AFRICA SOFT POWER

THE AFRICA SOFT POWER INTELLIGENCE REPORT

2026 EDITION

An annual assessment of where African influence stands, what is shifting, and what it will take to own the systems that convert influence into value.



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FOUNDER'S STATEMENT

Building the Architecture for African Soft Power: A Founder's Perspective



Dr. Nkiru Balonwu
Founder & Creative Director
Africa Soft Power

The institutional frameworks, capital flows and alliances that have shaped the global order are being renegotiated, and Africa finds itself at the centre of that shift. As traditional champions of multilateralism recalibrate their commitments, and as development assistance contracts and the terms of global trade are contested, the continent's response will shape not only its own trajectory but also the character of what comes next.

Africa's influence in that response is real and growing. But it is still too often celebrated as spectacle rather than recognised as capital, and too rarely converted into ownership, institutional power or durable economic returns.

Influence without architecture does not compound. That is the gap Africa Soft Power exists to close.

Across African Women on Board, RDF Strategies and the Africa Soft Power Project, our work takes different forms but proceeds from the same conviction: that African influence, given the right architecture, becomes power. We work across leadership, institutional credibility, narrative, human systems and cross-sector convening to help build the structures and relationships through which that influence can produce lasting outcomes.

The Africa Soft Power Summit is the annual culmination of that work. We have never started with speakers or panels. We start with the questions that matter to Africa's future, and then think carefully about who needs to be in the room.

Across seven editions, I have seen that some of the Summit's most consequential work happens in the margins: the conversation between a development finance leader and a creative

founder who might otherwise never occupy the same professional space; the idea that surfaces over dinner and finds its way into an investment decision months later; the relationship that begins in one room and becomes a partnership neither party anticipated.

Our job is to make those encounters more deliberate and to create the conditions for what comes afterwards.

The 2026 Summit in Nairobi deepened that mission. Central bankers sat alongside technology founders. Institutional investors engaged directly with creative enterprises. Policymakers, entrepreneurs, academics and development leaders challenged one another across perspectives that rarely meet, but increasingly shape the same future. That was the point.

Seven editions in, I am increasingly convinced that the most durable soft power is not performed. It is built - through creative excellence, institutional credibility, capital, ownership and the relationships that convert influence into outcomes.

The 2026 Africa Soft Power Intelligence Report is the next expression of that work. It marks a shift from documenting an annual gathering to building an annual body of proprietary intelligence: tracking where Africa's influence is growing, where value is being created or lost, what is changing beneath the headlines, and how the people closest to these shifts are thinking about what comes next.

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Africa in Motion maps seven forces moving simultaneously across the continent, from the contest over AI infrastructure to the rise of African cities as soft power platforms. The inaugural ASP Leadership Pulse draws on our speaker, delegate and institutional network to capture how leaders across finance, technology, policy, culture, enterprise and the diaspora assess the forces shaping African growth – and establishes a baseline we intend to track over time.

Together, they begin to answer a question that sits at the heart of our work:

As Africa becomes more economically, culturally and technologically consequential, will it also build the power to shape, finance, govern and capture the value of that relevance? I believe Africa can do this, but it will require us to be much more deliberate about building the architecture around our influence, rather than waiting for others to determine what that influence is worth.



Executive Summary

Seven forces stand out in Africa's soft power landscape in 2026. They span artificial intelligence and digital infrastructure, capital and investment, culture and intellectual property, women's economic participation, diaspora influence, Africa's position within global institutions, and the growing power of African cities.

They are moving at different speeds, but together they point to a continent whose position in the global economy is changing in ways that are not always captured by conventional measures of growth or influence.

The Africa Soft Power Intelligence Report 2026 examines those shifts from the vantage point of the Africa Soft Power network, looking not at sectors in isolation, but at the systems that connect capital, enterprise, technology, culture, institutions and leadership – and at the conditions that determine whether African relevance translates into agency, ownership and durable value. That lens extends beyond any one industry: from whether the global success of African brands is building manufacturing capacity and stronger local supply chains, to whether advances in technology, healthcare and other areas of African enterprise are strengthening the institutions, capabilities and markets around them.

At the centre of the report is **Africa in Motion**, which identifies seven conditions we believe warrant particular attention in 2026. Some represent clear areas of momentum; others expose gaps between opportunity and the systems required to capture it. Taken together, they offer a view of where African economic, institutional and cultural relevance is translating into greater agency and where important constraints remain.

The **ASP Leadership Pulse** provides a different lens: what the people within our network are seeing. This inaugural survey captures how leaders across finance, enterprise, technology, policy, culture and the diaspora assess the forces shaping African growth, where they believe capital is most misaligned with opportunity, and where Africa has the strongest opportunity to set global terms rather than respond to them. It also establishes a baseline that will allow us to track how that judgement changes over time.

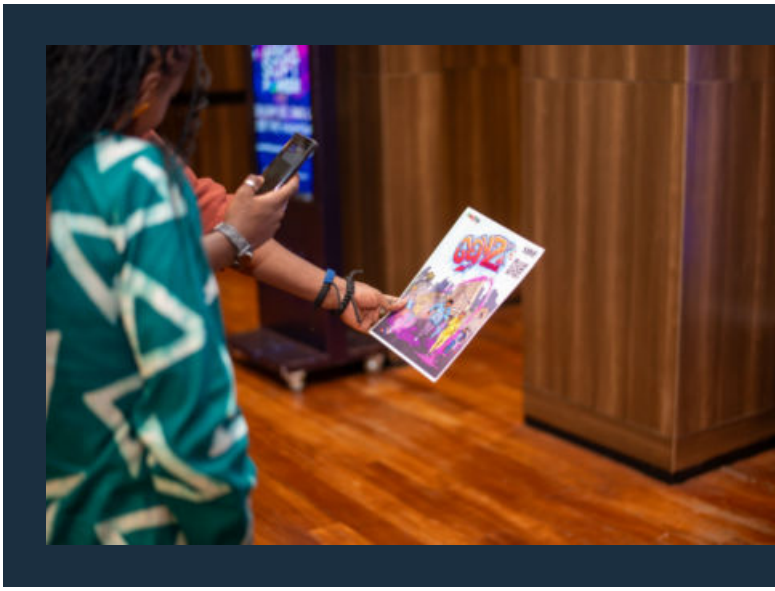
The 2026 Africa Soft Power Summit in Nairobi provides a further layer of insight. More than 230 leaders, founders, investors, policymakers and cultural practitioners came together across four days, with discussions spanning Inclusion, Leadership and Market Access; Innovation, Creativity and Cultural Value; and Capital, Ownership and Scale.

Rather than reproduce those conversations chronologically, this report draws out the arguments that travelled across sectors and sessions. Several recur: the difficulty of financing forms of value that do not fit conventional models; the growing strategic importance of ownership and intellectual property; the infrastructure implications of Africa's participation in the AI economy; the economic significance of women's participation; the evolution of diaspora capital; and the role African institutions and enterprises themselves must play in building stronger markets.

The report also looks at what some of these ideas mean in practice. **The ASP Culture Shifter** Spotlight, for example, brings an African enterprise with demonstrated commercial strength and cultural influence into direct conversation with investors, institutions and potential partners who can support its next stage

of growth. It is one practical expression of a much larger question running through this report: how do we close the distance between the value Africa creates and the systems capable of helping that value grow?

There is no single prescription running through these findings. What emerges instead is a set of choices about where capital is directed, how markets are structured, what institutions choose to build, how enterprises scale, and whether African economies are positioned to retain more of the value being created.



What This Means

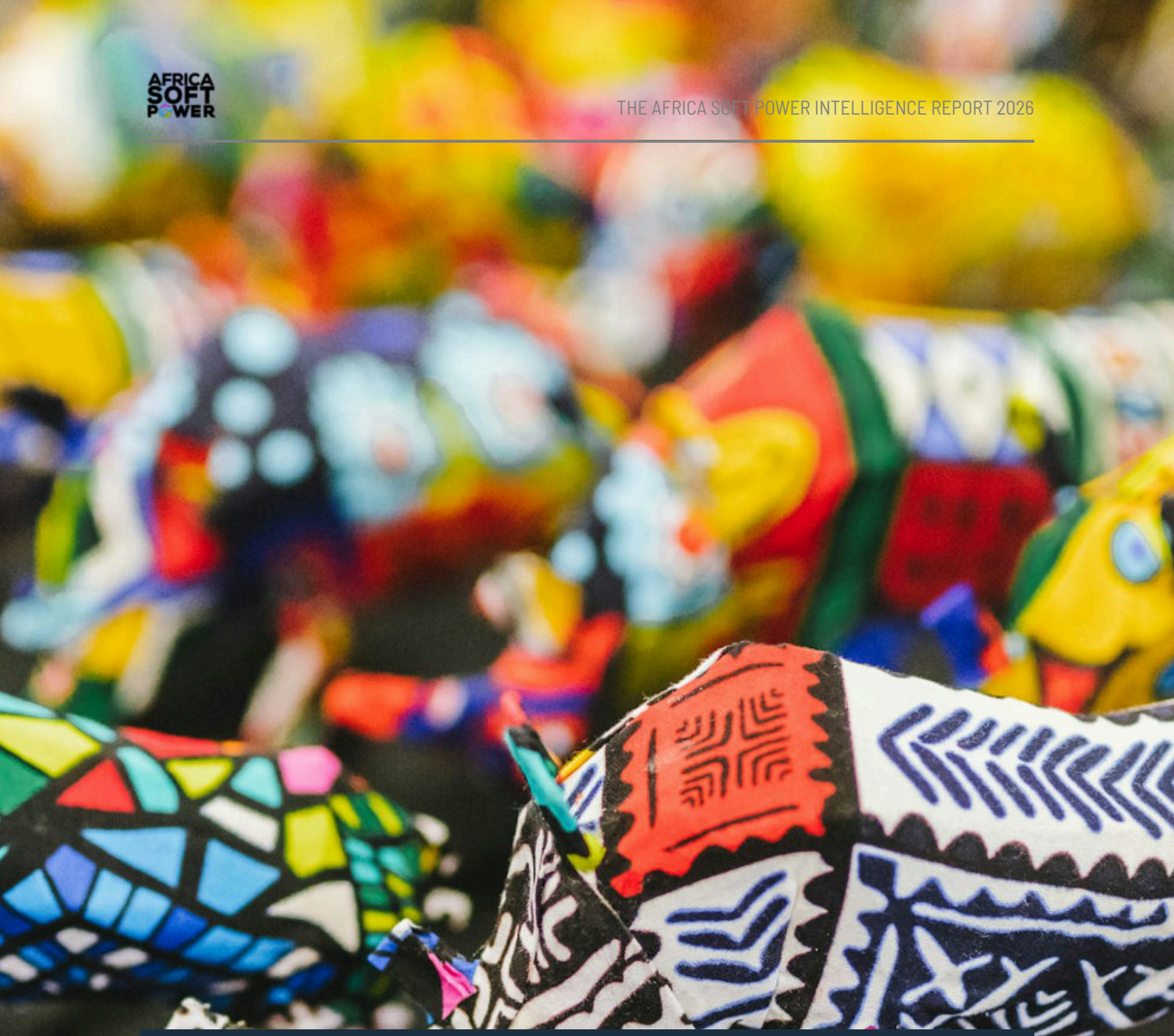
For development finance institutions and institutional investors
From creative IP and technology infrastructure to locally rooted supply chains, women-led enterprise and emerging industries, different forms of African value require financing models and risk frameworks better calibrated to how that value is actually being created. For institutions willing to help build those mechanisms, the opportunity is not simply to provide capital, but to help shape the markets through which African enterprises can grow and scale.

For policymakers and governments
Changes in development finance, AI, trade and global capital are unfolding simultaneously. Data and AI governance, AfCFTA implementation, investment in human capital and the infrastructure that enables participation in the economy cannot be treated as disconnected policy agendas. Increasingly, they form part of the same question: whether African economies can build the institutional capacity to participate in – and influence – the systems shaping the next phase of global growth.

For African enterprises and entrepreneurs
Visibility and demand are not substitutes for ownership. Businesses capable of protecting and aggregating IP, building institutional structures, accessing larger markets and becoming investable at scale will be better positioned to retain the value they create.

For the African private sector
There is considerable agency within African business itself. Where companies manufacture, procure, invest, build technology and develop supply chains matters, as does whether successful African brands and enterprises create deeper productive capacity around them. The opportunity is not simply to grow individual companies, but to use that growth to strengthen local suppliers, industries, talent and markets, so that more of the value generated by African demand remains within African economies.

For the diaspora
The opportunity is increasingly to move beyond a relationship defined primarily by remittances towards one that also encompasses investment, ownership, market access, knowledge and networks. Building trusted structures through which those assets can connect with African enterprise and infrastructure at scale remains an important part of the unfinished work.



PART ONE:

The Africa Soft Power Proposition

Part One opens the report's argument in two movements. Africa in Motion identifies seven signals of a shifting soft power landscape, testing where the continent's rising visibility is converting into genuine agency, ownership and value, and where that conversion is still incomplete. The ASP Leadership Pulse then turns to the network itself, an inaugural survey of how leaders across finance, enterprise, technology, policy and culture read these same forces, establishing a baseline for tracking that judgement year on year.



Africa in Motion: Signals of a Shifting Soft Power Landscape

Africa's soft power is no longer difficult to see. It is visible in the music the world streams, the films and fashion it consumes, the athletes and artists it celebrates, the cities it wants to visit, the talent it recruits, and the markets it increasingly cannot ignore.

The harder question is whether visibility is becoming power.

Across culture, technology, capital, gender, diaspora influence, global institutions and urban identity, Africa's relevance is rising. But relevance does not automatically produce agency. Demand does not automatically produce ownership. Visibility does not automatically produce value capture.

This is the Africa Soft Power test running through the signals that follow: where African influence is growing, is it also converting into greater African agency, ownership, institutional leverage and economic value?

In 2026, the answer is still uneven. African culture is expanding faster than the commercial systems built to protect and monetise it. Artificial intelligence is turning data, language and compute into strategic infrastructure. African risk is being contested not only as a financial category, but as a narrative one. The diaspora is being understood less as a remittance pool and more as a global network of talent, access and influence. Women's economic power is becoming harder to treat as marginal. African cities, meanwhile, are becoming cultural and commercial brands in their own right.

Together, these signals describe a shifting soft power landscape in which questions of participation are increasingly becoming questions of agency: who designs the systems, who sets the terms, who benefits from them, and what it will take for more African value to compound closer to its source.

In 2026, the answer is still uneven. African culture is expanding faster than the commercial systems built to protect and monetise it.

AFRICA IN MOTION



Signal 01:
African culture has gone global. Its economics have not.

The Shift
African cultural influence continues to expand through music, film, fashion, sport, literature, food, design and digital media. Across global platforms and consumer markets, African creativity is increasingly visible, desirable and commercially useful.

Globally, creative services have become a major component of trade. UNCTAD estimates that global exports of creative services reached a record $1.7 trillion in 2024, accounting for 20 per cent of global services exports.[1] Yet Africa's formal share of that market remains very small. Available UNCTAD creative-economy data indicates that in 2022, creative services exported by African countries accounted for less than 0.3 per cent of global creative-services exports, while noting that data availability itself remains a significant limitation.[2]

The Power Question
Visibility is not ownership. The soft power question is not whether the world wants more African culture. It clearly does. The question is whether African creators, companies, institutions and investors will own more of the intellectual property, production capacity, distribution infrastructure, audience relationships and commercial value created by that demand.

African culture already shapes global taste. Durable power will depend on whether the continent builds the systems that allow cultural influence to become investable, protected and retained economic value.

Watch This
- *Ownership and licensing structures in major deals involving African artists, filmmakers, fashion enterprises, sports talent and global platforms.*
- *Growth of African-owned distribution, streaming, publishing, rights-management and catalogue-financing platforms.*
- *Inclusion of creative industries in AfCFTA implementation, national industrial strategies and investment-policy frameworks.*
- *Better data on creative-sector exports, employment, IP revenues and intra-African cultural trade.*

AFRICA IN MOTION

Signal 02
Africa's strategic value is rising



The Shift

The old development compact is changing, but the deeper signal is not simply that aid is declining. It is that Africa's relationship with traditional partners is being renegotiated in a world shaped by development-finance contraction, geopolitical competition, critical minerals, energy transition, technology and demographic change.

Development assistance is becoming less predictable. OECD projections show that net official development assistance fell by 23.3 per cent in 2025, its largest recorded annual decline, and is projected to fall by a further 6.9 per cent in 2026. Bilateral net ODA to sub-Saharan Africa is projected to fall by 11.6 per cent in 2026, following a 26.3 per cent decline in 2025. [3]

At the same time, Africa's strategic assets are becoming more central to global systems. The International Energy Agency notes that Africa is already a major global supplier of minerals including cobalt, manganese, bauxite and platinum-group metals, and holds substantial untapped graphite and lithium resources. The IEA also argues that the economic contribution of mineral production can be significantly increased by moving up the value chain into processing, smelting and refining. [4]

The demographic dimension also matters. The World Bank describes Africa as having the world's youngest and fastest-growing population, and notes that by 2050 more than half of global population growth will take place in Africa. [5] In that context, Africa's strategic value is not only in what lies beneath the ground, but in the markets, labour force, talent base and cultural influence it is already producing.

The Power Question

Can Africa convert strategic importance into better terms?

Soft power is both attraction and leverage. If Africa is increasingly central to global conversations on energy, climate, artificial intelligence, migration, food systems, security and culture, then African institutions must be able to negotiate from that position.

The test is whether African states, regional institutions and private-sector actors can move from being recipients of externally designed priorities to co-authors of the terms on which capital, technology, minerals, talent and markets are exchanged.

Watch This

- *Bilateral and multilateral agreements on critical minerals, technology, trade, migration and security, particularly whether they include local processing, skills transfer, IP sharing and African ownership.*
- *Domestic resource mobilisation, including tax-to-GDP ratios, domestic bond-market depth and the ability of African governments to finance their own priorities.*
- *Strengthening of African Union and regional institutions as negotiating platforms, not only convening platforms.*
- *The extent to which African governments coordinate positions in global forums rather than negotiating separately.*

AFRICA IN MOTION

Signal 03
Africa is challenging who defines Africa

The Shift
African risk is being challenged as both a financial and a narrative category. Real structural weaknesses exist, but African countries and businesses also face generalised assessments that do not always distinguish adequately between countries, sectors, institutions or performance records.

UNDP's work on sovereign credit ratings has argued that subjectivity in credit assessments carries significant costs. One UNDP study estimated that African countries could save up to $74.5 billion if credit ratings were based on less subjective assessments.[6] UNDP's wider credit-ratings work points to structural limitations in global methodologies, including foreign-currency bias, insufficient consideration of informal economies and asymmetric treatment of African risk.[7]

The issue is not only ratings. Ratings are one example of a broader question: who produces the data, indices, research, rankings, media frames and investment narratives through which Africa is understood? The African Union and the African Peer Review Mechanism are advancing the Africa Credit Rating Agency as a private-sector-driven, self-funded and self-sustaining African ratings institution.[8] The initiative responds to longstanding concerns over perceived bias, inaccuracy and cost in how the major international agencies assess African countries.[9]

The Power Question
Who gets to define African reality? The price of capital is shaped partly by fundamentals, but also by interpretation. Data, ratings, rankings, benchmarks, due-diligence systems, media narratives and investor assumptions all influence where capital moves and at what cost.

If African markets are interpreted mainly through external analytical systems, African performance will continue to be filtered through other people's categories. Greater agency requires better African data, stronger analytical institutions and more credible African participation in the systems that define risk.

Watch This
- *The establishment, credibility and investor uptake of the Africa Credit Rating Agency.*
- *Adoption of African-led or Africa-sensitive risk frameworks, including UNDP-supported credit-risk tools and African sovereign-risk analysis.*
- *Growth of African data, research, ratings, market-intelligence and policy-analysis institutions.*



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- *Performance of African sovereign and corporate debt relative to assigned ratings over the next 12 to 24 months.*

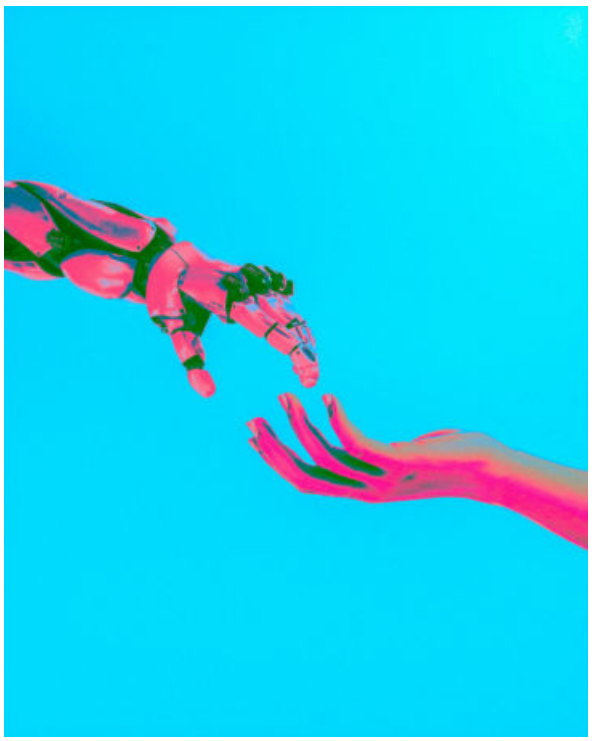
Signal 04
AI is becoming a contest over who represents Africa

The Shift
Artificial intelligence has moved beyond applications and skills. The decisive questions now concern data, language, compute, electricity, broadband, data centres, governance and intellectual property.

The African Union's Continental AI Strategy identifies uneven access to electricity, broadband infrastructure, AI skills, computing platforms, data infrastructure, data legislation and AI readiness as core constraints shaping AI development across member states. The Strategy's first implementation phase, covering 2025 and 2026, prioritises governance frameworks, national AI strategies, resource mobilisation and capacity-building.[10]

Infrastructure is central, but its dimensions cover technology, culture and politics.

AI systems increasingly shape how knowledge is organised, how language is processed, how people are represented and how decisions are made. Africa is home to an estimated 1,500 to 3,000 languages, roughly a third of the world's total,[11] the vast majority of which are absent from the foundational models being trained today. A 2026 review of large language models for African languages identifies support for only a small minority of African languages and finds that more than 98 per cent remain unsupported in the models and datasets reviewed.[12]



The Power Question
Who owns the data, models and intellectual property through which African knowledge enters global AI systems?

Africa's AI position will not be determined simply by whether Africans use AI tools. It will depend on whether African institutions own, govern and finance meaningful parts of the infrastructure beneath them.

Data and language are soft power assets. They carry memory, identity, context and commercial value. The question is whether African knowledge will be extracted into systems controlled elsewhere, or whether African institutions will help build and govern the models, datasets and standards through which the continent is represented.

Watch This

- *Investment in African-owned or Africa-based data centres, compute capacity and AI infrastructure, particularly beyond the continent's dominant technology hubs.*
- *National implementation of the AU Continental AI Strategy, including legislation, governance frameworks and public-sector capacity.*
- *African-language datasets, models and standards, especially for underrepresented languages.*
- *Ownership structures around AI products built on African data, agricultural systems, climate intelligence, consumer behaviour and public-sector datasets.*

AFRICA IN MOTION



Signal 05
African talent is becoming a global strategic asset

The Shift
The global African diaspora has too often been understood primarily through remittances. Remittances remain essential household finance and should not be treated as capital waiting to be redirected. But the wider diaspora story is now broader than transfer flows.

The World Bank estimated that formally recorded remittances to sub-Saharan Africa reached $56 billion in 2024. Across low- and middle-income countries, remittance inflows were expected to reach $685 billion in 2024, exceeding foreign direct investment and official development assistance combined.[13]

That financial scale matters, but the diaspora's strategic value is not only financial. A joint African Development Bank and International Organization for Migration analysis describes diaspora communities as rich in human, social and intellectual capital: entrepreneurs, technologists, health professionals and educators positioned to contribute to the continent's development well beyond financial transfers.[14] AfDB research on remittances similarly identifies technical assistance, capacity-building and institutional knowledge transfer as areas where diaspora engagement is most underdeveloped.[15]

The Power Question
Can the global African network be connected back to African opportunity?

A dispersed network does not automatically become power. The question is whether African institutions can build trusted mechanisms that connect diaspora expertise, capital, access and influence to African enterprise, infrastructure, culture and policy.

The opportunity is not to replace remittances but to create additional pathways. Diaspora professionals, investors, creatives and operators can help open markets, transfer knowledge, build companies, finance infrastructure, shape narratives and influence policy. That requires systems that are credible, investable and easy to trust.

Watch This

- *Diaspora-focused investment vehicles, including bonds, pooled funds, venture vehicles and mutual funds linked to African enterprise and infrastructure.*
- *Programmes connecting diaspora expertise to African companies, universities, public institutions and creative enterprises.*
- *Regulatory frameworks that make cross-border diaspora investment easier, with appropriate currency, governance and investor protections.*
- *Fee compression and formal-channel adoption in remittance corridors, including whether more flows are captured by formal data systems.*

AFRICA IN MOTION

Signal 06
The female economy is becoming a market force

The Shift
Women shape African economies as consumers, workers, founders, investors, carers, creators, executives, informal traders, household decision-makers and institutional leaders. They influence what is bought, produced, financed, marketed and represented. Yet capital, workplace systems, care infrastructure, legal frameworks and institutional decision-making have not kept pace with that economic role.

The African Development Bank's AFAWA initiative identifies a $42 billion financing gap facing women in Africa.[16] AfDB reporting indicates that AFAWA has partnered with more than 200 financial institutions to channel over $3.1 billion to women-led businesses across the continent.[17] The World Bank's Women, Business and the Law 2026 shows how legal and policy frameworks shape women's economic opportunities across 190 economies, and argues that removing barriers to women's participation can boost jobs, productivity and inclusive growth.[18]

The Power Question
Are institutions adapting to the economic power women already exercise?

The soft power question is not simply whether more women are participating. It is whether women's economic influence is changing how markets, institutions and capital behave.

If women are central to consumption, production, entrepreneurship, care, culture and community investment, then treating the female economy as marginal misreads the structure of African growth. The issue is whether financial institutions, corporates, governments and investors are building products, workplaces, policies and capital-allocation systems that recognise women as market makers, not only beneficiaries.



Watch This
- *Capital deployed through women-focused financial products by development finance institutions, commercial banks, venture funds and domestic financial institutions.*
- *Policy frameworks addressing care infrastructure, particularly childcare and elderly care, as economic policy rather than social provision.*
- *Women's representation in senior leadership, boards, investment committees and financial institutions.*
- *Growth of women-led and women-focused enterprises in sectors including beauty, retail, health, media, entertainment, agri-processing and digital commerce.*

AFRICA IN MOTION



Signal 07
African cities are becoming soft power platforms

The Shift
Africa's soft power is increasingly urban. Lagos, Nairobi, Dakar, Marrakech, Cape Town, Accra, Kigali and other cities are projecting cultural energy, attracting talent, hosting global gatherings and shaping perceptions in ways that sometimes move faster than national branding.

This is not simply a branding claim. The World Cities Culture Forum's African Alternatives research examined the cultural landscape of eleven African cities: Accra, Addis Ababa, Cape Town, Dakar, Freetown, Harare, Johannesburg, Kampala, Kigali, Lagos and Nairobi.[19] Its African Creative Capitals analysis notes that Dakar's music scene, Nairobi's fusion of technology and creative industries, and Kigali and Accra's support for female entrepreneurship are reshaping city economies and urban life.[20]

The city signal also connects to enterprise and technology. Startup Genome's Global Startup Ecosystem Report 2025 identifies Lagos as one of Africa's leading innovation hubs, while its broader analysis places African cities within a global start-up ecosystem increasingly shaped by talent, capital and technology clustering.[21] Separately, UNESCO has launched work with Dakar, Johannesburg and Nairobi to strengthen data-driven cultural policymaking and international cooperation for culture and the creative industries.[22]

Cities concentrate what soft power needs: artists, founders, investors, institutions, universities, media, nightlife, food, fashion, sport, technology, tourism and civic imagination. They are where cultural scenes become industries, where informal networks become companies, and where global visitors encounter African modernity in lived form.

The Power Question
Can African cities convert attention into infrastructure, investment and institutional influence?

A city brand is valuable only if the city captures the benefits of the attention it generates. Global visibility can raise tourism, attract capital and draw talent, but it can also produce exclusion, rising costs and cultural extraction if not supported by planning, infrastructure and local ownership.

The soft power test is whether African cities can

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turn cultural magnetism into better creative infrastructure, stronger urban services, investable districts, tourism value, talent retention and globally recognised institutions.



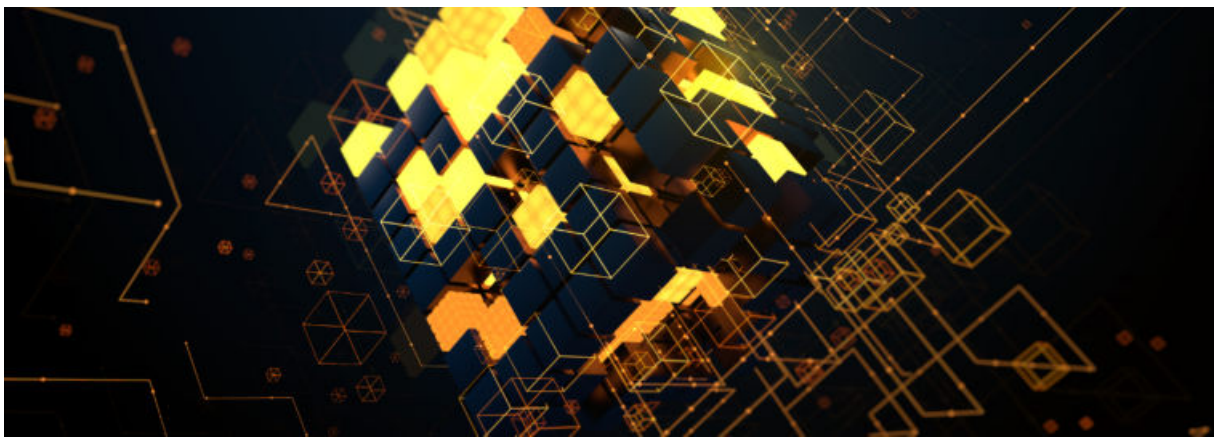
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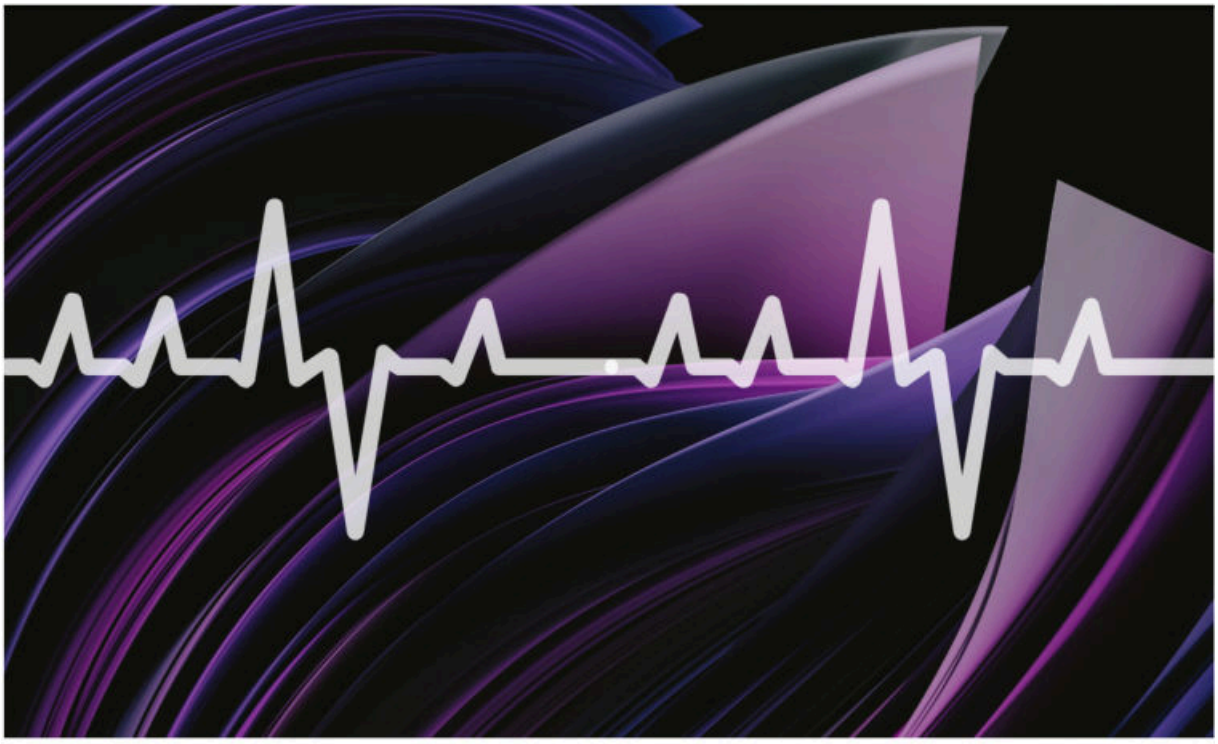
- *Growth of city-based creative, technology, fashion, film, music, design and hospitality districts.*
- *Major cultural, investment, sports and policy events hosted by African cities, and whether they produce long-term local partnerships.*
- *City-level tourism, aviation connectivity, hotel development and cultural infrastructure.*
- *Local ownership in urban creative economies, including venues, studios, galleries, production houses, festivals, restaurants, retail platforms and media companies.*

What these signals suggest

In each case, the demand for what Africa produces keeps rising, while many of the systems that determine who profits from it still sit elsewhere: streaming platforms and catalogue owners; rating agencies and risk models; foundational AI systems and the datasets beneath them; remittance corridors and investment committees. These are the mechanisms through which value gets priced, routed and captured, and Africa's position across many of them remains more supplier than owner.

None of this is settled. The Africa Credit Rating Agency, the AU's Continental AI Strategy, AFAWA's lending partnerships and the growth of African-owned distribution platforms are all attempts to move where those decisions are made. Whether they work will depend not only on the scale of African influence, but on the quality of the institutions built to hold it.





The Africa Soft Power Leadership Pulse 2026

How do the people leading and investing in African enterprise, capital, technology and culture see the continent's direction of travel – and where do they believe the greatest opportunities and constraints now lie?

The ASP Leadership Pulse draws on Africa Soft Power's speaker, delegate and institutional network across Africa and its global diaspora to capture that judgement. It examines the forces leaders believe will shape African growth, where capital remains most misaligned with opportunity, and where Africa is best positioned to exercise greater agency and set global terms.

This inaugural edition establishes the baseline for an annual Pulse, allowing us to track how the judgement of this community shifts as Africa's economic, political and cultural landscape evolves.

What the Pulse found

Four findings carry across the survey. Three concern where value is created and where it is captured. The fourth concerns how quickly that is changing.

1. The creative economy is the clearest perceived mispricing:

Respondents ranked creative industries and cultural commerce first among the areas where Africa is best positioned to set global models, standards or market practice, at 45.2 per cent. They also ranked creative industries, cultural enterprises and African brands first among the areas most undercapitalised relative to their growth potential, at 74.0 per cent, a margin of more than fifteen points over the next area. The assessment is strongest among respondents closest to investment decisions, with 80 per cent of finance, investment and development-finance respondents naming the sector as undercapitalised.

2. The constraint on African enterprise is the cost and conditions of capital, not its supply:

Lack of patient or growth-stage capital ranked last of nine barriers, at 15.1 per cent, falling to 13 per cent among finance-sector respondents. What ranked above it describes the terms on which capital

ASP LEADERSHIP PULSE 2026

moves: fragmented markets and cross-border regulation at 45.2 per cent, high borrowing costs and currency volatility at 42.5 per cent, weak data, credit histories and investor visibility at 41.1 per cent, and regulatory uncertainty at 39.7 per cent. Respondents chose remedies that follow directly from that diagnosis, ranking AfCFTA implementation and regulatory harmonisation first among institutional reforms at 50.7 per cent, and African-led credit data, ratings and investment intelligence second at 39.7 per cent.

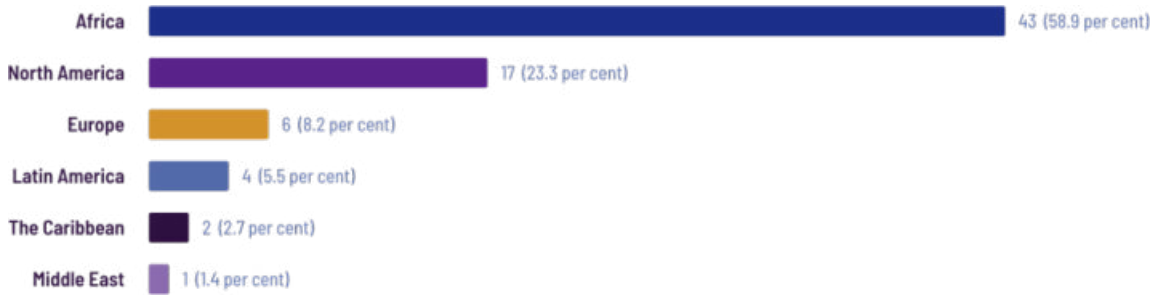
3. The diaspora is a capability network before it is a capital pool:
Asked where the global diaspora can make its most consequential contribution, respondents placed transferring specialist knowledge and technical capability first at 58.3 per cent and opening international markets and distribution channels second at 54.2 per cent. Investing in African-owned enterprises and funds ranked last of eight options, at 19.4 per cent. In a network where 41.1 per cent of respondents are themselves based outside Africa, that is a substantial reframing of a relationship usually measured in remittance volumes.

4. Direction is clearer than pace:
No respondent selected the most pessimistic option offered. Only 9.6 per cent described Africa's trajectory as accelerating strongly. Between those poles, 86.3 per cent chose readings that are positive on direction but dissatisfied on pace. The live question among this group is velocity rather than direction.

Methodology
The 2026 Pulse drew 73 responses from across the Africa Soft Power network. Respondents are senior practitioners rather than a representative population sample. They lead firms, funds, institutions, studios and public bodies, and they were invited on the basis of their participation in the Africa Soft Power platform. The Pulse is therefore best read as an expert signal from a specific and unusually well positioned constituency, not as a survey of continental opinion.

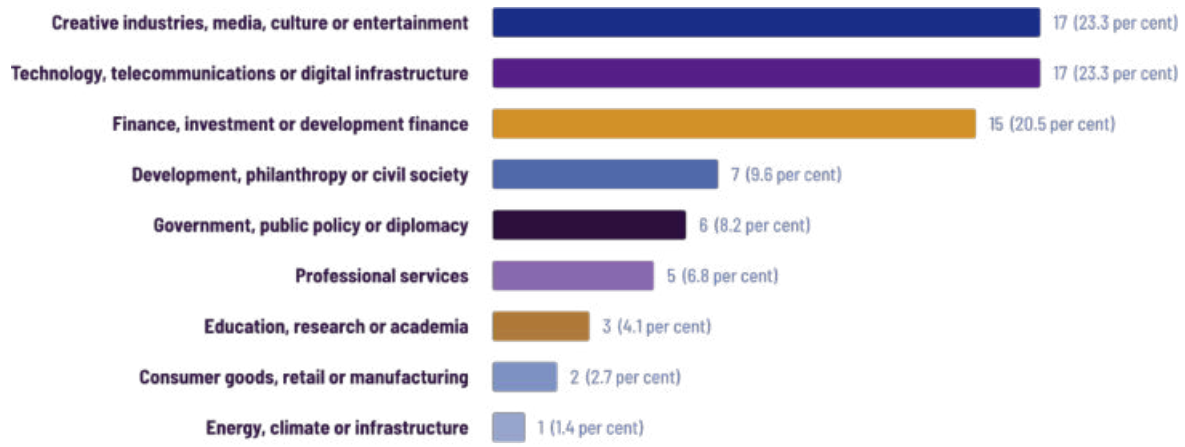
Several questions invited up to three selections. In those cases, percentages express the share of respondents who chose a given option, so totals exceed 100 per cent. The findings are organised thematically rather than in the order in which questions appeared in the survey.

Who responded

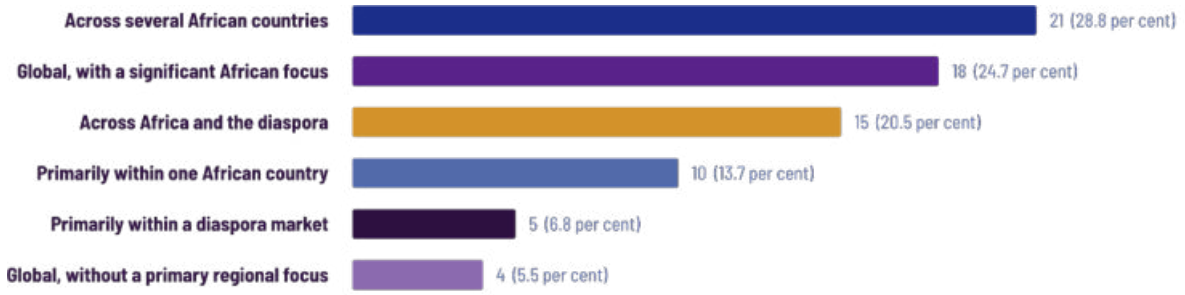


Africa accounted for 58.9 per cent of respondents and North America for 23.3 per cent. Europe followed at 8.2 per cent, Latin America at 5.5 per cent, the Caribbean at 2.7 per cent and the Middle East at 1.4 per cent.

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Creative industries, media, culture or entertainment and technology, telecommunications or digital infrastructure were level at 23.3 per cent each, followed by finance, investment or development finance at 20.5 per cent. Development, philanthropy and civil society accounted for 9.6 per cent, government, public policy and diplomacy for 8.2 per cent, and professional services for 6.8 per cent.

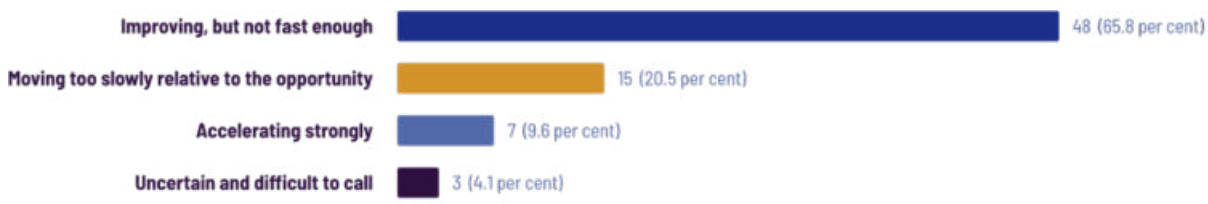


Almost 80 per cent of respondents work across more than one market. Only 13.7 per cent operate primarily within a single African country and 6.8 per cent primarily within a single diaspora market. The rest work across several African countries, 28.8 per cent, globally with a significant African focus, 24.7 per cent, across Africa and the diaspora, 20.5 per cent, or globally without a primary regional focus, 5.5 per cent.

The composition matters for how the findings read. This is a cross-border constituency answering questions about cross-border constraints, and its answers reflect that vantage point.

Direction is clearer than pace

How would you characterise Africa's trajectory toward greater ownership and influence over its own economic and institutional agenda over the next five years?



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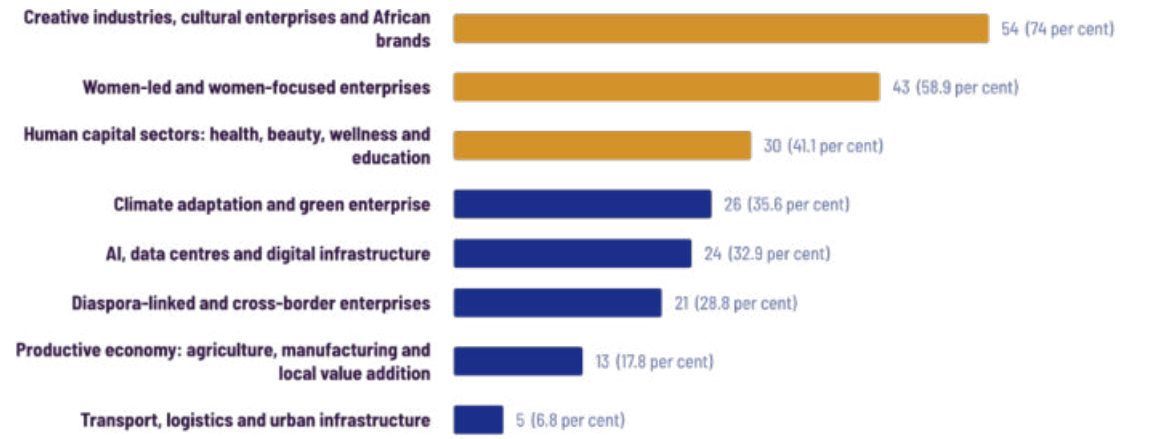
No respondent selected the most pessimistic option: "at risk of stalling without significant intervention." At the other end of the scale, only 9.6 per cent described the trajectory as accelerating strongly.

What sits between those poles is the dominant reading. Taken together, 86.3 per cent chose options that can be read as positive on direction but dissatisfied on pace, with 65.8 per cent selecting "improving, but not fast enough" and 20.5 per cent selecting "moving too slowly relative to the opportunity."

Among this respondent group, the dominant debate is less about whether Africa's position is improving than whether it is improving fast enough. On the leading option, Africa-based and diaspora-based respondents were closely aligned, at 65.1 and 66.7 per cent respectively. They diverged on intensity. Among respondents based outside Africa, 26.7 per cent selected "moving too slowly relative to the opportunity," against 16.3 per cent of those based on the continent.

The creative economy is the clearest perceived mispricing

Which three areas of African economic activity or enterprise are most undercapitalised relative to their growth potential?



Creative industries, cultural enterprises and African brands led at 74.0 per cent. The judgement holds across the network rather than within one part of it. Among respondents who work outside the creative industries, 75 per cent named the sector as undercapitalised, marginally higher than among creative-sector respondents themselves at 71 per cent. Among finance, investment and development-finance respondents, the figure rose to 80 per cent, placing the strongest reading of the mispricing among those closest to investment decision-making.

Women-led and women-focused enterprises followed at 58.9 per cent, and human capital sectors covering health, beauty, wellness and education at 41.1 per cent. Climate adaptation and green enterprise reached 35.6 per cent, AI, data centres and digital infrastructure 32.9 per cent, and diaspora-linked and cross-border enterprises 28.8 per cent.

Set against the trajectory finding, this is the more consequential result. A network that believes progress is too slow also believes, by a wide margin, that some of the continent's most promising areas of value creation are still not being priced accordingly.

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Capital is constrained by price, data and fragmentation

Which three barriers most constrain the growth and international expansion of African-owned enterprises?



The most striking result in this question is the one at the bottom of the chart. "Lack of patient or growth-stage capital" ranked last of nine barriers, selected by 15.1 per cent.

What ranked above it describes the conditions attached to capital rather than its availability. Fragmented markets, cross-border regulation and currency restrictions led at 45.2 per cent, followed by high borrowing costs and currency volatility at 42.5 per cent, weak data, credit histories and investor visibility at 41.1 per cent, and regulatory uncertainty and policy inconsistency at 39.7 per cent.

Limited access to diaspora and global commercial networks reached 32.9 per cent and intellectual-property leakage and dependence on foreign platforms 31.5 per cent. Visa, mobility and professional-recognition barriers were named by 26.0 per cent, a reminder that the friction African enterprise encounters is administrative as often as it is financial.

Taken together, these are pricing and information problems rather than supply problems. Respondents locate the constraint less in headline capital supply than in the conditions under which capital moves: thin data, fragmented regulation and currency risk. That is a solvable set of problems, and respondents were specific about how.

Integration is the leading reform priority

Which institutional reform would do most to strengthen African growth, ownership and global influence over the next five years?

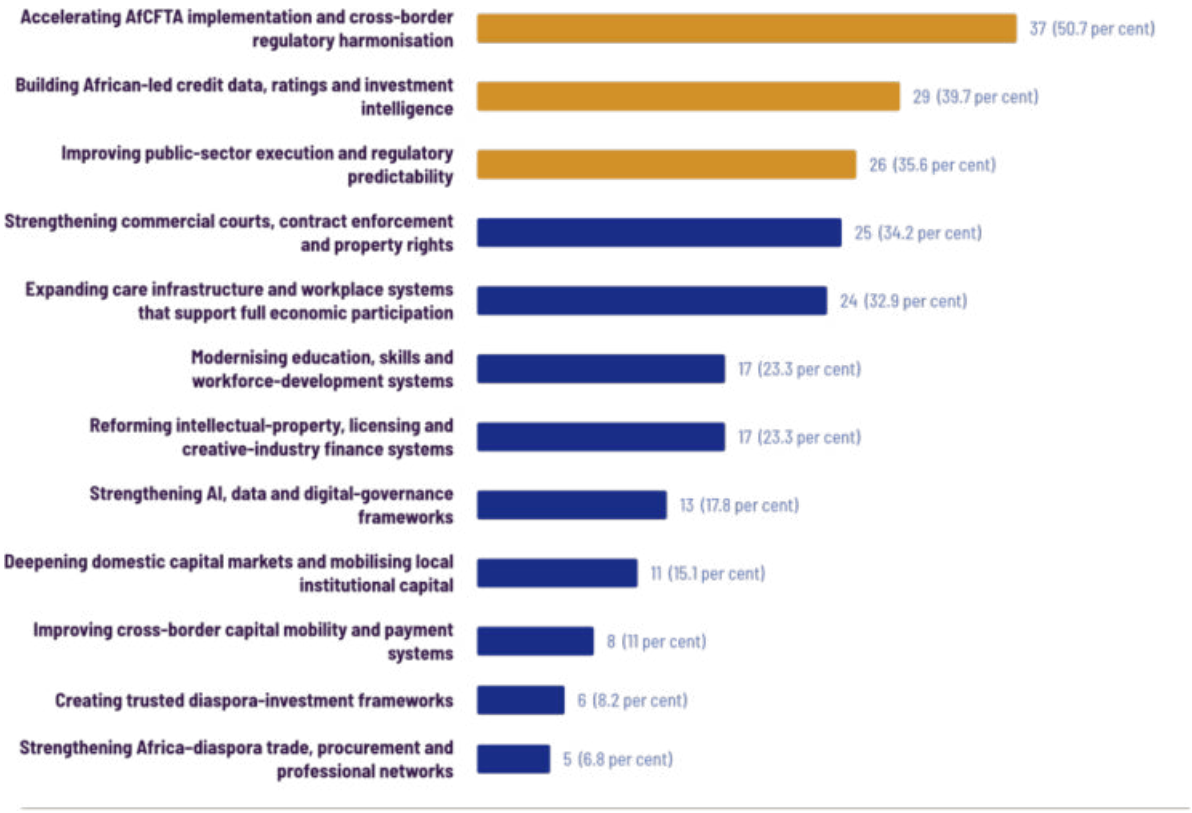
Accelerating AfCFTA implementation and cross-border regulatory harmonisation led at 50.7 per cent, the only reform selected by more than half of respondents and a direct answer to the barrier respondents ranked first.

Building African-led credit data, ratings and investment intelligence followed at 39.7 per cent. Read alongside the 41.1 per cent who identified weak data and credit histories as a binding constraint, this is a coherent proposition. The reform priorities cluster around market infrastructure rather than sector-specific intervention, favouring integration, better credit data, stronger public-sector execution and more predictable legal systems.

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Improving public-sector execution and regulatory predictability reached 35.6 per cent and strengthening commercial courts, contract enforcement and property rights 34.2 per cent. Expanding care infrastructure and workplace systems that support full economic participation was named by 32.9 per cent, placing it above education reform at 23.3 per cent and intellectual-property reform at 23.3 per cent.

For the respondents, fragmentation is the constraint, integration is the remedy and better information about African risk is the precondition for both.



Where Africa can set the terms

In which three areas is Africa best positioned to shape or set global models, standards or market practice over the next three years?

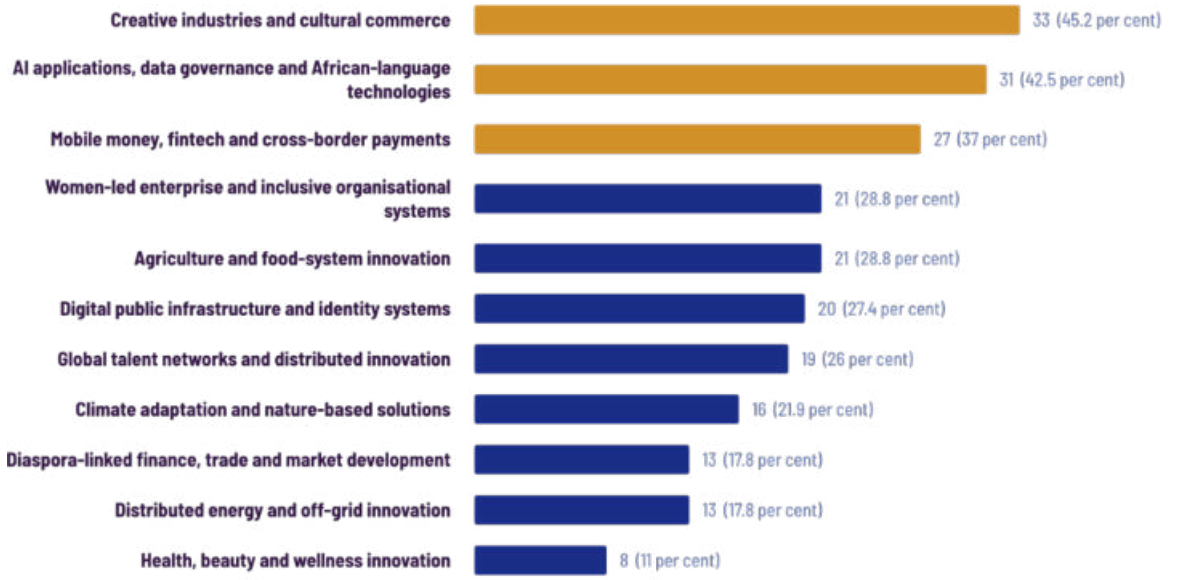
Creative industries and cultural commerce led at 45.2 per cent, followed by AI applications, data governance and African-language technologies at 42.5 per cent.
Mobile money, fintech and cross-border payments came third at 37.0 per cent. That ordering is itself the finding. Mobile money, fintech and cross-border payments remain important, but respondents placed them behind culture and applied AI, suggesting that the next frontier of standard-setting may lie beyond the sectors most often associated with Africa's innovation story.

Agriculture and food-system innovation and women-led enterprise and inclusive organisational systems were level at 28.8 per cent, digital public infrastructure and identity systems at 27.4 per cent, and global talent networks and distributed innovation at 26.0 per cent.

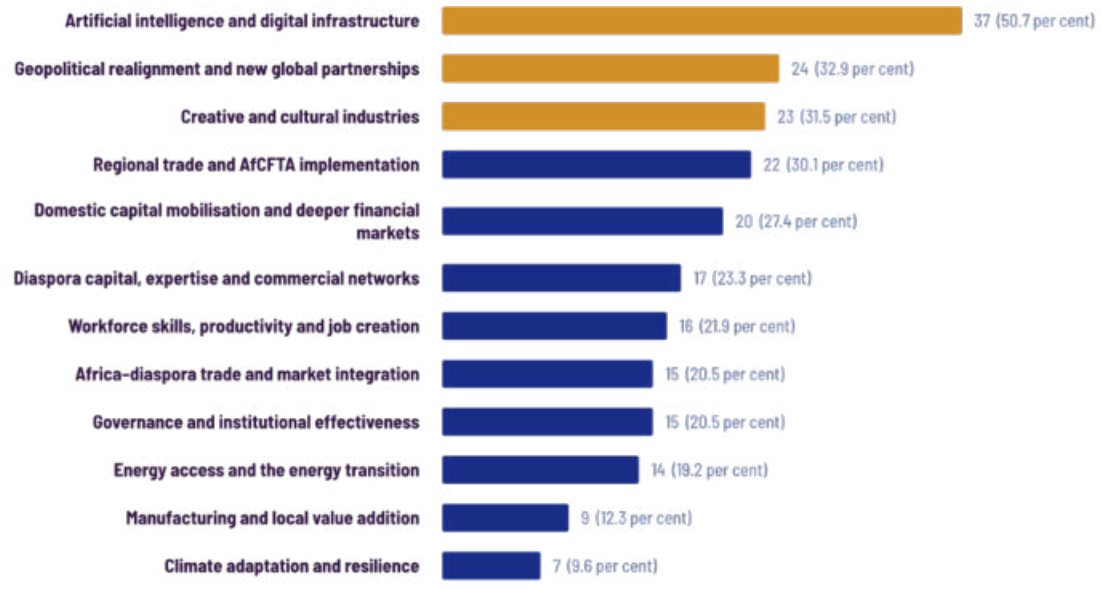
The creative-industries result closes a loop. The sector respondents ranked as most undercapitalised

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is also the sector they ranked as best positioned to set global practice. Among respondents outside the creative industries, 45 per cent selected it here, matching the overall figure almost exactly. The judgement is not sectoral advocacy. It is a shared assessment that African cultural production is already shaping global markets and narratives, while still being financed below its perceived potential.



Which three forces will have the greatest influence on African growth and global economic position over the next five years?



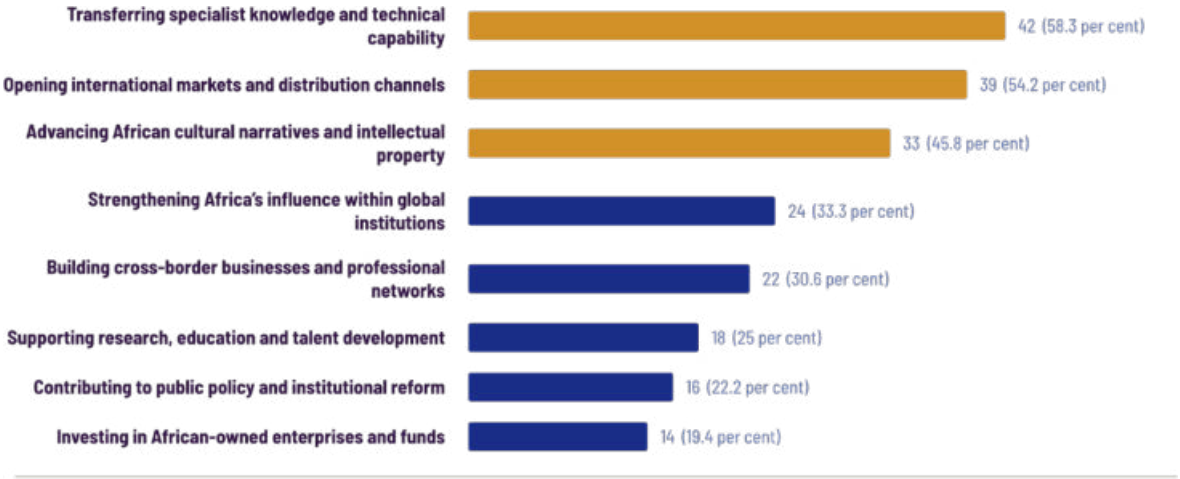
Artificial intelligence and digital infrastructure led at 50.7 per cent, the only force named by more than half the respondents. Geopolitical realignment and new global partnerships followed at 32.9 per cent, creative and cultural industries at 31.5 per cent, and regional trade and AfCFTA implementation at 30.1 per cent.

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Domestic capital mobilisation and deeper financial markets reached 27.4 per cent, diaspora capital, expertise and commercial networks 23.3 per cent, and workforce skills, productivity and job creation 21.9 per cent. Climate adaptation and resilience, at 9.6 per cent, ranked last of the twelve forces offered, notably lower than the 35.6 per cent who identified climate enterprise as undercapitalised. Respondents appear to see climate as an investment gap rather than a primary growth driver.

The diaspora is a capability network, not a capital pool

Where can Africa's global diaspora make its most consequential contribution over the next three years?



Transferring specialist knowledge and technical capability led at 58.3 per cent, followed by opening international markets and distribution channels at 54.2 per cent and advancing African cultural narratives and intellectual property at 45.8 per cent. Investing in African-owned enterprises and funds ranked last of the eight options, at 19.4 per cent.

The split by location sharpens the point. Africa-based respondents ranked market access highest at 60 per cent, ahead of knowledge transfer at 52 per cent. Respondents based outside Africa reversed the order, placing knowledge transfer at 67 per cent and market access at 47 per cent. Africa-based respondents ranked direct capital investment last, at 14.3 per cent. Respondents based outside Africa rated it higher, at 26.7 per cent, though they still placed knowledge transfer, cultural narrative, market access and professional networks ahead of direct investment.

What the Pulse suggests

The first Pulse points to a constituency that is not debating whether Africa's relevance is rising. Its concern is whether that relevance is being converted quickly enough into ownership, agency and economic value.

The strongest findings return to that gap. Respondents see the creative economy as one of the areas where Africa is best placed to set global terms, and as the area most undercapitalised relative to its potential. They read capital not as a supply problem but as a problem of cost, currency risk, weak data, fragmented markets and regulatory uncertainty. They see the diaspora less as a pool of money than as a network of knowledge, access and influence.

Africa's next advantage will depend on ensuring that value stays closer to where it is created. That means stronger market infrastructure, better African-led data and clearer cross-border rules. It also means platforms capable of turning cultural influence, talent and enterprise into durable ownership.



PART TWO:

Ideas From Nairobi:

Arguments, insights & reflections from the ASP Summit 2026

The Africa Soft Power Summit is the premier cross-sector convening for Africa's creative, innovation, finance and leadership ecosystems. In May 2026, the Summit returned to Nairobi for its seventh edition, bringing together leaders across culture, capital, policy, technology and enterprise from 20–23 May. It has evolved into a distinctive platform where Africa's cultural and creative capital increasingly intersects with investment and broader economic priorities.

What follows sets out the shape of the convening, synthesises the arguments that emerged across both conference days, and includes longer pieces from members of the broader ASP Speaker Faculty who wanted to take a single idea further than a panel allows.



OVERVIEW

About the Africa Soft Power Summit 2026

The Africa Soft Power Summit was founded on a proposition that remains at its core: that Africa's creative and cultural capital is not peripheral to economic growth, it is central to it. What began as a response to a global moment of disruption has evolved, over seven editions, into one of the continent's most distinctive cross-sector platforms; a space where the forces shaping Africa's future, among them finance, policy, technology, and the creative industries, converge in a single room.

The Summit began with two virtual editions in 2020 and 2021, founded on the premise that the continent's creative, cultural, and human assets were undervalued strategic resources, and that the conversations needed to unlock them were not yet happening at the scale or seriousness they deserved. Four in-person editions followed, each building on the last, expanding the geographic reach of the delegate community, deepening the quality of the speaker faculty, and sharpening the platform's central argument.

The seventh edition, held in Nairobi from 20–23 May 2026, brought that argument into clearer focus than any that came before it. The summit's theme, **'Africa's Compound Interest: Aligning Ecosystems of Finance, Creativity and Human Capital for Growth',** reflected a proposition that has gathered force across every edition: that Africa's next advantage will not come from creativity, capital, innovation, or inclusion working in isolation. It will come from the compounding effect produced when those forces are aligned.

Across its editions, the Summit has convened a speaker faculty drawn from the organisations and institutions shaping how capital, ideas, and markets move, including Netflix, Meta, Mastercard, Google, MTN, the NBA, Apple, the NFL, Safaricom, Amazon Studios, Afreximbank, IFC, the Bank of Industry, AfCFTA, and NGX Group, alongside former heads of state, ministers, founders, media leaders, and cultural figures from across Africa and the diaspora. The community it has built reflects something harder to manufacture than a speaker list: a room of decision-makers who have chosen to engage with Africa's growth story not as observers, but as participants.

The 2026 programme was organised around three interconnected pillars, each addressing a distinct dimension of that story:

Inclusion, Leadership & Market Access
How do power, participation, governance, consumer influence, and enterprise shape who builds, earns, owns, and leads?

Innovation, Creativity & Cultural Value
How do African ideas, creators, brands, and technologies shape markets, influence global narratives, and generate competitive advantage?

Capital, Ownership & Scale
How can investment, finance, policy, platforms, and diaspora and institutional capital convert African creativity and innovation into long-term, durable economic value?

Together, these pillars defined a summit that was as much a platform for action as a space for reflection – one where the participants assembled were, in many cases, the institutions and individuals best placed to answer the questions being asked.

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The Africa Soft Power Summit is designed to produce a set of ideas that outlast the room. This section draws those ideas together, organised around the three pillars that structured the 2026 programme: **Inclusion, Leadership & Market Access; Innovation, Creativity & Cultural Value; and Capital, Ownership & Scale.**



SECTION ONE: INCLUSION, LEADERSHIP & MARKET ACCESS:

How do power, participation, governance, consumer influence, and enterprise shape who builds, earns, owns, and leads?

The corporate capital drain

Among the most direct arguments of the day was the case for African businesses to audit where their operational capital goes. A single African consumer business, over the course of a year, can direct hundreds of thousands of dollars off the continent to foreign advertising platforms, technology subscriptions, and data management tools. Multiplied across the ecosystem, this represents a structural outflow of capital that the continent's own innovators, platforms, and talent could be retaining.

The argument is not protectionist: it is an observation about where value compounds. Companies that direct marketing spend to local talent and local platforms keep that value in the ecosystems they simultaneously sell into. Those that do not are, in effect, subsidising the growth of competitors to their own market. The arrival of AI tools has made this more actionable than ever – locally-built analytical and operational systems are now achievable at a fraction of the historical cost, and often outperform the foreign subscription models they replace.

The beauty economy: market momentum without domestic value capture

African consumers are now primary drivers of one of the world's fastest-growing beauty, wellness, and aesthetics markets. Domestic manufacturing capacity, while growing, remains insufficient relative to

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the market's scale. The result is that a sector in which Africa leads as a consumer remains one in which it consistently trails as a producer.

The sessions examining this sector did not treat this as a static condition. The beauty economy is actively constructing local value chains, generating real revenue, scaling operations, and driving significant employment. The gap between what the sector is producing and the investment it receives is a function of how it is categorised by the capital community, as "aspirational" rather than as what it demonstrably is: a high-growth, employment-generating industry with a large and expanding domestic consumer base.





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The female economy is a mispriced asset class

Women drive consumption, production, and enterprise across Africa's largest markets. From beauty and wellness to media, entertainment, agri-processing, digital commerce, and retail, female-led demand and supply chains are generating returns that consistently outpace the capital deployed around them.

The female economy is not an emerging or niche category. It is the primary driver of activity in some of the continent's fastest-growing sectors. The data systems, financial products, and investment infrastructure built around it underprice what it is generating, not because the returns are unclear, but because the frameworks used to assess them were not built with this economy in mind. That is a pricing error, and pricing errors of this scale and duration represent material opportunity for institutions willing to correct them.

Women reinvest approximately 90 per cent of their income into their families and communities, compared to roughly 35 to 40 per cent for men. At an economic policy level, that differential is not a

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footnote: it is an argument for treating investment in female-led enterprise as the highest-velocity mechanism available for keeping capital productive within local economies.

Redesigning financial products

Behavioural data, including mobile payment patterns, community-based financial activity, and commercial consistency across informal structures, is generating a more accurate picture of creditworthiness and business viability than traditional collateral frameworks allow. The institutions that update their assessment models around this data will access a vast market that current products consistently fail to reach. This is not a concession on credit standards; it is an upgrade on how creditworthiness is measured.

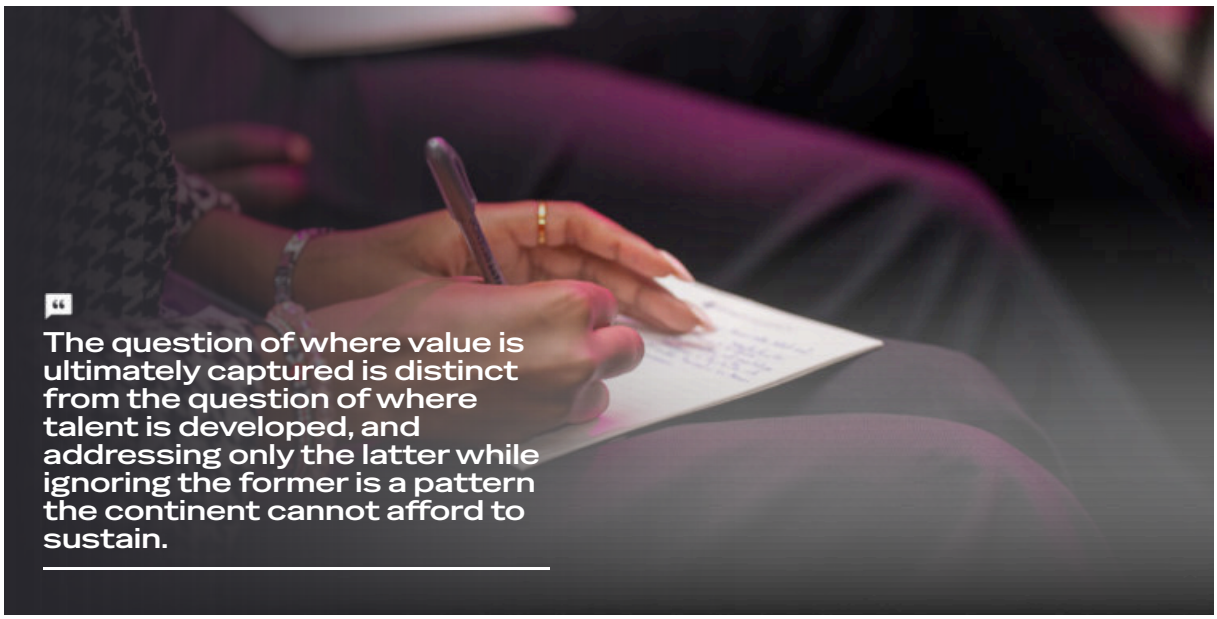
The gap between visibility and economic power

Participation in a market and participation in the value that market generates are different things, and the summit's conversations insisted on the distinction. Access is not inclusion. Visibility is not ownership. The question that matters is not who is present; it is who benefits.

This gap is particularly pronounced in technology and digital ecosystems. There is a widely shared aspiration to build Africa's engineering talent for the continent's own benefit. But the value of that talent (the intellectual capital, the professional expertise, the compounding return on skills development) continues to be captured primarily by institutions and economies outside Africa. The question of where value is ultimately captured is distinct from the question of where talent is developed, and addressing only the latter while ignoring the former is a pattern the continent cannot afford to sustain.

Women's leadership is a systems question, not a representation question

If leadership diversity is an economic design question, then the homogeneity of leadership in most African institutions, public and private, is both a social shortcoming and a structural drag on performance. When organisations invest heavily in female talent at entry level but lose it in middle management, and the leadership table reflects that loss by remaining male-dominated, the institution is making a consistent, compounding error. Reversing it requires deliberate architectural decisions, not good intentions.



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That same logic extends to capital allocation. The gap between capital supply and capital deployment is one the market has not yet closed of its own accord. Development finance institutions, institutional investors, and domestic capital vehicles have the mandate and the resources to do so deliberately. The economic case, beyond equity and beyond obligation, is that well-run businesses led by capable founders are being systematically underfunded. That is, by definition, an inefficiency. And inefficiencies at this scale, in economies this large, represent investable opportunity.

SECTION TWO: INNOVATION, CREATIVITY & CULTURAL VALUE:

How do African ideas, creators, brands, and technologies shape markets, influence global narratives, and generate competitive advantage?

The AI economy is not waiting for Africa

The global AI economy is being built on existing infrastructure, trained on existing data, and governed by existing rules. Those who control these foundational layers capture the majority of the value. This was the opening premise of the summit's AI session, and it is not an abstract concern: it is a description of how the technology sector has already structured itself, and where Africa currently sits within that structure.

The session examined Africa's position across three axes: where the continent buys AI capability, where it builds it, and where it partners to develop it. The consensus was that each of these choices, made now, compounds differently over time. Being part of the AI architecture from the earliest stages, ensuring that African languages, contexts, and data are embedded in the models being trained today, is not a question of national pride. It is a market position decision. If the foundational models governing AI's global expansion are not trained on African data, the products those models generate will not serve African users accurately, and the developers building on top of them will be building on infrastructure optimised for someone else.



Sovereignty is built in contracts, not declarations

There is a gap in many African markets between what governments say about AI sovereignty and what their procurement portfolios reflect. Declarations of data sovereignty coexist with government contracts that place foreign companies, foreign talent, and foreign infrastructure at the centre of the very systems those declarations are meant to govern. Sovereignty is built in procurement decisions and capacity development, not in policy statements alone.

The more productive question is not whether to declare AI sovereignty but how to operationalise it. The model that emerged from the discussion positions government not as a purchaser of finished technology but as a partner in its development, with ownership, operational capacity, and locally trained talent built in from the outset. The practical

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implication is that governments need to audit their portfolios, not just their policy documents, and ask honestly how much local capability is actually being developed through the contracts they are signing.

Infrastructure does not need to be built at the scale of global data centre operators to be effective. Bringing intelligence closer to where data is generated, rather than routing it through distant and energy-intensive infrastructure, produces systems better suited to local realities. Countries building AI capacity at a scale appropriate to their current energy systems and expanding incrementally are making more sustainable long-term decisions than those pursuing centralised solutions designed for different contexts.

The banking sector's lens: risk, patience, and the infrastructure bet

The financial institutions engaged in this conversation approach technological transformation from a structurally different vantage point than the entrepreneurs and innovators alongside them. While one side of the room is thinking about the next opportunity, the other is managing the next potential crisis. Banking operates under regulatory constraints that make the downside of getting things wrong extremely costly. In an environment where multiple overlapping global crises have tested the resilience of financial systems in quick succession, that risk consciousness is not excessive caution. It is institutional design.

> **The banking sector's most consequential role in this transition is as a mobiliser of patient capital, the kind of long-tenor financing that energy and data infrastructure requires.**

That conservatism is not, however, incompatible with the kind of investment the AI infrastructure moment demands. The banking sector's most consequential role in this transition is as a mobiliser of patient capital, the kind of long-tenor financing that energy and data infrastructure requires. Energy constraints are a real and binding variable in several of the continent's most digitally active markets. A single large data centre can place more demand on a national grid than the grid can currently sustain. The capital to build the underlying infrastructure, at the scale and tenor required, cannot be assembled by the technology sector alone. Banks and development finance institutions are among the

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few actors equipped to mobilise it.

What the banking and finance community needs, to make that commitment, is not proof of demand already visible. It is a clear use case and a credible framework for why the demand will come. The broadband precedent offers exactly that framework. The bet was placed without certainty. The returns were structural and compounding. The AI infrastructure moment asks the same question of the same institutions: how early are you willing to move, and on what basis?

SECTION THREE: **CAPITAL, OWNERSHIP & SCALE:**

How can investment, finance, policy, platforms, and diaspora and institutional capital convert African creativity and innovation into long-term, durable economic value?

Africa's risk premium is a perception problem with a market solution

A recurring observation across the capital sessions was that Africa has historically been priced as risk rather than as return, an association that reflects accumulated bias more than current market behaviour. Correcting that requires demonstrated performance, sector-specific evidence, and a deliberate shift in how the continent's growth markets are framed to global capital. The argument is not that risk does not exist. It is that the premium currently applied to African investment does not consistently track the actual risk profile of the opportunities being assessed, and the institutions willing to look past the premium are positioned to capture returns the broader market continues to underprice.

Energy, infrastructure, and intra-African trade were repeatedly identified as the categories where this mispricing is most pronounced and the opportunity most immediate. Significant trade imbalance persists between African economies and the rest of the world relative to trade within the continent itself, a pattern that constrains growth on both sides of the equation. Closing it is less a matter of new capital than of redirecting existing capital toward the infrastructure, particularly transport corridors and cross-border systems, that intra-African trade depends on. Africa's scale and demographic weight, often discussed as a future asset, is already a present one: a large, young, and increasingly digitally connected population represents demand that does not need to be created, only served by infrastructure built to match it.

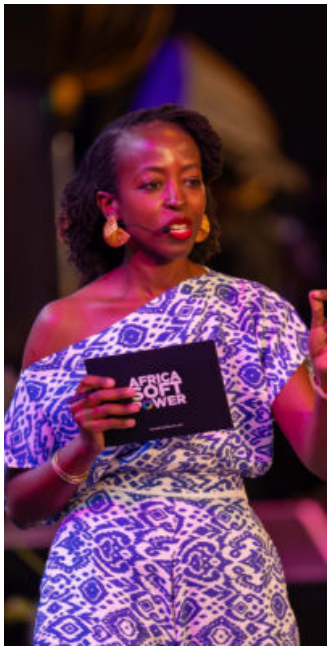


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Patient capital needs the right structure, not just the right intention

Development finance institutions and pan-African banks bring long-tenor capital to the table, the kind of twenty to twenty-five-year financing that infrastructure and emerging sectors require and that short-term capital markets are not built to provide. But patient capital deployed without the right structure underperforms its potential. What several sessions converged on was the need for African banks, guarantee institutions, and development finance bodies to co-design financing structures specifically suited to local market realities, rather than adapting frameworks built for other contexts and hoping they transfer.

Local knowledge is the variable that determines whether capital finds its opportunity efficiently or searches for years without finding the right structure. Institutions with deep, hands-on familiarity with specific markets, built through years of operating across multiple African financial centres, are positioned to identify viable structures that capital without that knowledge consistently misses. The framing that emerged repeatedly was capital as a complete team rather than a single instrument: short-term trade finance and long-term patient capital each play a distinct role, supported by guarantee mechanisms and insurance structures that absorb risk when conditions shift, all of it underpinned by regulation that, while sometimes resisted, is what allows the rest of the structure to function reliably.







Remittances are an underused capital instrument

Remittance flows into Africa frequently outpace foreign direct investment, and have done so on a multi-year basis since 2010, yet most of that capital is consumed rather than invested, and a meaningful share of its value is lost to currency volatility, informal intermediaries, and the absence of platforms designed to convert it into durable assets. A return of fifteen per cent on an investment means little if the local currency depreciates by twenty per cent in the same period; on paper there was a gain, in practice there was a loss. This is not a minor technical inefficiency. At the scale of total remittance flows into the continent, it represents a significant and recurring transfer of value out of the systems remittances are meant to support.

The diaspora's relationship to these flows is shifting in ways the existing financial infrastructure has

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not kept pace with. Many in the diaspora no longer wish to be treated solely as emergency support systems, sending money home only when something has gone wrong. There is a growing and largely unmet demand for platforms that allow diaspora capital to build wealth, manage assets, and participate in markets, not simply transfer funds. The financial institutions and fintechs that build genuine asset control, direct ownership structures, and currency interoperability into their platforms, removing reliance on intermediaries and reducing exposure to currency volatility, will be building the infrastructure this shift in diaspora behaviour actually requires.

> **There is a growing and largely unmet demand for platforms that allow diaspora capital to build wealth, manage assets, and participate in markets, not simply transfer funds.**

There is a parallel opportunity in how the value of diaspora-driven cultural influence is monetised. Diaspora communities do not only move money. They move taste, demand, and cultural relevance into markets far beyond the continent. Few platforms currently exist to convert that influence into a financial instrument with the same intentionality applied to remittance flows themselves. Doing so is one of the more significant unbuilt opportunities in this space.



Whoever sets the terms shapes the outcome

As official development assistance to the continent has fallen sharply, with bilateral aid to sub-Saharan Africa down by as much as a quarter in 2025 alone, African institutions are being asked to absorb a growing share of investment risk: domestic development finance institutions, sovereign wealth vehicles, pan-African banks, venture capital, family offices, and an expanding set of digital financial rails. That shift in risk-bearing carries with it a shift in power, specifically the power to define what counts as a bankable opportunity, what makes a founder credible, and which sectors are treated as strategic.

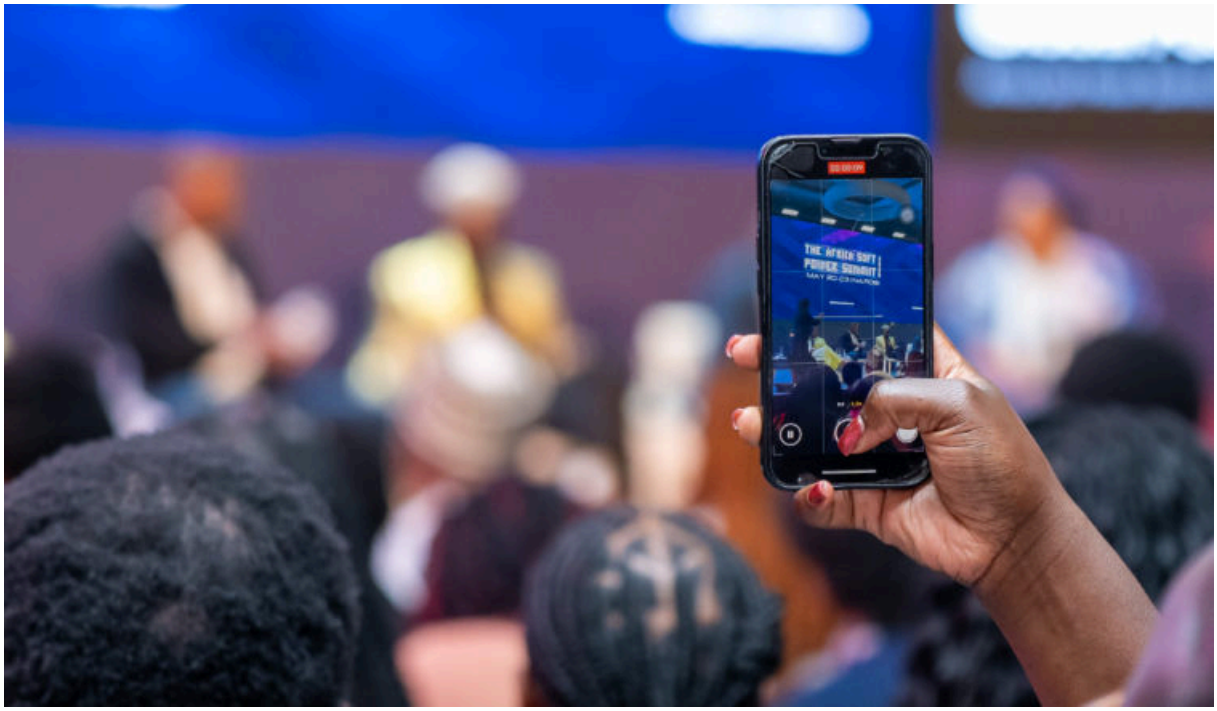
This is, in practical terms, the clearest mechanism available for African institutions to move from receiving capital on terms set elsewhere to directing it on terms set locally. The institutions willing to take on that risk now are also the institutions that will shape the investment criteria the continent operates under for the next decade. That is a considerable strategic opportunity, and one that rewards early and decisive participation over cautious observation.

Extended Reflections

In this section, speakers who joined us in Nairobi and contributors from the wider Summit community were invited to develop one idea in depth: a perspective they wanted to advance, a question the programme raised that they felt warranted a longer answer, or a dimension of the Summit's themes that their own work speaks to directly.







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Africa Is Not the Story Being Told. That Is the Problem

By Naledi K. Khabo, CEO, Africa Tourism Association

Africa accounts for just 5% of global international tourist arrivals. This statistic is often cited to demonstrate untapped potential. It is that, but it additionally highlights a deeper issue: a narrative gap so wide that the most asset-rich continent is chronically undervalued, underchosen, and underinvested, not due to a lack of quality, but because the prevailing narrative does not reflect Africa's own.

Tourism is more than hospitality. It is a creative and narrative industry where perception is a primary product, and narrative is the infrastructure. A traveler does not choose a destination and then form an opinion about it. The opinion is formed first, through accumulated exposure to images, stories, and cultural signals that exist long before a flight is booked. This is why cities like New York, London, and Paris can absorb over 60 million visitors annually. They have spent decades and billions, not simply building airports and hotels, but also allocating resources to the systems through which their identities travel. The experience follows the story. Ghana's Year of Return is recent proof that a narrative decision, not an infrastructure investment, repositioned a country within the global cultural conversation and drove significant, measurable tourism growth.

The economic stakes of getting this right are significant. Tourism generates more jobs per dollar invested than nearly any other sector. And in Africa, where youth unemployment remains one of the continent's major challenges, that multiplier effect is consequential. It is the difference between a community with a viable economic future and one without. Increasing Africa's share of global arrivals from 5 percent to even just 10 percent would represent one of the most meaningful economic interventions on the continent. Closing the narrative gap is not a marketing priority. It is an economic one.

This distinction matters enormously for Africa. The continent does not have a product deficit. It has a narrative infrastructure deficit. The story of Africa's tourism potential is not reaching the decision-makers, travel advisors, media ecosystems, or diaspora consumers who would act on it, not because the story is weak, but because the distribution systems that carry it were not built for African-led authorship.

The African diaspora represents one of the clearest case studies of this gap. Over 200 million people of African descent live outside the continent. Black American travelers alone represent a market valued at $145 billion annually *(Source: Black Travel Alliance/MMGY).* These are not casual tourists. They are deeply motivated travelers who research deliberately, choose intentionally, and return loyally once a destination earns their confidence. They do not need to be convinced that Africa is worth visiting. They need a tourism ecosystem that was designed with them in mind. When they do not find it, they do not redirect their travel dollars to Africa they redirect them elsewhere. This is a distribution problem, not a demand problem.

Owning the narrative requires investment across three layers. The first is infrastructure: visa access, airlift, digital discoverability, and products aimed to meet travelers where they are already operating. The second is representation: who is telling Africa's tourism story, in what rooms, through which platforms, and to whom. Too often, Africa's destinations are represented by intermediaries whose market incentives are not consistent with African-led growth, or are entirely absent from the distribution channels where high-value travel decisions are made. The third is intentionality: a clear, strategic decision by governments, destination management organizations, and private-sector operators to define what kind of travelers they want to attract and then design the full arc of the experience from discovery to return accordingly.

There is a compounding opportunity in this moment that African destinations cannot afford to miss. Sports, music, fashion, and gastronomy are driving a new generation of global travelers, many of them young, many of them of African descent, and most of them operating through networks of cultural trust rather than traditional travel retail. Events like the AfroFuture Festival and Basketball Africa League Playoffs/Finals have demonstrated what is possible when culture functions as a front door to a destination. These are not peripheral entertainment moments. They

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are proof of concept for a tourism strategy that treats contemporary African culture and heritage as complementary rather than competing propositions. The continent need not choose between aspirational modernity and ancestral connection. It needs destinations that can hold both, and the narrative infrastructure to communicate that to the world.

A fundamental shift is required. Africa's most powerful destinations must move from being subjects of other people's travel stories to being the authors of their own. That entails investing in the people and organizations that understand the markets being targeted. It means presence in distribution channels, including diaspora media ecosystems, luxury travel advisor networks, cultural platforms, and global trade conferences, where perceptions are formed, and decisions are made. And it means committing to the long arc of brand-building, which does not happen in a single campaign cycle, but develops over years of consistent, credible, and intentional engagement.

Africa's tourism sector does not suffer from a shortage of remarkable destinations. It suffers from a shortage of investment in the narrative ecosystem that would make those destinations globally legible, desirable, and chosen. That is the deficit the industry must resolve, as both a creative and an economic mandate.

The Transfer Is Not the Relationship: Why diaspora capital deserves more than a pipe

By Uzoma Dozie, Founder and CEO, Sparkle Microfinance Bank

Not long ago, at a dinner in London, I was talking to a young Nigerian working in tech. He sends money home every month, like clockwork. But that wasn't what he wanted to talk about. He wanted to know when he could buy shares in Lagos businesses from his phone. He had backed two startups back home. He streams Afrobeats daily, wears Nigerian designers, and follows Nigerian founders the way his father's generation followed Premier League scores. Then he asked me a question I haven't stopped thinking about: why is sending money home still the only financial relationship I'm offered?

He's right. And the industry hasn't caught up.

I saw the old model clearly during my Diamond Bank years. Diaspora banking was built on one assumption: money flows one way, home, to meet obligations. School fees. Rent. The roof on the family house. The product was the pipe, and the competition was about who had the cheapest, fastest pipe. That assumption made sense for a generation that related to the continent through duty. It does not describe the generation relating to it through identity, culture and ambition. The customer changed. The infrastructure didn't. Here's the uncomfortable truth: the transfer is the least interesting part of a remittance. Moving money is a commodity, and like every commodity it is being competed down to zero. The real value is in what happens after the money lands. Data creates information. Information creates insight. Insight drives better decisions. That chain is where the economics of diaspora capital actually live, and it's the part we've barely built.

At Sparkle, serving individuals and small businesses at the receiving end of these flows, we see the pattern every day. A single transfer lands and immediately fragments. Some goes to consumption. Some quietly funds a sister's shop inventory, a brother's generator, a cousin's market stall. The sender is, in effect, an angel investor in half a dozen micro businesses. But they have no visibility, no stake, no return. The capital is working hard. It just never compounds. And because it moves through channels that capture no context, nothing is learned. No credit history is built for the recipient. No track record is created for the business being funded. The money arrives; the intelligence evaporates.

So what's missing? Not better pipes. Imagination. What if the sender could see what their money actually builds? What if they could take a small ownership position in the shop they've been informally underwriting for years, with the protection of formal rails? What if the same flows that fund consumption today could build credit

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histories, surface investable businesses, and pay returns back to the diaspora tomorrow? None of this is science fiction. It's a data problem, and AI has collapsed the cost of solving it. An AI-native platform can turn raw transaction flows into insight at a fraction of what legacy systems spend, which means Africa doesn't have to retrace anyone else's path. We can leapfrog, building an ecosystem of smart working institutions rather than hard working ones.

There's a cultural dimension too, and it's the most obvious unbuilt opportunity on the continent. The same diaspora sending money home is driving global demand for African music, film, fashion and food. They are exporting the culture and funding it informally at the same time.

Connecting their capital to the production of the culture they're already amplifying is sitting right there, waiting for someone to build it. Regulators have a role to play: identity and trust that work across borders, and proportionate rules that let small-ticket diaspora investment flow without friction.

The diaspora has already made its decision. It wants more than a transactional relationship with the continent; it wants ownership, participation and a stake in the story. The question is whether African-built platforms will create the rails that let that value compound at home, or whether we'll watch it leak out through infrastructure designed elsewhere, for a relationship that no longer exists. Because the future of diaspora capital won't be measured by how much money comes home. It will be measured by how much of home the diaspora can own.

If Bill Gates Started as Njeri Gates, Would We Even Have a Microsoft?

By Wangari Kebuchi, Africa Fiscal Policy Economist & Managing Director, Expertise Global

I asked this question during our panel session not to be provocative, but because it captures the conversation we keep circling. We talk about women's entrepreneurship, inclusion pipelines and gender-responsive budgeting. All of it matters. But a more important question remains: are Africa's economic systems designed to let Njeri scale?

I do not think they are. Not yet.

Across Sub-Saharan Africa, women spend more than three times as many hours on unpaid care work as men, every single day. Cooking, caring for children and elders, running the household. In Kenya, the national statistics office estimates this invisible labour is worth 23.1% of GDP. From Lusaka to Lagos, the pattern is the same. The geography changes; the burden does not. And this matters because time is the one resource you cannot borrow. A woman spending five hours on care work before sunrise is not spending those hours pitching investors, building supplier relationships or negotiating contracts. It is not a personal failing. It is a system quietly taxing half the population before the working day begins.

Africa has the highest rate of female entrepreneurship in the world. One in three women on this continent is starting or running a business, according to the African Development Bank. And yet in 2025, women-led startups received less than 1% of all venture capital invested across Africa, the lowest proportion recorded since anyone started counting. Boston Consulting Group found women-led businesses in Africa generate twice the return per dollar invested compared to those led by men. The women building real businesses are still being turned away at the door. The International Finance Corporation puts the financing gap for African women entrepreneurs at $42 billion. The ambition across this continent is not in question. The conditions surrounding it are.

And those conditions are not set by investors

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alone. Private capital follows public frameworks. Where the rules are stacked against one, no pitch deck fixes it. Which is why the next fight is not in a pitch room. It is in the budget.

Where Budgets Tell the Truth
If you want to know what a government actually values, read the budget. Across Africa, beautifully worded strategies for women's economic inclusion exist. Then fiscal pressure arrives and those line items quietly disappear while other spending continues.

Kenya's procurement programme, which reserves 30% of government contracts for women, youth and people with disabilities, is one of the more serious attempts on the continent to use state purchasing power as an economic lever. But winning a government contract and being able to finance and deliver it are two entirely different things. Women win the tender, then cannot get a bank to advance them working capital against it. Government payments arrive late, sometimes many months late.

Nigeria tells a similar story at a bigger scale. Public procurement accounts for up to 15% of Nigeria's GDP, but less than 15% of those contracts reach women-owned businesses. Kaduna State recently passed a Gender-Responsive Procurement Policy and early results show promise: over 650 women-led businesses have secured new contracts through targeted reform. The gap between policy intent and economic reality however remains wide.

South Africa pioneered this work earlier than almost anyone. The Women's Budget Initiative launched in 1995, making it one of the first countries in the world to attempt gender-responsive budgeting. Three decades later, the 2025 Gender Budget Statement was described by analysts as a step forward, one becoming a symbolic document, relying on labelling spending rather than examining whether the budget actually changes outcomes for women. The longest history has not yet produced the deepest change.

The serious question, in Nigeria, South Africa, Kenya and everywhere else, is not whether women appear in a development plan. It is whether money actually moves, reaches the right people and produces measurable results.

Participation without asset ownership still leaves women economically vulnerable. The conversation must move from getting women into rooms to getting capital into women's hands.

Visible to Powerful
The Summit asked us to think about the distance between presence and participation. I would push further and ask about the distance between participation and power.

Walk into most major African corporations, financial institutions or government ministries and you will find women in the room. You will also find, if you look at who controls budgets, signs off on investment decisions or shapes policy, a very different picture. Our own Expertise Global research with Co-Impact on women in Kenya's banking sector found men and women enter the industry at nearly the same rate. By mid-career, women have dropped out in significant numbers, not because they lacked ambition or ability, but because the structures around them made staying and rising too costly. Rigid working hours. No senior women to learn from. Care responsibilities nobody else was sharing. The pattern holds across financial sectors continent-wide.

Rwanda offers the clearest evidence of what changes when women hold actual institutional power. It became the first country in history with a majority-female parliament. Women currently hold 63.8% of seats in the lower house, and by 2024, occupied 50% of cabinet positions. The IMF has described Rwanda's gender inclusion as central to its economic strategy. And the legislation followed: land rights, criminalisation of marital rape, extended maternity leave, and gender budget statements across government ministries all passed in the years after women entered legislative leadership. Rwanda ranked second in Africa on the World Economic Forum's 2024 gender parity index. Representation at the top of institutions, it turns out, changes what institutions do.

So what does real change look like?

It starts with recognising care as economic infrastructure, not a domestic arrangement. In December 2025, Kenya became the first country among Africa's 54 nations to adopt a formal National Care Policy. Investing in childcare, reliable public transport and community care

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systems frees up the hours women are currently subsidising with their own time. This is not charity. It is the foundation on which everything else is built.

It also means making sure women can use the opportunities governments say they have created. Procurement quotas are a good idea. They need to be matched with faster payment systems, simpler processes and access to working capital so businesses winning contracts can actually deliver them.

And it means being honest about where decisions really get made. Women need to be shaping budgets, directing investment flows and sitting on the committees where monetary policy is decided, not advising from the outside. Influence borrowed from proximity to power is fragile. Influence built into institutional decision-making is durable.

Back to Njeri. She has the vision, has done the work and has built something tangible. The question for Africa's institutions, investors and governments is whether they have genuinely built the conditions for her to scale. The answer will shape this continent's next decade more than any individual founder's brilliance ever could.

To see more of our work and to partner with us: https://expertiseglobal.org/ and https://wangarikebuchi.com/

Seeing Africa's Creative Industries as a Business

By Ken Osei, Principal Investment Officer – Manufacturing & Consumer Services - International Finance Corporation (IFC)

Africa's Creative Industries, which includes fabric and fashion design, music and dance, arts and crafts, film and movie making, sports and entertainment, are an important contribution to the Continent's heritage, image, identify, and economy.

Nigeria's movie industry, also known affectionately as "Nollywood," is the second largest globally, with estimated economic value of ~$6.5b.

Africa's Creative Artists, including those from the African diaspora in the Caribbean Islands, South and North America, Europe and beyond, have made an indelible mark on global fashion, arts, sports, and entertainment. Vibrant colors, avant-garde styles, jewelry, afro beats music and videos, are all part of everyday life around the world. African Athletes and entertainers are celebrated as global icons.

Examples of renown African creative "artists" are everywhere including the flamboyant football player Jay Jay Okacha, musicians such as Manu Dibango, the father of Soul Makosa, whose chants were from his song "Soul Makosa" were included in Michael Jackson's award winning hit song, "Wanna be Starting Something", fashion designers such as Anifa Mvemba and Imane Ayissi, and NBA all-star great, Hakeem "the Dream" Olajuwon.

Creative industries should therefore provide greater economic value and societal benefits to Africans including those in the diaspora globally.

Achieving this economic value, will require creative "artists" to recognize that their craft, is indeed a business, and must be seen in a business context, to attract the required level of funding and investment.

As with all business enterprises, creative artists must deliberately include in their plans the essential aspects of intellectual property ownership, including the registration and protection of their creations, funding and investment, procurement, production, marketing, sales, and distribution, monetizing and eventually

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harvesting of invested capital and efforts. Creative artists could lean on concepts from other industries.

For example, Ghana, the world's second largest grower of cocoa, an ingredient that is at the core of a multi-billion-dollar industry of chocolate and confectionery, sells the crop grown by individual farmers, through a single entity; the Cocoa Board. (https://cocobod.gh/).

Kenya's leading tea exporter is the Kenya Tea Development Agency (https://ktdateas.com/), a company owned by 600,000 small-holder farmers, which serves as an aggregator for the farmers, providing them access to markets, economic scale and supplier power to customers, and buyer power in sourcing and procurement of inputs.

Each individual cocoa farmer in Ghana, or tea grower in Kenya who is part of KTDA, would face significant challenges in accessing customer markets globally, purchasing their fertilizer and pesticides individually, obtaining and working capital, own their own, without the benefit of the scale provided by Cocoa Board or KTDA.

Africa's creative artists and artisans should consider similar business models, to achieve scale and scalability, gain access to investment capital, procurement of supplies, registration and protection of intellectual property rights, access to markets, and the economic benefits that can result from that.

Creative industries require patient capital, which provides a source of funding during the "creation period," which has a "long runway," during which the "art form," is not generating income. Creatives also require working capital for day-to-day business, such as purchasing of supplies, payment for the distribution of goods and services such as fabric, paint, media, maintenance of movie making equipment, etc.

Investment capital required economies of scale to be deployed efficiently, and to reduce risk.

As with the cocoa farmers of Ghana who sell their cocoa through Cocoa Board, and the Tea Key growers of KTDA, access to finance and investment capital, for "creatives" will likely be more readily achieved through the collective, which provides the scale, through which a provider of investment and working capital, can efficiently deploy and manage funds.

This pooling of "creative artists" into commercial "aggregators" could help pool risk assessment for investors and providers of funding because the aggregation of risk, can serve as a risk mitigant, because the "portfolio" of artists collectively, will have lower risk, than the risk of each individual venture or individual.

Creative artists such as movie makers, music producers and artists, clothing designers, entertainers, could consider establishing "aggregation vehicles," that are commercial in nature, not merely trade associations established by government. These commercial entities can in turn procure legal services for the collective, on matters such as copyright registration and protection, enabling them to have copyrights, trade, and service marks for their creation.

The economies of scale from IP registration and protection for the collective from a handful of law firms, will provide greater protection than each individual artist trying to negotiate with distribution outlets such as Netflix, Spotify, etc.

Fabric and fashion makers must protect the rights to their designs and be in a stronger position to negotiate production agreements with manufacturers of garments who manufacture at scale, on their behalf.

Colorful outfits, made from Africa's unique designs and fabrics such as batik and Kente cloth, are now manufactured and sold by factories outside the continent, with no financial benefit to the designers, including royalties, etc. This is often not the fault of the garment manufacturer, because there was no copyright protection nor trademark for the product they are selling.

Once established, the "aggregators' can partner with financial institutions such as Development Finance Institutions, who can in turn mobilize resources from intermediaries, including venture capital firms, investment funds, sovereign wealth funds, etc. to provide a mix of equity-like investment capital, and other financial institutions such as fintechs for working capital, and debt finance at the appropriate stage in the life cycle of the business. Institutional partners could then help facilitate access to advisory

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services (e.g., legal, and accounting, tax, etc.), to support the industry players, and help the creatives monetize and unlock the value they create. Creatives are also often entrepreneurs, owners of family businesses, and are at distinct stages in their development. These aspects can be catered for in a collective, rather than as individual businesses.

Creatives could also increase the potential size of the market for their products, by considering the global African diaspora, as both a marketplace and a source of innovation, inputs, and suppliers. For example, the conga drum, a musical instrument of African origin, music such as reggae, Soca from the Caribbean, Afrobeats, rap, hip hop, which are all part of current genre, are all African origin. African creatives should not underestimate the potential value of their business, especially as a collective.

Creatives must look beyond sentiment and seek a commercial benefit for the important economic and social contribution they make to Africa and the world.

Hold the Pen: Africa's Ownership Problem — and the Case for Owning the Narrative

By Neneh Diallo, Founder & Creative Director, The NDG Agency

Who gets to tell the story of Africa's rise?

That is the question at the center of African soft power. Because Africa's soft power will never be fully realized if Africans are not in charge of the narrative.

For too long, the continent has been interpreted for the world by outsiders. Our histories have been written through other people's lenses. Our crises have been amplified while our complexity has been flattened. Our potential has too often been described as something waiting to be discovered, unlocked, saved, or validated by someone else.

But Africa is not waiting to be discovered. The world already dances to Africa's rhythm. It watches our stories. Wears our prints. Streams our music at 3 a.m. in Seoul, São Paulo, London, Lagos, and New York.

And yet, too often, the value flows somewhere else.

After sitting with the conversations from the Africa Soft Power Summit in Nairobi this May, one idea has stayed with me: Africa does not have a soft power problem. Africa has an ownership problem. And ownership begins with narrative. Who tells the story determines what the world sees — and what the world sees determines what gets funded, protected, celebrated, and believed.

If Africa is always narrated by others, even its rise can be packaged as someone else's discovery. So, the question is not whether the world is paying attention. It is. The question is whether Africans will own the story the world is now consuming.

Soft power is the ability to attract rather than force. African people have lived it for centuries. Music. Food. Fashion. Language. Rhythm. Beauty. We have always known how to move people. Hollywood did not become powerful because America made movies. It became powerful because America owned the studios, rights, distribution, and platforms that carried those stories across the world. The power was in the systems around the culture. Culture without ownership is influence without return.

This is no longer a story of emergence. Afrobeats isn't "rising." Nollywood isn't a footnote. African fashion isn't a niche reference. Our food, slang, choreography, language, and visual codes are moving through the world with force. The African "swag" is not the issue.

The issue is what happens after the world consumes it. If African creators are celebrated while African platforms remain weak, if African stories travel while African IP is underprotected, if African aesthetics become global currency while African institutions do not capture the value, then we have simply supplied the raw

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material.

And we know this pattern too well.

Africa produces the cocoa, but not enough of the processed chocolate. The minerals, but not enough of the finished technology. The culture, but not enough of the platforms that monetize it. Even the map has been part of the story.
Most of us grew up seeing the world through the Mercator projection, where Africa appears smaller than it is. But Africa is not small. You can fit the United States, China, India, Japan, Mexico, and much of Europe inside the continent. The map shaped imagination. It made Africa look peripheral when, in truth, it is central.

A continent of 54 countries, thousands of languages, rich cultural and intellectual traditions, vast natural resources, and the world's youngest population has been compressed into a handful of familiar narratives: Poverty. Conflict. Corruption. Aid. And, of course, potential. Rarely power.

I have spent much of my career working at the intersection of communications, culture, and global development, and I have seen how narratives shape what happens next. The stories told about a place influence who invests there, who travels there, whose expertise is valued, and who is invited into the room as a partner rather than treated as a problem to be solved.

Narrative is currency. It is not just about better headlines or more flattering documentaries. It is about who gets to define the frame. Who gets to decide what Africa is, what Africa needs, what Africa lacks, and what Africa can become.

Long before Burna Boy sells out a stadium, someone else has often already decided what "African" means in a donor strategy, a credit rating memo, an investment brief, or a development report. Those documents shape financing, policy, risk perception, and whose ideas get funded.

Africa cannot own its cultural narrative while outsourcing its policy narrative. For years, the development world has used the language of "country ownership." On paper, it sounds right. African governments set their priorities, and partners align behind them. In practice, the reality is more complicated.

Sometimes ownership means African leaders endorse a framework already written elsewhere. Sometimes "technical assistance" means outside consultants shaping policy options before a government ever gets to choose. Sometimes donor systems sit beside national systems, pulling attention away from the institutions they claim to strengthen.

And the pen matters. The person who writes the diagnosis often controls the solution. So what does ownership look like in practice?

- Africa must build and control more of the cultural infrastructure — streaming platforms, studios, publishing houses, labels, festivals, archives, rights management systems, and distribution networks. These are not luxuries. They are economic infrastructure.

- Africa must protect and finance creativity like the asset class it is. Copyright systems need teeth. Collection societies need credibility. Investors and development finance institutions need to stop treating the creative economy as decoration and start treating it as trade, jobs, exports, and power.

- Africa must build independent policy and narrative capacity — African-led research institutions, media platforms, think tanks, data centers, and advisory firms strong enough to challenge imported assumptions and produce homegrown analysis from first principles.

Ownership is not real until the diagnosis, not just the delivery, is African.

It will not trend as quickly as a viral dance. But it is what determines whether soft power becomes economic power, whether influence becomes leverage, whether attention becomes ownership. The world is already dancing to Africa's rhythm. We do not need to ask for attention. We have it.

The next chapter of African soft power must be about something bigger: Africans deciding what the world sees when it looks at us — and having the platforms, capital, and institutions to make that vision impossible to ignore. This time, we must not simply be the story. We must hold the pen.

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Capital That Compounds: Rebuilding How Africa Funds Its Creative Economy

By Mildred Okwo, Founder, GlazedLens Media & The Audrey Silva Company

By now, we all know that Africa does not have a talent problem. It has a capital architecture problem. We export our stories, sounds, designs, and likenesses and import it back as finished product, monetized on someone else's balance sheet. The question all through the Summit was not whether African creativity has value. That is settled. The question is who truly understands how to captures that value, and whether it compounds for Africans or for others who have long benefited from extracting raw material from Africa.

If the ambition is to ensure value compounds for Africans, then funding the creative industry cannot be treated as charity, grant-cycle goodwill, or a cultural side-event to the "real" economy. It must be treated as infrastructure as deliberately built as roads, water supply, or power. As I stated during my panel session, talent is something we have in abundance, a gift from God, it is imperative that we finally learn how to monetize this talent for the sake of generations of Africans to come.

The recommendations below are offered in that spirit. This to me is a reset of how capital meets creativity on this continent.

Five Recommendations

1. Build creative capital vehicles designed for IP, not collateral

The reason a filmmaker in Lagos or a studio in Nairobi cannot raise money is structural. African lenders ask for land and machinery, when our assets are rights, catalogues, and audiences. We need purpose-built instruments like revenue-based financing, catalogue-backed lending, slate funds, and completion guarantees that underwrite intellectual property as the asset class it already is.

For example, at Glazedlens Media, we have a slate of 4 feature films curated for commercial and critical success to be produced under a Special Purpose Vehicle lead by renowned leading African Directors Mildred Okwo & Shirley Frimpong Manso. We strategically selected the portfolio to dominate both local & Diaspora box office and attract international streaming deals. International streamers won't touch this slate unless we have financial backing, but financiers won't touch it unless we have a streamer guaranteeing that they will buy it. Who will bell the cat?

A slate of films spreads risk across different genres, budgets, and release windows. If one film underperforms, another may break out, a third may find a long tail on streaming, and a fourth may generate licensing or sequel revenue. This diversification smooths volatility and should improve the ability to secure debt or gap financing but our average financial companies do not see this. They would rather take the short term "buying and selling mentality" route.

Development finance institutions and sovereign funds should anchor first-loss capital in blendedfinance structures so commercial investors can follow. The goal is patient, recyclable capital that stays invested across a creator's career, not just one-off grants.

2. Make IP ownership and value retention non-negotiable

Too many African creators sign away their rights to access distribution, then watch the upside accrue offshore for decades. Funding should come with a floor, not just a ceiling: deal terms that keep ownership, back-end participation, and equity in African hands. Platforms and co-producers entering the continent should be required by policy and by negotiating discipline to structure for shared ownership and local value retention. Rights are the compounding engine. A catalogue owned is a catalogue that pays for the next decade of production; a catalogue surrendered pays someone else.

3. Fund the infrastructure between talent and audience

Capital alone does not scale a film or a fashion label, distribution does. The missing middle is infrastructure: studios and post-production facilities, payment and rights-management rails,

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data on what audiences watch and buy, and distribution pipelines that reach the 1.4 billion-person continental market and the global diaspora. Investment should flow not only to individual projects but to the platforms, pipes, and pan-African distribution networks. It is astonishing that our financial sector still hesitates to fund capital projects that would carry our creative products to the consumer. Nigeria's telecom companies have, for years, sat on the perfect infrastructure to distribute short films to millions of subscribers and treated the opportunity more like a pest to be kept at arm's length.

4. Use policy as an investment lever, not a press release
Governments shape creative capital whether they intend to or not through tax treatment, co-production treaties, rights enforcement, foreign-exchange rules, and procurement. The levers do exist but are simply underused. Production incentives and rebates, robust copyright enforcement, intra-African co-production agreements, and creative-economy carve-outs in trade frameworks such as the AfCFTA would de-risk private capital at scale.

5. Measure success by ownership, not output
If we measure the creative economy only by titles produced, jobs counted, or screens filled, we will mistake activity for progress. The metric that matters is retained value. What share of the revenue, the rights, and the long-tail earnings stays on the continent. Funders, institutions, and ministries should report against ownership and value-retention benchmarks, not vanity volume. Nollywood is the world's second-largest film industry by volume, yet earns a fraction of what that output suggests because for decades value was captured through flat-fee sales and, now, rights signed to platforms in perpetuity. We are the envy of the world on titles produced and an afterthought on value retained.

The Compounding Imperative
Compounding is the most powerful force in finance and the one Africa's creative economy has been systematically denied. Every time a right is sold cheap, a catalogue is signed away, or a creator is funded once and abandoned, we reset the curve to zero. The opportunity in front of us is to let value accumulate: ownership building on ownership, catalogue financing the next catalogue, success replicating through shared infrastructure.

The Summit framed this as Africa's growth engine. I would put it more plainly. The creative economy is one of the few sectors where Africa already leads on the thing that matters most — the raw material of culture and imagination. We have spent a generation building the talent. The next decade must be spent building the capital architecture that lets Africans keep what they make.

That is what it means for value to compound for Africans. Everything else is detail.

EXTENDED REFLECTIONS

Building the Infrastructure African Fashion Needs

By Rukky Ladoja, Founder & Creative Director, Dye Lab
www.dyelab.ng | rukky@dyelab.ng | @dye_lab

When we started Dye Lab, we began with a question: could a fashion brand built on indigenous African textiles and traditional craft be genuinely profitable, scalable, and relevant to a global market? The assumption in most rooms was no. We believed otherwise, and we proved it.

Today, Dye Lab has sold over **70,000 products across 35 countries**, with a revenue growth of 119% from inception to date. What started as a hypothesis is now a business with the numbers to back it.

We began as an exploration of indigenous textile practices and the ingenuity of local artisans working with techniques that have existed for generations and adapting them for contemporary life. Every fabric, dye, stitch, and panel became an opportunity to demonstrate that products made in Africa can be beautiful, globally relevant, and drive fashion innovation.

As the brand grew, we began to see a larger challenge. And as first movers, we could not look away from it.

The Infrastructure Gap

Across Africa, there is no shortage of talent, resources, or ambition. Yet many of the systems needed to support long-term industrial growth remain fragmented. Traditional knowledge rarely connects to formal research. Manufacturing often operates separately from the communities and ecosystems that sustain it. And perhaps most pressing: finding well-trained tailors, dyers, and textile workers is a struggle shared by every brand operating in this space. We are all drawing from the same shallow pool, because the systems needed to deepen it have never been built.

As a result, much of the value generated from African resources, knowledge, and creativity leaves the continent before it can compound locally.

A First-Mover Responsibility

What we are building at Dye Lab has no clear precedent in our context. We are first movers and we are aware of it. The approaches we are developing, the systems we are putting in place, and the problems we are choosing to confront are already being observed and replicated. That is both a validation and a weight.

Being first means we cannot afford to look away from the problems embedded within our own production cycle. Every decision we make about how we dye, how we dispose of water, how we train our workforce sets a precedent.

We do not have the luxury of treating these as secondary considerations to be solved later. They must be built into the foundation of what we are creating.

That is the spirit in which this project was designed: not simply to build a factory that works for Dye Lab, but to build infrastructure that demonstrates what responsible, scalable, African-owned production can look like and that others can learn from, adapt, and build upon.

The Next Chapter

In Ibadan, we are building more than a production facility. We are building an ecosystem designed to strengthen multiple parts of the textile value chain while creating opportunities for learning, innovation, and sustainable growth.

At the heart of the project is a simple belief: Africa should not only supply raw materials to the world. We should also own more of the value created from them.

The campus brings together several interconnected systems. A dedicated dye farm will cultivate indigenous plants such as indigo and hibiscus, creating a more reliable and traceable source of raw materials. A production house will bring fabric dyeing, garment manufacturing, warehousing, and dispatch operations into one integrated environment. There will be research and training facilities dedicated to advancing sustainable dyeing techniques and exploring new possibilities for African textiles, while water treatment and recycling systems will help us reduce waste, reuse resources, and minimize the environmental impact of production.

EXTENDED REFLECTIONS

Most importantly, there will be people.

The project includes spaces for artisans, researchers, students, designers, and visitors to learn from one another. We are creating an ecosystem where traditional knowledge and contemporary innovation exist side by side. A place where an artisan can refine a centuries-old technique while a researcher explores how that same process can meet the demands of modern production.

That exchange matters.

Too often, conversations about industrialisation focus exclusively on machinery and output. Those things matter, but industries grow when people, knowledge, and opportunity grow alongside them. Strong industries require systems that preserve skills, encourage experimentation, and create pathways for future generations to participate.

Solving the Skills Crisis
One of the most persistent and under acknowledged challenges facing African fashion is the shortage of well-trained artisans; skilled tailors, dyers, pattern makers, and textile specialists who can meet the demands of growing production at scale.

This is not a Dye Lab problem. It is an industry-wide problem. Every brand, every manufacturer, every designer working on the continent is navigating the same gap.
We are all competing for the same limited pool of skilled hands, and that scarcity constrains what is possible for all of us.

The training infrastructure embedded in this project is one of its most critical functions. Not a supporting feature, but a primary reason the factory is being built the way it is. We are creating a dedicated environment for artisans to be trained, for techniques to be documented and passed on, and for new generations of practitioners to enter the textile industry with real skills and real pathways.

We also intend for this to be a shared resource. Designers, manufacturers, and brands who face the same skills shortage are welcome to engage with what we are building, to train alongside us, to place apprentices with us, and to draw from the same talent pipeline we are investing in creating.

If we are serious about growing African fashion as an industry, the skills infrastructure must grow with it.

Sustainability Built In
We believe sustainability should not sit on the sidelines as an afterthought. It should be built into the way we design, grow, and operate from the beginning.

The environmental impact of fashion is well documented. Textile dyeing accounts for up to 20% of global industrial water pollution, while the fashion industry contributes roughly 10% of global carbon emissions. Yet many sustainability solutions remain inaccessible because they were not designed for the realities of African manufacturing.

We are approaching the challenge differently.

Dyeing at the scale we operate and intend to grow causes significant water pollution. We cannot ignore that. Our team is developing a closed-loop water management system that supports water reuse using locally sourced filtration materials. The factory will incorporate renewable energy, regenerative agricultural practices, and circular approaches to waste management.

We are combining indigenous knowledge, natural dye processes, resource-conscious production methods, and climate-friendly innovations to develop solutions that are both locally relevant and forward-looking.

An Open, Shared Resource
We also want this facility to serve the wider industry. Other manufacturers and brands who share a concern for environmental responsibility should not have to build this infrastructure from scratch on their own. We intend the water treatment and sustainability systems we develop to be accessible. A model that others can use, learn from, and adapt for their own operations.

What we build here should not stay here.

Open, Visible, Educational
We want the factory to be open, visible, and educational. Visitors can see where dye plants are grown, understand how fabrics are dyed,

EXTENDED REFLECTIONS

engage with artisans, and follow the journey from raw material to finished product. In doing so, we hope to reconnect consumers with the people, processes, and ecosystems behind what they wear.

Scale and Impact
At full scale, the project is expected to create more than 600 direct jobs, train over 300 artisans in sustainable textile production, and reduce production costs through greater vertical integration. More importantly, it aims to demonstrate what becomes possible when production, agriculture, research, education, and community development are designed as a single interconnected system.

A Model, Not Just a Factory
For us, the Dye Lab factory represents a shift in how we think about value creation.

The future of African fashion will not be built by brands alone. It will be built by ecosystems. It will depend on our ability to connect knowledge, manufacturing, culture, education, and commerce in ways that create lasting opportunities for communities.

That is what we are building in Ibadan.

Not simply a factory, but a model for how African industries can grow with greater ownership, greater sustainability, and greater ambition.

The work is complex. It requires patience, experimentation, and long-term commitment. But if we want a future where more value remains on the continent and more Africans participate in creating that value, then we must be willing to build the infrastructure that future requires.

We are not waiting for that infrastructure to appear. We are building it. And because we are building it first, we are building it to be shared.





PART THREE:

Soft Power in Practice:

How influence becomes enterprise, institution, platform and recognition

Soft power gets discussed most often as something a place or a people simply has. In practice it is built, and the building happens in specific ways: in the deals cultural enterprises negotiate, in the systems institutions run day to day, in the decisions about whose work gets recognised and on what terms, and in the platforms built to carry a generation's images onto the global stage.

The sections that follow are deliberately different in kind. The ASP Culture Shifter Spotlight, an annual programme feature that puts African creative enterprises in front of the capital and institutions that determine their next stage of growth. The Human Systems Governance Framework developed from a decade of African workplace research. The ASP Climate Storytelling Fellowship & Photo Essay Prize, a platform that puts the visual voices of young African photographers in front of the institutions and audiences shaping the climate conversation. And the careers of three women honoured for what they constructed rather than what they won.



Africa Soft Power Culture Shifter Spotlight

2026 Focus: Dye Lab







ASP CULTURE SHIFTER SPOTLIGHT

Some of the most consequential outcomes of the Africa Soft Power Summit have begun outside the formal programme: in an introduction, a conversation over dinner, or an encounter between people who might otherwise never have occupied the same professional space.

Conversations at the 2022 Summit in Kigali, for example, helped lay the ground for NVH Studios' 2024 acquisition of Enda, Africa's first athletic shoe brand. The relationship began with proximity, timing and a shared sense of what might be possible.

The ASP Culture Shifter Spotlight gives that instinct a deliberate home within the Summit. Each year, the Spotlight focuses on an African enterprise that has already demonstrated commercial strength and cultural influence and is ready to think ambitiously about its next stage of growth. It brings that enterprise into direct conversation with investors, market institutions and potential partners who can open up new possibilities around capital, market access, partnerships and scale.

The format can change, from a fireside conversation or roundtable to a workshop or immersive encounter, but the purpose remains the same: to create the right environment for conversations and relationships that can help an already successful African business go further.

Each year, the Spotlight focuses on an African enterprise that has already demonstrated commercial strength and cultural influence and is ready to think ambitiously about its next stage of growth. It brings that enterprise into direct conversation with investors, market institutions and potential partners who can open up new possibilities around capital, market access, partnerships and scale.

In 2026, that enterprise was Dye Lab, a Nigerian fashion and lifestyle business that has built a significant following at home and internationally, including through global pop-ups. The Spotlight brought Dye Lab into conversation with leaders across capital, business and the wider ASP network to explore what its next stage of growth could look like.

Ultimately, the point is to make sure that the enormous cultural value Africa is creating translates into economic value for the businesses and people behind it.



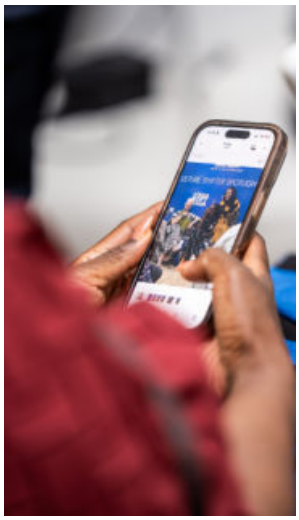



An Evening with Dye Lab
Scaling Culture into Global Growth | Friday, May 22, 2026

The 2026 Spotlight centred on Dye Lab, the Lagos-born fashion house whose founder has spent years building not just a brand but an argument: that creative identity and commercial ambition are not in tension, and that a business rooted in African craft and aesthetic intelligence can reach global scale without losing either.

The evening opened with a fireside conversation between Rukky Ladoja, Founder, Dye Lab and Beverley Spencer-Obatoyinbo, Independent Non-Executive Director of Standard Chartered Bank

ASP CULTURE SHIFTER SPOTLIGHT



Kenya, before a gathering of senior institutional investors, capital-market leaders and creative-economy practitioners. Guests then encountered the brand's latest collection through an immersive presentation of its craftsmanship, design language and storytelling, with the opportunity to acquire pieces directly.

The recognition gap, named by the institutions positioned to close it
The most revealing aspect of the evening was not Dye Lab's case alone, but the response it elicited from the institutions represented in the room. The discussion exposed the distance that remains between recognising an African enterprise's cultural and commercial relevance and possessing the financial instruments required to support its growth.

Several participants arrived already converted as consumers but acknowledged that their institutions still lacked clear pathways for engaging as financiers.

Temi Popoola, Group Chief Executive Officer of the Nigerian Exchange Group, described discovering Dye Lab through his wife's wardrobe and encountering a devoted consumer following that existed almost entirely outside the frameworks through which his industry traditionally recognises commercial significance.

His observation extended beyond the brand. Younger Africans, he noted, remain largely absent from conventional capital markets, while the cultural energy evident in the room could not easily be explained, much less reproduced, through what he called "finance grammar". The exchange highlighted a widening distance between the businesses and communities generating contemporary cultural relevance and the institutions through which public capital has historically moved.

Popoola was equally candid about the structural challenge. Public markets generally expect mature businesses with formal boards, established governance systems, detailed financial disclosures and the capacity to meet continuing market obligations. An enterprise at Dye Lab's stage occupies a different point in its development.

The issue, therefore, is not simply persuading such businesses to approach existing markets. It is building more credible pathways between high-growth African enterprises and formal market infrastructure, while helping them develop the governance, reporting and institutional capacity required to access larger pools of capital over time.

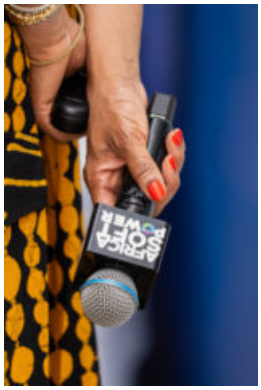
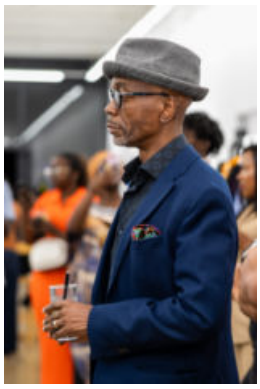


ASP CULTURE SHIFTER SPOTLIGHT

Heike Harmgart, Managing Director for Sub-Saharan Africa at the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, identified a parallel gap within development finance. Institutional investors, she argued, have not yet found the right model for investing early in African enterprises. Ticket sizes designed for infrastructure and real estate are often too large, while conventional equity instruments may require founders to dilute ownership and brand identity on terms that are unattractive or inappropriate for the businesses they have built.

Her proposal was not that African enterprises should remain outside institutional finance, but that finance itself must become more responsive. Venture debt, smaller ticket sizes, partnerships between different classes of investor and structures that do not demand an immediate equity stake could allow capital providers to engage businesses such as Dye Lab on terms that make sense for both sides.

She identified a public listing, with broad participation in the enterprise's success, as one possible long-term destination, while acknowledging that the financial instruments and institutional pathways required to reach it are not yet fully in place.





Why this matters

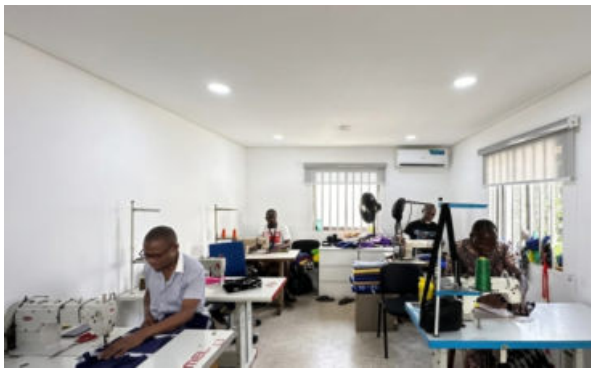
The Spotlight's recurrence is the point. A single encounter produces a conversation. A standing annual feature of the Summit produces a pattern, and patterns are what shift how capital understands a sector over time. The organisations that have historically struggled to price African enterprise are the same organisations best placed to build the instruments it needs – if they are in the room consistently enough for the gap to become undeniable.

Placing that enterprise and that capital in the same room, deliberately and repeatedly, is what makes the rest possible.

ASP CULTURE SHIFTER SPOTLIGHT



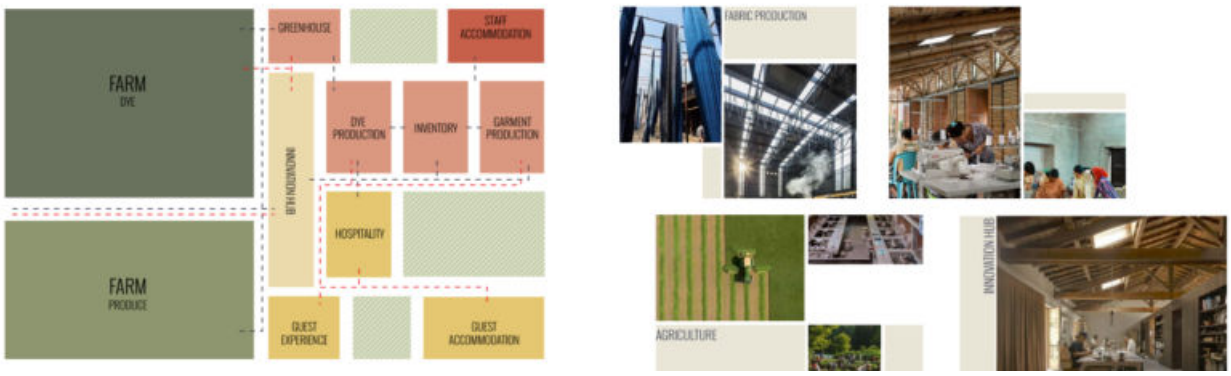
A cross-section of models featured in Dye Lab's signature Adire pieces



Dye Lab tailors in the production studio; skilled hands at every station



Fabric being worked from dyeing to production process



A model, not a factory



THE SYSTEMS THAT HOLD POWER

Why human systems governance belongs alongside financial, operational and compliance risk

Institutions are soft power assets. They shape how trust is built, how risk is read, how talent is held, and whether ambition can survive contact with everyday organisational reality. Credibility is built through systems that work consistently, decisions that hold, and the alignment between what an organisation says and what it actually does.

The Human Systems Governance Framework, developed by RDF Strategies from foundational research by African Women on Board, both part of the Africa Soft Power Group, examines that alignment. It makes visible the formal systems, informal dynamics and everyday behaviours through which institutions distribute opportunity, enforce accountability and sustain performance. It is included here because institutional credibility is one of Africa's soft power's foundations, not an adjacent concern.

THE HUMAN SYSTEMS GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK

What it is
A learning framework developed by RDF Strategies, drawing on African Women on Board's workplace research across African institutions since 2017.

What it addresses
The gap between an institution's formal systems and the informal dynamics and everyday behaviours that determine whether those systems hold in practice.

Why it matters
Talent retention, trust, advancement and accountability are institutional performance issues that rarely appear on a risk register.

How it works
A structured programme moving participants from personal awareness, to workplace relationships, to organisational systems – supported by baseline, embedded and endline assessment.

What organisations receive
A governance findings report setting out what the programme's own data reveals about how their institution operates in practice.

Most organisational risk registers are built to catch what can be counted: financial exposure, compliance breaches, operational failure. But a significant category of risk to institutional performance never appears on those registers at all. It shows up instead as disengagement, stalled careers, talent loss, quiet conflict, and decisions shaped more by informal influence than by stated policy. By the time it is visible enough to measure, it has usually already cost the organisation something.

This pattern is not unique to any one sector or institution type. It shows up in law firms and manufacturers, in banks and NGOs, in family businesses and public institutions alike – wherever an organisation's written policies and its everyday operating reality have quietly drifted apart.

These risks rarely have a natural home. HR owns policy and process, but not the informal authority that overrides it. Boards oversee financial and operational risk but rarely examine how decisions actually get made day to day. Culture initiatives describe shared norms but seldom trace how those norms translate into who advances, who is heard, and who is quietly excluded. What connects all of it is a single, underexamined discipline. Human systems governance is the deliberate design and oversight of the formal systems, informal dynamics and everyday behaviours through which institutions make decisions, distribute opportunity, enforce accountability and sustain performance. Until their interaction is examined directly, the risks they produce stay largely invisible to the people responsible for managing them.

Alongside the written rules, most institutions run a parallel operating system in which relationships, habits, hierarchy and discretionary judgement determine whether those rules hold in practice. The HSGF makes that second system visible to everyone inside the institution, regardless of role, seniority or department, and brings policy, behaviour and lived experience into closer alignment.

Drawing on foundational workplace research by African Women on Board, RDF Strategies developed the Human Systems Governance Framework as a structured, practical application of this thinking, helping institutions identify and address the human dynamics that conventional governance and risk systems often miss.

Policy is rarely the missing element. Alongside the written rules, most institutions run a parallel operating system in which relationships, habits, hierarchy and discretionary judgement determine whether those rules hold in practice. The HSGF makes that second system visible to everyone inside the institution, regardless of role, seniority or department, and brings policy, behaviour and lived experience into closer alignment.

THE HUMAN SYSTEMS GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK

Built from African institutional experience
Since 2017, AWB's work has examined workplace safety, leadership, reporting systems and the structural conditions that affect professional advancement across African institutions.

Although much of that research began with women's experiences, it revealed organisation-wide patterns. It showed how informal authority can override policy, how weak reporting systems protect power rather than people, and how discretionary decisions influence opportunity, performance and trust. Gender remains an important analytical lens within the HSGF, and the institutional questions the research exposed reach further, into how decisions are made, how standards are enforced, how influence operates, and whether organisational systems work consistently in practice.

The HSGF also draws on engagement with CEOs, executives, managers and HR leaders across the continent, rather than frameworks developed around different institutional conditions. That starting point produces a more accurate picture of how African institutions operate and what conditions are most likely to support meaningful change.

Seniority is the clearest example. Where it works well, it carries mentorship, sponsorship and protection. It becomes an informal governance structure when deference to senior status starts to shape whether concerns are raised, whether challenge is tolerated, and whether formal process holds where it conflicts with hierarchy. What gives it institutional weight in many African settings is that the authority attaches to the person rather than the post, so it operates across reporting lines and outlasts the roles that created it. Whether anyone can act on it depends on conditions the individual does not control: probation status, job insecurity, dependency on a single sponsor, or isolation from the networks that make alternatives possible. Examining those conditions alongside the dynamic itself, rather than assuming a framework built elsewhere will account for them, is part of what makes the HSGF Africa-grounded.

Why this is a learning framework, not an audit
The HSGF is structured as a learning experience rather than an audit. Audits can identify where a system has failed. What they rarely change is how people exercise judgement in the moment – in the day-to-day decisions, conversations, and trade-offs that determine whether a system actually holds.

The journey moves from personal awareness, to workplace relationships, to organisational systems, reflecting the way individual judgement is reinforced through interaction and eventually institutionalised through structures and norms. Participants develop the awareness, judgement and shared language needed to recognise and respond to these dynamics as they arise.

Making the invisible visible
Where reputation, trust and talent retention are inseparable from long-term competitiveness, the cost of unexamined organisational systems is rarely dramatic. It is, however, cumulative: the employee who quietly disengages, or the informal decision-making pattern that persists because no one feels able to challenge it.

What the HSGF offers is visibility – a structured, research-based way of understanding why these problems occur, and the practical capability to address them through the systems, decisions and behaviours of the institution itself. Participating organisations also receive a governance findings report drawing on baseline, in-programme and endline data to surface organisational patterns, track shifts in participant thinking, and flag signals segmented by employee group where relevant.

Institutions cannot govern what they cannot see. Human systems governance belongs alongside financial, operational, and compliance risk, as a core institutional capability in its own right.



Climate Storytelling as Soft Power

THE AFRICA SOFT POWER CLIMATE STORYTELLING FELLOWSHIP & PHOTO ESSAY PRIZE

Africa has a significant stake in the climate decisions of the next two decades. Adaptation, resilience, energy access and the financing of climate solutions are moving to the centre of global debate. The perspectives of the communities experiencing those shifts most directly remain, too often, absent from it.

The Africa Soft Power Climate Storytelling Fellowship and Photo Essay Prize exists to close that distance. It supports African and diaspora photographers aged 18 to 30 to document the climate realities reshaping their communities, and the ingenuity, adaptation and resilience emerging in response. Photography does what policy language often cannot: it makes complex climate realities human, visible and difficult to set aside.

The 2026 theme, *Lines of Survival,* asked them to work across three registers.

LIVING
What is changing in landscapes, livelihoods and everyday life.

ADAPTING
How communities respond, with ingenuity and locally led solutions.

IMAGINING
What more resilient futures could look like, and who gets to shape them.

A global platform:

1,140+
photographs submitted

30+
countries represented

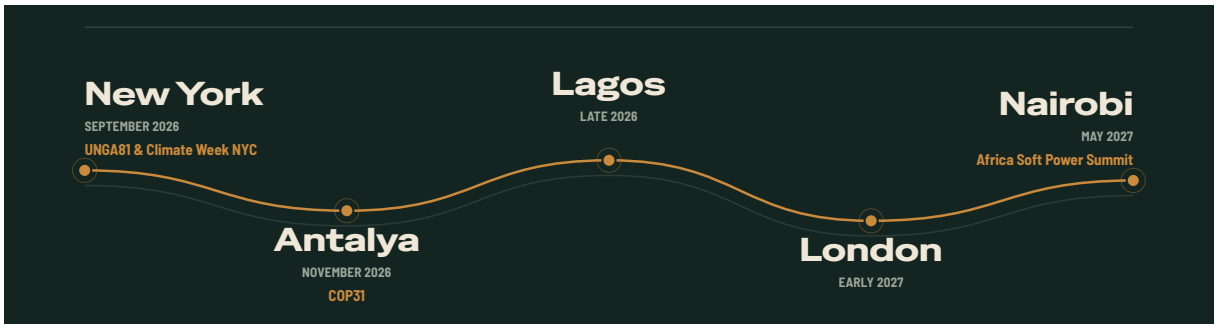
3rd
edition underway

3
continents exhibited

Across three editions, the Prize has grown into an international platform. More than 1,140 photographs have been submitted from over 30 countries, with selected work exhibited across Africa, Europe and the United States. In 2026, the programme enters its next phase, with an expanded Fellowship model and an international exhibition tour.

The Fellowship awards US$2,000 to the Winner, with a cash award for up to four Finalists, alongside exhibition, publication and other Fellowship opportunities.

The 2026 Exhibition Tour:



The 2026 exhibition tour opens opportunities for collaboration across venues, programming, media, logistics, travel, production, education and convenings. Organisations working across climate, culture, youth, energy, development, creativity or public engagement can help extend the platform's reach across New York, Antalya, Lagos, London and Nairobi.

For enquiries: curator@africasoftpower.com









The Africa Soft Power Gala & Awards

The Africa Soft Power Summit has always insisted that culture is not decoration on the edge of an economic argument. The Gala & Awards, the Summit's closing evening, is the most direct expression of that insistence. It is where the week's conversations move from analysis to recognition.

THE ASP GALA & AWARDS 2026

Soft power is shaped, among other things, by who a platform chooses to honour and why. The ASP Gala & Awards is the moment each year at which the Summit makes that choice explicitly: naming the individuals whose careers embody the arguments the report makes, and doing so in a room that brings together the investors, policymakers, cultural leaders and institutional actors best placed to carry those arguments forward.

The 2026 Gala took place at the JW Marriott Nairobi on the evening of Saturday, 23 May, bringing together the Summit's speaker community, delegates, partners and guests in a setting that wove African fashion, live performance and the awards programme into a single, curated close to four days of programming.

The evening honoured three women whose careers demonstrate what this report argues throughout: that African influence at the highest levels is not discovered. It is built, through discipline, institutions, sustained investment and the courage to create the spaces and structures that did not previously exist.

ASP Creative Legacy Award
Honouree: The late Koyo Kouoh

Presented by: David Kinyua, Chairman, Renaissance Capital
Received by: Neneh Diallo, Founder, NDG Agency

ASP Architect of Culture Award
Honouree: Bolanle Austen-Peters, Founder, Terra Kulture and Lagos International Theatre Festival; Artistic Director/ Producer, BAP Productions

Presented by: H.E. Zainab Hawa Bangura, Under-Secretary General and Director-General, United Nations Office at Nairobi

ASP Gold Standard Award
Honouree: Faith Kipyegon, three-time Olympic Champion

Presented by: George Odhiambo, Managing Director, National Bank of Kenya
Received by: Patrick Sang, Coach



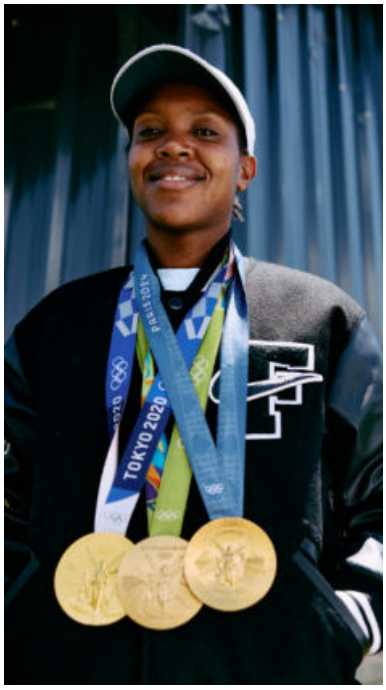




THE ASP GALA & AWARDS 2026







The Honourees

Koyo Kouoh
Soft power as institution-building
Born in Douala and raised in Switzerland, Koyo Kouoh was one of the most important curatorial voices of her generation. She founded RAW Material Company in Dakar, an institution that functioned as residency, academy, library and gallery, built on the conviction that African artists needed spaces of their own. Her later leadership at Zeitz MOCAA in Cape Town and her landmark exhibition When We See Us, which travelled to major European institutions, expanded the global conversation around Black figuration and African artistic memory. In December 2024, she was appointed to lead the 61st International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia, becoming the first African woman to hold the role. She died in Basel on 10 May 2025. The team she had assembled carried her exhibition to its opening exactly as she had planned.

Bolanle Austen-Peters
Soft power as cultural and commercial architecture
A lawyer by training, Bolanle Austen-Peters founded Terra Kulture in Lagos in 2003 as a cultural home for Nigerian art, language, literature and heritage. Through BAP Productions, she produced some of Nigerian theatre's most significant works, including Saro the Musical, Fela and the Kalakuta Queens and Moremi the Musical, demonstrating that African stories could command scale, sustain audiences and travel. Her film catalogue includes 93 Days, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti and House of Ga'a. The Terra Academy for the Arts continues to develop actors, writers, producers and technical crew across the wider Nigerian creative industry.

Faith Kipyegon
Soft power as sustained, systemic excellence
Raised near Keringet in Nakuru County, Faith Kipyegon is a three-time Olympic champion in the 1,500 metres, with gold medals from Rio, Tokyo and Paris. She holds world records across the 1,500 metres, 5,000 metres and the mile. Her career is defined not only by its achievements but by the consistency and discipline with which they have been built, making her one of the most compelling demonstrations of what African excellence looks like when it is supported by the right systems over the long term.

THE ASP GALA & AWARDS 2026

The Fashion Exhibition

The four brands featured at the Gala were not incidental to the evening. Each was chosen as a working expression of what the report's creative economy arguments look like in practice: African design intelligence meeting institutional attention, on African terms.

LilaBare
LilaBare is a Nairobi-based design house that produces consciously made clothing in small batches, working closely with artisans and makers throughout the production process. Rooted in contemporary design and traditional craftsmanship, the brand creates versatile, seasonless pieces designed for everyday wear and long-term use. Every garment reflects a thoughtful approach to materials, craftsmanship, and the people behind its creation.

Kezem
Kezem is a Rwandan fashion brand that celebrates the country's culture through contemporary design. Drawing inspiration from Rwandan traditions, the brand incorporates embroidery, beadwork, and print into collections that honour local craftsmanship while embracing modern silhouettes. Each piece reflects a connection to culture, identity, and storytelling.

1407 Style
1407 Style is a Nigerian androgynous fashion label known for clean lines, thoughtful tailoring, and versatile wardrobe staples. Its gender-neutral designs prioritise comfort, individuality, and ease of wear, offering pieces that move naturally across different styles, and identities.

Adele Dejak
Adele Dejak is a luxury African accessories brand that brings together art, fashion, and craftsmanship. Using locally sourced materials, the brand creates handcrafted jewellery and accessories with bold, sculptural forms. Each collection reflects African artistry while celebrating confidence, individuality, and contemporary design.











GALA & AWARDS
OPENING REMARKS
AFRICA SOFT POWER
GALA & AWARDS
MAY 2026
KENYA


GALA & AWARDS






















AFRICA
SOFT
POWER





PART FOUR:

Appendix



OVERVIEW
Africa Soft Power Summit 2026 | The Programme

WEDNESDAY
MAY 20TH

Opening Night
The Summit began with an evening gathering that set the tone for the days ahead. Speakers, delegates, and partners connected for an evening of casual conversation and introductions at one of Nairobi's most talked about restaurants.

THURSDAY
MAY 21ST

Leadership, Inclusion & Market Power
The first full day of the Summit examined power: who holds it, who accesses it, who builds with it, and how it shapes Africa's economic future.

Powered by African Women on Board, the day explored how capital is allocated, how markets function, how creative and digital sectors grow, and how demand and purchasing power reshape industries. Conversations centred on inclusion through SMEs, women's leadership, creative and innovation ecosystems, and financial access within the wider architecture of finance, enterprise, and market participation.

Women Unscripted: Off The Record
An intimate gathering in celebration of remarkable women shaping culture, business, creativity, and leadership across the continent and beyond. Away from the formal Summit setting, the evening brought together guests across industries for honest conversation and meaningful connection.

OVERVIEW

The Programme

FRIDAY
MAY 22ND

Creativity, Innovation, Capital, and Commerce

The second full day of the Summit examined how Africa's creative, technological, and cultural influence becomes investable value.

From AI and data ownership to diaspora capital, creator economics, and investment agendas, the programme asked what it takes to move from visibility to ownership, from cultural influence to market power, from global attention to durable economic value.

ASP Culture Shifter Spotlight: An Exclusive Evening with Dye Lab
Scaling Culture into Global Growth
An intimate, high-level evening with Dye Lab, one of Africa's most compelling fashion brands, exploring how locally rooted design excellence can power global scale. The evening opened with a fireside conversation with the founder, unpacking the journey of building a brand that balances creative identity with commercial growth.

Guests then stepped into the latest collection, an immersive encounter with the craftsmanship, design, and storytelling behind the brand, with opportunities to acquire pieces.

The evening offered a rare look at how culture becomes a competitive advantage and a scalable investment opportunity: how a locally rooted African brand builds toward long-term scale, institutional relevance, and global reach. More than a showcase, it was an example of ASP's wider proposition, creating the conditions for strategic access, sharper visibility, and new pathways into capital, partnership, and market expansion.

SATURDAY
MAY 23RD

ASP Gala & Awards

The Summit's red-carpet finale celebrated the talent, enterprise, leadership, and vision shaping Africa's creative economy and global influence. The fashion-forward evening featured award presentations, a live fashion exhibition, and live performances, bringing the Summit's ideas to life through recognition, entertainment, style, and cultural presence.

SATURDAY
MAY 23RD
⇌
SUNDAY
MAY 24TH

#MagicalKenya: Explore Nairobi & Beyond
Delegates stayed on for a curated journey into Nairobi and beyond. From private safaris and close encounters with wildlife to cultural immersions and bespoke city experiences, they were invited into a deeper, more exclusive perspective of one of Africa's most rewarding capitals.

Nairobi became more than the host city. It became part of the Summit experience: a living expression of African innovation, creativity, enterprise, conservation, and cultural energy.

Dye Lab | Shop the Collection
Guests stepped into the Dye Lab pop-up to shop a collection where heritage dyeing and printing techniques meet modern silhouettes made for real life. Culture you can carry home.

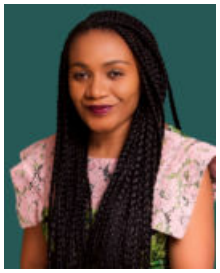






A global faculty shaping Africa-led conversations

The Africa Soft Power Summit brings together a distinguished, cross-sector speaker faculty spanning government, finance, technology, the creative industry, media, culture, and civil society.



Dr. Nkiru Balonwu
Founder & Creative Director, Africa Soft Power



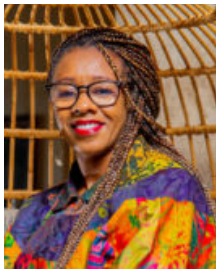
H.E. Zainab Hawa Bangura
Under-Secretary General & Director-General, United Nations Office, Nairobi (UNON)



Ms. Ummi Bashir, CBS
Principal Secretary, State Department for Culture, The Arts and Heritage

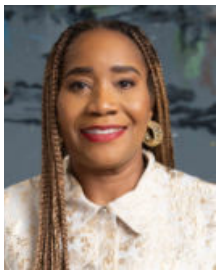


Dr Umaru Kwairanga
Chairman, The Nigerian Exchange Group (NGX)



Carol Abade
Chair, Advisory Council, Africa Soft Power; Group CEO, EXP

Designing Power: Women's Leadership as Economic Infrastructure



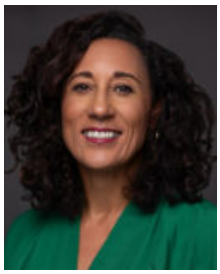
Uche Ofodile
CEO, MTN Benin



Joyce-Ann Wainaina
Managing Partner, Chui Ventures



David Kinyua
Chairman, Renaissance Capital



Michelle Moore
Change Agent, Leadership Coach, Author (Moderator)

Beauty, Aesthetics & Power: Building Africa's Beauty Economy Responsibly



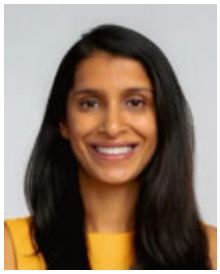
Vimal Shah
Chairperson, Bidco Africa



Cheryl Itemere Arunga
Head of Entrepreneur Experience, Endeavor Kenya



Dr Pranav Pancholi
Founder, Avane Clinic



Sneha Mehta
CEO, Uncover



Eniitan Tejuoso
Technical Adviser to Nigeria's Presidential Initiative for Unlocking the Healthcare Value Chain *(Moderator)*

From Presence to Participation: African Women and the Economics of Access



Catherine Muraga
MD, Microsoft Africa Development Center & Engineering Director, Microsoft



Tomiwa Aladekomo
CEO, Big Cabal Media; Publisher, TechCabal



Wangari Kebuchi
Founder & Managing Director, Expertise Global



Eme Essien Lore
Co-Founder, Wealth4Impact; Senior Advisor, ESG Africa



Obinna F. Okamgba
Director/Chief-of-Staff, UN Office at Nairobi *(Moderator)*

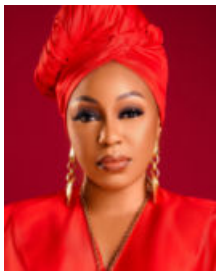
The Female Economy: Africa's Most Undervalued Growth Engine



Mapula Bodibe
CEO, MTN South Sudan



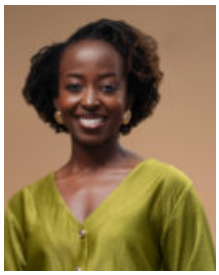
Rukky Ladoja
Founder & Creative Strategist, Dye Lab



Rita Dominic
Co-Founder, The Audrey Silva Company; Actor & Filmmaker



Wandia Gichuru
CEO, Vivo Fashion Group



Fiona Kemigisha
CEO, Khama Digital Content Hub ***(Moderator & Event Compère)***

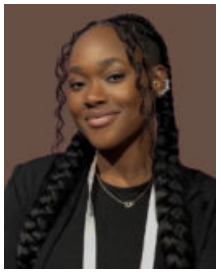
The AI Scramble: Who Owns Africa's Data, Talent and Digital Future?



Alex Okosi
Managing Director - Africa, Google



Snehar Shah
CEO, iXAfrica Data Centres



Charlette N'Guessan
Lead, Data Solutions, AI Ecosystem and Government Partnerships, Amini; Founder, Afrokwary; Founder & Fmr. CEO, BACE Group



Birju Sanghrajka
CEO & Head of Coverage, Corporate & Investment Banking, Standard Chartered Bank Kenya



Ugochukwu Obi-Chukwu
Founder/CEO, Nairametrics *(Moderator)*

From Remittances to Power: How the African Diaspora is Rewiring Global Influence



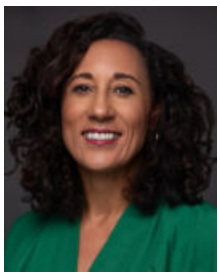
Esther Masese Waititu
Chief Financial Services Officer, Safaricom



Mamadou Mareme Diop
VP, Remittances, LemFi



Michael Eganza
Director, Banking and Payment Services, Central Bank of Kenya



Michelle Moore
Change Agent, Leadership Coach, Author *(Moderator)*

Soft Power & Capital: Who Shapes Africa's Investment Agenda?



Heike Harmgart
Managing Director for Sub-Saharan Africa, EBRD



Neneh Diallo
Founder, NDG Agency/Fmr. Chief Diversity Officer, USAID



Abraham Ongenge
Acting CEO, Stanbic Bank Kenya Limited

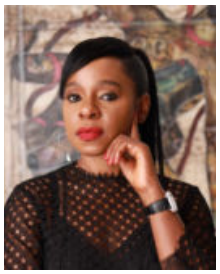


James I. Mwangi
Co-Founder & CEO, Africa Climate Ventures

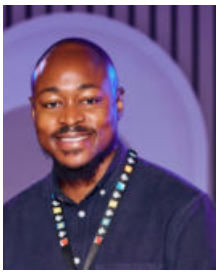


Innocent Isichei
CEO, ACIOE Associates
(Moderator)

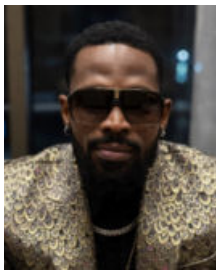
Creators as Economic Power: How Influencers, Artists & Storytellers Are Shaping Africa's Global Position



Bolanle Austen-Peters
Founder Terra Kulture and Lagos International Theatre Festival; Artistic Director/Producer BAP Productions



Brian Mogeni
Co-Founder & CEO, Wowzi



Oladapo 'D'banj' Daniel
Oyebanjo, Entertainer, Music Executive; CEO, The C.R.E.A.M Platform



Ken Osei
Principal Investment Officer – Manufacturing & Consumer Services - International Finance Corporation (IFC)



Mildred Okwo
Co-Founder, The Audrey Silva Company; CEO, GlazedLens Limited



Njoki Muhoho
Founder and Executive Producer, Zebra Productions Ltd (Moderator)

OVERVIEW

Speeches & Addresses

Opening Remarks | Conference Day 1
Dr. Nkiru Balonwu, Founder & Creative Director, Africa Soft Power

Good morning, everyone.

Welcome to Nairobi, and welcome to the seventh Africa Soft Power Summit.

Last night at the welcome event, I watched people who had never met before deep in conversation, exchanging numbers, ideas, recognising shared frustrations, and discovering unexpected alignment. And I remember thinking that this is how power actually moves. Not only through governments or institutions but through networks, trust and proximity.

For as long as I can remember, Africa's growth story has been discussed in fragments: finance in one room, creativity in another, technology somewhere else, and talent everywhere and nowhere at once. But serious economies do not develop in fragments. The countries and regions that shape the world align their capital with their culture.

Their talent with their markets. Their innovation with ownership. That alignment is what creates compound interest.

And that is the focus of this Summit. Not simply how Africa grows - but who captures the value of that growth. Who owns platforms. Who controls narratives. Who finances ideas early enough. And who benefits when African culture, talent, and innovation become globally valuable?

African influence is not the question. The question is whether that influence will translate into enduring economic power.

Over the next two days, we'll talk about leadership, creativity, capital, AI, commerce, governance, and markets. And underneath all of those conversations is one central challenge: How do we build systems that allow African value to compound - for Africans - over time?

That is the work. The good news is that many of the people needed to do that work are already in this room: leaders across finance, technology, AI, media, film, policy, innovation and creativity. People building markets, those shaping narratives and those financing the future.

Thank you for being here, and welcome to the Africa Soft Power Summit, 2026.

> **African influence is not the question. The question is whether that influence will translate into enduring economic power.**



OVERVIEW

Speeches & Addresses

Keynote Address | Conference Day 1
H.E. Zainab Hawa Bangura, Under-Secretary General and Director-General, United Nations Office at Nairobi

Excellencies, distinguished leaders, participants, partners, innovators, and friends,

It is a great privilege to join you at this important gathering here in Nairobi, a city that today stands at the intersection of culture, innovation, entrepreneurship, diplomacy, and continental ambition. As host to the United Nations Office at Nairobi, the only UN Headquarters in the Global South, we are proud to see this platform convene the thinkers, creators, investors, and leaders helping to shape Africa's future.

This summit comes at a defining moment for our continent. Across Africa, a profound shift is underway, one that recognizes that our greatest assets are not only beneath the ground, but within our people: our creativity, our ideas, our innovation, our stories, and our talent.

Indeed, Africa's creative, technology, finance, and knowledge industries are no longer peripheral sectors. They are emerging as powerful engines of growth, drivers of innovation, and instruments of global influence.

For too long, power was measured narrowly, through GDP, military strength, natural resources, or geopolitical weight. But the world is changing. Today, influence is increasingly shaped by the ability to shape narratives; inspire ideas; build trust; drive innovation; and mobilize people and partnerships around a common vision. This is the essence of soft power, and Africa possesses it in abundance.

From Nollywood to Afrobeats; from fintech innovation to fashion; from climate leadership to

Indeed, Africa's creative, technology, finance, and knowledge industries are no longer peripheral sectors. They are emerging as powerful engines of growth, drivers of innovation, and instruments of global influence.



digital entrepreneurship, Africa is no longer waiting to be discovered. Africa is actively reshaping global culture, commerce, and conversations. The outdated narrative of a continent defined solely by dependency, crisis, or vulnerability is steadily giving way to a far more accurate reality: a continent of dynamism, solutions, creativity, resilience, and opportunity.

Today, Africa is increasingly helping to shape global debates, not merely reacting to them. The question before us, therefore, is not whether Africa has influence. The question is: how do we convert that influence into sustainable economic power? The answer lies in integration. The Africa Soft Power Summit itself reflects this shift, bringing together finance, creativity, technology, policy, and human capital into one strategic conversation.

We must now deepen this integration across three critical fronts.

First, we must fully value Africa's creative and

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Speeches & Addresses

knowledge economies. Africa's cultural industries are far more than expressions of identity. They are economic ecosystems capable of generating jobs, exports, innovation, and global value chains. Unlocking this potential requires stronger intellectual property protections; greater access to finance for creatives and innovators; and expanded regional and global market access.

Second, we must harness innovation and digital transformation. Africa's technology ecosystem is among the fastest growing in the world. Digital finance, artificial intelligence, and data systems are not merely technological tools. They are catalysts for inclusion, productivity, efficiency, and scale. To succeed, however, we must ensure that digital infrastructure keeps pace with innovation; governance and regulatory frameworks build trust and inclusion; and African talent leads Africa's digital transformation.

Third, we must align policy, capital, and partnerships. Economic transformation does not happen in silos. Sustainable growth depends on coherent policy frameworks, investment-friendly environments, regional integration, and strategic public-private partnerships capable of unlocking catalytic investment at scale.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the United Nations, we do not see Africa as a continent of challenges. We see Africa as a continent of solutions, innovation, and immense human and natural potential. We are particularly proud that Kenya hosts one of the most diverse UN presences anywhere in the world. The United Nations in Kenya is, in many respects, a microcosm of the UN system itself, where virtually every dimension of UN work is represented, spanning development, humanitarian action, peace and security, climate action, governance, administration, and multilateral diplomacy.

With more than 90 UN offices in Kenya, including over 70 entities located within the UN Gigiri complex in Nairobi, this duty station has become a unique platform for global dialogue, regional cooperation, and multilateral engagement. The United Nations Office at Nairobi, which I have the privilege to lead, delivers administrative and support services to over 166 countries globally from Nairobi, Kenya, demonstrating the reach, efficiency, and opportunities that technology and global connectivity now make possible.

As the Secretary-General's representative in the region, I remain committed to advancing partnerships that amplify Africa's voice in global decision-making and strengthen collaboration across governments, the private sector, academia, civil society, and the creative economy. We firmly believe that Africa's rise must be African-led, people-centred, inclusive, and globally connected.

Excellencies, Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen, Africa's moment is no longer on the horizon. Africa's moment is here. But moments only endure when they are transformed into movements. We must therefore invest boldly in Africa's talent, innovation, and creativity; build institutions capable of converting ideas into capital and opportunity; ensure that economic transformation benefits women and youth alike; and tell our own stories, while fully owning the value they create.

Above all, Africa must move from being a consumer of global narratives to becoming an author of global transformation.

Let this summit mark a turning point: from cultural resonance to economic resilience; from influence to impact; from potential to prosperity. Together, we can ensure that Africa's soft power becomes not only a source of pride, but also a pillar of economic strength, resilience, and global leadership.

I thank you.

Asanteni sana.

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Speeches & Addresses

Remarks | Conference Day 1
Ms. Ummi Bashir, CBS
Principal Secretary, State Department for Culture, The Arts and Heritage

I'm delighted to join you this morning to welcome you to Nairobi as we host the 2026 edition of the Africa Soft Power Summit. Karibuni sana Kenya, karibuni Nairobi on behalf of the government of Kenya and more particularly the State Department For Culture, Arts and Heritage.

I warmly welcome leaders, creatives, innovators, policymakers and members of the diaspora who have gathered here from across Africa and beyond. And thank you for choosing Kenya as the home of this important conversation.

As the government of Kenya, we are proud to welcome you back home. Kenya is the home of human origins. Kenya is where Turkana Boy was found 40 years ago, aged 1.5 million years old. So, a fossil was found in Kenya in Turkana. And that is why we proudly say Kenya is the home of human origins. So welcome back home.

We are also the home of the United Nations headquarters where Africa is increasing her diplomatic footprint – slowly moving from the periphery to the center and that is why this summit matters to us as Kenya and as the Kenyan government.

The work of Africa Soft Power aligns closely with the mission of our state department as it seeks to elevate culture, heritage and the creative economy as drivers of development, collaboration and global influence.

The Africa Soft Power Summit has therefore become an important space for shaping how Africa tells its story, builds influence and creates opportunities through culture, creativity, innovation and also partnerships. I celebrate that this year's theme, "Africa's compound interest: aligning ecosystems of finance, creativity, and human capital for growth", reflects a simple but urgent proposition.



OVERVIEW

Speeches & Addresses

> **Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, today's focus on leadership, inclusion, and power markets speaks directly to the future.**
>
> **And we're working to build one where Africa's talent, ideas, and cultural capital are recognised as drivers of economic growth and global engagement.**

Africa's next advantage will not come from creativity, capital, innovation or inclusion working in isolation. It will come from the compounding effect created when these forces are all aligned.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, today's focus on leadership, inclusion, and power markets speaks directly to the future. And we're working to build one where Africa's talent, ideas, and cultural capital are recognised as drivers of economic growth and global engagement.

We speak often about innovation as though it were born in laboratories or recorded in service. But the deepest innovations in human history from M-Pesa to pharmaceutical breakdowns and breakthroughs that have saved lives have grown from the place where culture intersects with innovation. Culture is not a backdrop of development. It is the very foundation as captured in Article 11 of our constitution here in Kenya.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, as I conclude, I hope the discussions and partnerships formed over the coming days lead to lasting collaboration and also meaningful engagements. And this leads us to great outcomes across the continent and also across the diaspora.

Once again, I'd like to thank the organizers of the Africa Soft Power Summit. And I'd like to thank all those who have participated and made time this morning to be part of this conversation. We look forward to welcoming many of you back to Kenya again in the future.

Thank you so much, and welcome back home.



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Speeches & Addresses

Opening Remarks | Conference Day 1
Alhaji Dr. Umaru Kwairanga,
Chairman, NGX Group

Having taken all the protocols, let me welcome all the delegates to the second full day of the African Soft Power Summit, being held here in Nairobi, the beautiful capital of Kenya.

Let me also appreciate the Africa Soft Power Group for convening programmes that sit at the intersection of Africa's creative industries and its capital markets. This is timely and apt, given the growing global influence of African music, arts, and culture, as well as the renaissance of capital markets across Sub-Saharan Africa.

Today, we are asking what it takes to move Africa's creative, technological, and cultural influence from visibility to ownership, from global attention to durable economic value.

> **The creative economy in Africa is one of those hidden gems. Given the increasing popularity of our arts, our music, and our movies, African financial institutions need to take the creative and innovation economy seriously as an asset class, rather than merely a cultural footnote.**

That question matters to the capital market because one of its basic functions is to match investors who have funds to invest with viable investment opportunities. In doing so, it creates value for entrepreneurs, investors, and the economy at large.

To perform that function effectively, capital market operators need to identify viable opportunities and products ahead of the curve, and find ways to properly structure them, prepare them for funding, and enable their monetization.

The creative economy in Africa is one of those hidden gems. Given the increasing popularity of our arts, our music, and our movies, African financial institutions need to take the creative and innovation economy seriously as an asset class, rather than merely a cultural footnote.

Yes, in recent years, some individual artists are finally getting the rewards they deserve for their talent and hard work. But it is not enough. Artists such as Tyla, Burna Boy, and Diamond Platnumz are fully exploiting the benefits derived from their brands, copyrights, ticket sales, concert revenues, and so forth. But is there a value chain in Nollywood or the East African film industry



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Speeches & Addresses

that properly rewards the thousands of people who, in one way or another, contribute to the light that our creative artists radiate?

How do we replicate the success of Safaricom across the thousands of innovative companies emerging from Africa's technology hubs? These are the kinds of questions that can only be addressed when we take the sector seriously and put the right structures and financing in place.

Let me restate that what makes this summit particularly valuable is its recognition that Africa's story will not be written by one sector alone, but through the alignment of finance, creativity, technology, policy, and human capital working together toward shared growth.

This is where capital markets and financial institutions have an important role to play.

At the Nigerian Exchange Group, we understand that capital markets must evolve alongside the economies they serve. As African economies become increasingly driven by innovation, digital enterprise, intellectual property, and creative talent, our role is not only to provide platforms for capital formation, but also to help build the ecosystems that allow these sectors to scale sustainably. We believe the exchange of the future must be connected not only to traditional industries, but also to the ideas, creators, entrepreneurs, and technology-driven businesses that are shaping Africa's next chapter of growth.

Our discussions today will therefore be wide-ranging. We will have conversations on AI and data ownership, diaspora capital, creator economics, and the investment agenda.

I invite all delegates in the hall to actively participate in these discussions. Your questions and contributions will help forge new paths for many of those present who are involved in the creative and innovation economy.

This summit brings together policymakers, investors, operators, and cultural leaders who are needed to move this conversation from ideas into action. My hope is that everyone gathered here leaves not only with sharper insights, but also with stronger relationships, greater conviction, and a renewed commitment to building systems that allow African creativity and innovation to generate sustainable value for our people and our economies.

Thank you very much for listening.

I appreciate you all.



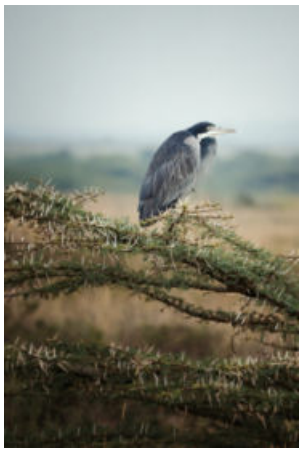


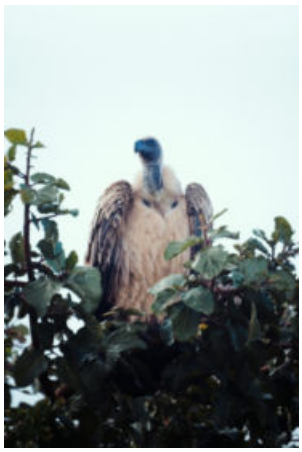
Magical Kenya: Explore Nairobi

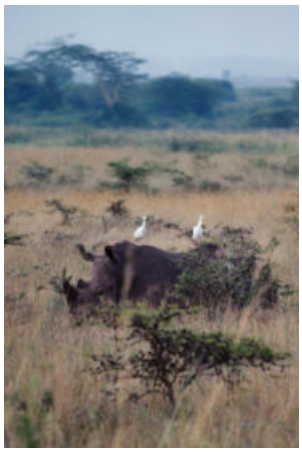
Come for the conversations. Stay for this. Nairobi sits at a rare intersection of urban energy and extraordinary nature, and the Summit would not have been complete without both. What follows is a record of what delegates found when they stepped outside the conference room.


NAIROBI NATIONAL PARK
MAIN GATE





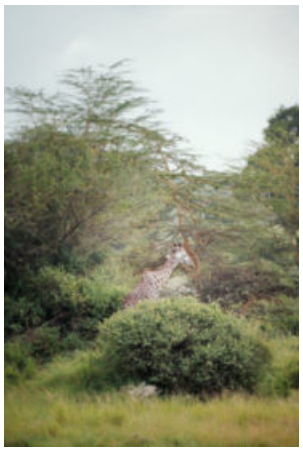


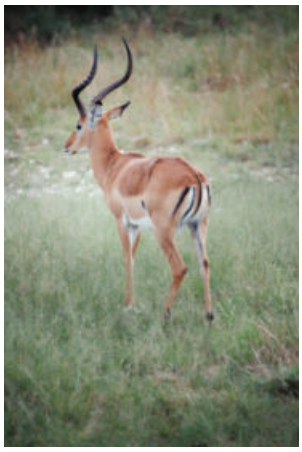


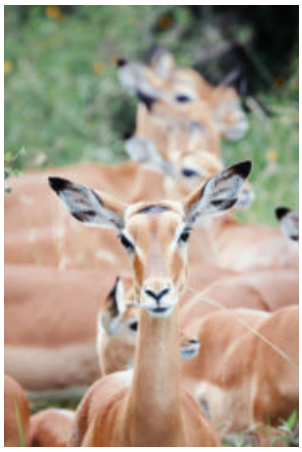


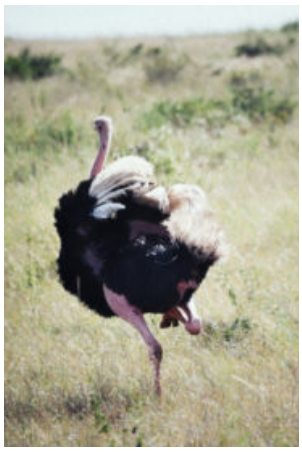



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