,” Kolubah says. “Being African, and just being invited to that type of prestigious event like Paris to showcase my art...And just beyond that, the way in which the audience accepted it and everything else that has followed since... it’s a dream come true.”

She is grateful indeed.

“I represent a million Africans because there’s so much created from the continent and [people] who haven’t had the chance. But now that I do have the chance, if I were to give somebody advice, I would say just ‘go for it!’” **F**





ON THE MOVIE MAP AGAIN AFTER THREE DECADES

In May, the Cannes Film Festival announced the selection of *Sarafina!* for the 2023 Official Selection–Cannes Classics at the 76th annual film festival.

Sarafina! debuted more than 30 years ago and is considered an iconic South African film embraced by a multi-generational audience over the years.

“It is exciting to be returning to the Cannes Film Festival with *Sarafina!* after 30 years. Being selected for Cannes Classics is a rare

and coveted recognition,” says the film’s producer Anant Singh in a statement.

The film portrays the power of young women who made their mark in South Africa’s journey to freedom. It is a vibrant combination of drama, music and dance.

“I remember in 1992, *Sarafina!* got a 20-minute standing ovation. It was so exciting,” says the film’s lead actress, Leleti Khumalo, on Instagram. “So I will be going back there to relive the moment. It is so exciting. Remember *Sarafina!* is going to put South Africa on the map again.”

ZIMBABWE’S DIGITAL MONEY

According to *Bloomberg*, Zimbabwe used nearly 140 kilograms of gold reserves to back the first sale of its digital money. According to reports, in May, the central bank received 135 applications valued at 14 billion Zimbabwe dollars (\$12 million) to purchase the gold-backed digital tokens.



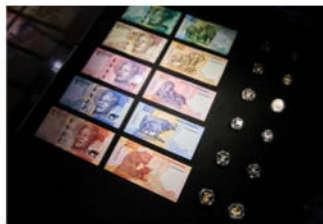
According to the United Nations, corruption costs the global economy \$3.6 trillion each year. Over the last 50 years, it is estimated that Africa has lost more than \$1 trillion to corruption, equivalent to all the official development assistance received during the same period.

SMALL CHANGE, BIG THEME

The South African Reserve Bank (SARB) announced it would be upgrading the country’s banknotes and coins from May 4.

“The denominations will be introduced incrementally,” SARB said in a statement. “The upgraded banknotes and coin have enhanced security features and new designs; however, the broad themes for the upgraded banknotes remain the same as the current banknotes, while the theme for the coin is deep ecology.”

The banknotes continue to pay tribute to South Africa’s first democratically elected president, Nelson Mandela, with his portrait retained on the front of the banknotes while the Big 5 animals are now illustrated as a family on the back.



The deep ecology theme for the coin acknowledges the interconnectedness of living organisms as an integral part of the environment.

The new design was reportedly not met with the same enthusiasm by citizens who wondered why the change when the country still continues to experience crippling power cuts. Reports in May noted that the South African rand hit a three-year low against the US dollar.

INVESTMENT MIGRATION GAINS GROUND

Between Quarter 4 of 2022 and Quarter 1 of this year, international investment migration advisory firm, Henley & Partners, recorded how rich South Africans are making enquiries about residence and citizenship. According to the firm, investment program options shot up by 66.8% during the two quarters. They were also up by 49% in Q1 2023 compared to the same period in 2022.

“We expect to see

investment migration continue to gain ground in Africa in the coming years,” Managing Partner of Henley & Partners South Africa, Amanda Smit, said in a statement. “Not only on the demand side from African high-net-worth individuals looking to improve their travel freedom and economic mobility, secure location optionality, and mitigate risk, but also on the supply side, with more and more African countries looking to launch their own residence and citizenship by investment options to increase the inflow of both capital and talent.”



KENYA’S CURRENCY WOES: HOW DID IT GET THERE?

Kenya has had a tough few months: ballooning debt, an enormous wage bill, and a depreciating shilling exacerbated by global conditions. Now, the government is unable to pay its salaries. An increased import bill, investment portfolio outflows, and servicing of existing foreign debt have also resulted in the reserves falling below the statutory minimum of four months of imports, with the Kenya shilling depreciating to an all-time low of KES135 to the US dollar in May.

So, how did Kenya get here?

“It was a matter of ‘when’ and not ‘if’ KES would weaken to reflect its fundamentals. There have been successive external shocks since 2020, but

the currency remained relatively stable relative to its peers. In this light, it is not surprising the sharp adjustment we have seen this year and which we see bringing it closer to its fundamental value,” explains Churchill Ogutu, an economist with IC Africa.

Kenya is among several African countries that have experienced a decline in the local value of currencies, with a 25% decline in value since 2020, to a large extent caused by the rising interest rate environment in the United States (US), which has witnessed a very aggressive rate tightening by the US Federal Reserve.

Kenya’s borrowing for the financial year 2022-2023 is also substantially behind target.

“Given the continued uncertainty in the global financial markets, it appears that [the government] will have no choice but to borrow at higher rates from the domestic markets,” adds Sunil Sanger, CEO of Orion Advisory.

– By Terryanne Chebet

– Compiled by Chanel Retief

By Paula Slier

'Situation In Khartoum Continues To Deteriorate'

It has been over a month of violence and conflict in Sudan and few are optimistic that peace will return any time soon, exacerbating the situation in an already deflated economy.

The humanitarian crisis in Sudan is worsening by the day and within the first month of violence, erupting on April 15, at least 700 people have been killed...and counting. Those fighting vow to do so until death—or at least until they're exhausted or one of the sides has a military breakthrough.

Pitted against each other are the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), led by Lieutenant General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), controlled by Mohamed Hamdan 'Hemedti' Dagalo. In their fight to control the country, the two generals are seemingly committed to destroying each other which is why observers don't foresee an end to the conflict any time soon.

Sudan was one of the first African countries to gain independence from British rule after World War II, but its governance has always been compromised and is reflected in the country's numerous civil wars. The latest violence can be traced directly back to the ousting of former military officer and head of state, Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir, in 2019, that was coordinated by the RSF and the SAF. But a power-sharing deal between the generals soon turned into a deadly power struggle.

RSF is a proxy militia that was historically used against the people of Sudan in marginalized regions. They've reportedly been found guilty of mass killings and rapes, pillage, torture, and the destruction of villages. Its key leaders have been indicted by the International Criminal Court of genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity.

Since the start of the current conflict, a variety of voices with different motives and backgrounds have called for the continuation of the war, in the belief that this will eliminate the RSF once and for all. In the eyes of many members of Bashir's former regime, the RSF represents the main obstacle preventing them from re-seizing power.

Peace talks in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, have so far failed to end the violence (as at the time of going to press). Brokered by Riyadh and Washington, thousands of foreign nationals have been ferried out of the country. Sudanese journalist Mohamed Amen is following the talks and says: "Recent strides towards a ceasefire open the passage for relief aid in many parts of Sudan, especially Darfur... Amid all these tensions, people are still fleeing the capital Khartoum and other parts of the country. The humanitarian situation in Khartoum continues to deteriorate because of the fighting that

is still continuing. The lack of food, the cutting off of water and electricity, and the shortage of fuel and other basic needs are mainly caused by the two sides not honoring the various ceasefires that were previously put in place."

The humanitarian situation is nothing short of catastrophic. The conflict has driven many to seek refuge in neighboring countries. Hospitals are under pressure. Many are without water and electricity and have been vandalized. Health practitioners' and patients' lives are also in danger and Sudanese doctors are warning of a healthcare crisis. A call for humanitarian aid has so far delivered too little to salvage the situation.

The war has also left many jobless and exacerbated an already deflated economy.

Homes have been destroyed, families torn apart and many civilians have looted shops in a desperate effort to get some food.

HEALTH PRACTITIONERS' AND PATIENTS' LIVES ARE ALSO IN DANGER AND SUDANESE DOCTORS ARE WARNING OF A HEALTHCARE CRISIS. A CALL FOR HUMANITARIAN AID HAS SO FAR DELIVERED TOO LITTLE TO SALVAGE AND AID THE SITUATION.

Sadly, the instability is also creating new opportunities for armed groups and there are reports of them taking over laboratories for infectious diseases. Former staff are worried there might be a bio-risk if they open and sabotage fridges.

Sudanese civil wars are rooted in the historical context of the country, with the first one breaking out in 1955 to 1972.

Until today, the second Sudanese civil war (1983-2005) remains one of the longest civil wars to ever erupt in Africa. Although it led to South Sudan eventually gaining independence from Khartoum, it left poverty and dependency on foreign aid in its wake. The latest conflict only exacerbates the situation, with infrastructure now even more dilapidated, poverty even worse and Sudanese people in greater despair. **F**

Making Hay Under The African Sun

African Agriculture, Inc. (AAGR) is a US-based for-profit entity addressing the expanding regional and global challenges of food security and the resilience of food and food supply chain systems.



AAGR is primarily a producer of necessary staples for cattle feed, primarily alfalfa, looking to expand existing production for local, regional, and export consumption from its current operations in West Africa. A critical component of livestock feed, and therefore food security, alfalfa hay currently commands record high prices.

Impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, the Russian-Ukraine war and the severe drought since 2021 in the Western US, one of the largest alfalfa production areas in the world, the global market is poised to grow significantly. The company seeks to expand plant-based protein source production, through collaboration with local farming collectives, providing nutrition for local and regional consumption, and simultaneously driving export-based revenue and corporate profitability.

The company is confident it addresses numerous United Nations Sustainable Development Goals in its approach (albeit accidentally), as it diversifies its production offering, and exposure to climates and regions across the African continent.

“We recognized that we had a very unique geographical location to produce

alfalfa,” says Chairman and CEO, Alan Kessler. “Not only is the Sahara sun a perfect operational partner—the old adage to make hay while the sun shines—but the abundance of cattle in the Sahel, quoted as over 200 million heads of cattle provides a massive market opportunity both locally and regionally for our product.”

“Local dairy and beef production is evolving as a consequence of the scaled production of our product, developing local food access, and minimizing the economic waste of imports and foreign exchange utilization. As the company looked beyond alfalfa, the key was to look for reasons for yield discrepancies in agricultural production in say, Western Europe, and that of the African continent,” he adds.

“Consistent power, farming management, machinery and capital access, logistics, agronomy, soil understanding need to be addressed. I am very proud of the experienced management team and board of directors all of whom have substantial operational experience on the African continent. We are all aligned and driven to achieve our vision.”

After considerable investment in infrastructure and feasibility studies, AAGR

began its commercial alfalfa operations early in 2022 and is already seeing considerable success in transforming desert-like arid conditions to ideal growing conditions for alfalfa. AAGR is already achieving world-class yields and quality, and is working to expand its capital base to increase its production capability.

In 2021, AAGR signed an agreement with Louisiana State University’s Agcenter to bolster education and training in Senegal. Additionally, AAGR recently signed a letter of intent with the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources at Michigan State University (MSU), to further develop the fields of soil science, agronomy, cattle nutrition, emissions, and animal genetics in Mauritania, an area of development for AAGR.

“The opportunity to work with US tertiary institutions with vast agricultural knowledge is a great pathway for skills transfer and development,” says Kessler. The company aspires to be positioned at the nexus of precision agriculture, yield optimization, and climate-smart approaches, on a continent that possesses the optimal growth conditions to address global food security challenges.

“African assets have historically been ascribed an Africa discount by global investors, given lack of liquidity in local capital markets, lack of strategic exit options, and historically challenged governance structures. Given Africa’s superior sun exposure, water purity, scalable land, extended and consistent growing seasons that mitigate supply chain disruptions, a young and motivated local population, with a legacy in agriculture, and growing improving logistical capabilities, African agricultural opportunities should command an investment premium,” Kessler concludes.

Africa's Green Economy =



AGRIPRENEURS +
AGRITECH
+ INVESTMENT

IMPROVING YIELD, EFFICIENCY AND PROFITABILITY IN AGRICULTURE COMES DOWN TO THE HARVESTING OF TECHNOLOGY. AT ITS FOREFRONT ARE THE AGRITECH INNOVATORS BRINGING TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE TO THE CONTINENT'S GREEN ECONOMY. FORBES AFRICA PROFILES SOME OF AFRICA'S BIGGEST AGRIPRENEURS, INVENTORS, AND AGRIBUSINESS LEADERS CHANGING THE WAY WE THINK ABOUT FARMING, FOOD SECURITY AND CLIMATE RESILIENCE. THEY HAVE CULTIVATED A PASSION FOR SMART AGRICULTURE AND ARE LEADING THE CHARGE FOR SOCIAL CHANGE NOT ONLY FOR THE SECTOR BUT FOR THE CONTINENT—AND FOR HUMANITY'S SUSTAINABLE FUTURE.

Words: Chanel Retief and Lillian Roberts | **Art Director:** Lucy Nkosi | **Photography:** Katlego Mokubanye | **Photography Assistant:** Sbusiso Sigidi | **Studio:** NewKatz Studio, Johannesburg | **Styling:** Bontlefeela Mogoye and Wanda Baloyi | **Outfits supplied by:** Kworks Design; Imprint South Africa; House of Suitability; LSJ Designs | **Hair & Makeup:** Makole Made

“WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING at?” Dr Agnes Kalibata asked the young businessman standing next to her at a summit in Kenya, who received a message on his phone and suddenly seemed very distracted.

“I am checking on my cows in the Ivory Coast’, he said to me,” says Kalibata, the renowned Rwandan agricultural scientist and policymaker and President of the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA).

“Then he said ‘I installed solar cameras all around my farm, which is a side hustle for me, so that I can check on my livestock whilst I work here in Kenya’.

“For me, that’s the future of farming!” exults Kalibata.

It all boils down to not just crops or copses, flower beds or bouquets.

It lies in the innovations being sown into the evolving landscape of agricultural technology or agtech/agritech.

And these agripreneurs don’t mind getting their hands dirty either—beyond their smart business suits.

The opportunities for them are immediate and ripe for the picking.

“What we’re seeing happening in the space, is a higher uptake of technology,” says Dr Mandla Mpofo, the Managing Director of Omnia’s Agriculture Division, to FORBES AFRICA.

Ominia Group specializes in conducting research and development, manufactures and supplies chemicals and specialized services and solutions for the agriculture, mining and chemicals application industries.

“By technology I don’t just mean the electronic side of it but also understanding the industry a bit better. So what I’m talking about here is understanding the soil, and working on improving yields. And then you have satellite technology being used and we’re seeing artificial intelligence coming

into this very, very exciting industry.”

Kalibata tells FORBES AFRICA that the agricultural sector has really been defined by the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

“There are specific moments in time that completely change how we think about business and how we do business,” Kalibata adds. “So specifically, this particular revolution, I would say, there’s a real revolution happening from an agtech perspective...This is why there are so many new ways of looking at how agriculture can be done, all the way from how we generate the technologies that we use.”

One of the biggest issues Khadija Mohamed, founder of Kwanza Tukule in Kenya, encountered when she began in this

industry was the food supply chain.

“It’s really difficult to solve but can be solved. Also, the investments don’t want to flow there.

Investment wants to flow into things like

IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA ALONE, THERE ARE OVER 400 AGRITECH SOLUTIONS AND STARTUPS, ACCORDING TO A 2020 REPORT BY THE GLOBAL TELECOMS INDUSTRY LOBBY GSMA.

unicorns or fintech. I mean, people have to eat. They will transfer money via mobile phones, they’ll take loans, but if they don’t have food, at some point, the priorities need to shift to focus on these fundamental things,” Mohamed explains.

Let’s take a step back.

In 2022, the World Economic Forum estimated that there are well over 600 million smallholder farmers around the world working on less than two hectares of land. These farmers are estimated to produce 28%-31% of the total crop production and 30%-34% of food supply on 24% of gross agricultural area.

A further study done by the United Nations showed that the world population will reach 9.1 billion by 2050, and to feed that

number of people, global food production will need to grow by 70%. For Africa, which is projected to be home to about 2 billion people by then, farm productivity must accelerate at a faster rate than the global average to avoid continued mass hunger.

In sub-Saharan Africa alone, there are over 400 agritech solutions and startups, according to a 2020 report by the global telecoms industry lobby GSMA. Agriculture makes up 35% of Africa's GDP and employs about half of its people, but the continent still imports billions of dollars of agri-products every year.

"From the outside, agriculture looks pretty dirty," the CEO and co-founder of Khula!, Karidas Tshintsholo, says to FORBES AFRICA. "But I'm a numbers guy...Once I started looking at the numbers and saw that we [Africa] have most of the world's arable land, which is 60%, we are the ones [with] remaining arable land. Almost everybody on the continent is dependent on agriculture for survival."

"I would look at agriculture in terms of the size of the opportunity," Peter Njonjo, the CEO and co-founder of Twiga Foods in Kenya, adds.

The opportunities may look monetary but for a number of the agritechs, especially the ones we looked at for this feature, it's about two mutually exclusive yet different reasons—solving food security on the continent while becoming climate-resilient.

"The yields of certain crops in Africa have already dropped by several percentage points, because of warming and drought. So, it's already happening. So, you can't possibly talk about sustainable agriculture without talking about climate change," says Professor Guy Midgley, Head of the School for Climate Studies in Stellenbosch University, South Africa.

In a report by Deloitte, with about 60% of the world's uncultivated arable land, as Tshintsholo previously states, Africa has the capacity to meet the world's long-term food demand.

In addition, land already under cultivation could produce much more but crop yields remain at half the global average.

With the right know-how and inputs, Africa's average cropland productivity can more than double. Coupled with positive global food demand, Africa's underutilization of its land resources for farming implies significant growth opportunities for agricultural producers and exporters in Africa.

For Midgley, it comes back to the fact there needs to be a better understanding of the integrated challenges. According to him, Europe and North America have access to what are called integrated assessment models (IAM). These models aim to provide policy-relevant insights into global environmental change and sustainable development issues by providing a quantitative description of key processes in the human and earth systems and their interactions, which, as Midgley assesses, are "really important and really valuable for asking questions about our policy".

"We've been late or rather our politicians have been late to realize the potential benefits of a green economy," Midgley adds. "I think as a region, we need a much better understanding of the integrated nature of these challenges...Our policy might sustain food security, within the constraints of water availability, within the constraints of fertilizer requirements. We don't have available to us to inform the policymakers of what is the best combination of scenarios going forward. There are many scenarios that would get us to a sustainable future, which would balance the interests of different countries on this continent."

Kalibata's view holds a different approach and one where we need to address these issues from a more holistic scientific perspective, which will help tackle food security.

"I actually think that the future of agriculture is smaller than 60%," she says. "We don't need 60% of land to drive agriculture. Some young people are already beginning to farm vertically, right? And we recognize that some young people are already beginning

to use what it is called hydroponics, recognizing that you don't need soil, and now let's produce food...In Singapore, you see people making chicken using stem cell research."

Although the innovators featured on these pages are not dabbling in stem cell research, the solution for these agripreneurs is ensuring that accessibility is at the forefront of all their work and ideas. Studies have shown that in most African countries, agriculture accounts for 70% of the labor force, over

25% of GDP and 20% of agribusiness.

Agriculture remains largely traditional and is concentrated in the hands of smallholders and pastoralists, the *Economic Report on Africa 2009* stated. Often women provide much or most of the labor, but don't reap the economic benefits.

"I think that it is often misconstrued that farmers are not willing to adopt tech," Tshintsholo says. "But I think if you're able to speak to them [about] their pain points, inputs, selling their products and financing, you will find that the uptake is actually quite high. And I think one of the lacking factors is solutions that actually speak to the real pain points farmers are facing"

"I think tech could be most impactful in a continent like Africa," Njonjo adds. "Where we have the largest inventory of cultivated farmland on earth or the continent is both important strategically for the global food system. But also, when it comes to stabilizing the economy, this is where more the impact and kind of social mission of the company comes in."

On the following pages, FORBES AFRICA speaks to some of the leading agri-players tackling farming tech and trends and feeding the continent. **F**

FOR AFRICA, WHICH IS PROJECTED TO BE HOME TO ABOUT 2 BILLION PEOPLE BY THEN, FARM PRODUCTIVITY MUST ACCELERATE AT A FASTER RATE THAN THE GLOBAL AVERAGE TO AVOID CONTINUED MASS HUNGER.

Editor's note: The list follows no particular order



Brian Bosire

Founder and CEO, UjuziKilimo
Kenya

Four years ago, Brian Bosire told FORBES AFRICA that his hope for UjuziKilimo was that it would reach over 10,000 farmers. Speaking to us during the photoshoot for this feature at the NewKatz.Studio in Johannesburg, he tells us he has now reached over 26,000 farmers.

“Our vision is really to see a world of empowered smallholder farmers working at the cutting edge of technology in terms of how they make decisions on the farms, how they access financial support, and also the knowledge they need to improve productivity from the farms,” Bosire says.

Bosire’s passion for smallholder farming started as a boy in a small town in southwestern Kenya known as Kisii.

“I come from a farming village in Kenya, and my parents—their first career was farming,” Bosire says. “They were smallholder farmers, so as I grew up, it formed the core of what I understood about food production and the economy; a sole source of livelihood in our family.”

The ESRC STEPS (Social, Technological and Environmental Pathways to Sustainability) Centre concurs with Bosire’s assessment that smallholder farmers are key to the country’s food security and economy. “Small farms account for 75% of the total agricultural output,”

ESRC STEPS Centre writes in a 2023 report.

Bosire, as a qualified engineer, wanted to find solutions for these farmers that would not only be beneficial to them from an economical perspective but from a social one too.

And with that, his business was born.

UjuziKilimo—which is Swahili for ‘knowledge farming’—processes millions of data points each day to create a complete soil and agronomic data pool that is both field-specific and highly accurate.

Soil Pal, a handheld sensor, acts as a soil parameter to quickly and easily measure the content of the farmer’s soil, and produce the right amount of data for the farmer to receive actionable information within five minutes on the best crops that will do well on the land and the fertilizers they would need.

Part of the UjuziKilimo experience is also FarmSuite, which is a complete farm management, predictive farm analytics, intelligent insights and recommendations software to power

**“OUR
TECHNOLOGY
IS ACTUALLY
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decision-making for farmer groups, co-operatives and service providers.

“Our technology is actually ensuring that farmers are moving away from guesswork. Because traditionally, farmers have been led by intuition to make decisions on which crops will do well.”

Part of this empowerment is looking at how much opportunity lies within the African landscape when it comes to agriculture and technology.

“We also understand that unlike developed countries, Africa is the place of opportunity when it comes to the uptake of technologies that we’re seeing and developing at the moment,” Bosire adds. “The fact remains: smallholder farmers form the majority of the people producing food at the moment, but unfortunately, you still realize that a majority of those farmers are living below \$2 or \$3 per day.”

According to the United Nations’ Food and Agriculture Organization’s report, *The Economic Lives of Smallholder Farmers*, three billion rural people live in about 475 million small farm households, working on land plots smaller than two hectares. Smallholder farms in Kenya are only marginally large as they are 0.47 hectares and in Ethiopia the average small farm size is 0.9 hectares.

“Many are poor and food-insecure and have limited access to markets and services. Their choices are constrained, but they farm their land and produce food for a substantial proportion of the world’s population. Besides farming, they have multiple economic activities, often in the informal economy, to contribute towards their small incomes,” the report read.

For UjuziKilimo, it’s about seeing smallholder farmers get a return on their products as they contribute to the future of food. The data that is being collected from the soil as well as the interaction with farmers is what Bosire actually uses to ensure these farmers have access to aspects like insurance and financing, “because of the richness of the data that we have can be developed over time”.

Spencer Horne

Founder and CEO, Cloudline
South Africa

Savoring the mild nippy weather in New York City, a far cry from South Africa's autumn sun, Spencer Horne seems to have come full circle.

The Spencer Horne who was born in the small community of Kales River, Cape Town.

The Spencer Horne who, from an early age, developed "an obsession" for engineering fueled by his love for trains.

The Spencer Horne who grew up as a dreamer and has always been keenly aware of this rhetoric of structure versus agency; what determines outcomes for individuals or communities?

The Spencer Horne who is in New York, a long way from home, ready to answer this question with regard to his business, Cloudline.

This should be a full circle moment for him, but it is not.

"It doesn't seem like it because I feel like the work is only just beginning," Horne chuckles in a Zoom interview with FORBES AFRICA.

Using battery- and solar-powered propulsion to deliver carbon emission-free flight operations, Cloudline is an aerospace company building a network of autonomous airships that delivers goods and services across the globe. According to Horne, air is an "underutilized resource". Getting anything into the air in general is difficult as also expensive. "[For conventional aircraft], putting those aircraft in the air comes at a high capital cost and keeping them there comes at a very high energy cost," Horne elaborates. "That's expensive in monetary terms; it's expensive in carbon terms. And we are at the heart of the technology that we've developed to address those two major barriers to more widespread use of the air for getting things done."

When Cloudline started out, they identified the infrastructural gaps that exist within African regions and saw a massive opportunity.

This is the key role that Horne plays in the agricultural space. Although he does not constitute Cloudline exclusively as an agritech, their business contributes significantly to farmers.

"I think in the agricultural sector, in particular, we've seen the role data has played in transforming the way in which precision agriculture is being done."

Precision agriculture is a part of the larger conversation around the green revolution. According to experts, this way of farming uses data from multiple sources to improve cultivation for farmers, whether it is used for crop yields and/or to increase the cost-effectiveness of crop management strategies including fertilizer inputs, irrigation management, and pesticide application.

Afagri, a South African agricultural services company, thinks of this type of farming as "site-specific and information-specific".

"If you think about Cloudline in the context of the way in which data is gathered today, that's against the backdrop of satellites...so this is one of the big places where Cloudline plays a role in that agricultural revolution. And to tie it in with more mainstream applicability, and lowering costs, we can think about the ways in which that grows these markets. From just the top-tier largest commercial farms, it makes it more accessible to more people. That is the kind of thing that makes both business sense and development sense."

Agriculture makes up 35% of Africa's GDP and employs about half of its people, but the continent still imports billions of dollars of agri-products every year.

**"AIR IS AN
UNDERUTILIZED
RESOURCE."**





Peter Njonjo

Co-Founder and CEO, Twiga Foods
Kenya

“Our story started with a banana. “Yes, a banana,” Peter Njonjo attests, as he sits down, adjusts his glasses and looks right into the camera reminiscing the beginnings of one of Africa’s most influential companies—according to *Time Magazine*—Twiga Foods.

“And the key thing here was that bananas in a supermarket in London were cheaper than they were in a supermarket in Nairobi.” This was strange for Njonjo as the banana in the London supermarket had traveled over 4,000 miles from Latin America to the United Kingdom. However, the banana in Nairobi had merely traveled 400 kilometers.

“And we asked ourselves, ‘why is this the case?’ And by answering that question, we started uncovering the issue around food inefficiency.”

Njonjo’s belief is that in Africa, the retail industry is fragmented by the many “middlemen” involved in the supply chain moving food from farm to the table.

“We realized that sometimes a banana has been touched by

five to six people before it gets to the retailer. In the course of that [time], half the produce is actually lost to poor handling and post-harvest losses. So that level of waste, that level of inefficiency was contributing to the high cost of food on the continent,” says Njonjo.

At least one in five Africans goes to bed hungry and an estimated 140 million people in Africa face acute food insecurity, according to the World Bank *Global Report on Food Crises 2022 Mid-Year Update*. Furthermore, a 2022 World Resources Institute report found that around a third of food produced globally is lost or wasted, resulting in economic losses of an estimated \$1 trillion

“SO THAT LEVEL OF WASTE, THAT LEVEL OF INEFFICIENCY WAS CONTRIBUTING TO THE HIGH COST OF FOOD ON THE CONTINENT.”

a year. In sub-Saharan Africa, the estimate is roughly 37% or 120kg-170 kg/year per capita.

“Food loss and waste leads to reduced economic returns for

farmers, and the water, fertilizers, energy and land used in production also go to waste. Such loss and waste drives expansion into fragile ecosystems, accelerates deforestation, species extinction and contributes to 8%-10% of annual greenhouse gas emissions,” the report said.

“What we wanted to do is develop an alternative system that allows us to reengineer this whole supply chain to digitize it and get to a point where we can shorten the cycle between the farms, and the retail and also reduce the amount of waste,” Njonjo explains.

Twiga Foods uses technology to build supply chains in food and retail distribution on the continent, starting with Kenya.

The company inspired by the banana is now reportedly worth \$300 million.

“The amount of food and beverage consumed in informal retail across the African continent is worth \$700 billion. And if 50% of Africa’s disposable income is going to food, it means that that’s where the bulk of expenditure is at; that’s a bulk of [what] the opportunity is.”

“So the way we’re looking at it is we’re simply fishing where the fish are. The reality is that being in food on the African continent is an amazing space to be.”



Nicole Rogers

Co-Founder and CEO, Butterfly Foods
(previously Drawdown Foods)
Kenya

Covid-19 halted business, led to lives and livelihoods lost and ruined economies around the world.

For Nicole Rogers, it had the opposite effect. “During Covid-19, we really took the plunge because we were able to insulate in Kenya for a bit and I got a huge opportunity to incubate my own ideas,” Rogers says. “...But we have a really audacious dream. And we know people and we know things that can help the dream be realized and we’re willing to take risks.”

As a purposeful entrepreneur, what drove the Canadian-born CEO to the bread basket of Africa and this dream was the law of economics. “Kenya has a

“A LOT OF THE PRODUCE THAT CONSUMERS IN THE UK AND EUROPE ARE PURCHASING IS GROWN IN KENYA.”

strong and established horticultural export value chain...And so a lot of the produce that consumers in the United Kingdom and Europe are purchasing is grown in Kenya.” But it also started with a strong sense of taste, and flavors, in becoming a part of Africa’s food flavor and enhancer market, forecast to witness a CAGR of 5.12% during 2020-2025,

according to a report by Mordor Intelligence.

When considering starting a plant-based B2B ingredient company (now Butterfly Foods) transforming regenerative grown crop inputs into high-quality flavors for today’s leading food brands, the one question on Rogers’ mind was why some foods taste better in some regions and are different in others?

This research led her to the soil and improving soil health. According to Rogers, when you have scaled operations or have big farms, growing one single crop could lead to the crop losing its intimacy with the soil, thus the flavors then get lost, sometimes even the nutrients. “For me, what sustainability tastes like is Africa,” Rogers explains. “Like truly, it tastes like Africa does—it’s a nuance of flavors. It depends on the soil. It’s crazy...And it’s really unique to Africa; I don’t see how you could do it in a lot of other places. You can’t do this in Europe!” She also works a lot with women as she believes women always have a better palate, with the ability to identify flavors such as bitter, sweet, and sour more strongly.

Karidas Tshintsholo

Co-founder and CEO, Khula!
South Africa

Khula! was built on friendship. “We [Matthew Piper, Chief Product Officer and co-founder] became friends pretty quickly at university,” Karidas Tshintsholo, wearing a powder blue suit and a bright smile, says to FORBES AFRICA.

“And then the friendship grew into business. I think already by the second semester of our first year [in university], we had an education type of business running.” It was after university that Piper returned to Johannesburg with ideas that he relayed to Tshintsholo.

“Initially, agriculture is not a very sexy industry,” Tshintsholo laughs. “From the outside, it looks pretty dirty and all of that...Almost everybody on the continent is dependent on agriculture for survival. But it just didn’t make sense that we were getting more food in than what we were taking out. We should be ideally positioned to be supplying the world 10 times over.”

And with that in mind, Tshintsholo, Piper and Jackson Dyora (Chief Technology Officer and co-

“IT JUST DIDN’T MAKE SENSE THAT WE WERE GETTING MORE FOOD IN THAN WHAT WE WERE TAKING OUT. WE SHOULD BE IDEALLY POSITIONED TO BE SUPPLYING THE WORLD 10 TIMES OVER.”

founder) set out to build Khula!

In a nutshell, the company provides small-scale and commercial size farmers with software and a marketplace to grow their business. The whole idea was to be an ecosystem of support to farmers across Africa. The platform has three key components: an input marketplace, which allows farmers to purchase inputs and get technical services; there is a trader platform where farmers can sell; and to close the loop, there is a funded dashboard, where the platform links farmers with financing assistance.

“I think it really speaks to the nature of agriculture,” Tshintsholo says, “that quite often, when you’re trying to solve one problem, you get undone by another problem.”

This was what drove him to entrepreneurship to begin with—wanting to solve problems.

“I think Mike Tyson said ‘everybody has a plan until they get punched in the face’. And I think entrepreneurship is like that...We went into this thinking,



‘we’ve got this, and we have a solid plan, we are going to connect farmers with buyers’. Easy. Until...”

“How many times have you been punched in the face?” we ask. “I get punched in the face every day,” Tshintsholo laughs. “We had to get a lot of punches. But I think the pilot helped us because the farmers were okay with giving us those punches, because in the end, we’re working together to build a product that we can then begin to scale.”

Desmond Koney

Co-Founder and CEO, Complete Farmer
Ghana

There is no manual or playbook to tell you how to run a farm or even scale a business, as this agripreneur will tell you.

“I think a lot of times, especially for solving problems in Africa, you always underestimate the infrastructure gap that your solution needs to get to market,” Desmond Koney says to us from his home in busy, bustling Lagos.

Complete Farmer was built connecting three integral parts of agriculture; buyer, grower and vendor, connecting farmers to global food buyers and growing with them to provide a competitive edge across the supply chain.

“I asked myself ‘how can we start looking at farming differently?’”

Koney went to the drawing board not as a farmer but as a qualified engineer who wanted to bring more success to the sector on the continent.

“COMPLETE FARMER REALLY STARTED WITH THE QUESTION OF HOW DO WE IMPROVE AND DIGITIZE THE AFRICAN AGRICULTURE VALUE CHAIN.”

“I started thinking of the problem from an engineering perspective. Like, how would I have done this, if I were designing a factory or if I were using my production engineering skills to approach the problem of farming in Africa?”

According to Koney, the reasons why African farmers struggle to scale and sometimes ultimately fail are because the continent has supply chain as well as capital issues.

The *AfCFTA: A New Era for Global Business and Investment in Africa* report by the African Continental Free Trade Area reiterates that already the pressure on Africa’s food supply will require substantial investment in order to guarantee food security, as the continent remains the only region yet to experience a Green Revolution.



“So Complete Farmer really started with the question of how do we improve and digitize the African agriculture value chain,” Koney says. “We did not have a clear path...I wanted to build but first we really had to figure out what the solution really is. And we spent close to five years refining the model to where we are today.”

Complete Farmer is an end-to-end digital agriculture platform that provides industries with an easy way to cheaply source quality farm produce and it offers individuals anywhere in the world a convenient way to own a farm by eliminating the middlemen and farm produce aggregators. The marketplace platform allows global industries to build the supply chain and solve their agricultural needs directly, these are then exclusively brought by African farmers.

“We’ve seen that data about what the potential for agriculture is in Africa,” Koney adds. “And then we’ve also seen that data for how food insecurity is increasing, especially with what’s going on in Europe. And given that we are talking about food, which is really something basic for human survival, this is what makes this industry full of opportunity.”

Reinforcing The True Meaning Of African Beauty



Faria Ichola

AN IMPROBABLE ROUTE TO ESTABLISHING A SKINCARE EMPIRE

Great things do start in unlikely places. Unknown to Faria Ichola at the time, the foundations for Belle Nubian were being laid as far back as 2009. Then, she worked as an Executive Assistant and Household Manager for an American A-list celebrity.

“It was an intense experience but one of the valuable takeaways of having such people as your coach and mentor is an incredible work ethic. My time with her also gave me an inroad to learning about the

skincare regimen of celebrities.”

By 2016, years after her adventure with the icon began, Ichola would become the founder of a beauty firm. Now, she looks back with fondness at her business adventure.

“I am elated that Belle Nubian is where it is today, after years of sheer determination and hard work. When people look at successful businesses, it is easy to overlook the effort and sacrifices while focusing only on the achievements. However, being in business also involves facing battles and overcoming them.”

Trials and adversity are opportunities to innovate and build resilience. For Ichola, those were key ingredients that helped her build a thriving business. This year, she is concluding preparations to launch our third store in Paris. If owning just one is laudable; having three is an undeniable testament of Belle Nubian’s exceptional growth as a brand.

ESTABLISHING DOMINANCE WITH AN AFRO-CENTRIC SKINCARE PROPOSITION

Ichola saw a gap and stepped in.

Most companies before hers focused on generic products that barely met the specific needs of African skin.

In the process of finding a solution to her skincare issues, she found a formula that proved effective in addressing her concerns—glutathione.

“When I found out that this ingredient was relatively non-existent in the beauty market, I created a dual-glutathione and vitamin C product and began selling.”

That pioneer product sold out and with consistent demand came scale. As her brand

grew and began introducing newer products, Ichola had to establish a distribution network across Africa. Now, Belle Nubian is one of the biggest skincare brands solely owned by a black person, generating over €9million (approximately \$9.9 million) in sales annually.

Beyond hard work, Ichola attributes her business’ growth to knowing her clientele. A hands-on Founder/CEO, she employs an open-door policy, not just with her employees but also with her customers. This way, she gets to feel their pulse and respond to their needs on a much deeper level than most companies her size.

BEYOND BEAUTY: FROM SKINCARE TO EMPOWERMENT

In addition to building a luxury skincare brand present on three continents, Ichola’s company is also a vehicle for empowering African women.

“It is wonderful to see how we have evolved from a brand focused on helping African women embrace healthy skin to one that also creates economic opportunities for them. Beyond beauty, they are also financially independent and happier. That freedom from not being dependent on badly-behaved men is beautiful to see.”

CHARTING NEW FRONTIERS

Getting into a hard-to-crack industry and prospering is no easy feat. However, when you have done it successfully for seven years, you are bound to explore ways to impact more lives. New horizons in haircare, baby care, and more have come calling.

For anyone, those should be daunting challenges, but this is Faria Ichola. When you have established a force to reckon with in luxury skincare, new frontiers are not overwhelming prospects. On the contrary, they are exciting opportunities to further leave Belle Nubian’s mark on the African skincare industry.



Jehiel Oliver

Founder and CEO, Hello Tractor
Kenya

Chatting to FORBES AFRICA from Nairobi, Jehiel Oliver recalls how he started a business on the Hello Tractor platform where farmers could make up to \$30,000 in bookings a year.

“I’m from the US, and started my professional career in finance,” Oliver says. “But in [my] mind, I always wanted to do work that was meaningful for my community and I came from parents who were kind of pan-African in their view of the world.”

“YOU HAVE LOW-INCOME POPULATIONS UNDERSERVED BY JUST ABOUT EVERY PART OF THE ECONOMY.”

When a young Oliver left banking and started doing consulting work, “mostly still in finance”, he looked at deal structuring for funds investing across the Global South which

then led him to agriculture.

“That’s where I uncovered the importance of agriculture, the role it plays in Africa’s economy and future economic growth,” Oliver says.

Hello Tractor, a Kenya-based smartphone app that connects small-scale farmers with nearby tractor owners, was built on understanding how much access smallholder farmers have to the basic needs of farming.

According to *The Economist*, in sub-Saharan Africa, 60% of crops are ploughed by hand, which in turn impacts the productivity of farmers and eventual crop yield. This is why over 220 million farmers in Africa live on less than \$2 a day.

Oliver reiterates that smallholder farmers don’t have the machinery they need to fully cultivate occupied land. Tractors and farm equipment are expensive, and financing is virtually non-existent.

“For us, it was about economic growth and prosperity for these African economies,” Oliver adds, “starting in a rural sector, you have low-income populations underserved by just about every part of the economy, and seeing an opportunity to commercially serve these economic actors, these farmers, who are also entrepreneurs themselves.

“And to serve them in a way where they can grow their productivity, they can grow their income, they can send their kids to school, and not pull their kids out of school to work the fields.”

What Does The Future Of Food Look Like?

“ PETER NJONJO

“The future of food in Africa should be around affordable food and widely available with minimum losses. That’s how we frame it. Because right now, where we are, it’s about the cost of food and availability of that food or the pervasiveness of that food. I think for me that would be the biggest outcome of the work we’re doing.”

“ DESMOND KONEY

“I get frustrated when I see that Africa has 60% more arable land with a growing youth population. And I’m like, ‘what are we doing with this opportunity?’ For me, the vision is to really realize the potential of making Africa truly the breadbasket of the world. And this will require us building the infrastructure to basically be able to feed the world.”

“ BRIAN BOSIRE

“At the moment, a majority of the food we consume is produced locally by smallholder farmers. Those are the people who feed the majority of the people. But a second point, Africa still remains a net importer of food, which means that we actually have all the incentives to bring all the money that we spent on importing food, to reinvest it actually into our local agricultural production. To empower the smallholder farmers, because they have the capability, we have developed technologies to ensure that they become successful; the only thing that we need is actually to change our mindset and decide intentionally to invest in smallholder agriculture in Africa, so that we become food-sufficient.”

“ KHADIJA MOHAMED

“It would be good if we could have affordable and accessible food. But learn from the West, so that we’re not repeating the mistakes. The biggest challenge in the West now is food waste, [and] excessive, unnecessary packaging. But I think if we can provide affordable, accessible, nutritious food with less waste and less packaging, that would be incredible. And it’s possible—because we don’t have to reinvent the wheel in everything.”

INTERGENERATIONAL WEALTH:

The Importance Of Financial Education

Research indicates that 70% of generational wealth gets depleted by the second generation, and 90% by the third. Standard Bank Wealth and Investment SA understands the importance of successful generational wealth transfer, and believes that it is vital to educate the next generation on the principles of managing, growing and preserving generational wealth, so that it is sustainable beyond the third generation.

As the current generation of traditionalists and baby boomers move more deeply into retirement, wealth transfer is on the horizon. It is therefore vital that any sustainable wealth preservation strategy places emphasis on financial education. With over 60% of its population under the age of 25, the African continent is growing more youthful. This necessitates an intentional investment in financial literacy, which strongly accounts for the improvement of intergenerational wealth mobility.

According to Lucratia Mathe, Head of Client Value Proposition at Standard Bank Wealth and Investment SA, High-Net-Worth individuals are becoming increasingly aware of the need to create sustainable, long-term intergenerational wealth plans.

“A key concern of wealthy individuals, both locally and globally, is that poor financial planning will result in the next generation being ill-equipped to manage, grow and protect their family wealth,” she says. “We’ve all heard the horror stories of people inheriting millions, only to squander it all and be left with nothing three or four years down the line. A big contributor to this crisis is that over 25% of those due to inherit wealth are inadequately prepared for financial responsibility.”

“As Africa’s leading wealth manager, our goal is to contain this situation by helping our clients and their families to develop dynamic and future-proof wealth management strategies that will enable them to build and preserve their wealth so they can leave a legacy for generations to come,” Mathe continues.

Leadership Academy program

To ensure that this happens, Standard Bank

Wealth and Investment SA has established a successful Leadership Academy program. Launched in 2014, the initiative is designed to empower and educate next generation clients on the principles of Financial Literacy; Entrepreneurship and Innovation; Mental Wellness and Social Impact.

“Our Leadership Academies are designed to inspire our delegates to take ownership of their lives,” says Mathe. “The Academies honor our purpose of banking the family and our belief in empowering the next generation of leaders. We invite our next generation of clients, what we call our “NextGen”, to deepen their knowledge of the world of wealth, learn and apply principles of investing and discover their personal strengths.”

Research has shown that when it comes to engaging the youth on how to manage their money, it is better to start young in order to build money knowledge and habits that will last a lifetime.

“IT IS VITAL THAT ANY SUSTAINABLE WEALTH PRESERVATION STRATEGY PLACES EMPHASIS ON FINANCIAL EDUCATION.”

“Our Leadership Academy programs feature age-appropriate content that is backed by research and behavioral science,” Mathe continues. “This allows us to deliver content that is effective at igniting a growth mindset for personal development purposes, while simultaneously educating the current generation on financial literacy and what it means to



Lucratia Mathe, Head of Client Value Proposition at Standard Bank Wealth and Investment SA

give purpose to wealth.”

While it is clear that families will always face challenges when transferring wealth from one generation to the next, initiatives like the Standard Bank Wealth and Investment SA Leadership Academy program create opportunities that enable the next generation to protect their family legacy while still forging their own paths.

“As a country, there is a critical need to do more to educate the next generation on financial matters, and to improve the financial literacy of all South Africans. We are committed to playing our part by providing a foundation through education upon which future generations can grow and preserve wealth successfully,” Mathe concludes.





Gugulethu Mahlangu

Founder and CEO, House Harvest
South Africa

In 2018, Gugulethu Mahlangu went home to the rolling plains of the Highveld in South Africa. In a landscape dominated by livestock farmers, she planted cabbages, only to soon find them waterlogged.

Counterintuitively, this first failure was the moment she realized she was going to be a farmer.

“I found that there’s just so many numerous opportunities, especially for young African women. That’s just what made me cultivate the love for agriculture, because before I really felt like it was roses and sunsets, but when you get in the industry itself, you realize that it’s a lot of work. It’s patience, it’s money, it’s time, it’s investing in trying, learning, and picking yourself up back again.”

Mahlangu describes aquaponics as a soilless farming method. She uses the Deep Water Culture (DWC) method.

In DWC, the nutrient-rich water is circulated through long canals while rafts float on top, according to the Food and

“Khula! app gives the smart in farming, it has given farmers the opportunity to have an all-in-one solution which is revolutionary,” says Gugulethu Mahlangu, pictured here as Khula!’s farmer model for their marketing rebrand.

Agriculture Organization (FAO). The plant roots hang through holes, absorbing nutrients and oxygen. According to the FAO, this method is commonly used for commercial aquaponics with a high stocking density of fish.

Mahlangu explains that fish provide 10 out of 13 nutrients plants need.

“It’s economical once it starts, and can provide you with a system that can employ people all year round, because it runs all year round.”

Mahlangu says aquaponics is a climate smart-solution to agriculture. Unlike traditional agriculture that is seasonal and based on economies of scale, aquaponics requires limited space.

“Global warming isn’t a regional issue. It’s not an African problem. It’s a planet problem. So, we are contributing to that positively.”

**“HERE COMES A SOLUTION LIKE
AQUAPONICS OR VERTICAL
FARMING SAYING ‘I CAN MEET
YOU WHERE YOU ARE, I CAN MEET
YOU ON YOUR BALCONY, I CAN
MEET YOU IN YOUR TOWNSHIP, IN
YOUR LIMITED SPACE!’”**

Technology like aquaponics can be a method of alleviating food insecurity in densely-populated and urban areas.

“Apparently, they say in South Africa, we are food secure. But we are insecure in the way that food gets accessed. Here comes a solution like aquaponics or vertical farming saying ‘I can meet you where you are, I can meet you on your balcony, I can meet you in your township, in your limited space’.”

She has worked as an aquaponics horticulturist at Finleaf Farms. Now, Mahlangu has returned to her hometown of Witbank in the Highveld of Mpumalanga, South Africa, to build her own facility, named House Harvest, in an urban setting.

Focused on trial and error, she’s going to gather her own data in the South African context before acquiring an investor and scaling. Since aquaponics is a high investment, she wants to produce high value crops to get an ROI as quickly as possible, focusing on restaurants.

As a 29-year-old emerging farmer, she understands the challenges in this sector.

“I think the first thing is because aquaponics is so new, the government doesn’t know what you’re talking about. They know aquaculture, they know about tilapia and all sorts of freshwater fish...So, it sometimes feels like I’m on a tangent on my own.”

Mahlangu feels like a pioneer—on a stressful but exciting journey, she concludes.



Nomhle Mliswa

Founder and CEO, Summerhill Farm
Zimbabwe

Farming is not for the fainthearted,” Nomhle Mliswa says to FORBES AFRICA in the middle of her harvesting season.

Mliswa founded Summerhill Farm in 2007, a 345-hectare farm located in Doma, Mhangura, in the Mashonaland West Province of Zimbabwe. She employs 350 people, two-thirds of which are women. She offers one of the few tillage services in Zimbabwe providing tilling for other farmers.

The mixed farming includes small grain crops, maize, soya beans, potatoes, wheat, cattle, chicken, and goats. Mliswa uses smart agriculture practices: precision farming, a zero-waste policy based on a Just in Time strategy that ensures the swift delivery of goods and land profiling to ensure mitigation and adaption, water harvesting, storage and drilled boreholes.

Summerhill Farm adheres to Sustainable Development Goals, namely SDG 13 on Climate Action, Environmental Management and Conservation, as well as employment structure informed by SDG 5 on gender equality, offering equitable practices for both male and female employees.

Employees also get sanitation and decent housing, informed by SDG 6.

Mliswa has established a local school for young children and a clinic within Summerhill Farm, in line with SDGs 3 and 4. This allows the women to work and maintain their families. The farm also has a shop for employees, sponsored ball games for the community, and employees are given potato and chicken rations, in line with SDG 1 and 3.

There is a Climate Desk, assisting local farmers with critical weather information. And Mliswa does not shy away from further CSR—the farm assists with repairing local road networks and bridges.

Summerhill Farm is run by a single mother with a spinal injury—but neither of these things has held Mliswa back in creating a successful diversified farm using smart agriculture. She wants to do more for preserving the environment, implementing mitigation measures, creating awareness with women on global warming, and hosting more educational tours for schoolchildren.

IS AGRIBUSINESS SYSTEMATICALLY SEXIST?

In most African countries, agriculture accounts for 70% of the labor force, over 25% of the GDP and 20% of agribusiness. Agriculture remains largely traditional and is concentrated in the hands of smallholders and pastoralists, the *Economic Report on Africa 2009* stated. Often women provide much or most of the labor, but don't reap the economic benefits of agriculture.

Butterfly Foods is predominantly owned and managed by women. Nicole Rogers, its CEO, says that because she feels Kenya is systematically sexist, she is trying to design more men into the business. “As a business, we’re strategically trying to [bring in] young men straight out of university who don’t have any experience so they can understand what it’s like to be led by strong women.”

Kwanza Tukule is also managed mainly by women. Khadija Mohamed, its CEO, says there are challenges for women food vendors, from access to capital to police harassment. “I can imagine for women business owners, there aren’t even those networks to start with. So, you have to graft a lot more and also, prove yourself a lot more. I was getting a lot of feedback that mostly I would imagine my male counterparts would not get, almost borderline patronizing. So, you must make the business very attractive from a revenue and growth perspective, and you have to jump a lot more hoops than you would otherwise as a female and as a local.”

Khadija Mohamed

Founder and CEO, Kwanza Tukule
Kenya

Khadija Mohamed is the Founder of Kwanza Tukule, a last-mile food delivery service lowering costs for street vendors in Kenya's low-income areas. The company uses a cashless, mobile-based B2B model. Kwanza Tukule, launched in 2019, translates from Swahili to 'first, let's eat'.

After working in a bank in Nairobi, Mohamed was promoted to work in London, where she stayed 11 years. During that time, she moved away from banking to consultancy.

Mohamed decided to move back to Kenya in 2017, volunteering with non-governmental organizations in low-income areas in Nairobi. Coming face-to-face with her country's challenges, she decided to tackle the issue of affordable food.

Kwanza Tukule has recently expanded, moving to a bigger office and warehouse, with another branch opened outside Nairobi, and one more opening by the year-end.

They plan to open two branches a year, growing beyond Kenya.

Kwanza Tukule operates by sourcing products directly from manufacturers, reducing the fancy packaging and making it affordable for two kinds of customers: people who run kiosks or food vendors.

"IT'S A LARGE CHUNK OF WOMEN-OWNED BUSINESSES, PRIMARILY BECAUSE IT REQUIRES LITTLE CAPITAL TO START."

"Seventy percent ownership of kiosks are female, 90% of food vendor businesses are owned by women. It's a large chunk of women-owned businesses, primarily because it requires little capital to start."

Mohamed says that this is a neglected demographic, with no solutions targeted to female informal workers in the food space. When solutions are not tailor-made for a group, either it doesn't fit or is too expensive, she explains.

"If you look at what Kwanza Tukule has managed to achieve in such a short period of time, it shows that we need more businesses to innovate around these challenges, and people who can focus on 'what are the problems that people are facing, how can businesses be designed to solve these problems?'"

Mohamed says the issues the continent faces with food security are structural and systemic. Unlike banking or mobile phone penetration, there is no leapfrogging, she muses.

"So, to fix farming, you have to deal with post-harvest losses, you have to deal with aggregation, you have to deal with climate change. It's huge. That requires multi-sectoral approaches, almost global. It becomes challenging to narrow it down to just small solutions that can easily be fixed."

Kwanza Tukule approaches the challenges of climate change by preparing their customers for supply chain shortages, such as shifting customers to another brand if there is a poor harvest.



This shifts consumer behavior, she says, as they move towards more sustainable products.

Climate change impacts their customers significantly, especially the poor. With the unpredictability of rainfall, food vendors cannot establish a reliable structure for work. While knowledge has been handed down generations, with urban migration, the knowledge about seasons has been wiped out.

In terms of funding challenges for the sector, Mohamed says it is like an ecosystem one needs to understand.

"But even for someone who works in finance, it was quite opaque in getting to understand how it works; where you find the funders, where the investors would go, what do they need?"

Mohamed adds that once someone sets up a company solving a need, generating revenue, and able to access investor networks, then capital can be raised.

Kwanza Tukule has raised \$2.2 million in seed funding, with plans to raise again in 2024 to expand. She says the capital exists, but it requires a lot of effort to find. People solving real problems are far removed from the realities of the funding circles, so it's important to do education for investors to understand, she adds.

Kenya has a booming agritech sector because the country has a culture of entrepreneurship, a well-educated workforce with an inherent pride in labor, regulations around business which are not draconian, and a relatively mature democracy, she goes on to say.

"It's also the weather," she laughs.

Money Does Not Grow On Trees: African Farming Draws Low Volume Of Venture Capital Investments

The most-funded sector on the continent, according to TechCrunch, is fintech.

Unfortunately, reports, experts and our profiles tell us a story of how difficult it is to source venture capital funding on the continent for agriculture.

“The answer to that is quite straightforward,” says Dr Mandla Mpfu, the Managing Director of Omnia’s Agriculture Division. “It’s the risk of the business.”

The pressure on Africa’s food supply will require substantial investment to guarantee food security, as Africa remains the only region yet to experience a Green Revolution. Most of this will come from private investment.

Venture capital firm AgFunder attested that African farming stands out for drawing in a low volume of venture capital investment.

At the moment, the continent is experiencing the fastest rate of population growth in the world. Consequently, food demand is growing rapidly as well.

However, as the continent with the youngest population in the world, the *2022 Africa AgriFoodTech Investment Report* says it attracted less than 1% of all venture capital spending on agriculture—just \$482 million compared to the nearly \$52 billion raised globally.

The figure for the entire continent is about the same as the public sector agricultural research budget of Nigeria or South Africa. Far too many potential food and agriculture investors still overlook opportunities in Africa.

“There are more and more funding opportunities coming up,” says Bosire, who bootstrapped his business. “But what I really think we need to focus on at the moment is look into Africa as a place of opportunity for investment. Because agritech in other developed markets is really receiving a lot of funding but it’s not the case in Africa. So, I believe that with more sensitization of global investors to see Africa as an opportunity to also invest in agritech is really going to help us.”

Investment volumes were negligible just a decade ago, according to reports, but thankfully have grown as investments more than doubled from 2020 to 2021.

They seem set to nearly double again.

“Investing in 2022 got off to a roaring start, with startups raising roughly \$400 million in the first half of the year—more than 80% of what was raised in all of 2021,” the *AgriFoodTech Investment Report* reads. While 40% of the agricultural workforce (some 440 million workers) is in waged employment; the other 60% are self-employed as farmers, mainly as small scale farmers (Fyfe 2002).

But why is the uptake slow?

“You have heard the jokes such as if you’re going to get broke very fast, you either start a farm or buy an airline,” Mpfu laughs. “And everything’s going to go south. But that’s exactly why you need more predictive tools in the business, which is why you would need agtech so that you’re bankable in the industry.”

But there are also reports that interest in funding African farming by venture capital groups spiked last year and is on track to continue expanding aggressively this year.

“I almost feel like this agtech space was made for agriculture,” Dr Agnes Kalibata says. “I was looking at how much money has been invested in this space. About two to three years ago, this was about a \$17 billion industry, you know, and growing very fast. Now, actually it is projected that by 2025 to be a trillion dollar industry... There is no reason why most of it should not be coming to Africa.”

There are 600 million smallholder farmers around the world working on less than two hectares of land. These farmers are estimated to produce 28%-31% of total crop production and 30%-34% of food supply on 24% of gross agricultural area.



More Big Players



JAMES PATERSON AND BENJI MELTZER Aerobotics, South Africa

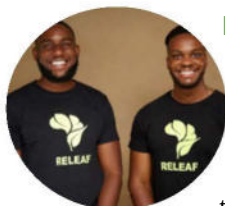
Founded by South Africans James Paterson and Benji Meltzer in 2014, Aerobotics uses aerial surveys—both drones and satellite imagery—and artificial intelligence to improve agricultural production outputs.

Both founders began with a self-funded investment of R50,000 (\$259) each. As the business grew, Aerobotics cumulatively raised approximately \$27 million over the years.

Their first software solution was aimed at monitoring tree health, identifying specific trees in an orchard under stress. As an extension of this software, in 2019, a fruit-counting solution was added.

Aerobotics has won several innovation awards, including the President Emmanuel Macron Africa Tech Award and FNB's Business Innovations Awards in 2019, and has recently been selected to become Endeavor members.

The company is now multi-continental, operating in South Africa, the United States and Australia, reportedly, with expansions into Europe underway. From 2020 to 2021, the company grew from 80 to a 100 people. Aerobotics says they have processed 81 million trees in the world. Another patent is on the way to estimate the age of trees and potential yield.



IKENNA NZEWI AND UZOMA AYOGU Releaf, Nigeria

Releaf is a Nigerian company focused on industrializing food processing in Africa.

Nigeria's vegetable oil market is estimated to be worth \$3 billion, with analysts estimating there's twice as much demand as there is supply. Eighty percent of the total supply comes from 400

smallholder farmers who face several challenges transporting the oil palm from their farm to processors. The logistical challenge means a lot of produce goes rotten before they reach the food processing plants which leads to a loss of earning and food insecurity.

Releaf is providing a solution to help farmers tackle this problem. Founded by Ikenna Nzewi and Uzoma Ayogu, it provides fast-moving consumer companies with the tools to get the inputs they need for cheaper prices by creating a network of food processing plants underpinned by technology and using geospatial software to identify the best locations for these factories to improve efficiency in the value chain. To date, the company has reportedly raised \$4.2 million.

Farmers climb palm oil trees, cutting down the indigenous fruit. Smallholder farmers use rocks to crack open the fruit, reducing the quality. Releaf's CTO, Ayogu, invented a nutcracker named Kraken to improve deshelling efficiency by almost 90%.



BENJAMIN NJENGA, ELI POLLAK, AND EARL ST SAUVER

Apollo Agriculture, Kenya

Apollo Agriculture, founded by Eli Pollak, Benjamin Njenga and Earl St Sauver in 2016, furnishes farmers in Kenya with technology, tools and financing to increase

small farms' profitability.

Apollo Agriculture operates as an all-rounded agribusiness marketplace. The startup invested in automated operations, creating a system for customer acquisition, lending decision-making, last mile distribution, and payments and collections. The farmers interact with Apollo using SMS and USSD technology, with the network's backend built on machine learning, remote sensing, satellite imagery and sensors.

Once the farmers apply for inputs/financing via SMS, Apollo sends an agent to assess the farm. The loan is linked to the size of the farm. Once approved, the farmer gets a voucher for the nearest agro-dealer to pick up supplies. The dealer uses Apollo's app to see what has been approved for the farmer, and Apollo processes payments instantly via mobile payment services.

Apollo decided to fundraise and lend off its own books rather than approach commercial banks to be financial partners, successfully raising millions.

In the future, Apollo's goal is to help their 100,000 customer base to transition into commercial farming by moving beyond maize, and also improve climate resiliency with smart irrigation and crop insurance.



SIMON HAZELL

Inseco, South Africa

Simon Hazell founded Inseco, a biotechnology company in Cape Town, South Africa. Inseco converts low-value organic material into sustainable insect ingredients. Operating in a 10,000sqm plant, they convert the larvae of black soldier flies into

100 tons of insect oil and meal a month.

The company believes insects will play an important role in meeting the food demands of the future, minimize environmental impact and ensure we promote the biodiversity of our planet. Inseco sees the possibility of a 500,000-ton market for insect protein by 2030.

Inseco manufactures insect meal and oil, creating an alternative to fish meal and fish oil. Their products include EntoMeal, NutriGrubs, EntoSoil, EntoOil, EntoEggs, and EntoChitin. They supply the agriculture and poultry industry locally in South Africa, and have moved on to exporting the product into pet food too.

In 2022, Inseco raised R81 million (\$4.1 million) in what is regarded one of South Africa's biggest-ever startup seed funding round, led by Futuregrowth Asset Management, and including the participation of E4E Africa and Oak Drive Ventures.

Partnerships Creating A Platform FOR WOMEN TO POWER ON

McDonald's South Africa's partnership for the FORBES WOMAN AFRICA Leading Women Summit is testament to its mandate to bridge the gap and drive diversity and inclusion.

Collaborations are often born out of synergies and common values between organizations, and this is no different in the partnership between McDonald's South Africa and FORBES WOMAN AFRICA.

McDonald's South Africa has ventured into a two-year partnership with FORBES WOMAN AFRICA as a headline sponsor for the FORBES WOMAN AFRICA Leading Women Summit. By forging this alliance, the two organizations, each of which is a pioneer in its own field bringing about significant and positive changes in society, highlight the power of women.

AS MCDONALD'S SOUTH AFRICA, OVER THE PAST 26 YEARS, WE ARE PROUD TO HAVE HAD OVER 65% WOMEN IN OUR BUSINESS.

"The partnership between McDonald's SA and the FORBES WOMAN AFRICA Leading Women Summit is one that speaks to synergy and the beliefs that both organizations hold when it comes to diversity, equity, inclusion as well as women empowerment. McDonald's SA believes in platforms that foster dialogue amongst female leaders to cross-weave their knowledge and drive socio-economic change," says Daniel Padiachy, Executive: Supply Chain, Marketing and Technology at McDonald's South Africa.

Real change is seen when women from different spheres provide each

other a platform where they can learn, bestow knowledge and grow together. The power of women connecting and supporting each other should never be underestimated. Engaging women in leadership positions will champion other women. Thus, creating a safe environment where women can unlock their potential which leads to safe and functional communities.

McDonald's South Africa has its own Women Leadership Network, a platform that encourages a cross-weaving of knowledge and inspires change among subject matter experts. It also aims to honor women by acknowledging and celebrating their achievements through conversations with phenomenal women in their own spaces of influence. Since its inception in 2021, the McDonald's South Africa purpose-led initiative has reached over thousands of women across the country.

We have the responsibility and opportunity to bridge the gap and play our part in ensuring that women are offered equal opportunities and thus drive inclusion. We embrace this opportunity to drive meaningful progress, and to do so through our own initiatives as well as through collaborations. We are strongly invested in ensuring a world free of bias, with equal representation and an equal opportunity for women's voices to be heard.

As big businesses we need to take this seriously and be committed as it allows for an opportunity to engage with women from all walks of life. We believe that we



Daniel Padiachy, Executive: Supply Chain, Marketing and Technology at McDonald's South Africa

should always walk the talk, and not just talk the talk.

As McDonald's South Africa, over the past 26 years, we are proud to have had over 65% women in our business; we continuously find ways to enable everyone within our business, not only focusing on women but inclusively bringing men along. The key driver in our business is a constant push against complacency, we strive to uphold transformation and excellence in all our interactions in all aspects of our business be it with our employees, executives or even our suppliers, thus giving us an opportunity to build a brand that lives in the hearts of our people.

Our young generation of women should always be empowered and encouraged to become better leaders who alter the narrative in their spheres, thus creating a bright future for their communities through conversations and action. By providing opportunities for women to succeed and realize their full potential, we hope to continue disrupting the power dynamic and alter the current status quo.

By Tiana Cline

Ripe For Disruption: Africa's Big Leap In Agritech



Robots that harvest grapes, 3D-printed drones for crops and burgers grown from a single cell? Here's how innovative new technology is making farming more efficient, sustainable and at the same time, revolutionizing agriculture across the continent.

In Africa, innovation in agritech is not only exciting, it's essential. With a quarter of the economy of sub-Saharan Africa driven by agriculture—and more than 60% of the population made up of smallholder farms—technological innovation is the key to producing food that will not only meet the needs of a burgeoning population, but do it in a way that ensures the sustainability of the planet's natural resources.

CELL-TO-FORK

In Cape Town, there's a foodtech company looking at agritech and sustainability through a different lens—reverse engineering. While traditional agriculture involves growing grain that can be fed to livestock until it's time for the slaughterhouse, Mzansi Meat are changing an age-old process by identifying the best parts of livestock and using cellular agriculture grow meat in bioreactors. These large-scale brewing vats mean that a single cell, cultivated from a cow, sheep or pig, can produce meat en masse. According to research out of Maastricht University in the Netherlands, cells from a single cow can produce 175 million hamburgers.

When you compare this to the 440,000 cows traditional farming would require for the same output, what Mzansi Meat is doing suddenly makes a lot of sense. Not only does lab-grown meat mimic

the exact texture of what can be found in the shops, it is 'farmed' without harmful antibiotics or growth hormones. Lab-grown meat could also be the solution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions, land use and other environmental concerns.

For Brett Thompson, the founder and CEO of Mzansi Meat, innovation will happen if more companies look into agritech from a biotech angle. "While more efficient irrigation systems and the use of drones have a role to play, it's not enough," he says.

In a landlocked country with few natural resources, farmers in Rwanda no longer need to choose between aquaculture or agriculture. NjordFrey Flagship



(Above) Brett Thompson, the founder and CEO of Mzansi Meat, says companies should look at agritech from a biotech perspective



NIRS device

Farm in Kayonza has created advanced, aquaponic equipment so that fish and vegetables can be farmed at the same time. The focus is hardware, but also sustainability, and the company's starter kit includes excavating to accommodate rearing fish, establishing soil-less beds for agriculture, piping, plumbing, establishing pumps and filtration. This is all centered around increasing fish and crop production while using 95% less water.

In Ghana, Fredrick Kpamber and Kingsley Safo are the founders of an 'eco-aquaponics' enterprise called Big Green Agro. The off-grid farm is solar-powered and contains 194,500-liter pools, one 7,000-liter pool and four of 12,000 liters. Not only do they farm a high-quality local strain of tilapia, they cultivate nutrient-rich algae which is turned into a concentrate and used as a chemical-free fertilizer. One of the things that make Big Green Agro stand out is that the plants grown aquaponically are not for human consumption, but to feed the fish, and that makes the entire operation self-sustaining.

SOIL SCIENCE

According to the World Bank, Africa produces 30 million metric tons of fertilizer each year—twice as much as it consumes—yet 90% of fertilizer consumed in sub-Saharan Africa is imported from outside the continent. In order to make fertilizer more

accessible and affordable, technology has a role to play.

In West Africa, smallholder farmers have started to microdose fertilizer. Headquartered in India with regional hubs in Nairobi, Kenya and Mali, microdosing fertilizer is an innovation out of the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT).

It works by applying small doses of fertilizer (one-tenth of the amount of fertilizer typically used on wheat, and one-twentieth of that used on maize) in the right place and at the right time. The process—which can be done by hand, with a drip irrigation system or via GPS-guided machinery—can effectively double crop yields and the results in Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Zimbabwe have garnered worldwide attention.

Understanding the micronutrients that make up soil—and by doing so, being able to create a better, biofertilizer—is an increasingly popular part of agritech research. Preferred by agronomists and soil scientists,

WHILE THE BIOFERTILIZER INDUSTRY IS STILL LARGELY UNDERDEVELOPED IN AFRICA, ZIMBABWE NOW BOASTS ONE OF THE LARGEST BIOFERTILIZER PRODUCTION FACILITIES IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA.

Dassie Robot



biofertilizers (or bio-organic fertilizers) are cost-effective, eco-friendly and guarantee sustainable agricultural production. Unlike their chemical counterparts whose use can lead to adverse effects on the environment, biofertilizers contain living microorganisms that help soil, converting atmospheric nitrogen into a form that plants can use, for example.

While the biofertilizer industry is still largely underdeveloped in Africa, Zimbabwe now boasts one of the largest biofertilizer production facilities in sub-Saharan Africa. Scientists from the Research Council of Zimbabwe and the National Commission of Science and Technology in Malawi are working together, doing innovative research to identify indigenous microbial strains with a potential of enhancing soil fertility, and reverse nutrient depletion human-induced stress to soil.

In Tanzania, an agritech company named Ng’wala Inventions has developed an automated, solar-powered bio-pesticide and biofertilizer delivery machines that give smallholder farmers access with a pay-as-you-farm system. To date, Ng’wala Inventions has delivered biofertilizer to thousands of rural farmers—70% being women and youth.

Another country focused on its soil quality is Ethiopia and the technology they’re turning to is near-infrared reflectance spectroscopy, or NIRS. South Ethiopia, alongside its neighbors Kenya and Somalia, is experiencing the worst drought in decades and this is severely impacting soil health and as a result, the country’s agriculture sector. NIRS works by analysing the amount of light that a material absorbs, which indicates how much of a substance is within it. By using this method, soil can be judged based on the nutrients it contains without the use of environmentally harmful chemicals.

Using a NIRS device is a quick, inexpensive and (surprisingly) easy way to understand the makeup of soil and ultimately, grow better quality crops. Ethiopian lab scientists are also using NIRS to analyse fodder—both foraged and formulated—as a way to improve livestock

ROBOT X, OR DASSIE, IS A UNIQUE VINEYARD ROBOT BUILT WITH INPUT FROM LOCAL FARMERS WITH THE AIM OF MAKING GRAPE PRODUCTION EASIER THANKS TO MORE ACCURATE, REAL-TIME DATA.

nutrition and productivity.

Other breakthrough studies have shown that NIRS can successfully predict the oil and major fatty acid content of sesame seeds, an economically important crop in the country (next to coffee). Often referred to as Ethiopia’s white gold, sesame seeds are drought-tolerant so producing a better crop can lead to increased income and food security for smallholder farmers, improved export revenue and preservation of the country’s cultural and culinary heritage.

RISE OF THE MACHINES

It’s reported that the global agricultural robots market will hit \$17.8 billion by 2027. While the agricultural robot segment includes devices like drones, there

IN BLANTYRE, SOUTH MALAWI, MICROMEK IS A STARTUP THAT IS BUILDING LOW-COST, FIXED-WING AUTONOMOUS DRONES FROM 3D-PRINTED PARTS AND RECYCLED MATERIALS. THE DRONES, WHICH WERE ORIGINALLY DESIGNED TO DELIVER MEDICINE AND MEDICAL TEST KITS FOR DIAGNOSIS TO REMOTE AREAS OF MALAWI, ARE NOW ALSO BEING USED BY LOCAL FARMERS TO MONITOR LAND AND PLANT HEALTH.

are also robots that work in the fields. In South Africa's Western Cape province, Stellenbosch is known for its rolling vineyards and wine farms and more recently, Robot X, a viticultural sensor robot developed in South Africa by the Department of Viticulture and Oenology at Stellenbosch University (SU). Robot X, or Dassie, is a unique vineyard robot built with input from local farmers with the aim of making grape production easier thanks to more accurate, real-time data.

Farms are full of data. From weather information to field statistics, seed yield and more, as technology evolves, more data points come up and this only adds to the complexity of what it takes to manage a modern farm operation. This is where precision agriculture comes in—taking big (farm) data and analysing it to maximize output. One of the most accessible ways a farmer can gather large amounts of data today is by using a drone but these eye-in-the-sky tools come at a price.

In Blantyre, South Malawi, MicroMek is a startup that is building low-cost, fixed-wing autonomous drones from 3D-printed parts and recycled materials. The drones, which were originally designed to deliver medicine and medical test kits for diagnosis to remote areas of Malawi, are now also being used by local farmers to monitor land and plant health. In a country that has to deal with climate issues like cyclones and flooding, MicroMek's innovative Ecosoar drones are built with the environment in mind, even going so far as setting flight records in the new drone corridor in Kisungu.

The MicroMek drone



FARMING THE FUTURE

Home to 60% of the planet's arable land, Africa holds immense potential to not only feed its own population but also the rest of the world. In order to optimize its ecosystem and mitigate a rapidly changing climate, new techniques and technologies must come into play because despite its challenges, agriculture remains an important sector that's ripe for disruption and digital innovation is what will help deliver the future of farming. 

Glowing Up: A Pathway To Healthy Skin

The skin is the largest organ in the human body, but with NUMA Medical Aesthetics, it's also part of the journey to a healthier and happier you.

The skin is the largest organ on the body, and with that comes a booming industry with a global market value of USD 171.25 million, per Data Bridge Market Research.

While a profitable market, the decision made by Dr. Lungile F. Mhlongo to enter into the skincare field was more of a personal than a business one.

Having witnessed her late father's failing health, as well as the lack of resources that influenced this, Dr. Lu ventured into the medical field to be the change that she wished to see in the world.

Once she obtained her medical degree, Dr. Lu was influenced to enter the aesthetic field through her journey with acne, which she suffered from in her mid-20s.

The acne was prominent on her face, chest, and back, and this caused the once-social individual to become withdrawn and develop clinical depression.

However, she eventually decided to take matters into her own hands.

It was with this mentality that she not only found the solution to her acne, but also chose to share this solution with those struggling with similar skin issues, and with that, she founded NUMA Medical Aesthetics in 2018.

Taken from the Arabic word for beautiful and pleasant, NUMA Medical Aesthetics offers high-quality medical aesthetics and individualized skincare treatments that ensure and protect the health of your skin.

With five clinics, three located in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, one in Eswatini, and the other in Johannesburg, NUMA Medical Aesthetics has not only made the path to healthier skin an easy one, but they've also been able to confront the unemployment rate among medical professionals in South Africa.

"Opening these various branches has enabled us to offer these young doctors opportunities for professional growth and upskilling, ensuring their long-term career success. Providing these transformative solutions has been one of the most rewarding and fulfilling aspects of this journey," says Dr. Lu.

CREDIBILITY SELLS SUCCESS

Following the success of NUMA Medical Aesthetics, Dr. Lu noticed a trend of skincare concerns among her clientele and this pattern of similarity encouraged her and her team to manufacture and launch their products, and so in 2022, NUMASKIN was born.

The medical-grade aesthetic range, which officially launched in July on Dr. Lu's birthday, has a strong focus on targeting pigmentation and catering to acne-prone skin.

NUMASKIN products aren't only medical grade, but they're also gender-neutral, suitable for all skin types, and have not been tested on animals.

The launch of any product can be intimidating, especially in an industry saturated with aesthetic products, yet Dr. Lu had one thing that other brands often take years to get—a good reputation.



“NUMASKIN products got a really good response because we had built credibility over the years by performing aesthetic treatments at NUMA Medical Aesthetics,” says Dr. Lu.

SKIN IN THE SOCIAL MEDIA GAME

While she may have had the drive and passion to launch a medical aesthetic business, Dr. Lu still had to find the capital to not only launch said business, but to also efficiently offer a service that her clients would appreciate.

That said, the financial aspect of her business plan was not only the biggest hurdle that she had to face, but it also created a second issue.

“ALL OF THIS WAS INSPIRED BY MY STRUGGLES AND I UNDERSTAND THE IMPACT OF NOT FEELING THE WAY YOU WISH AND HOW MUCH THIS CAN AFFECT OTHER AREAS OF YOUR LIFE.”

“The lack of finances affected how I marketed my business. As I did not have the necessary funds for traditional media platforms i.e. radio or television ads, I decided to work with what I had at the time, which was social media.”

Through her social media, Dr. Lu began to promote her businesses and her technique was so successful that she believes that 80% of her clientele consists of individuals that saw a social media post about NUMA Medical Aesthetics.

“What I learned from those challenges is that sometimes you just need to start, you don’t need to have it all together before you start, you need to start and work with what you have. And when you start making the money, then you can invest it back into the business.”

While she does use social media to market her business, that does not mean that she is not well aware of the ethics of using social media as a medical practitioner.

Dr. Lu and the team at NUMA Medical Aesthetics make sure to adhere to the



guidelines set by the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) because while they may want a loyal clientele, they also understand the role that they have as a medical practice.

SKIN HEALTH IS A LIFESTYLE

As saturated as the medical aesthetic industry may be, NUMA Medical Aesthetics’ appeal is not just about the efficiency of their products, but also because of the incredible customer experience they offer.

Due to her personal experience, Dr. Lu understands the importance of making clients feel safe when they visit her practice for assistance with their skin,

“All of this was inspired by my struggles and I understand the impact of not feeling the way you wish and how much this can affect other areas of your life,” Dr. Lu says.

“At NUMA Medical Aesthetics, what we try to give you is make you feel at home because we understand that if you have something wrong with how you look, it affects your psychology.”

“This is why we also work closely with a psychologist as some people see how their appearance is influencing the way they feel.”

THE FUTURE OF SKIN IS BRIGHT

NUMA Medical Aesthetics isn’t just focused

on catering to the skin of its clientele, but they’re also concerned about the skin of the next generation.

“Angels Are Made Foundation empowers children in townships and rural communities, providing skincare services to boost confidence, tackling issues like acne, fostering inner and outer well-being,” explains Dr. Lu.

By addressing these skincare concerns, younger children can present themselves better and also improve their academics as they’ll feel more confident in who they are.

The Angels Are Made Foundation also teaches the children about the importance of not treating individuals badly based on the state of their skin and their look.

“We also teach on skin health, and we try to teach them about safe skin ingredients, especially because social media exposes them to a range of ingredients that are not always kind to young skin,” adds Dr. Lu.

“We want to see these kids becoming our future leaders, and not hindered by the way they look, never able to reach their fullest potential.”

By using her journey to not only help those struggling with their skin but to also ensure that the next generation does not experience the same issues, the future of NUMA Medical Aesthetics is as bright and clear as ever.



CITYSCAPES: SOUTH AFRICA'S INFORMAL ECONOMY

The beating heart of South Africa's inner cities are the street vendors. They keep commuters fueled with fresh fruit, cooked food and drinkable water. They feed tired souls and also repair the tireless soles of those walking to and from work. They continue the legacy of indigenous practices by selling traditional African goods. They represent the niche and the creative in Africa, also selling the staples essential for survival to the working masses, often unrecognized and excluded from the mainstream financial sector. These micro-entrepreneurs offer the candor, culture and character to South Africa's thriving informal economy.

Words And Photographs By Lillian Roberts

The International Labour Organization (ILO) explains the informal economy as: "All activities that are, in law or practice, not covered or insufficiently covered by formal arrangements; the notion of exclusion lies at the heart of these parameters—that it refers to working people who are largely excluded from the exchanges that take place in the recognized system."

Informal work is precarious work.

By its nature, profits may vary wildly from week to week. The scarcity of spots to sell goods may limit opportunities. And infrastructure may be lacking—ablation facilities, storage, and access to electricity. Street vendors also face health impacts from exposure to outdoor air pollution, poorly-ventilated spaces and exposure to biomass fuel from cooking on gas or open fires.

Informal workers are excluded from the provisions of South Africa's Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Act because there is



often no employment relationship or they work in unconventional workplaces such as urban public spaces. South Africa has ratified the ICESCR, CEDAW and the ILO Occupational Health and Safety Convention, which requires member states to extend OHS protection to informal workers.

Street vendors also face the grim reality of crime on Johannesburg's streets. In a quiet alley in Westdene, fruit-seller Thabang Tlou placed his phone down while helping a customer, only to have it stolen. Early in 2023, someone stole his trolley for transporting goods.

On a busy street in the city's Central Business District (CBD) on a Saturday in autumn, a man gets choked by two men stealing his valuables while four men stand guard, which this reporter was witness to. He staggered away, barely keeping consciousness. Staying alive in the city is the consolation prize for surviving violence.

Street vendors can also help maintain the social fabric of an area. Markets like Kwa Mai-Mai in the Johannesburg CBD remain safe because the community bands together and keeps an eye on everything that happens within the walls of the stalls and shops. It's unsafe to hold or carry cash, yet it continues to be the predominant medium of payments and transactions.

The white paper, titled *Driving Financial Inclusion In South Africa's Informal Economy: The Landscape At The Bottom Of The Pyramid*, published by FORBES AFRICA Insights, in association with Mastercard in May, found that cash continues to be king in the informal sectors, among both consumers and Small and Medium Enterprises, in South Africa.

Hundred percent of the over 250 respondents of consumer surveys for the white paper said they used cash to pay bills (municipal, utility, airtime) and for shopping but in 2022, those who "sometimes or regularly used a payment facility other than

cash were asked why they preferred these options over cash, with 91% saying it is not safe to touch cash because of Covid, 60% saying it was more convenient to use a credit card, 26% saying it is more convenient to use a phone, and 25% citing safety for not carrying cash”.

Essentially, both vendors and consumers struggle with the dilemma of carrying cash as a safety issue, but cash remains central to the operating of South Africa’s informal sector.

The *Women In Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing* (WIEGO) reports that two billion people worldwide work in informal employment.

According to data from 2021 from StatsSA, jobs in the informal sector in South Africa account for nearly one-third of the national total, highlighting the sector’s importance for reducing poverty. It has been estimated to contribute about 6% of the GDP.

As a street vendor, you are covered by national law, The Business Act 71 of 1991.

While this act says you don’t need a licence to trade, it does give local municipalities authority to make by-laws. These regulate where and how street vendors trade and under what conditions; including paying for a permit or license.

As an informal trader, the existing by-laws often consist of confusing technical and legal speak. Some of these include Health Department regulations on health standards if you are involved in the preparation and selling of food, Zoning Scheme Regulations that say where informal trading is allowed, and by-laws relating to streets, public places and prevention of nuisance, reports *WIEGO*.

According to the Gauteng Informal Business Upliftment Strategy from 2016, by the Gauteng Province Economic Development, a number of issues were raised on the by-laws implemented by municipalities. These are namely that municipalities do not train informal traders on the by-laws, rather they harass and confiscate goods, that by-laws need to be standardized across municipalities, that there is a lack of communication across law enforcement, municipalities and informal traders, and that there is a high level of corruption from municipal officials on the implementation of by-laws.

Pritch Nzirah, a Zimbabwean immigrant selling handmade dog beds and assorted goods, tells *FORBES AFRICA* that goods were confiscated from him and his mother prior to receiving their permit to trade.

Now, after going through the technically complex process, they are protected by law.

The informal economy in sub-Saharan Africa is the second-largest in the world, after Latin America and

the Caribbean. From 2010 to 2014, sub-Saharan Africa’s informal economy accounted for 38% of GDP to the region, according to the International Monetary Fund.

The white paper published by *FORBES AFRICA* Insights, in association with Mastercard, reported that in 2022, 96% of businesses used cash to buy stock, with 4% indicating cash is less safe, but these micro-enterprises are slowly wanting to switch. There is definitely a shift in sentiment with a majority likely/extremely likely to start offering their customers digital and online payments to help them grow their business.

Only two vendors interviewed for this article used alternative cashless payment methods to cash.

The owners of Perfect Smart Coffee offers Snapscan as a method of payment as well as a card machine, while Cloe Berry, who sells hand-painted clothes, uses a Yoco card machine.

“We basically use a card machine and sometimes take cash, now and then. We transitioned to card machine because that was the rule of the market [The Playground] for clients to pay using card machine,” says Berry to *FORBES AFRICA*. Berry uses a Yoco device (from a South African-based fintech company that has spread through the country), making it easier for entrepreneurs to get paid. Yoco Go connects to a smartphone via Bluetooth using the Yoco App. The customer pays by tapping, swiping or inserting their card. All a vendor like Berry needs is a working smartphone.

In 2023, the City of Johannesburg’s digitized informal trading permits allow informal workers to register and apply for a trading licence electronically. The City of Johannesburg says this new policy recognizes that informal trading is creating employment, unlike its earlier version.

While the digitized trading informal permits represent progress in recognizing informal traders, the City of Johannesburg still has a way to go with integration. One million to two million new jobs will be in the informal sector by 2030, South Africa’s National Development Plan estimates. This creates potential challenges down the line to adequately protect existing and future workers. Informal workers mainly sell wares and services in central or secondary business districts and townships. And Johannesburg in Gauteng, mythologized as the land of milk and honey, is an attractive place for all ages to try and make a living and a life. Though the city can seem heartless, street vendors are a visible thread of community and creative survival.

On the following pages, we take a tour of the city’s inner precincts to offer you snapshots of their hustle, their working lives, a slice of their every day. 📍



Mpungose sells traditional Zulu items such as handcrafted wood and artifacts in his small shop at Kwa Mai-Mai Market in Maboneng, Johannesburg

ISAAC SAKHILE MPUNGOSE

In Maboneng in the Johannesburg CBD is a colorful quarter, the Kwa Mai-Mai Market, which comes alive every weekend, with people drinking, eating and merry-making, cow-heads being transported for cooking, and rows of stalls dedicated to traditional items and *muthi* (traditional medicine).

At shop number 9 in the market is a seller of traditional Zulu items. Isaac Sakhile Mpungose, 49, from Maphumulo in South Africa's coastal KwaZulu-Natal province, takes pride in how his wares are presented. The outside of his small shop displays sandals and *knobkerries* (traditional wooden clubs), and the inside *isithebe* (placemats for children to eat on), *iingqwembe* (wooden dishes for serving meat), as well as *imiqhele* (traditional headbands for Zulu men) and round bowls for *umqomboti* (traditional beer).

Mpungose has been selling traditional Zulu items for four

years now making an average of R1,000 (\$52) per month and claims he has no other source of income.

"After Covid, it gets better. Because everyone was locked in [their] house, no one was allowed to go outside and the business was slow. We didn't even get R10 (\$0.50) on those days. After Covid, it's much better now, people are coming from different places, [they're] seeing what we've got," Mpungose says to FORBES AFRICA from inside his tiny shop.

Mpungose's most popular item is *ngqwembe*, for serving meat. They come either as a long oblong dish, or two circular dishes, and sometimes, in a distinct leaf shape. All of them have a darkened underside, and the top is smooth and treated, in two or three shades of brown.

"If you are a man, you just have to struggle. Don't just sit down. You have to push. Just stick to wherever you are and do it," he says. Wise words from a man keeping his culture alive, no matter what.

Mazondi (this picture and below) literally plays with fire to get her succulent meats cooking at Kwa Mai-Mai



PROMISE MAZONDI

Just a few years after South Africa became a democracy in 1994, as a young woman, Promise Mazondi brought herself and her famed culinary skills from her hometown of Msinga in KwaZulu-Natal, to Johannesburg's CBD.

"I was the first to start cooking here," she says to FORBES AFRICA, even as smoke from her fire fills the air in Kwa Mai-Mai. She began Mazondi Restaurant Zwangobani Grill 25 years ago, but has been cooking for 35 years.

She works Monday to Monday, seven days a week, cooking chicken, and all kinds of red meat such as slabs of beef, pork and lamb, as also cow-heads. Other women fry meat next to her on open barrels, and pap (traditional porridge or polenta) cooks in big pots. People sit on trestle tables in front of them, with music and conversations filling the April air. Expensive cars fill the parking lot and people wander about with crystal glasses of whiskey in hand. The well-off and the working class mix in this market, an epitome of why Johannesburg is so cosmopolitan and authentically South African.

Mazondi has thus far never suffered illness from cooking on an open fire. She says the red-yellow clay mask all the women wear protects them from the smoke. If the smoke gets too much, the vendors use a cloth mask. The facial clay pastes are called *letsoku* in Sotho culture and *ibomvu* with Nguni people. They are used by both women and men in traditional ceremonies. *Ibomvu* and lighter-colored clays are also used as sunscreen.

Like her first name, Mazondi's food promises sated customers.



Muzumbi in front of his handmade leather goods stall in Melville, Johannesburg



SAMUEL MUZUMBI

In between a busy bar and a corner shop of Melville, Johannesburg, stands a quality leather stall bursting with wallets, sandals, bags, and belts. Samuel Muzumbi, 39, has been perfecting his craft making handmade leather for 14 years. He likes to collaborate with others on ideas, and works six days a week at the same stall, from Monday to Saturday.

Muzumbi is originally from Harare, Zimbabwe, and started doing bead work and paintings, eventually learning how to make sandals. “I gained more experienced and did repairs,” he tells us.

“Business has been quiet after Covid. I need capital [to go] ahead and make more,” he rues.

His leather goods range in eye-catching hues, from sandalwood to red, blue and dark brown.

Formal international trade in leather and leather goods is estimated at over \$50 billion a year.

Africa has around 15% of the world’s cattle population, and 25% of the world’s sheep and goat population. Despite this, the continent accounts for only 8% of the cattle hide production, and 15% of goat and sheepskin production, according to *Africa Business Pages*. While leather is ranked high in Africa for export, leather products account for less than 4% of total exports, due to the unorganized nature of the sector.

THABANG TLOU

In the temperate autumn sun, sitting under a tree alongside cardboard boxes is one of Johannesburg's daytime staples—a fruit and sweets vendor; one of the only ways people have access to fresh fruit and condiments on their way to and from work.

Thabang Tlou, 32, sells whatever is in season; plums, bananas, naartjies, apples, avocados. He also sells sweets and chips, and repairs shoes. Hailing from the Limpopo province of South Africa, he began by repairing shoes in 2015 before incorporating a food stall into his hustle. He makes around R450 (\$23) a day. He fixes anything from boots to sandals to stilettos. Fruits are the most popular item with customers, followed by sweets.

"It's harder in the winter months," Tlou says to FORBES AFRICA of the struggles of being outdoors. He works at his impromptu stall in Westdene from Monday to Thursday, and on Saturdays, he is in Brixton, a suburb close by.

Tlou wakes up at 5AM to arrive at his preferred spot by 7AM, leaving only after 6PM.



Fruit and sweets vendor Tlou, by his weekday station in Westdene, Johannesburg

(This image) Mother and son, Margaret Gwindi and Pritch Nzirah, run a small business selling dog beds by Emmarentia Dam, Johannesburg. (Below) Nzirah, seen here with a dog on a stroll with its owner, laments that business is difficult and slow

PRITCH NZIRAH AND MARGARET GWINDI

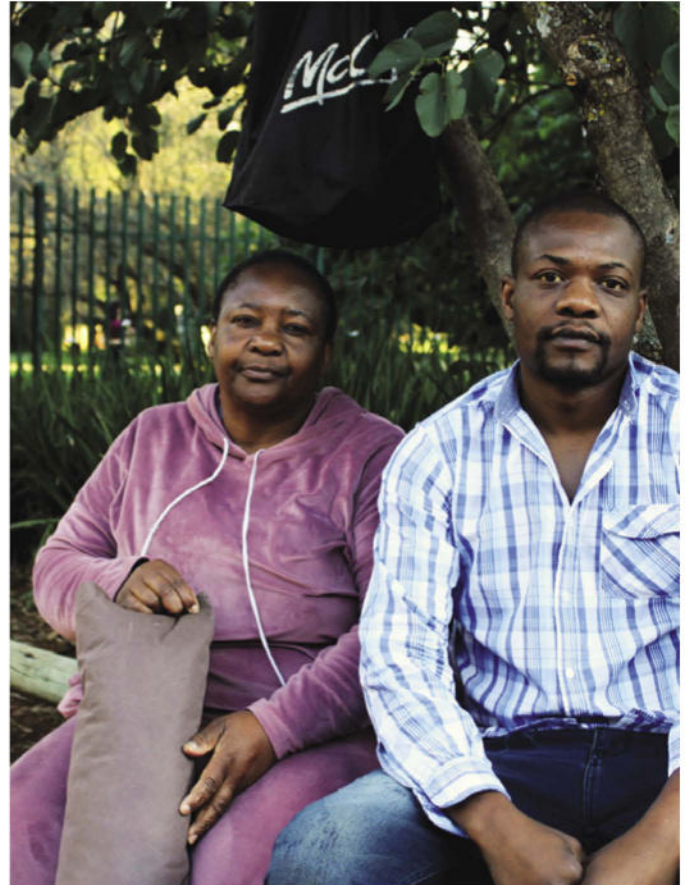
At the entrance by Emmarentia Dam where customers regularly walk their dogs are two regulars themselves: Margaret Gwindi, 51, and Pritch Nzirah, 34. This mom and son duo sells handmade dog beds of all sizes, along with patterned tablecloths, cat beds, stuffed toys, oven mitts, aprons, tote bags, and car dust bins. Together, they greet all the familiar dog-walkers—as well as their dogs—by name. Both are from Harare, Zimbabwe.

In the pre-Covid days, they made about R8,000 (\$415) a month, but now, are selling what they can to put food on the table. “These days, it’s been quiet,” laments Nzirah to FORBES AFRICA, as he greets yet another dog walking into the park.

Gwindi has been making and selling handcrafted items for almost 12 years. She began with selling ordinary store-bought table cloths, and someone suggested to her that if she could make them herself, she could turn it into a business.

“So I copied the samples, and starting making them,” says Gwindi, holding a sewing needle and making the final touches to a dog bed. She also repairs clothes, as she is an experienced seamstress. The mother and son used to come to Emmarentia seven days a week, but with income becoming precarious and transport being expensive, they usually only do weekends now, when they bring their entire stock, and on Thursdays, they bring the basics. Otherwise, they work door-to-door selling their wares.

“Most people go to the big malls and shops, forgetting their local businesses,” comments Nzirah, sadly.





Thando and Isabel at their stall, Smart Perfect Coffee, in Emmarentia

THANDO SITHOLE AND ISABEL SITHOLE

The Smart Perfect Coffee stall sees a steady stream of visitors, usually those who have come by to walk their dogs, by Emmarentia Dam. They usually come for a takeaway cappuccino or iced coffee. Thando Sithole and Isabel Sithole are the husband and wife behind this venture, trying to making a mobile business work. They both hail from Bergville, a small town in KwaZulu-Natal. Isabel was a barista before starting the business with her husband. “I had the passion,” she says, on why they started with a coffee stall. They took out a loan to afford equipment and get the ball—or coffee bean—rolling.

Now, they have been running it for five years, working at Emmarentia for a year now. They also do events, and offer Snapscan, cash or card as payment methods. Beyond coffee, they also make sure there is a water bowl available for all the hot and tired dogs on their way out of the park.

Cappuccinos are their most popular. Their iced coffees are refreshing on a hot day doing the full loop around the park. “Business is not always the same. There are dark days and bright days, so you just have to be persistent,” Isabel muses.



Customers lining up for cappuccino

U.S.-Africa Business Summit: Opportunities For Collaboration

The U.S.-Africa Business Summit, taking place July 11-14 in Gaborone, Botswana, is the Corporate Council on Africa's premier annual event. It brings together African heads of state, senior U.S. and African government officials, and top CEO's and senior business executives from the U.S. and Africa, spanning major business sectors critical to the continent's development.

During a visit to Gaborone, Botswana, Corporate Council on Africa (CCA) President and CEO Florizelle "Florie" Liser was honored to meet with Mokgweetsi Masisi, President of the Republic of Botswana, who reiterated his government's commitment to successfully co-hosting the 15th U.S.-Africa Business Summit (USABS) in Botswana later this year.

CCA is the leading U.S. business association focused solely on connecting business interests between the United States and Africa. CCA uniquely represents a broad cross section of member companies from small and medium size businesses to multinationals as well as U.S. and African firms.

President Masisi noted that key Cabinet officials who were in attendance at the meeting were ready to mobilize their ministries and work collaboratively with CCA and the private sector to organize a highly successful summit. Following several days of government and private sector meetings as well as site visits, Liser was pleased to announce with Minister of Investment, Trade and Industry, Mmusi Kgafela that the summit will be held July 11-14, 2023 in Gaborone. The announcement was made Friday, February 3, 2023 at the Minister's office along with the signing of an agreement between CCA and the Government of Botswana.

The U.S.-Africa Business Summit is the CCA's principal yearly event, connecting African heads of state, senior U.S. and African government officials, and CEO's and senior business executives from the U.S. and Africa, covering major business sectors critical to the continent's development. These include infrastructure, ICT / digital, health, energy, mining, agriculture, consumer goods, finance, tourism and creative industries.

The 15th USABS theme "Enhancing Afri-



Mokgweetsi Masisi, President of the Republic of Botswana (left) with Corporate Council on Africa (CCA) President and CEO **Florizelle "Florie" Liser**

ca's Value in Global Value Chains" highlights an issue that was heavily discussed during the U.S. - Africa Business Forum, hosted by President Joseph R. Biden on the second day of the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit in Washington, DC in December 2022. During the forum, President Biden announced more than \$55 billion in new U.S. government programs to support trade, investment and development in Africa along with more than \$15 billion in new trade and investment deals made by private sector companies that were in attendance.

CCA was proud to have co-organized the U.S.-Africa Business Forum which highlighted opportunities for greater collaboration between the U.S. and African private sector. This year's CCA Summit will build on and advance those discussions, further deepening U.S.-Africa economic engagement and business ties.

With a desire to keep the positive momentum going from the U.S.-Africa Leaders

Summit and Business Forum, Liser states that "the U.S.-Africa Business Summit is an important platform and opportunity to again bring together U.S. and African government and private sector leaders to grow U.S.-Africa trade, business, and mutually beneficial gains for the people and businesses of both the United States and Africa."

"We look forward to working with our partners at the Corporate Council on Africa to herald a new era of two-way trade and investment between Africa and the United States. We welcome U.S. private sector businesses to drive investment and technology that can enhance Africa's role in key global value chains, create jobs, and spur economic growth here in Botswana and across the continent," concludes Minister of Investment, Trade and Industry, Mmusi Kgafela.

Please visit www.usafricabizsummit.com



Berry with her painted clothes in the Johannesburg CBD

CLOE BERRY

A DJ sets the mood at The Playground market in Braamfontein in the Johannesburg CBD, while people mill around sipping drinks, painting canvases, and perusing artisanal stalls. A hotspot for tourists and locals, the market brings the best daytime vibes for all ages, a must-see for showcasing African talent.

At the top level of The Playground is a stall that inevitably attracts hordes of people.

Cloe Berry and Aubrey Berry are a brother-and-sister operation, selling painted clothes at the 27 Boxes shopping center in Melville during the week and at The Playground market on Saturdays.

The Berrys also have a strong social media presence on both Instagram and Facebook.

“I was just interested in it, I love collecting stuff,” Cloe says to FORBES AFRICA.

During her learning curve with painting clothes, she acquired a sewing machine.

If they don’t make a sale, they have to buy paint and equipment which can be a struggle, says Aubrey. On their best days, they make R10,000 (\$518). Coming from Zambia eight years ago, they have been selling African stylized portraits on jackets and trench coats at The Playground for two years now.

SHEPHERD CHANGI

On a bustling street in the charming residential suburb of Melville, Johannesburg, sits a bead worker on an upturned bucket, turning beads and wire into fully-fledged decorative animals. Shepherd Changi, 49, has been making beaded figures and figurines since 2000.

When he was in Harare, Zimbabwe, he saw his friends making these items, so joined in to learn. Now, as an immigrant here, he works his craft and has customers whose favorites are his beaded chicken items. His own personal favorite is the beaded bull.

On a good month, Changi will make R5,000 (\$259), sitting in Melville from Monday to Sunday selling his wares. The work needs intense focus.

“It’s also hard on my hands,” Changi says to FORBES AFRICA of the recyclable wire goods made with aluminum. He creates everything, from keychains to wire-and-bead trees, and intricate animals.

Bead work was one of the first decorative artistic endeavors. Archaeologists working in the Blombos cave in South Africa uncovered perforated marine shell beads made approximately 75,000 years ago. During the 19th and 20th centuries, European colonizers also brought glass beads, which have intertwined with indigenous African art since.



Changi with his pet bead work design, a bull, in Melville, Johannesburg

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By Peace Hyde

Remote Success

Former *The Apprentice* star Samuel Brooksworth is capitalizing on the remote working revolution by getting young skilled people to work from Africa for organizations around the world.



The market for remote workplace services is set to grow from \$20.1 billion in 2022 to \$58.5 billion by 2027, according to a report by MarketsandMarkets, a sector research and growth advisory firm in the United States (US), and Samuel Brooksworth, the CEO and founder of Remoteli is here to seize it.

The savvy London-born Ghanaian businessman is also famous for being on *The Apprentice* reality TV series on *BBC One* in the United Kingdom (UK) in 2016.

On the show, he got to sell his ideas and display his sales skills, which he has been honing from a young age.

At university, with his twin brother Andrew, he revitalized the African & Caribbean Society, growing it from just 15 members to over 600 people. They then went on to launch a t-shirt business, JC Range, featuring Christian-themed messages and sold at youth events and major gatherings across the UK.

Their t-shirts did well and the two quickly realized they had

a surefire knack for sales. After graduation, Brooksworth joined Enterprise-Rent-A-Car, a UK car rental service where once again he was in the hot seat and his skills put to test.

“At Enterprise, there was a culture called Elite Club where the top sellers in the organization are [rewarded] for their hard work. In my first eight months at the organization, I made [it to the] top five consistently out of about 500 people in the region. To put this in context, most people only make the Elite Club once or twice every one or two years and some sales people have never made it to the club. So when I [accomplished] that, it put my name at the top of the organization and I got the attention of area managers and different regional individuals,” recalls Brooksworth.

It was not long after that his wife, an avid fan of *The Apprentice*, insisted he too apply for the show. He did, and a week later, he received the call. For Brooksworth, getting on the show was not to win, he says. It was to leverage the platform to give visibility to his latest business idea.

“I felt I got the exposure and after the show I was able to connect with people I didn’t have access to beforehand. When I

**“WE ARE HELPING
COMBAT THE
RISING GRADUATE
UNEMPLOYMENT
RATES IN AFRICA.”**

went on the show, the business idea [I presented] was similar to what I am doing now. On the show, they rejected the idea but years later it has actually become one of the most successful businesses of any candidate. It's a beautiful moment that what they didn't see has grown to be as big as it is now," says Brooksworth.

Needless to say, it came after a lot of hard work.

In a 2019 article in *The Guardian*, he writes: "I was taught by my parents that I needed to work 10 times harder than my white friends in order to be seen as equal. As a child, this made no sense. I thought education was very black and white. If my answers were right, they were right; if they were wrong, they were wrong. Why then would I need to work harder just to receive the same grades?"

His big business opportunity came during the Covid-19 pandemic.

"I was speaking to various senior executives, business leaders and C-Suite individuals [about] the challenges during the pandemic and a lot of them were struggling. They were paying huge bills [for] offices that were empty," says Brooksworth.

However, it was a trip to Ghana with his wife that solidified the idea for his business, Remoteli.

"There were so many young people who were unemployed but were sharp and on the ball. But when I spoke to the adults, they would say the young people are lazy and don't want to learn.

I thought that was not true, rather there were not enough opportunities and if you give them the skills, I believed that they would thrive"

Brooksworth decided to get these skilled young people to work remotely in Ghana for organizations around the world.

His company, Remoteli, is a tech-led, on-demand staffing organization providing remote workers for companies and individuals worldwide offering a range of services—from virtual assistants to web developers and social media managers.

The company has not raised any money yet and has grown rapidly by bootstrapping and word-of-mouth referrals.

"We are helping combat the rising graduate unemployment rates in Africa by providing opportunities for unemployed youth," says Brooksworth.

The organization has grown from two employees to over 100 staff and they are currently in the business hubs of Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Nigeria.

The pandemic has changed the way organizations work forever and for Brooksworth, the time to capitalize on this is now and in doing so, he is making a tidy profit and helping fellow Ghanaians get high-paying jobs with global companies whilst working from the comfort of their homes in Africa. 🇵🇸

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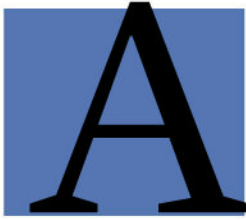


A man with a beard, wearing a white button-down shirt, dark trousers, and brown shoes, stands with his hands in his pockets in front of a large industrial structure. The structure features several vertical blue pipes or columns. The background is dark, and the lighting is dramatic, highlighting the man and the pipes.

The Nuclear Option

Old-fashioned fission may be the best way to wean the world off fossil fuels. So Bret Kugelmass wants to deploy 10,000 inexpensive, off-the-shelf microreactors—but not in America.

By Christopher Helman



An hour west of Houston, where suburban sprawl surrenders to cow pasture, sits a cavernous industrial workshop in which welders and pipefitters assemble equipment bound for oil refineries and drilling platforms in the Gulf of Mexico.

“These guys have been working for decades to modularize components for high pressures and temperatures,” says Bret Kugelmass, 36, the founder and CEO of Washington, D.C.–based Last Energy. That’s why he came here, to VGas LLC, when he wanted a prototype of the small, modular nuclear fission reactors he’s betting could play a big role in cutting down on fossil fuels.

Based on Kugelmass’ open-sourced design and using mostly off-the-shelf components, VGas fabricated almost all the parts for a basic small light-water reactor and crammed them into nine shipping container-sized modules. It took only two days to bolt them together.

To be clear, this wasn’t a working prototype—in fact, its 75-ton reactor pressure vessel is cut away to show how standardized fuel assemblies of zirconium rods filled with pellets of enriched uranium fuel could nestle inside. “We’re not doing any new chemistry or reactor physics,” Kugelmass emphasizes. “Our core innovation is the delivery model of a nuclear power plant. We’re just packaging it in a different way.”

We’re talking old-fashioned fission technology here—the kind that for decades has been used to generate energy by splitting uranium atoms apart. It’s the opposite of nuclear fusion, which is how the sun generates energy: by fusing hydrogen atoms. For decades fusion research has stalled because scientists could not coax more energy out of fusion reactions than it took to trigger them. Recent breakthroughs show promise, but even in the most optimistic scenarios commercial fusion is many years away.

Leaning into science is one way to make things easier; avoiding U.S. regulators is another. Kugelmass isn’t even asking for American approval of his plants. Instead, he hopes to have his first 20-megawatt reactor (enough to power 20,000 homes) up and running by 2025 in Poland, which has been getting 70% of its power from burning coal since Russian natural gas supplies were cut off.

Poland has agreed to buy the electricity from 10 of the units, which Kugelmass hopes to make for \$100

million each, under a long-term contract that requires Last Energy to operate the reactors and take on the risk of cost overruns.

Kugelmass aims to build 10,000 of these mini reactors worldwide, which sounds fantastical for a nuclear industry newbie who has so far raised just \$24 million in venture capital. It’s smart money, though: \$21 million came in a round led by Austin, Texas-based Gigafund, whose managing partner, Luke Nosek, was the first VC investor to back Elon Musk’s SpaceX.

You can still hear in Kugelmass’ voice the Long Island kid who loved building robots and who studied math at SUNY Stony Brook before earning a master’s in mechanical engineering at Stanford. In 2012, when he was just 25, he launched a business that used a fleet of fixed-wing drones to assess storm risk by conducting photographic surveys of millions of rooftops for insurance companies. He raised \$5.8 million for his venture, known as Airphrame, and sold it in 2017. At that point, he decided to devote himself to fighting climate change.

Kugelmass quickly homed in on nuclear power as a big part of the solution. According to Columbia University’s International Research Institute for Climate and Society, nuclear is the only fix for the “energy trilemma”—a source that is reliable, affordable and sustainable. Wind? Solar? They require more than 10 times as much material per unit of electricity generation as nuclear, notes Marc Bianchi, an energy analyst at Cowen & Co. Moreover, land access and NIMBY-ism make it hard to scale upwind and solar farms worldwide already cover an area twice the size of Texas and deliver just 5% of the planet’s electricity needs. Generating the same 20 megawatts as one of Kugelmass’ proposed mini reactors would take, on average, 600 acres of solar panels or 4,000 acres of wind turbines.

Kugelmass was still a nuclear novice in 2018, so he began interviewing experts via a podcast, *Titans of Nuclear*, that has now grown to nearly 400 episodes. He studied the obstacles to building more nuclear capacity and concluded that too much complexity, along with excessive regulation, were major problems.

Another issue: the historically runaway costs of large nuclear projects, which he attributes in part to skewed incentives in the way they have been financed and built. In the U.S., utilities that dare try to build new nuclear plants bear little risk from outrageous cost overruns, since they know they can always cover bills by charging

Green Dreams

Last Energy envisions its power plants blending into the environment, with reactor cores installed safely underground and symmetrical fans and steam turbines replacing hulking cooling towers. Each 20-megawatt unit requires less than an acre of land.



more for their electricity. After all, their monopolistic rates are set by regulators. Kugelmass' solution is to adopt the financing model from wind and solar projects: Last Energy will build and own the plants, using long-term contracts like the one signed in Poland as the basis for borrowing the large amounts of money needed around \$1 billion in the case of the Polish project.


Last Energy is hardly the only startup aiming to build a new generation of smaller reactors. Deep-pocketed competitors include Terra-Power, a joint venture between Bill Gates and Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway, which is seeking to build a novel molten chloride, liquid sodium-cooled 345-megawatt reactor in Wyoming.

Despite \$2 billion in federal subsidies, TerraPower's costs have ballooned to more than \$4 billion amid years of delays. X-energy, soon to be a public company via SPAC sponsored by Ares Management, is also using a new-fangled meltdown-proof uranium oxycarbide fuel for its 320-megawatt reactor, which will result in greater regulatory scrutiny. NuScale Energy, the first publicly traded mini-nuke developer, got its 50-megawatt design approved in January after spending a decade and \$1

billion to navigate the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission but doesn't expect to finish a first plant until the early 2030s.

So how does Last Energy, using old technology, answer the safety fears (justified and not) that have held up nuclear projects for decades? Kugelmass says that even if its multiple redundant cooling mechanisms failed, the underground vault encasing the reactor in 550 tons of steel would efficiently dissipate excess heat and contain fuel in the unlikely event of a meltdown.

As for radioactive waste, most nuclear plants remove the bundles of spent fuel rods from the reactor and store them outside in concrete and steel casks. Last Energy's plan, by contrast, calls for bringing in a new reactor module, preloaded with fuel, once every six years.

The old cores stay behind, secured underground, cooling off until the eventual decommissioning of the plant. It might seem a waste to replace an entire reactor module rather than just the fuel, but it does make life simpler. "We've deliberately accepted certain plant inefficiencies to achieve economic efficiencies," Kugelmass says. "Any other approach and you'd be right back where we started." 

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SKYLIGHT HOTEL

By Renuka Methil

Guru Of Fintech

Gaurav Dhar, a tech investor and second generation fintech entrepreneur in Dubai, has a keen eye on the sector in Africa, saying the continent will see larger and larger funds coming into enabling environments—and there are also some key lessons from the Middle East.



At the Dubai Fintech Summit in May, Gaurav Dhar is outside the lavish Madinat Jumeirah hotel where the event is being held, walking out of the venue into the afternoon sun in a dapper blue suit. Like the weather by this chic coastal property, he is warm and welcoming, referring to our chat a few weeks earlier.

As the Group CEO of Marshal Fintech Partners, these are the events you will typically find him at in the spiffy Middle Eastern emirate, those that focus on investments, fintechs, startups, venture capital, entrepreneurship and innovation.

Just like Dubai, the city he was born and raised in, his specialties too are as dynamic and diverse.

Like any third generation expatriate, Dhar says he has a great sense of pride locating his activities out of the glistening emirate, yet doing business for the world, even for Africa.

“I consider myself an ambassador of the UAE. I have Indian roots, but for all intents and purposes, I consider myself an

honorary Emirati. Because there is this pride when you [have been] part of the story of building this country in some way, shape or form.” Dhar’s grandfather came to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in the early 1970s to become the General Manager of General Motors, when the country had just been carved out as seven emirates from its hitherto existence as the Trucial States.

Dubai was still a dusty city being developed around a port, bringing in tidings and tidy profits from the sea.

“The UAE was its own little paradise, and now is this behemoth global player... Our business evolved along with the country—it was a very side-by-side story,” says Dhar about how after his grandfather, his father, Anil, too followed in the late 1970s and took to “the landscape that was fresh, exciting, mixed and new”.

He worked at Unilever and Texas Instruments before “manifesting his own destiny” and deciding to go his own, turning around an office furniture and supplies company, slowly implementing it also as a technology-focused enterprise, incorporating typewriters, photocopiers and fax machines, as more and more businesses in the region started looking for ways to formalize and store work.

“My father wanted to follow the next trend...and understand the space where again, he could control his own destiny, as opposed to waiting for Xerox or Microsoft to tell him what to do, how to build or what his revenue could be,” recalls Dhar.

Called Marshal Equipment and Trading LLC, the company started in the UAE, expanding across the Gulf Cooperation Council states and Africa. “It has been profit-generating for over 35 years and consistently growing,” says Dhar, speaking from his new office on Dubai’s ritzy Sheikh Zayed Road, also home to the almost-kilometer-long Burj Khalifa, the world’s tallest tower. When his father started his business, it was in a small office in Deira—a historic district bursting with character, old forts, wind towers, the legendary Clock Tower and the shimmering waters of the creek.

As a curious child growing up in this space, watching the business evolve, Dhar’s answer to questions while studying at Doon School in India was always that the family was in “payments technology”. His mind was already on the job.

The business grew from one country to another and so did the public penchant for payments technology slowly gaining currency in the boardrooms and bourses of Dubai as “people also started understanding the blocks that make up the fintech system”.

Photo supplied

When Dhar—who studied law at the University of Exeter in the United Kingdom and calls himself “a second generation fintech entrepreneur”—first started exploring fintech, it also took a little convincing to get Dhar’s dad, who is 70 this year, to get on board.

“When we started talking in 2015 about the concept of non-profit generating companies that are pure valuation-based, you can imagine his reaction, as a businessman, it was initially to say this is not going to fly, this is not going to work as a concept, because it’s very easy to spend money, but it’s very difficult to make money.”

Dhar started spending time in San Francisco, Hong Kong, Vietnam, India and other places to understand more of what was happening in the “high-risk, high-return, high-failure-rate” venture capital space in this regard.

About seven years ago, Dhar, in his personal capacity, started investing in fintech in the Middle East, Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the United States, and three years ago, the company’s name changed to Marshal Fintech Partners—as it got acquired by a sovereign wealth fund in the Middle East.

With over 19 years of experience under his belt in various aspects of business, Dhar now has a well-entrenched interest in fintech ecosystems and solutions.

“It’s very exciting to be a part of this evolution, where the ecosystem from a startup or investing point of view has started maturing and we were part of that as it started again...

“If I were to have an intellectual conversation in detail about payments technology with my father, he is extremely well-equipped, because he was there as it was being written, assembled, and literally adopted by all parts of the ecosystem in the Middle East, so he’s extremely capable,” smiles Dhar.

The business growth has been organic, as the entire ecosystem works mutually on codependency and reciprocal relationships from a technology, landscape, business and venture capital perspective. Along the evolution journey, through these collaborative interactions, Dhar says he has also formed networks and friends with “tangible value exchange” and “a genuine desire” to drive economic growth and create job opportunities in the Middle East and Africa.

The Middle East has historical ties with Africa, and Dhar continues to build connections on the continent, often featuring founders of African fintechs and Web3 startups on the podcast series (on Spotify, Apple, YouTube) he hosts every week. “The continent of Africa has its own path of adoption for technology, infrastructure and the different economies... there is huge potential but the unlocking of it

has taken different trajectories...

“Let’s not forget that the Middle East has a lot of sovereign wealth, and they have been engaging in investing internationally for decades...So along with that wealth comes access to knowledge, learning, and exposure, so it has been much faster.

“I think the African continent again has it in pockets, but it’s not been [able to] move that timeline faster to have the whole continent benefiting from the influx of capital. So these are very separate ecosystems with different outcomes,” he says.

But there is no doubt there are massive opportunities and synergies between both regions.

“What you’re going to see is larger and larger funds in Africa, either pooled from Europe, or within Africa itself. Entrepreneurship still needs funding and fueling”

According to the *2022 African Private Capital Activity Report* released by the African Private Capital Association (AVCA) in early

May, reflecting Africa’s changing demography, venture capital was the most active asset class, accounting for 74% of the total private capital deal volume and over half of private capital deal value. “As a younger, more tech-oriented population drives interest in disruptive sectors—investments in tech secured the largest part of all investments recorded last year on the continent,” said the report.

With over 650 million mobile phone users in Africa, it is a ripe market for innovations in the financial

services sector. Dhar offers his own forecast.

“Whoever is going to be the most-friendly regulator is going to win, then the most-friendly telco operator is going to gain massively; and then the third is with the government allowing people to understand subsidized ecosystems to spark long-term talent staying in those ecosystems, and the understanding of educating properly what is happening in that ecosystem.” Effective partnerships between the government and the private sector is one thing the Middle East has done extremely well, he adds. “They have written the playbook for this essentially—the marriage between the government or the federal ecosystem and the private sector has been very close. They talk to each other and push each other to do bigger and better things. And one of these things in the UAE is the venture capital space. And that perhaps is something that needs to happen more in Africa.”

Also a board member of the MENA FinTech Association, a trip to Africa is on the cards soon, but when Dhar is not spending his time on advisory boards and “giving back” to the entrepreneurial community, he dabbles in his other interests: F&B, collecting vintage cars and hosting vintage car rallies every year, where all roads eventually lead to Dubai. 📍

“THE CONTINENT OF AFRICA HAS ITS OWN PATH OF ADOPTION FOR TECHNOLOGY, INFRASTRUCTURE AND THE DIFFERENT ECONOMIES... THERE IS HUGE POTENTIAL BUT THE UNLOCKING OF IT HAS TAKEN DIFFERENT TRAJECTORIES...”


By Kenrick Cai



MOBILIZING A.I.'S INFANTRY

Alexandr Wang briefly became the world's youngest self-made billionaire by supplying artificial intelligence companies with the one thing they all need: humans. Hundreds of thousands of them. Now, his \$7.3 billion startup is primed to cash in on the biggest A.I boom yet—unless someone else can do it better or cheaper.

Photo: Ethan Pines/Forbes



In 2018, on a trip to his ancestral homeland, Alexandr Wang listened as China's brightest engineers gave impressive presentations on artificial intelligence. He found it odd that the researchers conspicuously avoided any mention of how AI might be used. Wang, whose immigrant parents were nuclear physicists at Los Alamos National Laboratory, where the first atomic bombs were designed, was unsettled.

"They were really dodgy on what the use cases were. You could tell it was for no good," recalls Wang, the cofounder of Scale AI, who has no "e" in his first name so that it has eight characters, a number associated with good fortune in Chinese culture. Scale was then an up-and-coming startup providing data services primarily to self-driving automakers. But Wang began to worry that AI might soon upend a world order that, excepting the fall of the Soviet Union, has remained mostly stable since World War II. "If you think about the history of humanity, it's mostly been punctuated by war except the last 80 or so years, which have been unusually peaceful," he says from Scale's sixth-floor headquarters in downtown San Francisco, as the occasional

"SCALE WAS CONCEIVED AS A ONE-STOP SHOP FOR SUPPLYING HUMAN LABOR TO PERFORM TASKS THAT COULD NOT BE DONE BY ALGORITHMS—ESSENTIALLY, THE ANTITHESIS OF AI."

(partly) self-driving car zips by below. "A lot of that has been because of American leadership in the world."

At first glance, Wang, 26, exudes the skittish energy of a fresh college graduate. He listens to "sad girl" musicians like Gracie Abrams and Billie Eilish and dresses "gorpcore," an in-vogue style of fashionable hiking clothes. He posts Instagram photos with actor Kiernan Shipka of *Mad Men* fame and spouts pithy nuggets on Twitter: "The best problems can only be solved by blood, sweat, tears, spirit and an overwhelming sense of purpose," he wrote in one February tweet. At bars, he still gets carded regularly.

None of that matters in Silicon Valley and DC., where he's already a power player. His rise began with a bet he made in 2016 to "label" the mass of data required to power AI, primarily for self-driving cars. Someone needed to train the AI to know the difference between a paper bag and a pedestrian. He cornered that market and put Scale in a good position in another sector: generative AI. It was a prescient move that helped him garner a client list that includes the

biggest names in AI—and the U.S. government.

"We're the picks and shovels in the generative AI gold rush," he says. It has quickly become a lucrative business for Scale, which says it pulled in \$250 million in revenue last year, at a time when many AI startups aren't yet making a cent. Its tech has been used by the Defense Department to analyze satellite imagery in Ukraine and by OpenAI to create ChatGPT, the bot that rocked the world with its ability to answer trivia and write poetry. Bret Taylor, former co-CEO of cloud software giant Salesforce, likens Scale's rise to that of cloud computing darlings Snowflake and Databricks. Former Amazon consumer boss Jeff Wilke, one of Wang's most trusted advisors, takes an even more enthusiastic view: Scale could become the Amazon Web Services of AI.

Investors awarded Scale a \$7.3 billion valuation in 2021, making Wang the latest Silicon Valley insta-billionaire. But his fortune wasn't built entirely on silicon. It was also built with a vast outsourced workforce that performs a rudimentary task crucial to AI: labeling the data used to train it. Those people—some 240,000 of them in countries including Kenya, the Philippines and Venezuela—work for Remotasks, a subsidiary Scale doesn't mention in public marketing materials. In other words, if AI does someday liberate humans from mundane workplace tasks, it will have done so using a legion of workers in the Global South, many of whom are paid less than \$1 an hour.

"They're very, very important to the process of building powerful AI systems," Wang says of his Remotasks workers.

They're also, increasingly, an ethical concern, with worries emerging about substandard working conditions and low pay. Meanwhile, competitors see Scale as a house of cards that has suffered layoffs and declining value on secondary markets in the past year that has stripped Wang of billionaire status. (Those markets now value his 15% stake at \$630 million. Scale argues it's worth closer to \$890 million.) "Scale markets itself as a technology company," says Manu Sharma, cofounder of rival startup Labelbox. "For us, they're no different than any business-process outsourcing company." Tech upstarts think they can do what Scale does better, while traditional outsourcers think they can do it cheaper.

"I would say that we've been working on this problem longer and have built more technology than anyone else," Wang counters. He's trying to follow Amazon's playbook of managing the entire chain, from warehouses to shipping. For Scale, that means both the machines—which are increasingly automating the data work—and the human army, which is growing ever larger. "We're always going to want a human in the loop," he says.

Before college, Wang moved to the Bay Area to work for internet startup Quora, where CEO Adam D'Angelo gave him a crucial piece of advice: Four years of college is

Young and Younger

Wang was just 19 when he started Scale. His cofounder, Lucy Guo, was 21. "It definitely made it harder to hire," Wang says. "There was somebody who asked me, 'Explain to me why I should entrust my career to you.'"



overrated, two is underrated. In the end, Wang spent just one year at MIT before heading to storied startup accelerator Y Combinator. There he teamed up with Quora alum Lucy Guo, another dropout, to start Scale in 2016. He remembers being "ridiculously young" at the time, just 19. "But I was just like, 'Yeah, I know how to code. We're going to go do this thing.'"

As it was first conceived, Scale was to be a one-stop shop for supplying human labor to perform tasks that could not be done by algorithms—essentially, the antithesis of AI. Accel partner Dan Levine was early to see its potential, offering the pair a seed investment of \$4.5 million (and his basement as temporary headquarters) in July 2016. Within months, Wang and Guo realized Scale was a viable solution to a problem plaguing the self-driving car companies at AI's then-frontier: They had millions of miles of on-the-road driving footage with which to train their autonomous vehicle AI, and not nearly enough people to review and label it. Scale could fill that need.

In 2018, Wang and Guo were named to *Forbes'* 30 Under 30 list in enterprise technology. Guo subsequently left the company "due to differences in product vision and road map," she says. "I think Alex has done a great job continuing to run the company." Guo otherwise declined to comment for this story, and Wang declined to speak about their split.

Investor Mike Volpi first heard Scale's name during a 2018 board meeting for autonomous vehicle (AV) startup Aurora. "Who?" he remembers asking. Scale's data labeling service had become crucial for Aurora, he learned, just as it had for Uber and for General Motors' self-driving subsidiary, Cruise. Volpi persuaded his firm, Index Ventures, to lead an \$18 million investment in Scale that August, when its revenue was still shy of \$3 million.

The AV wager was becoming a cash cow. Scale's client list now included major international auto manufacturers such as Toyota and Honda, as well as Silicon Valley behemoths like Google AV subsidiary Waymo, according to a June 2019 fundraising pitch deck seen by *Forbes*. An account with Apple's secretive self-driving unit alone was bringing in more than \$10 million, the document said, putting annual revenue on track to surpass \$40 million. (Scale declined to comment on the deck.) By that summer, annual revenue was on track to surpass \$40 million.

When Peter Thiel's Founders Fund made a \$100 million investment that minted Scale as a Silicon Valley unicorn in August 2019, it kicked off a 20-month, \$580 million fundraising spree, the final round of which valued the company north of \$7 billion. It had taken Wang, then 24, just five years to become the youngest self-made billionaire in the world.

By the time Scale dominated the data labeling market for self-driving car companies, its name had become something of an irony. The more it scaled, the harder it became to keep up with the demand for human labor. Wang first turned to outsourcing agencies to fill gaps, but costs quickly spiraled. Gross margins, which hovered at about 65% in early 2018, approached a mere 30% by the fourth quarter. Wang needed to stanch the bleeding while still capturing both the human and machine sides of the AI data training supply chain.

Enter Remotasks, Scale's in-house outsourcing agency. Created in 2017, Remotasks soon became a priority as the company's AV business skyrocketed. In need of cheap labor, Scale set up a dozen-plus facilities in Southeast Asia and Africa to train thousands of data labelers. By mid-2019, Scale's margins had recovered to 69%, according to the deck.

Serving Through The Art Of COMMUNICATION

Thami Nkadameng continues to use her background in communications to make positive change and contribute towards the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. She continues to work with presidents, leaders, executives, corporates and organizations worldwide and has recently been selected as one of 2023's Top 100 Most Influential People of African Descent Under 40.

The quote that Albert Einstein is widely credited for is: "The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again, but expecting different results."

How did Thami Nkadameng get to be The Message Architect? Rather than spending the next few sentences writing about it, she suggests it would be better for all those reading this article to also watch her TEDx Talk *I Used My Mind's Theatre To Become* on YouTube.

She says she would rather write about her gift, her purpose and calling and the method she uses to differentiate herself. Walking in her Message Architect shoes is a decision she consistently makes with intention. She speaks on topical matters concerning society at various meetings, conferences and events but says her ultimate duty is distinguished by how she treats these global platforms with respect to humanity and for the greater purpose of serving mankind. What does it take for her to achieve this? Well, step into her mind for a few minutes to understand, The Message Architect way:

S – SIMPLICITY

She has come to learn that if something is intentionally complicated it is not for her to share. She is wired to make messages understandable by the majority. Often the more complicated matters are, the more sugar-coated the truth is too. The words used need to be understandable by all genders, races, age groups, especially on topics pertaining to consistency, fairness and justice of people across the board.

E – ECOSYSTEM

Everything is interconnected and in her



preparation process, the consideration of the ecosystem alignment is imperative. Her role is to foster collaboration through her thought-processing and suggestions, playing the golden thread.

R – RESEARCH & INTENTION

Research of the topic is absolutely and obviously imperative. However, research of the environment, its history including the culture, religion and other aspects that may contribute towards information consumption in that geographical area is of utmost importance. This has to be done with intention.

V – VISIONARY & CLARITY

Understanding the objective of the gathering is key. Once the objective is defined, she uses her imagination and role play, visualizing the impact creation the stake-

holders of that gathering could attain – that often allows the creativity side to join the scripting process.

E – ENDURANCE

The vocabulary used in the delivery of the communication through moderating, program-directing or hosting must allow the message to stand the test of time. Refrain from catch phrases that will last a season only – unless absolutely necessary. History dictates that change on matters that count for society happen steadily and she wants her contribution to be a baton that she can hand over to the next generation, not one that requires recreation.

If you pay particular attention to the first letters of each point you will begin to spell out 'serve'. The biggest ask about being The Message Architect is to make certain that the manner in which she creates messages is not just for consumption for those in the selected audience but also for everyone else who will also hear it – often the ones who are not intentionally considered.

Did the waiter in the room understand? What about the person at the technical booth and the child doing their research from the recording of the event? Why? Because if all humanity begins to understand what we are working towards, then moving the needle will become simpler... not effortless, just simpler. She understands that education can help remedy many of the other issues and education never takes place in the classroom alone. Her calling ultimately is to serve through communications and architecting messages that educate people.

Visit www.thaminkadameng.com

Scale has been careful to position Remotasks as a separate brand. Its website makes no mention of Remotasks; the reverse is also true. Early employees say this was done to make Scale's strategy less obvious to competitors and shield the company from scrutiny. Scale told *Forbes* it separated the two brands for client confidentiality.

In a 2022 study into working conditions on 15 digital labor platforms, University of Oxford researchers concluded Remotasks met the "minimum standards of fair work" in just two of 10 criteria, flunking equitable pay—which early employees say is pennies per hour on average—and fair representation. They noted that the "obfuscation" of its association with Scale creates confusion that "can contribute to workers' vulnerability to exploitation." Lead researcher Kelle Howson compared data labelers on digital labor services like Remotasks to garment factory workers in many of the same countries. "There is pretty much zero accountability for those working conditions," she added. Scale says it is committed to paying workers "a living wage."

Beyond the ethical considerations, there are business questions, too. What Scale is doing with Remotasks isn't hard to replicate. Kevin Guo, cofounder of Hive, a startup that once fielded its own Remotasks rival before shuttering it due to tough margins, contends that the sort of data labeling Scale does is a commodity business. "Any one who puts up a team can compete with you, and it comes down to price really quickly," he says.

While Remotasks' huge overseas workforce is critical to Scale's private sector success, it's a nonstarter for the company's other focus: defense contracts with the U.S. government, which is unlikely to share classified data with foreign labelers. Wang is therefore building a much more expensive domestic AI army. Last year, Scale opened an office in St. Louis and announced plans to hire 200 people, many as data labelers.

"There's two things I deeply believe," Wang says. "One, AI is a huge force for good, and it needs to be applied as broadly as possible. Two, we need to make sure that America is in a leadership position."

So far Scale has made \$60.6 million from such contracts, according to a government data base. The company touted a \$249 million award in a press release last year—but read the fine print and Scale's ceiling of potential payouts is capped at \$15 million. The lion's share of government spending on AI is still going to the likes of Northrop Grumman and Lockheed Martin, not Silicon Valley upstarts.

"Those companies, they're really not that cutting edge when it comes to understanding generative AI," Wang says. For him, government partnership is a long game. The Defense Department has already used Scale's expertise to make strategic sense of satellite imagery in Ukraine. And that's just the beginning. Generative AI, he says, could someday be used more

comprehensively. Train a custom AI model on live data from America's 1.3 million active service personnel and you might just change the nature of war.

But it won't be easy to get there. Generative AI models require far more complex training than their precursors. They too need additional human help, but instead of simply labeling data harvested from the internet, people need to create it. For AI to explain *why* puppies are cute in a way that sounds right to the human ear, you need people to train it using natural phrasing. "Human-annotated data turns out to be extraordinarily impactful to model performance," says Aidan Gomez, cofounder of Cohere, a Toronto-based OpenAI competitor that counts Scale as its primary custom data provider.


Not all AI companies are sold on Scale. OpenAI, for example, relies on Scale's human labelers but opts to use its own software to manage the data, says cofounder Wojciech Zaremba. Three engineering leaders who used Scale at prominent AI startups told *Forbes* confidentially that they have concerns about the quality of its human-made AI training data. One described a text-based generative AI model that was hampered by the labelers' poor English. "Their data quality can be high, but also that's not a given," said another. Said a Scale spokesperson: "We stand behind our products and [their] results."

Alternatives are emerging. San Francisco-based Surge AI, which debuted in 2020, offers data labeling tools and specifically targets AI companies. OpenAI, along with upcoming AI heavies Cohere and Adept, use both Scale and Surge. Then there are billion-dollar Bay Area labeling startups Labelbox and Snorkel AI, which focus on bringing AI to non-tech enterprises.

In January, Scale slashed 20% of its full-time staff. Wang cited "uncertainty" in market conditions. "We increased head count assuming the massive growth would continue," he wrote in a blog post. Shares of the company are currently trading on private secondary markets at a 42% discount to the last funding round in July 2021.

Scale's stakeholders remain confident Wang can keep the company ahead of its rivals. "He didn't get to where he is because he's a boy genius—MIT pumps out a lot of teenage dropouts," says William Hockey, the billionaire co-founder of \$13 billion fintech Plaid, who sits on Scale's board. "He has an absolutely insane work ethic like nobody I've ever met."

Scale recently signed consulting giant Accenture, which plans to use its services to help hundreds of companies build custom AI apps and models. And with nearly a quarter-million human labelers, Remotasks is still growing, Wang confirms. All this growth comes down to what he views as Scale's ultimate purpose: playing a role in maintaining America's AI supremacy.

"We're in an era of great power competition," he says. "American leadership—I don't want to say it's at risk, but it's never been more important for us to retain that." 

Putting African Cosmetics ON THE MAP

The beauty industry continues to thrive, and while it's been dominated by the usual suspects in recent years, Hermosa Flor Cosmetics may be the one to put African cosmetics on the beauty map.

The African beauty and personal care market is a booming industry that is expected to experience an increase of USD 1.26 billion by 2025, per PR Newswire.

53% of this growth is expected to come out of South Africa, and one brand that is sure to be leading the charge is Hermosa Flor Cosmetics.

Founded by Mbali Sebapu, Hermosa Flor Cosmetics, which translates to a beautiful flower, is a cosmetic brand that not only focuses on spotlighting African beauty but also introduces a quality African brand to the global stage.

Upon its launch in 2019, the brand only offered eyeshadows, lipsticks, eyelashes, and beauty tools that included blenders and brushes.

However, the range has now expanded to include skincare products.

Now while there are more plans to expand into body care, Sebapu shares that whatever new product is introduced by the brand, the decision will be influenced by their consumer's needs.

"Most of our products are what our consumers want us to have so they're our source of inspiration when it comes to adding to the brand."

A BEAUTY FOLLOWING

In recent years, social media has created ample opportunities for entrepreneurs to launch and grow their businesses, and that is precisely what Sebapu did.

Before launching her business, Sebapu had a strong social media presence and through her Instagram moniker, @gorgeous_mbali, she garnered a loyal following.

Sebapu's dedicated following not only helped her launch her business online, but the success of it allowed her to open two physical stand-alone Hermosa Flor Cosmetics stores,



Mbali Sebapu

as well as two additional stalls in leading malls located in Johannesburg and Cape Town, South Africa.

Now while not every brand that has a following is sure to succeed, Sebapu is adept in the science of speaking to and understanding her audience.

"A good following is a great asset to any business, but it's worthless if don't know how to sell and market your product"

Additionally, Sebapu's apt understanding of the social media landscape allows her to see past any online vitriol.

Instead, she opts to focus more on strengthening the already existing relationships the brand has with its customers.

"Our consumers understand that brands do make mistakes and as long as we take responsibility, they are willing to continue to invest in a brand that is so open about investing in them."

REPRESENTATIVE BEAUTY

Hermosa Flor Cosmetics' steady growth since its inception can also be credited to its stance on inclusivity, particularly among black people and the queer community.

Through her European travels, Sebapu would struggle to find beauty products available in her skin tone.

This experience inspired her to create an inclusive brand that appealed to everyone, regardless of gender, shade, or sexual orientation.

Additionally, the brand isn't just about uplifting black women by offering products that cater to their skin as they recently partnered with Mosa's beauty bar to recruit girls from lower-income communities and train them in makeup artistry so that they can develop the necessary skills to make a living.

LEAVING A (BEAUTY) MARK

Over the past five years, Mbali Sebapu has made a name for herself within the beauty industry, becoming an incredible trailblazer.

During this period, she's also come to learn the importance of taking things slow, especially when it comes to business.

"One thing I've learned is to pace yourself. You don't need to rush taking over the world. Just take it one day at a time and take on what you can handle."

Additionally, while she is accustomed to doing things herself, Sebapu understands the importance of teamwork.

In fact, along with the help of sponsorships, Sebapu believes that these relationships can help achieve the goals of introducing her brand to the rest of Africa and the world.

With an affordable price point and high-quality ingredients and goods, Hermosa Flor Cosmetics can easily rival the world's leading cosmetic brands, proving that the secret to healthy and happy skin is pure African talent.



From Hotel To Lifestyle Brand: Redefining Work, Walk And Play

In the heart of Johannesburg, in the trendy suburb of Rosebank—an address synonymous with the city’s most creative movers and shakers—a one-year-old hotel is turning the traditional idea of what a hotel is on its head.

At voco The Bank Johannesburg Rosebank, a hotel is not simply a comfortable place to lay your head. Rather it’s a place to work, walk, play and immerse yourself in the place—getting the best sleep of your life is just a bonus.

Positioning itself as the best address in Rosebank, this hotel/lifestyle brand may only have opened a year ago, but it easily stands out amongst a host of rivals.

A MULTI-USE SPACE TO LIVE, WORK AND PLAY

The voco The Bank Johannesburg Rosebank experience is backed by the reliability of the renowned IHG Hotels and Resorts—with over 6000 hotels, 18 global hotel brands and an award-winning loyalty program IHG One Rewards which allows guests to earn and redeem points across all its hotel brands. But don’t think this hotel is cookie cutter.

The state-of-the-art Manhattan-style building, boasting an Africa meets Big Apple art deco atmosphere, is a cleverly designed multi-use space offering an all-in-one user experience to live, work, play and shop.

With an art collection impressive enough for any glitzy gallery, complete with trained ‘Art Butlers’ that will guide you on a tour of the hotel’s 800+ carefully curated original, South African pieces of artwork, the hotel delivers a playful—and fascinating—introduction to the art and design hub of Rosebank.

In a city where no one walks, Rosebank is a vibey and refreshing exception to the rule, with great shops, restaurants and meeting spaces within (safe) walking distance. And voco The Bank is well positioned to take advantage as the work, walk and play hotel of choice.

GUESTS KNOW WHAT THEY WANT

Guests may arrive strangers, but they’ll leave

feeling like a Rosebank local!

Going beyond the trend of personalization, the hotel guest of 2023 doesn’t want stuffy, overly formal or deferential service—or fluffy gimmicks. Exceptional service, yes, but with the freedom to truly relax and feel at home, whether travelling for business or pleasure.

voco The Bank offers guests the perfect space to recharge and enjoy a little ‘me-time.’ Or, like one of the hotel’s three signature bird mascots being used by the brand globally—the flamingo—the chance to socialize all night long in the hotel’s characterful restaurant and bars.

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

As an appealing lifestyle brand, voco The Bank’s partners prove that birds of a feather do flock together.

The on-site Proud Mary restaurant is the place to see and be seen—an all-day eatery and wine bar that attracts both hotel guests as well as local visitors. Kitted out in a mid-century

meets modern design, the restaurant offers up a selection of small plates in addition to a larger café and bistro-style casual offering, plus a superb boutique wine cellar and artisanal cocktails.

Guests at Proud Mary will be lucky to meet Katlego Mathobela, one of only a handful of Black female sommeliers in South Africa—and Proud Mary's first female sommelier. (Hotel General Manager, Jessica Redinger, is also leading the way when it comes to top female talent in hospitality in South Africa.)

The sexy Latin American restaurant Mamasamba is only 20 steps from voco The Bank, while the newly opened Fugazzi, a vibey Italian American restaurant, is also just steps from the hotel's front door.

For shopping, step into We Are Egg, a type of multi-brand department store with a focus on customer experience, and of course, offering shopping with a difference. The store offers a creative and unique retail experience, with the focus on elevating small local and international brands, side by side, with its massive selection of top local and African designers.

Guests needing to get work done are well catered for thanks to the affiliate partnership with Workshop17. Workshop17 The Bank gives access to flexible co-working spaces and office solutions in the most inspirational of settings. For guests needing a tailor-made MICE space, forget boring, stuffy conference centres. On the third floor of Workshop17 is a fully-flexible, ergonomic 40-seater space, with cocktail and banqueting capacity for 100 guests.

EASY ON THE PLANET

Of course, today's hotels need to be serious about sustainability. And not just by paying lip service but proving that actions speak louder than words.

Sustainability was always at the heart of the hotel's mission. The hotel received the prestigious Impact Award as Best New Hotel Opening Team 2022 at the annual IHG Hotel & Resorts Awards for its many 'firsts', including:

- A solar farm on the roof that powers much of the building
- A heat recovery system that reuses the waste heat from the HVAC to heat water for the hotel
- Bedding made from 100% recycled materials (an estimated 150 plastic bottles are recycled per guest room through bedding alone)
- Glass water bottles (which remove an average of 300+ plastic bottles in every guest room per year)
- Biodegradable straws available upon request
- No more minis and hard-to-recycle amenities (Aveda products in the bathrooms are in large-format bottles, creating 80% less waste than miniatures)
- Aerated shower heads reduce water usage and lower energy consumption

Whether you're travelling for work or plea-

sure, local or international, you'll find voco The Bank is the address in the city—and an African hotel set for the future.

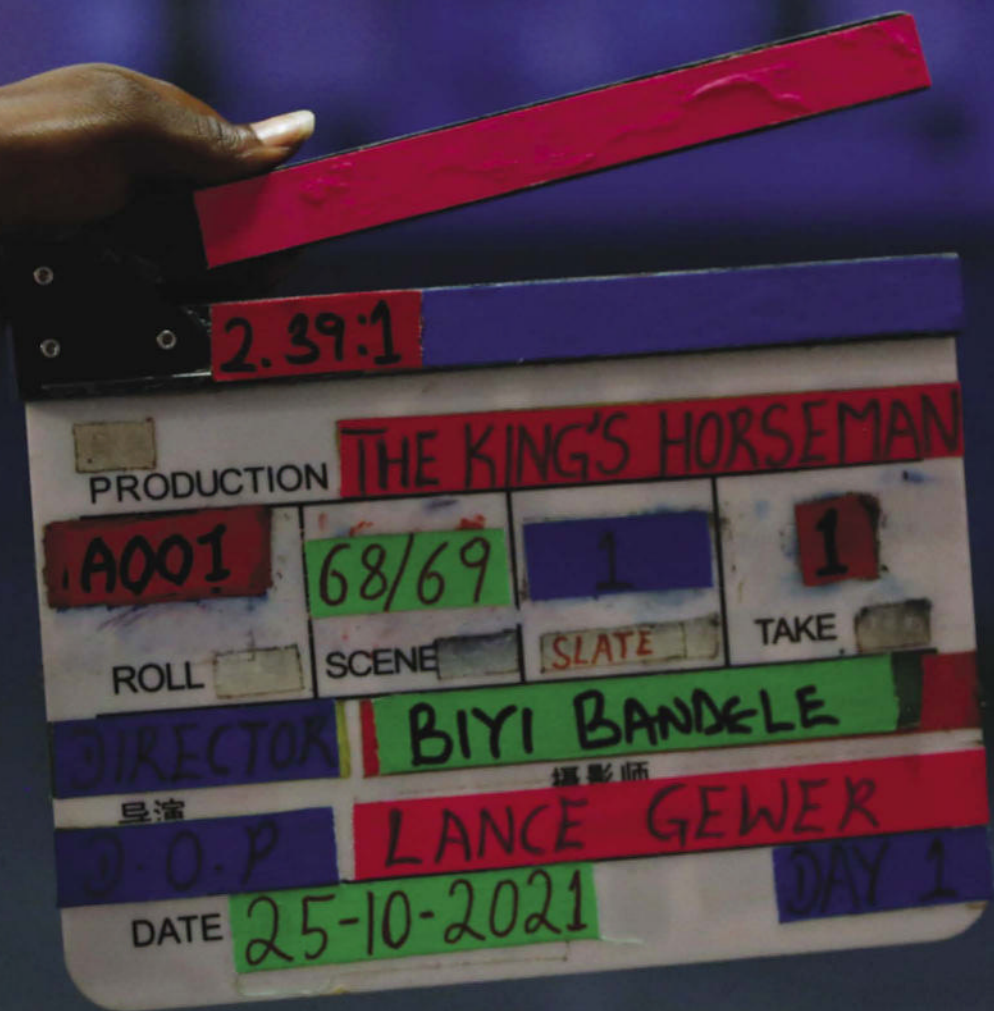
VOCO THE BANK FAST FACTS

- Within walking distance of global head offices, galleries and world-class restaurants as well as extensive and diverse shopping options at Rosebank Mall, The Zone @ Rosebank and The Firs.
- The Gautrain (Metro Express) station is 100 metres away. Direct trains from nearby Rosebank Station reach OR Tambo Airport (JNB) in 15 minutes so guests can easily combine their city stay with their South African safari. Enjoy complimentary golf cart transfers from the station to the hotel.
- 131 spacious and modern rooms.
- There are over 800 original pieces of art in all rooms, guest areas, public areas and restaurants
- Valet parking, 24/7 room service.
- A one-of-a-kind, well-equipped super gymnasium, available 24 hours a day—complimentary to all guests.
- Workshop17 The Bank offers day and night eventing with a café and working bar on the first floor, more than 60 private offices, meeting rooms and lounges.



By Inaara Gangji

The Big Ticket



There was talk early this year of Hollywood A-lister Idris Elba looking to build a major movie studio in Tanzania. More homegrown filmmakers and professionals are also working to create new paradigm shifts and give the African film industry the boost and blockbuster attention it deserves.



Behind the scenes of 'Elesin
Oba The King's Horseman'

The experience of every filmmaker in Africa is—creating stories from the ground up, immersing themselves in the communities they are in, telling stories and working laboriously with crew who only have the conviction of their art to keep going. Most times, you are on a tight budget and with limited infrastructure, but you make it work and try and get on to the festival circuit too. But grants are limited and so also distribution networks. Such is the story of the film industry in most parts of the continent, despite the zeal and enthusiasm from creatives, as well as their supporters abroad.

For renowned Tanzanian filmmaker, Amil Shivji, these issues hit close to home.

While he has been able to make significant progress on multiple big movies locally, he often had to outsource editing to a different country, for instance, or struggle with the infrastructure and crew available. And for the students he teaches at the University of Dar es Salaam, making a film of festival-caliber seems like a distant dream—at least for now.

“Our students don’t have access to equipment, they have to do a lot of theory and are unable to get production experience—the markets are the ones that dictate the kind of content that’s coming out,” Shivji rues. “But the markets are dependent on the infrastructure as well...we are losing out on making original productions and telling our own stories.”

There is funding for filmmaking and infrastructure-building coming in especially from the NGO sector, but they have agendas that do not always give filmmakers the flexibility to tell their own



“BUT THE MARKETS ARE DEPENDENT ON THE INFRASTRUCTURE AS WELL... WE ARE LOSING OUT ON MAKING ORIGINAL PRODUCTIONS AND TELLING OUR OWN STORIES.”

– Amil Shivji

stories, he adds.

“I mean, take your pick, there is help needed across the board—financing, infrastructure, training, distribution. There’s a lot of work that needs to be done,” echoes Tambay Obenson, an African-American filmmaker, journalist and entrepreneur of Nigerian and Cameroonian descent, who started Akoroko, a subscription streaming service that offers a hand-picked and curated selection of arthouse, independent, and international films telling African stories, supported by contextual materials.

For Ethiopian-American filmmaker, Mehret Mandefro, despite her film, *Difret* (2014) winning the audience awards at both the Sundance Film Festival and the Berlinale Panorama, and be selected as Ethiopia’s submission to the Best Foreign Language Film at the 87th Annual Academy Awards, she struggled to find her audience and distribution in Africa, telling an important story of a young

“I WOULDN’T EVEN USE THE WORD INDUSTRY, I’LL SAY AFRICAN FILM INDUSTRIES... SOME COUNTRIES ARE MORE DEVELOPED AND HAVE MORE PROMINENT INDUSTRIES THAN OTHERS.”

—Tambay Obenson

Ethiopian girl and a tenacious lawyer embroiled in a life-or-death clash between cultural traditions and their country’s advancement of equal rights.

Obenson emphasizes that the underappreciation of African cinema at home and abroad is the reason he started Akoroko.

“As an African, I almost also kind of felt like I was coming home, metaphorically, figuratively, to do this. I’ve been in the business for so long, and this is the first time that I decided to really focus on Africa. I decided to do it for those reasons. There’s a need and I’m passionate about the art form. And as an African, I think there’s a lot of work that could be done.”

Yet the industry varies so much across the continent, making the challenge of building a robust film industry and culture from the ground up even more difficult. “I wouldn’t even use the word industry, I’ll say African film industries,” says Obenson. “Some countries are more developed and have more prominent industries than others.”

Nigeria, home to Nollywood, boasts the most prominent and varied industry of its kind in the world today.

Northern Africa with Arab cinema has also been active since the 1950s. And then, there is South Africa, featuring a strong service industry and large production and post-production operations.

Kenya is also an up-and-coming industry with a strong



middle class and making waves in the film festival circuit. So too Rwanda.

It is no surprise that streaming services such as Netflix have made these regions their new hubs for investment and talent development, notes Shivji.

Netflix’s socio-economic impact report for Africa released in April highlights key productions and an investment of \$175 million in content and the local creative ecosystems in South Africa, Nigeria and Kenya combined.



Behind the scenes of 'Elesin Oba: The King's Horseman'

But the service seems to be aiming for more.

“At Netflix, our work is not only about investing in local creative partners to produce exciting stories and bringing them to members around the world—it’s also investing in skills development and capacity, building opportunities that will ultimately contribute to the growth of Africa’s film and TV industries. This is a work in progress, and we’re excited to be a key part of this journey on the African continent,” says Ben Amadasun, Director of Content, Middle East and Africa at Netflix, to FORBES AFRICA.

While veterans like Mandefro have been trying to build out these ecosystems in a pan-African way with the co-founding of spaces like the Realness Institute, one of the continent’s best incubators for African filmmakers, she sees Netflix as a significant partner in creating opportunities for filmmakers on the ground.

“[Netflix] is thinking about upstream stuff, trying to incentivize and help out who goes into film in the first place. And then also really thinking about all those things that you need, like the story editors and development executives in order to build out a market,” emphasizes Mandefro. “So, I think that’s really commendable.”

But for filmmakers like Shivji, such reports and promises come with a grain of salt. For him, the growing middle class in Nigeria, South Africa and Kenya already bolster the subscriber base of streaming services, leaving out many other countries.

“We are selling ourselves short to just have one country from each region. We should really get past the stage of just being happy with what we’re given and be able to argue for more, because this is a platform that prides itself on showing international films. So, we want to be able to show more films, and we want to sell our films to Netflix and be able to get a fair deal,” he says.

And if not a Western financing giant like Netflix, then who?

“It’s really coverage and

“WHETHER YOU LIKED OR HATED *BLACK PANTHER*, IT CERTAINLY DID SOMETHING FOR THE WORLD. IT’S LIKE PEOPLE DISCOVERED AFRICA ALL OF A SUDDEN.”

access. African cinema has been grossly undervalued on the international stage and international film marketplace,” says Obenson. There is the need to tell African stories to the world, and despite the content overload for audiences, governments need to step up, he emphasizes.

Not only are there few film journalists, but the consistency is also missing as also the incentives for filmmakers to excel.

Obenson believes self-funding and creating opportunities locally is the way forward, making it less easy for Western institutions to dictate African storytelling. “As a whole, I think that the potential is just immense,” he adds. “And the rest of the world is increasingly interested in African stories.

“...just to allow African filmmakers to be able to tell African stories in Africa with African money without having to rely on others.”

There is more than one reason this matters.

“We as Africans need to start to value filmmaking as a craft and as an art form and recognize the power of storytelling. We talk about soft power; the United States has been using this since the beginning of Hollywood,” he says.

“Hollywood films travel, they dominate theaters across the world. I don’t know if African films will ever get there, we will get there but just realizing that there is power in the fact that filmmakers can have an impact on how the rest of the world sees the continent.”

And while Mandefro recognizes more African countries setting up film commissions, there is a need to acknowledge the urgency Western institutions are already seeing while rushing to the continent.

Africa has a median age of 19 years and consumer spending is set to reach \$2.5 trillion by 2030, and by 2050, a quarter of the world’s population will be in Africa.

“Every business, if you don’t have an Africa strategy, you’re going to miss out on a lot of growth, or potential for growth.”

Yet, unemployment levels are high on the continent, up to 60% on average, according to the World Bank.

“Investing in stories means increasing exposure for all of the countries, it does more for tourism than anything else. And often, when I find myself in policy circles, I talk a lot about investing in storytellers, in films, TV and media. The media entrepreneurs are really the new infrastructure

investment. This is where the jobs of the future are coming from, especially for young people,” says Mandefro.

“So, governments need to be really smart about incentivizing and setting some policies up that make it easier for these entrepreneurs to be successful, so it means not being so heavy-handed with regulations, for instance.”

Shivji also mentions the importance of building state-funded film festivals and institutionalizing them, especially as something filmmakers can always fall back on.

“This is where we’re able to educate new audiences, we’re able to travel with the films, we’re able to invite new filmmakers and new artists. And those collaborations are happening at festivals for filmmakers almost half of your life. It’s where you really build your career, you’re able to network and all the events around it are super important,” he opines.

But whether it is cinema under the stars in the middle of an open field, or a phone on a commute in the daily bustle of the city, or in the comfort of your home or at the theater, African cinema is finding its place, both on the festival circuit and in people’s hearts across the globe.

“This is the golden age of African cinema. Our continent has great talent and world-class creatives,” echoes Amadasun.

“Whether you liked or hated *Black Panther*, it certainly did something for the world. It’s like people discovered Africa all of a sudden. But that’s how it works when you’re not exposed. And so, I think it’s the appetite,” says Mandefro.

“And even the realization that storytelling has been so incredibly closed for so long, right? There were no real global stories in the sense of, like us being able to consume, so this is where obviously platforms like Netflix have also changed the game. So, a series like the *Squid Games* makes us realize there’s a whole world out there.”

Yet, for Shivji, the focus should remain on the development of authentic African cinema, which can be poetic, experimental, and give a platform to independent African stories.

“Film is supposed to be a mirror to our society and present our culture...African filmmakers need to always be at the decision-making table,” he adds.

Obenson hopes these new shifts in the industry work to inspire local favor towards financing films and film infrastructure, whether that is local production companies or just local financiers.

“Let’s put our heads together and try to create something that competes [abroad],” he says. “I’m hopeful as there is a paradigm shift. I think there’s no going back from here.”

The development of cinema continues to be challenging, but there is a bright light at the end of the cinematic tunnel.

“One of my pet peeves is, you know, development doesn’t happen in Africa,” says Mandefro. “But in many ways, there’s never been a better time to be an African filmmaker.” 📽️

THE *New Scent* Of AFRICA

Botswana-based cosmetics company, White Label Fragrances, has firmly cemented its presence and brand strength on home ground and now, according to Thamani Thothe, Founder and Creative Director, is set on growth and expansion into the rest of Africa and beyond.



The company, led by the dynamic and astute businesswoman is only six years old in the cosmetics industry, but Thothe confidently affirms: “I believe we have mastered fragrances, what we are looking for now, is to expand more on our product offering and for the brand to gain reach and recognition outside of Botswana.”

That product offering involves creating cosmetic products for personalities and individuals with name recognition, who have done their part in building their own

brand equity as well as retail stores that may be looking to offer their consumers new and exciting cosmetic products that include inhouse fragrances.

White Label Fragrances takes control of the entire value chain in creating and crafting the kind of cosmetics brand that will speak to your specific demographic, from brand conceptualization, product development, manufacturing all the way through to packaging and finally finding your product shelf space within chosen chain stores—if you are an individual. They work with you

closely in crafting the kind of product and brand you will ultimately be proud of.

The company’s growth plan has seen it slowly being rolled out in South Africa, where it is in talks with a few of the big chain stores to develop instore products. An exciting prospect for Thothe and her team as they build on this positive growth trajectory. “I believe it’s important to recognize what your business is and learn what you are good at, then stick to it,” she says.

This clarity of thought has been important for gaining the attention of a few investors but they are cautious to note that they don’t only want capital funding. “African growth is key for us and as we prepare to scale, we want to attract the right strategic partners.” Partners that will guide White Label Fragrances into its next phase of growth, mainly through knowledge resources and skills transfer. White Label Fragrances looks forward to knowledge of new African and global markets, as well as ease of entry into these markets.

It is important to note that White Label Fragrances remains firmly rooted as proudly Botswana, observing that this desire for growth has been spurred on by the country’s need to build and invigorate emerging manufacturing industries by supporting local entrepreneurship in its quest to diversify from a mineral-based to knowledge- and a more industrialized-based economy.

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Poised For Growth



South Africa's players

THE NEXT BOOM IN WORLD FOOTBALL OVER THE COMING 10 YEARS WILL SURELY BE IN THE WOMEN'S GAME, LARGELY BECAUSE THE POTENTIAL IS SO GREAT. AND THE IMPACT THE AFRICAN SIDES CAN MAKE.

By Nick Said

Africa will send a quartet of teams to the FIFA Women's World Cup for the first time, which includes two debutants at the tournament to be staged in Australia and New Zealand from July 20 to August 20.

It will be a month-long celebration of football and the great strides the women's game has made in recent years to create a product that has a growing army of fans and admirers.

Just what impact the African sides can make remains to be seen. Nigeria have appeared at every tournament played since 1991, while continental champions South Africa will play their second finals having debuted in 2019.

North African side Morocco and southern African nation Zambia take their places for the first time, but are packed with potential.

The World Cup has been expanded from 24 teams to 32 this year, providing an extra spot for the continent.

South Africa have been drawn in something of a Group of Death that includes Sweden, who are ranked number three in the world, Italy and Argentina, who are both also well ahead of them in the global rankings.

Sweden were runners-up at the 2003 World Cup and have won bronze on three other occasions, including last time out in France in 2019. They have also won the silver medal at the last two Olympic Games.

They are ranked number 16 in the world and were quarterfinalists four years ago, though perhaps Banyana midfielder Refiloe Jane, who has been based in that country for the last few years, will be able to add some insight.

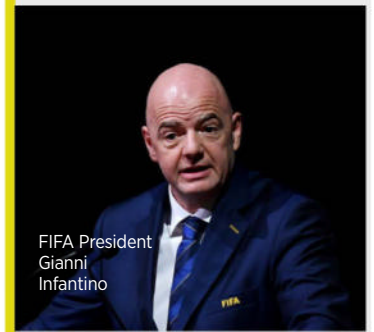
Argentina are appearing at a fourth World Cup but have yet to get past the group stages, so may be the team Banyana should target. They are ranked 28 in the world, still well ahead of South Africa's 54.

"It is a tough group, we cannot escape that fact," Banyana Banyana coach Des Ellis tells FORBES AFRICA.

"But we have to believe we can advance. There is no point going to a World Cup and not believing in yourself.

"The tournament in 2019 was a big learning curve for us, but also a great experience and we will bring that into this World Cup.

"Since then we have grown as a team, we are African champions, we have four more years of experience and more



FIFA President Gianni Infantino

EQUAL PRIZE-MONEY ON THE HORIZON

FIFA President Gianni Infantino said earlier this year that equal prize-money for men and women at the World Cup should be in place by 2027, as he announced a significant jump for the tournament in Australia and New Zealand.

The 2023 World Cup will see a 300% increase from 2019 for the women, with overall prize-money up to \$150-million.

Around \$60-million of that will go directly to players, but the overall pot is still well short of the \$440-million that was shared among the men's teams at their World Cup in Qatar late last year.

The sticking point, Infantino claims, is that broadcasters offer far less for the rights for women's World Cup, a fact not helped this time round by the unfriendly time zones the 2023 tournament will be played in that affects the European market.

"Women deserve much, much more than that and we are there to fight for them and with them," Infantino said at a press briefing. "Offer us 20% less, 50% less. But not 100% less."

In December, the United States House of Representatives passed a bill that ensures equal compensation for sportswomen competing in international events, legislation born out of the US women's team's long battle to be paid the same as their male counterparts.

There is also a push in soccer circles in Canada, France and Spain for the same.



“THE TOURNAMENT IN 2019 WAS A BIG LEARNING CURVE FOR US, BUT ALSO A GREAT EXPERIENCE AND WE WILL BRING THAT INTO THIS WORLD CUP!”

—Des Ellis

players who play overseas. So we have to go there with confidence in what we can achieve.”

South Africa open their tournament against Sweden on July 23, perhaps a blessing to get, on paper, their toughest assignment out the way first.

“We know them, we have played them a few times in recent years and we have been competitive. There is no reason why we can’t be so again.”

South Africa drew their last meeting with the Swedes 0-0 in 2019 and were beaten 3-0 at home a year earlier.

Italy will be new opponents, as will Argentina, but Ellis is also adamant it is about how her side prepares ahead of the tournament.

“We have to be ready, to be in the best shape that we can be as a squad, both physically and mentally, and then make sure we execute our plans in the matches. We cannot ask for more than that.”

Zambia also have a challenging group with Spain, Costa Rica and Japan. The Asian nation were world champions in 2011 and runners-up in 2015, while Spain reached the second round four years ago. Costa Rica’s only previous finals was in 2015 when they exited in the group stage.

Zambia have announced that they will camp in Spain ahead of the tournament.

Football Association of Zambia President Andrew Kamanga says there is much to work on ahead of the World Cup.

A FIRST AFRICAN HOST?

South African Football Association (SAFA) President Danny Jordaan is under no illusions as to the task ahead of Banyana Banyana in Australia and New Zealand, but has also set his sights on a secondary prize.

Jordaan, who was a key figure in South Africa winning the bid to host the 2010 FIFA World Cup, is now hopeful of the country staging the 2027 women’s tournament too.

They are up against a combined bid from Belgium, Germany and Netherlands, while Brazil have also thrown their hat in the ring. The United States and Mexico have said they too will join forces on a bid. But Jordaan believes Africa’s time is now.

“When you look at world football, the first men’s World Cup was 1930. The first World Cup in Africa was 70 years later. As a result, the gap between European and South American football in relation to Africa and Asia is now impossible to close,” Jordaan tells FORBES AFRICA.

“Of the global revenue for football, 80% goes to Europe. Africa is on the margins. Now, if we sit back and do nothing, and the same pattern emerges in women’s football, we are going to struggle to close the gap between in women’s football as well.

“We want to have a strong bid to hopefully secure the Women’s World Cup on the African continent because that will inspire and invigorate and strengthen football for women on the continent and close that gap rather than allow the pattern to repeat itself.”

Jordaan believes it is imperative that FIFA acts to at least try and give African women’s football a shot in the arm.

“If we want football to be truly global, then we must increase the competitiveness throughout the world. I think Africa can deliver a winner of the Women’s World Cup long before the men eventually get an African winner.

“Of course, Morocco made it to the semifinals [of the men’s tournament in Qatar last year], but I think it’s going to be quite a challenge for Africa to eventually win a men’s World Cup.

“That doesn’t mean you must give up. But I think on the women’s side, we have a greater chance.”

Whether that will come in this tournament Down Under remains to be seen, but Jordaan is hopeful that Banyana Banyana can at least make the knockout rounds.

“It’s a second consecutive World Cup for us, about 80% of the players are going for a second World Cup, having been there in France 2019. So, they must be over the jitters and have more experience,” he says.

“We want them to go to the second round. But even that second round place is going to be a challenge because we’re up against Sweden, Italy and Argentina. There’s a gap of 30 places between us and the rest in that group.

“Therefore, we have to give [the players] enough opportunity to be able to deal with the challenge that they’re facing. It is very, very important. I think that we have a chance to go through the second round.”



Danny Jordaan



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...nesting international standards with African hospitality

“We need to work on the physical side of the team, we need to strengthen the analysis and bring in technical advisors. The coach [Bruce Mwape] will remain in charge of the team, but we need to reinforce the areas where they need additional support,” Kamanga says.

“We will play three friendlies within Europe before the tournament, we want everyone who has a chance to be considered the opportunity to train. We will have local camps and those who make it from there, will go to the next stage.

“The squad to go to the World Cup will only be selected after the training camp in Spain, so the process is quite intense. No-one is guaranteed a place and everyone’s position is up for grabs.”

Nigeria are at yet another finals, but have yet to really fly the African flag, though they too have been handed a horror draw.

They must play hosts Australia, who will be among the tournament favorites, Olympic champions Canada and the tricky Republic of Ireland, who have former Banyana Banyana coach Vera Pauw now in charge.

The Super Falcons are coached by American Randy Waldrum and he knows just what awaits.

“It’s scary, to be honest. Our first two games are brutal,” the Texan said. “Many people have our group ranked as the hardest in the World Cup. The other three teams are all ranked in the top 25 in the world. They all pose different kinds of problems.”

Nigeria did recently get a morale-boosting 3-0 friendly win over World Cup co-hosts New Zealand to go with victories over Costa Rica and Haiti.

“Probably still a ‘B’ [mark] for the team, we got three goals and a clean sheet, maybe I guess am a little harsh with that grade, but there are still so many things we can improve on,” Waldrum said in the wake of the New Zealand win. “We have got better and better, that’s what we need leading up to the World Cup.”

Morocco have shot from nowhere to be among the leading teams in Africa in recent years, and had in fact not even qualified for the African championship in 20 years before they hosted in 2022.

But there has been a heavy investment in the women’s game in the country, and well as a reach-out to the diaspora to find gems such as English-born Tottenham Hotspur forward Rosella Ayane.

She will be their major threat as they face Germany, Colombia and South Korea in what looks the gentlest of the pools for the African teams.

“There’s a lot of talent in Morocco, and they’ll eventually be picked up and spotted but I’m so proud to be flying the flag for Morocco, for Africa as a continent and for other countries that don’t necessarily get the recognition sometimes that they deserve,” Ayane told Inside the WSL.

“It’s been an incredible time for the country, for Arab women and for Arab women in sport. Sometimes, I really need to take

WHERE TO NOW?

The next big boom in world football over the coming 10 years will surely be in the women’s game, largely because the potential is so great.

While men’s football has, to a point, become saturated, the potential in the women’s game is still largely unrealized.

“Football and women are not only the right thing to do, but it’s also good business. There is a massive 3 billion customer market that is gravely under-served and untapped,” says Victoire Cogevina Reynal from

Gloria Football, which is dedicated to growing the women’s game.

It is a point echoed by Ebru Koksak from Women in Football, but she says it can only happen with more resources.

“To grow the system we need a fair distribution of resources. Today, only 2% of the global value and money that football generates goes into women’s football,” Koksak says.

Cindy Parlow-Cone, President of US Soccer, believes this is a seminal moment for the women’s game and that change is coming.

“The women’s game is poised for exponential growth. I think the time is now to invest in the women’s side of the game across the globe,” she says.

“THE WOMEN’S GAME IS POISED FOR EXPONENTIAL GROWTH. I THINK THE TIME IS NOW TO INVEST IN THE WOMEN’S SIDE OF THE GAME ACROSS THE GLOBE.”



Barbra Banda
of Zambia

a step back and actually look at what we’ve achieved because sometimes I can’t put it into words.

“So, it’s been a real journey and one that I’m going to be proud of for the rest of my life.”

Ayane makes one other excellent point—for all the African teams at this World Cup, it is a chance for the players to put themselves in the shop window and sign professional contracts with top clubs. That is now a dream closer to being realized.

“There’s a lot of talent in Morocco, and they’ll eventually be picked up and spotted but I’m so proud to be flying the flag for Morocco, for Africa as a continent and for other countries that don’t necessarily get the recognition sometimes that they deserve.” 



11 Years of Championing AFRICAN LEADERSHIP

The stage is all set for the 11th All Africa Business Leaders Awards (AABLA™), presented in partnership with CNBC Africa; and in true tradition, will welcome visionary leaders across the continent to honor and award the best of African business.

All roads will lead to Sun City, South Africa, on the 23rd of June 2023, for the 11th annual All Africa Business Leaders Awards gala evening. Since its inception, the AABLA™ have grown into Africa's single biggest premier business awards, recognizing those leaders who dared to tread onto uncharted waters, defeating the blows of adversity, and who are changing the way Africa does business, on the home front and on a global scale. The annual awards have established a renowned platform that echoes the success stories of Africa's trailblazers.

Each year, through a rigorous process, the organizing committee selects a stellar judging panel who have themselves demonstrated the key principles of the awards program in their respective careers. These exceptional leaders are drawn from a vast knowledge pool, representing business, academia, entrepreneurship and media, from across Africa.

The judges play an integral part in the overall credibility and quality of winners selected. The judges vetting and analysing the nominees ensure that the winner of each category embodies the core values set out by the AABLA™.

The judges for the 2023 awards are:

- **Sam Bhembe**, Head Judge and Founding Director; ABN Group
- **Godfrey Mutizwa**, Editor-in- Chief; CNBC AFRICA
- **Stavros Nicolaou**, Group Snr. Executive – Strategic Trade; Aspen Pharma Group
- **Renuka Methil**, Managing Editor; FORBES AFRICA and FORBES WOMAN AFRICA
- **Prof. Jon Foster-Pedley**, Dean and Director; Henley Africa
- **Geoffrey Qhena**, Chairperson; Exxaro Resources & Telkom Board, and Non-Executive Director; Investec Bank
- **Dr Diane Karusisi**, CEO; Bank of Kigali
- **Prof. Sarah Chiumbu**, Associate Professor, Department of Communication and Media; The University of Johannesburg
- **Kyari Abba Bukar**, CEO; Inlaks Limited

Over the last few weeks, these esteemed industry leaders have had the challenging task of vetting all the nominations, alongside the AABLA™ business partners. The finalists were announced on the 22nd of May 2023, drawn from the exceptional talent pool from which the winners of each category were selected. In addition, this year has seen three

new categories added to this prestigious list, namely African Change Maker of the Year, African Infrastructural Project of the Year, and Trade & Investment Facilitation Agency of the Year. The main award categories will remain unchanged, they are:

YOUNG BUSINESS LEADER OF THE YEAR	BUSINESS WOMAN OF THE YEAR
CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER OF THE YEAR	BUSINESS LEADER OF THE YEAR
INNOVATOR OF THE YEAR	AFRICAN OF THE YEAR
INDUSTRIALIST OF THE YEAR	PHILANTHROPIST OF THE YEAR
AFRICAN COMPANY OF THE YEAR	LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

The weekend will conclude at the Lost City Golf Course, with the annual CNBC Africa Corporate Golf Challenge in aid of the ABN Education Trust.

For more information about the awards, or to book a table at the Grand Finale, visit <https://aablawards.com/>.

Alternatively, you can follow us on social media @cnbcafrica or @AABLAwards, #AABLA2023.

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By Charu Chadha

The Environment Is Everybody's Business, Especially For Those In Business



– A writer-photographer from Nepal who keeps the values of freedom and compassion at the core of her work

We all live and we all die, what makes us different are the things we do and the impact of our actions on the world. When it comes to the human mindset, we only think in terms of human-dominated ecosystems. However, with the climate crisis now upon us, the environment is everybody's business, especially for those in business.

For entrepreneurs and industrialists, the time has come to not just reflect but to put into meaningful action the values that drive work. It is time to think about impact not just on our species but the world in its entirety, to create entrepreneurship beyond the terminology of just buying and selling, and to truly understand

that profit is an output, not a purpose.

Research suggests that companies that struggle to answer the purpose question, or that answer it only in terms of the hard metrics of profit, market share and shareholder returns are most likely to encounter lower employee engagement, higher turnover, an uninspiring work culture, and lack of respect for the environment and communities they operate in. This is irrespective of whether the company has prestige, market dominance or great potential for growth.

As per the *Climate Risk Country Profiles* developed by the World Bank Group, Nepal, where I live, and South Africa, both share climate vulnerabilities.

Nepal is experiencing changes in temperature and precipitation at a faster rate than the global average. From the loss of lives to the loss of livelihoods, natural hazards in different parts of the country put people and ecosystems in distress year after year.

What does climate risk really mean and how does it affect us? Climate risk is commonly defined as extreme changes in weather, floods, disasters, rising sea levels, erosion, biodiversity loss etc. Why does it matter is simple—because people suffer due to these risks, it changes how we live, it changes our health, our livelihoods, our environment.


And where do businesses factor in? The opening statement of a PricewaterhouseCoopers article reads: “The race for net zero has captured the imagination of countries and companies alike. And not a moment too soon: the latest report from the United Nation’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change finds that greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs) must peak no later than 2025 to avoid the most dangerous and irreversible effects of climate change.”

It goes on to state that companies are not paying enough attention to their decarbonization commitments. Citing what businesses can lose, the report gives the example of how extreme weather events can cost a business conglomerate several hundred million dollars as soon as 2030 due to supply chain disruption. The examples are many and eye-opening. Businesses

are forced to give due consideration to reports and articles such as these not just for the financial implications on their operations but also because governments around the world are aligned to the Net Zero Commitment including the top polluters—the US, China, EU and India.

The private sector does have a crucial role in fighting climate change. From reducing the carbon footprint of their product to cultivating climate-conscious practices at work, businesses need to tackle their climate and social impact. Consumers must commit to eating, traveling, living and shopping more mindfully. Governments must pledge to tangible actions that go beyond policy discourse and debates.

Even as the world feels increasingly complex and unpredictable, meaningful action is needed to maintain a natural balance in how we use our resources and treat the world we inhabit. Climate change then is not just an ecological, environmental, social or economic issue, it is really about our personal ethics and the choices we make from moment to moment.

We do not have another planet to move to, what then do we choose for our children and the generations to come? 

Home is Where The Art Is

Your home is a sacred place, but there's no reason why it can't be filled with beautiful furniture. With the pieces from Bleau Art Décor, you can add both function and art to your home.

Home is where the heart is, but with Bleau [pronounced 'blue'] Art Décor, home is also where the art is.

A furniture and home décor business that launched in 2019, Bleau Art Décor uses epoxy resin to create alluring furniture pieces that are not only functional but also pleasing to the eye.

Epoxy resin is a liquid adhesive and when paired with sustainably sourced wood, it creates decorative furniture items that add beauty to your home.

"I was looking for a dining room table for my home and then I came across the epoxy resin trend and that's how I got the opportunity to build my own table," explains Matti Motsumi, the owner and founder of Bleau Art Décor.

FROM WOOD TO TABLE

After creating her own table, Motsumi began creating epoxy resin cheeseboards, right from her garage.

Over time, the brand expanded to include coasters, side tables, and pedestals.

In addition to this, Bleau Art Décor also offers customized pieces, with Motsumi creating her own pieces before leaving room for the client to either find inspiration from the piece or request alterations so that the piece can better suit their tastes.

The new business venture allowed for Motsumi to work with her hands and create something from scratch.

This was especially important as she's always had a passion for labor and art, believing the combination to be a cathartic experience.

"It was a dream to be able to apply an artistic touch and to create a beautiful product with a beautiful finish that appeals to both the high-end consumer and an ordinary person on the street."

As for where she gets the inspiration that

allows her artistic side to flourish?

According to Motsumi, it's all about good energy,

"It's important for me to surround myself with good energy. From the people around me to my home environment, to my work environment. When I've got the right energy, then I am inspired."

IT'S ALL IN THE DETAILS

As she launched her new business, Motsumi made the decision to start small and work alongside a humble team.

Doing so allowed her to spend enough time on each project, paying meticulous attention to both design and aesthetics.

"The most important thing for me is attention to detail. Whether it's on the actual product itself, or when you're engaging with a client or an investor, attention to detail matters."

Attention to detail is also indicative of the passion that Motsumi possesses for the brand, and this is especially appealing to consumers,

"I found that the attention to detail, along with my passion and expertise, is what consumers end up buying. I've always been told you're passionate, and that passion comes through. That passion is paying attention to how you carry yourself and how you approach your work."

THE FUTURE IS BLEAU

Homes and other open spaces will always need to be furnished.

However, this doesn't mean that the furniture manufacturing sector does not experience setbacks at times.

Be it recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic or having to adjust manufacturing hours due to electricity shortages, the industry has experienced both economic upturn and downturn.

Despite these complications, Motsumi



looks forward to seeing the manufacturing industry succeed.

She believes that it can play a pivotal role in growing the economy and creating opportunities for jobs and prosperity.

"I'm constantly looking for opportunities to change and grow because the more I train myself, and the more hands-on I am, the more I can teach the next woman. The more I teach her, the more she can be independent. Those are the things that bring me inspiration."

Blue may be Motsumi's favourite color, but the same cannot be said for the future of Bleau Art Décor.

With plans to become accessible across the African continent and to introduce a wider range of unique furniture pieces, the future of Bleau is as unique and breath-taking as one of its pieces.



By Letlhokwa Mpedi

Africa Must Strengthen Social Security Systems To Address Youth Unemployment Meaningfully



— The writer serves as Vice-Chancellor and Principal at the University of Johannesburg in South Africa

Africa is simultaneously contending with three realities: the continent has the youngest growing population; the Covid-19 pandemic has spurred substantial development and growth setbacks; and employment opportunities are flailing. This is seemingly a direct antithesis of the Africa rise narrative that dominated just a few years ago. If we consider this post-pandemic era as an opportunity for growth, this is a crisis we must address.

Africa has a population that is under 25 in excess of 60%. Young Africans are anticipated to make up 42% of the world's youth by 2030. Yet, we are demonstrably not tapping into this potential. As Audrey Donkor wrote for *Foreign Policy* in 2021: “Such a large youthful population might ordinarily symbolize an ample and energetic workforce, a boon for the development prospects of any region. But the dire employment situation for young

people across Africa continues to snuff out their potential.”

The African Development Bank (AfDB) asserts that only one in six young people aged 15 to 35 are employed for pay, another third are vulnerable workers, and a third are unemployed and discouraged.

Intriguingly, in sub-Saharan Africa, unemployment rates overall are relatively low. However, if one were to delve into the statistics, these figures do not consider the quality of employment. Much of this work is informal, wages are low, and little to no social safety nets exist. It is thus difficult to make any comparisons to more advanced economies. The trend demonstrates that many engage in insecure jobs for income.

Research suggests that youth unemployment leads to increased poverty levels, migration, social exclusion, social instability, welfare increases, human capital erosion, and even conflict. Moreover, high levels of unemployment stunt a nation's development. Evidence suggests that if most of the youth are economically active, there are distinct opportunities for poverty and inequality reduction and greater economic growth as dependency ratios are lowered. This phenomenon comprises part of the democratic dividend, which speaks to the growth associated with the age structure of a region.

As Julius Maina, regional editor of *The Conversation*, aptly argued: “The media frequently portray young people excluded from wage work as inactive, aimless and alienated from mainstream society. This image feeds into fears of crime, violence, and social unrest in which jobless people are cast as a ‘ticking time bomb’ that threatens a country's stability. But this is a very misleading characterization. Most analyses of unemployed youth fail to grapple with the reality that unemployment in the sense of ‘doing nothing’ is not a feasible option for most young people.” In South Africa, of course, unemployment presents itself starkly; 43.4% of those in the 15-34 age range are unemployed.

Against this context, there is a clear intersection between unemployment, economic growth and social security. Social security broadly refers to public measures provided by society against economic and social distress. In Africa, there is a distinct gap between the first economy, which is competitive and globally integrated, and the second economy, primarily comprised of the unemployed and characterized by underdevelopment. The question is, how do we bridge these two worlds? Much of Africa lacks comprehensive social security systems, leaving the population, particularly the youth, vulnerable to economic shocks and social instability. These programs often face significant challenges in implementation, including limited funding and

inadequate infrastructure. The introduction of strategic social security programs could provide support for youth seeking employment.

Implementing social security measures in Africa while also ensuring empowerment, job creation, and economic growth requires a comprehensive and holistic approach that addresses the region's underlying causes of poverty and joblessness. One strategy is job training programs and youth entrepreneurship programs. This emphasizes both skills-building and the creation of safety mechanisms. Partnerships with universities and vocational training institutions as well as initiatives that support innovation and entrepreneurship can help achieve this. The University of Johannesburg, for instance, has partnered with the Youth Employment Service (YES) to provide students with internship opportunities. Another strategy is to invest in infrastructure, including transportation, telecommunications, and energy systems. In particular, investments in renewable energy technologies can create new industries and job opportunities while contributing to sustainable development. To address unemployment and create growth, these social security systems need to be strengthened to ensure access and provide a safety net. A comprehensive social security system could well be the remedy. 

The Multipotentialite Of South African Fashion

Gert Johan Coetzee brings a new dawn of bespoke luxury fashion that epitomizes the concept of haute couture while remaining steadfast in South African authenticity. A truth felt by all who have seen and worn a Gert Johan Coetzee original.



stroke is unique, just like each of us, and this collection serves as a reminder of the power of individuality and creativity.

Coetzee's visionary approach to fashion has always been centred around innovation and artistic expression. With the use of brush strokes in this collection, he is creating garments that are not only visually stunning but also deeply meaningful.

"Life is like a canvas, and with every step we take, we leave behind a brush stroke to create our own unique story on the painting of our lives. Just as every brush stroke is significant, so too is every individual. Each of us has a special and unique contribution to make to the world, and it is up to us to leave our mark and make our own story a masterpiece," says Coetzee.

Through this collection, Coetzee is inspiring us to express ourselves through fashion. As a visionary designer who has always been ahead of the curve, this collection is another example of his commitment to pushing the boundaries of what is possible in the fashion industry.

With the fashion industry growing in leaps and bounds daily, Coetzee understood the seriousness of elevating his craft and brand to new heights. A handbag making course was precisely the feather that Gert needed to add to his cap. Spanning several weeks at an undisclosed location in Italy, Coetzee has honed the craft of fine leather artistry to create pieces which will soon be available to treasure.

To add yet another jewel to his crown, Coetzee and jewellery powerhouse, American Swiss collaborated to create an exclusive collection called The American Swiss Love Knot, a bespoke jewellery collection consisting of different pieces which launched early this year. His attention to detail and relentless endeavour to



improve his brand affords us as South Africans the gumption to walk with unwavering pride because our creative landscape is represented.

In as much as Coetzee has celebrated win after win in his career, his cognizance for those less fortunate has taken a prominent role in current years, namely, the Gert Johan Coetzee Bursary Program in proud partnership with The Northwest School of Design.

"The reason I ignited the program is that I noticed how there are so many great bursary programs out there that offer immense knowledge and it simply just ends there. That information is never followed through into the workforce and that is the reason I wanted my bursary program to be different and more focused on the internship that I offer," he says.

"The student not only gets to study where I studied at the Northwest School of Design and familiarize themselves with the foundation that I received, but they also get the opportunity to come to my studio in Bryanston to experience the practical side of design execution, the creative processes around it as well as the grit it takes to run a fashion business," Coetzee adds.

The future looks glitteringly bright for South African fashion.

His artistry for design is fast becoming an internationally recognizable feat: With a long list of celebrities, from Cardi-B to Lizzo, and Bonang Matheba to Boity Thulo, and a recent leather mastery class in Italy, Coetzee is showing no signs of plateauing any time soon.

The concept of creative limitation has no home in Coetzee's mind. He recently announced his new collection on social media where he flexes his imagination by creating the first of its kind on African soil, a clothing line generated using Artificial Intelligence.

The collection is a fusion of South African inspiration, punk rock, and pop culture, featuring vibrant primary colours and bold brush strokes that bring each garment to life. Each

The Scent of Success

The scent of home is a comforting one. With Yerwa Secrets, these fragrances become a fusion of select smells that leaves you emanating success.

What is your favourite smell?
The earth's soil after a rainy day?
Freshly baked bread?
Or maybe it's the scent of home?

One that leaves you warm and reminds you that you're safe.

For Fatima Babakura, the aroma of home is what inspired her to launch Yerwa Secrets, a range of incense, body fragrances, and hair mists.

Yerwa is the local name given to the capital city of Babakura's home state, Maiduguri, located in Borno, North Eastern Nigeria. The name of her brand directly translates to 'secrets from home'.

"I started the brand to share my culture with the world in a way that people will easily understand, which is through scent because everybody knows what smells good."

A MODERN SENSE OF SMELL

Launching a business that plays on the sense of smell was not part of Babakura's initial plans, as she was originally focused

on growing her hand-bag and shoe business.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic forced her to place these plans on hold.

During her forced sabbatical, Babakura would spend her time engaging in her family's tradition of burning incense. Over time, visitors to her home would remark on the aromatic scents.

These remarks soon encouraged Babakura to launch a

business that would tantalize our strongest sense, and so in 2021, Yerwa Secrets was born.

"A LOT OF MY INSPIRATION COMES FROM HOW I FEEL AND MY CURIOSITY IS WHAT INSPIRES ME TO PLAY WITH DIFFERENT SCENTS BEFORE CREATING A SPECIFIC FRAGRANCE."



Fatima Babakura

A FRESH SCENT

We all know what smells good, but how Babakura selects the scents of Yerwa Secrets all comes down to one thing: curiosity.

“A lot of my inspiration comes from how I feel and my curiosity is what inspires me to play with different scents before creating a specific fragrance.”

The brand only provides products that have been heavily researched and tested to not only smell good, but to also be safe on the skin and hair.

Unlike other local perfume, popularly known as Khumrah, that are packaged in dropper bottles, Yerwa Secrets packages their perfumes in spray bottles, making the act of smelling great that much more convenient.

“SUSTAINABILITY FOR US IS ALSO HOW WE BUILD OUR COMMUNITY AS ONE SALE MEANS THERE’S FOOD ON THE TABLE FOR FAMILIES.”

Additionally, Yerwa Secrets has set out to revolutionize the way incense smells, with their products having scents that go beyond the traditional woody scents associated with incense.

“We’ve made incense that smells like vanilla” shares Babakura.

While there may not be a set method when it comes to incense production in Northern Nigeria, Babakura has faced push-back on production and manufacturing,

“I work with local people and they’re used to doing things a certain way, so it takes a while for them to adapt and understand what you’re trying to achieve.”

While this back and forth has often resulted in a few mistakes, Babakura has managed to convince the locals about how adapting and evolving can facilitate both personal and professional growth.

A LASTING BOUQUET FOR THE COMMUNITY

Yerwa Secrets isn’t only focused on plat-



forming local scents, but they also believe in using products to protect and build up the community.

In regards to packaging, Babakura and her humble team stay clear of plastic, and rather opt for glass, with consumers receiving discounts when they return the bottles for refills.

This is only part of Yerwa Secrets’ sustainable efforts, as choosing to do everything in-house, sans shipping, allows for them to also pour back into the community.

“Sustainability for us is about how we

build our community, as one sale means there’s food on the table for families.”

For instance, Babakura took in a 17-year-old boy to help at the store and the boy grew from handling package deliveries to DHL to being part of the production process and even watching over the business in his employer’s absence.

With plans to launch a physical store in Abuja, Nigeria, where consumers can come and enjoy the different scents that Yerwa Secrets offers, it’s clear the success of the brand will linger just as long as the savoury fragrances that it offers the world.

By Colin Iles

ADAPT OR DIE:

What Must Boards Do To Improve Their Company's Survival Chances?



– The writer curates thought leadership events that help executive teams transform their organizations; visit coliniles.com

“**H**ow did you go bankrupt?” Bill asked.

“Two ways,” Mike said. “Gradually and then suddenly.”

This passage from American writer Ernest Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises* perfectly summarizes the process almost every organization eventually faces.

Or at least it did up until Tuesday, May 2.

Because that was the day when ChatGPT claimed its first victim, the online education platform Chegg.

It seems gone are the days when companies could expect a death spiral of years and years before the CEOs called it a day.

Blockbusters and Blackberry are two examples that spring to mind.

But Chegg’s stock plummeted by more than 50% in just a few hours, and

at the time of writing this piece, it was worth just a third of what it was prior to the launch of ChatGPT.

The reason of course, why every business ultimately fails is because the market shifts.

In Blackberry’s case, they lost out as consumers decided they didn’t want keyboards.

For Blockbusters, their customers decided to stay at home and stream.

And for Chegg, Wall Street is predicting that they will lose their students to generative AI.

What’s fascinating and scary though, is we have just entered a phase of business disruption that is exponential in nature.

AI, Cloud, 5G, IoT and a host of other technologies are working perfectly in concert to allow anyone in the world to develop new products and services at a fraction of historical costs in record time.

ChatGPT is a case in point.

On release, it registered 1 million users in one week and hit the 100 million mark within two months. That’s 5x faster than TikTok managed; 30x faster than Facebook.

So with barriers falling left right and center because of technological advancements, what must boards do to improve their company’s survival chances?

If you guessed innovate, you are partially right.

Boards absolutely need to impress on their executive teams the importance of doubling down on their innovation strategies.

But this will only work if boards think laterally about deliberate actions they can take to encourage their executive teams to become less hubristic.

Because leadership hubris is the catalyst of inertia, not innovation, and inertia is what ultimately kills most organizations.

To be fair to executives, they operate in environments that encourage overconfidence. When you are running a successful multi-billion dollar business, it’s not easy to consider the possibility that it could be fallible, or worse, that it might fail on your watch.

If one don’t know many CEOs who’ll admit they are fearful of being disrupted. And those that do typically fail to place the necessary disruptive business bets.

How can companies remove hubris from their executive teams?

I humbly suggest by setting up environments that culture a certain amount of fear and a huge amount of curiosity.

One of the best examples of a leadership team that encourages this is Amazon. Jeff Bezos is well-known for emphasizing the importance of staying paranoid and maintaining a sense of urgency.

In his 2017 shareholder letter he wrote: “Day 2 business is stasis. Followed by irrelevance. Followed by excruciating, painful decline.

Followed by death. And that is why it is always Day 1.”

The goal?

To encourage his team to continually think like a startup, not a multi-billion dollar listed entity.

And this idea then gets consistently reinforced in a multitude of ways, ranging from their choice of building names (Amazon’s head office is named Day 1) to how they encourage executives to make decisions carefully when the outcomes are irreversible, but quickly in all other instances (the two-door/one-door model).

These systems and frameworks were deliberately introduced to encourage healthy levels of paranoia that in turn, helped motivate a culture of curiosity.

It should not be surprising when successful innovators state that “curiosity” is mission-critical.

What is surprising is how knowing this, so few boards demand their leadership teams implement systems to agitate and encourage curiosity.

Perhaps this was acceptable when we lived in a world where change was glacial. But in a world where bankruptcy may skip the slowly part and just come suddenly, boards need to stop worrying about the risks of doing business and start cultivating leaders who understand the need to adapt or die and have the curiosity and courage to attempt to do just that. 📌

An “Ace” for African Education

The annual CNBC Africa Corporate Golf Challenge is one of many CSI initiatives of the ABN Group, hosted in aid of the ABN Education Trust. Over the years this golf challenge has become an annual event that provides businesses a platform to enjoy a day out for a good cause and is usually held over the same weekend as the highly anticipated All Africa Business Leaders Awards.



For more information on how organizations can get involved, or to book a four-ball, please contact Katleho Moloi: katleho.moloi@abn360.com. Alternatively, you can follow us on social media @cnbcafrica, #CGC2023.

CONTACT DETAILS:

Sponsorship opportunities: sales@abn360.com

PR and Marketing: Yolande.dutoit@abn360.com

Event-related queries: Nastassia.Charles@abn360.com / Alshanthethe.Smith@abn360.com

The ABN Trust, founded by Rakesh Wahi, was established in 2011 to consolidate the CSR initiatives of the ABN Group. The trust is funded by the Wahi family, the various activities by the ABN Group of companies, namely CNBC Africa and FORBES AFRICA, The Transnational Academic Group, and through the tireless efforts of its patron, Mrs Saloni Wahi.

Since its inception, the ABN Trust has supported numerous unfunded orphanages, feeding schemes, bursaries, and has provided more than 300 internship opportunities via its print and broadcast channels.

This year’s golf challenge is set to take place on June 24, at the Lost City Golf Course, Sun City, in the North West Province of South Africa, and will welcome business elite across the continent to enjoy a day out in aid of transforming education in Africa. The day will conclude with a prize giving and an auction.



By Gary Martin

Time To Move The Needle On ‘Jargon Monoxide’ In Our Workplaces



– The writer and professor is CEO with the Australian Institute of Management Western Australia and a workplace and social affairs expert

If the thought of being told to fly something up the flagpole, put on a record to see who dances or stir-fry things in the ideas wok makes you want to lose your lunch, you are not alone.

Jargon monoxide—a dangerous concoction of distasteful, pungent and sometimes colorful language—is seeping into workplaces to create nauseating conditions for those forced to inhale the noxious fumes.

Every workplace has its fair share of jargon, buzzwords, bizspeak and abbreviations.

Sometimes the language serves a useful purpose like condensing a complicated process into a single word or phrase to save time.

But when it slips out of the boss’ mouth once too often it is usually for the wrong reasons, which is when jargon monoxide poisoning takes place.

More and more workers

have been “circling back” only to discover their boss’ misused business babble has created unnecessary “pain points”.

This has arisen from those in charge either failing to “bring to the table” some “fully baked”, “out-of-the-box thinking”, “putting lipstick on a pig” to camouflage the truth or disguising the fact they are simply not capable of doing the “heavy lifting”.

In other words, workers are being contaminated by jargon-mongering bosses who seem intent on using the latest cringeworthy clichés to hide the truth, cover up stuff-ups or obscure the fact they lack what it takes to get the job done.

It is necessary to “drill down”, “unpack” or “open the kimono” to get a “high-altitude view” on how workers are exposed to jargon monoxide on a daily basis.

The truth is many bosses allow gobbledygook to seep from their mouths and into the workplace to conceal the fact they are not “best of breed”: in other words, to obscure their ineptness.

So when “parking a project” rolls off your boss’ tongue, it probably means an initiative was an unmitigated disaster under their direction.

If the same boss suggests there has been a “wrong-siding of the demographic”, it is safe to assume their poor public relations caused customers to become extremely disgruntled.

Other bosses restrict their polluting ways to using buzzwords to disguise negative messages and, in doing so, compromise transparency.

Some bosses substitute the term “redundancy” with the likes of “trimming the fat”, “cutting capacity”, “delaying”, “downsizing”, “right-sizing”, “right-shoring” and “moving to an outsourced model”—all jargon used to make sacking staff sound more palatable than it actually is.

And you might have noticed how many bosses resort to “going forward” (or its close relation “moving forward”) when they have no clue about what they ought to do in the aftermath of a challenging situation like a pandemic, public relations nightmare or financial crisis but still need to say something.

“Going forward” conveys that an embattled boss is leading their people on a purposeful path to a brighter future.

Yet the overused phrase is ambiguous in relation to specific actions, timelines and accountability and could easily be substituted with “I don’t have a clue what to do next”.

Perhaps of more concern is the fact that at the very time we are trying to reduce spiraling levels of antagonistic

behavior, bullying and harassment in our workplaces, some bosses poison their workplaces with newfangled aggressive office speak just to appear as part of the “in-crowd”.

Common phrases of aggression including “you smashed it”, “you are killing it” and “you crushed it”—somewhat ironically—are all buzzwords used to denote progress rather than destruction.

Think, too, about the impact on others of hearing the boss say “there is only one throat to choke”, the team is a “dysfunctional circular firing squad” or that you are a “decision sniper”.

Climbing the corporate ladder is often synonymous with losing the ability to speak or write clearly. The higher the climb, the greater the use of overblown language.

It should not be that way.

It might be time for all good bosses to “give 110 per cent”, “lean in” and take a closer “look under the bonnet” to get better “optics” on the impact of their poisonous prattle on those around them.

“At the end of the day” it is perhaps best to keep in mind that jargon monoxide is a language which can pollute and poison an otherwise healthy workplace.

For those in charge, do not let it loose.

And for those lower down the “food chain” and at high risk of contamination, avoid breathing it in. **F**

Smooth Moves: Scaling A Beauty Brand

An opportunity in the beauty business for entrepreneurs and salon professionals.

This strong and consistent beauty brand, built up over 14 years is finally offering franchise opportunities. The brands' track record speaks for itself, as the founders and branches have won business and beauty awards, including multiple Professional Beauty Awards, Les Nouvelles Esthetiques Awards and EOHBC Best Business Award. The secret to The Laser Beautiques' success? It's a recipe that includes their obsessive customer service, results-driven treatments, laser-focused training academy, culture-driven business style, and a kickass marketing team that makes brand loyalty look easy.

UNDER THE WING OF A SERIAL ENTREPRENEUR

Most South Africans are familiar with serial entrepreneur Ian Fuhr. If the name doesn't ring a bell, you will undoubtedly have heard of the franchise he founded, Sorbet, South Africa's largest beauty chain. After franchising and scaling the business to over 200 stores, Fuhr sold Sorbet to Long4Life in 2017.

So what's the connection between Fuhr and The Laser Beautique? Power couple Tzvia and Neil Hermann, founders of The Laser Beautique are working hand in hand with Fuhr. Fuhr is supporting and guiding The Laser Beautique to scale the model and make its mark on the hair removal and skincare industry. This new-age hair removal and skincare franchise is dedicated to ensuring their clients live smoothly ever after. Smooth is their game. They specialize in skin, permanent painless hair removal, and they know the industry like nobody's business.

THE BACKSTORY

The Beautique Group was founded in 2009, with the very first laser clinic in a shopping center environment. The first Laser Beautique launched with Africa's first pain-free, permanent, laser hair removal that is safe for all skin types. Traditional laser technology was not safe for darker skin types.

As demand for laser treatments increased, demand for laser training increased and an even greater demand for high-tech lasers grew, hence Beautique Academy and Beautique Brands were founded. The Beautique Group has been the first to market with a plethora of ground-breaking tech. To name a few:

1. **Apilus**, the first speedy and comfortable tech that permanently removes light, blonde, red, grey, and white hair. Laser hair removal is only effective when treating pigment in the hair. Thanks to the Beautique group, South Africans can now say goodbye to all unwanted hair.
2. **CoolLifting**, the first tech that combines hyaluronic acid and high-pressure CO2 to hydrate and plump out fine lines and wrinkles non-surgically, no need for needles or fillers. It's completely painless and a fraction of the price of an injectable and other similar treatments.
3. **Beautique Academy** was South Africa's very first hybrid online and in-person aesthetic academy to offer postgraduate beauty therapists, aesthetic and laser training.

2019 saw The Laser Beautique launch their very own brand of laser technology for pain-free, hair removal called BeauLase, and the first quarter of 2023 saw the group launch their very own skincare brand, TLB Scientific Skincare. This skincare brand can prove with a skin scan, that it strengthens one's skin barrier as well as improves collagen production in the skin. This essentially slows down the signs of aging.

QUICK FACTS

- Open a franchise from as little as R800k
- The Laser Beautique franchise model is owner managed
- The Beautique can build to over 1



Tzvia and Neil Hermann, founders of The Laser Beautique

million rand (\$54,435) in revenue annually

- We typically see a return on investment in one-two years
- Franchise can be up and running in 90 days
- We already have 11 successful branches
- 3-6 week client cycle

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

This is strictly an owner managed franchise opportunity available for entrepreneurs, beauticians or somatologists. It's also a great option for existing salons or clinics who struggle due to lack of support.

Franchisees can expect to join a tribe of inclusive, talented, and dedicated women (mostly) who have formed a support network of note! They perform what they like to call "modern day magic". There's always support when needed, a mentor to help guide, and a friend to celebrate successes.



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By Tshilidzi Marwala

ChatGPT In Africa: Opportunities And Challenges



– The writer is a United Nations University (UNU) Rector based in Tokyo, Japan

ChatGPT, a cutting-edge language model developed by OpenAI, has revolutionized how we interact with technology and access information through artificial intelligence (AI). As an AI-driven conversation agent, ChatGPT has the potential to significantly impact various sectors in Africa, offering opportunities for growth and development. However, ChatGPT also presents unique challenges that we must address to harness its benefits fully. This article explores the implications of ChatGPT for Africa, focusing on its potential applications in education, healthcare, agriculture, and language preservation, as well as the challenges associated with its adoption.

Before discussing the applications of ChatGPT in Africa, it is crucial first to discuss what ChatGPT can and cannot do. Firstly, ChatGPT, like many AI technologies, depends on existing data. Therefore, it cannot incorporate what does not already exist. For example, it will

not recommend medications not yet discovered. Consequently, it would not have invented Einstein's theory of relativity. However, it can gather and summarize existing information, which may help find new medicines. Despite these, ChatGPT can be a valuable tool for enhancing education in Africa by providing personalized learning experiences, facilitating access to knowledge, and supporting educators. By offering tailored content based on individual learning needs, ChatGPT can help bridge the gap in educational resources and improve overall learning outcomes. Additionally, it can assist teachers by providing instant feedback on student performance, identifying areas for improvement, and suggesting targeted interventions.

ChatGPT can be crucial in providing medical information and support in Africa, where access to healthcare professionals is often limited. It can serve as a health assistant, offering advice on common health issues, symptom analysis, and self-care tips. This could help reduce the burden on healthcare systems and facilitate timely intervention, particularly in remote or underserved areas. For this to happen, we need to retrain existing and new medical professionals to develop competency in the seamless use of technology in medical care. This, therefore, calls for revising the medical curriculum to incorporate more technology.

Another application of ChatGPT is in the area of agriculture. ChatGPT can contribute to developing sustainable agriculture in Africa by providing farmers real-time information on weather patterns, pest control, and crop management. This could help farmers optimize their operations, improve yields, and enhance food security for the continent. This requires farmers to form learning communes where issues of agricultural performance are discussed together to augment existing recommendations of ChatGPT, which is based on existing information.

ChatGPT can be used for language preservation. Africa is home to a rich linguistic diversity, with over 2,000 languages spoken across the continent. ChatGPT can be trained to understand and interact in various African languages, promoting language preservation and cultural heritage. By making technology more accessible and inclusive, ChatGPT can help bridge the digital divide and empower local communities. However, for this to happen, we need to infuse the ethos of AI transfer learning methodology to ensure that all languages are included, irrespective of size. One of the primary challenges for ChatGPT adoption in Africa is the lack of robust digital infrastructure. Limited access to the internet, unreliable connectivity, and high data costs can hinder the widespread use of ChatGPT and its associated benefits. To fully harness the potential of ChatGPT, investments

in digital infrastructure and affordable internet access are essential. However, for this to happen, we need to bridge the digital divide and ensure that telecommunications data and affordable devices are accessible.

The adoption of ChatGPT in Africa also depends on the population's digital literacy level. Therefore, promoting digital literacy through education and training programs is crucial to ensure people can effectively utilize ChatGPT and other digital technologies. As with any AI, ChatGPT raises concerns about data privacy and security. Therefore, ensuring that ChatGPT complies with data protection regulations and safeguards user privacy is essential to build trust and encourage widespread adoption.

AI models, including ChatGPT, can inadvertently perpetuate biases and stereotypes in the data they are trained on. Addressing these biases and ensuring ChatGPT's interactions are culturally sensitive and contextually appropriate is crucial. ChatGPT has the potential to significantly impact various sectors. By harnessing its potential, Africa can benefit from the advancements in AI technology. However, addressing challenges related to digital infrastructure, digital literacy, data privacy, and ethical considerations is crucial, through collaborative efforts from governments, the private sector, and civil society. 

The International Man Of Mystery

How many illusionists does it take to do magic? Just one will do the trick. And his name is Brendon Peel.



From bespoke product launches in Africa to headlining cruise ship theaters in Australia, and from featuring in festivals in Dubai to starring on international TV shows in London, South Africa's magic performer, Brendon Peel, has taken his award-winning shows to over 50 countries.

His performances have been witnessed by millions of people around the world in TV shows such as *Britain's Got Talent*, The Travel Channel's *Magic Caught On Camera* and various international documentaries.

In 2023 he is currently competing as a semi-finalist on the international TV show sensation known as *Got Talent All Stars* which is a show with only the very best acts from various *Got Talent* shows from across the world. Peel's act is the only mentalist & magician act from the continent to be selected for the show.

Over and above his TV work, Peel's live stage shows is where he has truly made a name for himself. He has performed for a plethora of top companies and corporations across South Africa and internationally all to critical acclaim. His unique and mind-blowing illusion show, IMPOSSIBLE has even managed to receive the coveted accolade of winning the Standard Bank SILVER OVATION AWARD 2022. In the same year Peel managed to win NMB Events Award's, Entertainer of The Year 2022 award.

Since Covid-19, Peel has also started headlining the biggest and most

prestigious cruise ships, where he is represented by some of the best entertainment agents in the world namely: Don Casino Entertainment Agency and Karen Maybury. In between all of the headlining shows, corporate events, and international TV shows, Peel's popularity has also been rapidly growing on social media and currently has garnered an online following of nearly 100,000 followers across all major social media platforms, making him one of the most followed magicians not only in Africa but also one of the most followed magicians from around the world.

Aside from being busy from a professional capacity, Peel has also been very busy academically too, where in 2021 he officially obtained his Master's in Business Administration (MBA) from Rhodes University, which is where he also did his undergraduate degree and postgraduate studies.

Peel applies his business acumen and skills to his trade and to his brand which has snowballed into an international entertainment success story. Peel's performances are always guaranteed to be a world-class display of brilliant entertainment, mind-blowing illusion, and unforgettable moments of mystery.

There is no wonder why Peel is currently one of the top entertainers not only in the continent but also in the world.

Words And Photograph By Ramdas Iyer



examples of Roman mosaics in the world.

While Bulla Regia is an important archaeological site, the current political climate in Tunisia has not been very protective of these historic sites. Mosaic tiles from over 2,000 years, unprotected from the elements, simply flaked off the tiled streets and elaborate floorings as I walked, despite trying hard to tread gently.

While Dougga, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, stands well-preserved,

In the windswept fields of northwest Tunisia, I stood amazed in front of an impressive pre-Roman 2nd-century-BCE Libyo-punic three-storied mausoleum, built in honor of a Numidian prince.

I had at last arrived at the lap of ancient North African history in the Numidian-Roman city of Dougga.

The history of North Africa—also known as Maghreb—is largely that of successive invasions and colonization.

Numidians are the earliest-known inhabitants of this area, later called Berbers by the Romans.

Traveling south from Tunis, a modern Islamic city built on the ruins of ancient Carthage, I was documenting the architectural impact of the Carthaginian and Roman Empires on the beautiful and agriculturally-rich North African belt that had provided a good share of the Roman Empire's food.

The beautiful temples, amphitheatres, baths and palatial homes were in fact built by Numidian kings who had adapted to a Roman way of life. Akin to how a European society was created in black South Africa, the Numidian society fell sway to the invading sophisticated Roman civilization.

Standing at the upper tier of the amphitheater built to seat over 3,500 spectators, I could see the full sweep of the city including the splendid Temple of Saturn built in 195 AD over the pre-Roman Punic Temple of Baal, the marketplace, the victory arches for Septimius Severus and the green olive fields surrounding this well-preserved Numidian-Roman city.

The most famous Roman ruler of Dougga was Masinissa. He was a Numidian king born of the Numidian race. They were warriors, known for their horsemanship and skill in battle. Masinissa was a loyal ally of Rome and helped the Romans defeat

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Carthage in the Second Punic War. In return, Rome granted Masinissa control of much of the territory that had formerly belonged to Carthage.

As a lone traveler walking through the ruins of the nearby city of Bulla Regia, also a part of the Africa proconsularis of Numidian Rome, I was amazed at the underground houses built to keep cool in the hot Tunisian climate.

The houses are well-preserved, and they provide a fascinating glimpse into Roman life. The houses are typically built around a central courtyard which are often decorated with mosaics and fountains. The mosaics are some of the finest

my heart sank at the thought of seeing Bulla Regia slowly disappearing into the sands where it has stood quietly abandoned since the Arab conquest of the Maghreb around 720 AD.

On returning to Tunis, I visited the world-famous Bardo Museum which houses all the important relics from Dougga and Bulla Regia amongst its collections.

As a traveling nomad, I will never forget that the word 'nomad' entered the Latin lexicon as a reference to the ancient Numidians while the word 'barbarian' was a reference to the Berbers. 

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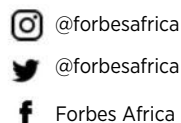
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