



UNSTOPPABLE
AFRICA
GLOBAL AFRICA BUSINESS INITIATIVE

THE **BIG PUSH**

Africa Shapes The Market

NEW YORK, 21 - 22 SEPT 2025

UNSTOPPABLE AFRICA 2025 INSIGHTS REPORT

Convened By:



United Nations

Organised By:



United Nations
Global Compact

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Foreword

We gather at a time of turbulence but also of tremendous opportunity. Africa stands at the centre of that opportunity. Home to the world's youngest population, abundant renewable energy resources, and extraordinary creativity from fintech to fashion, from agriculture to artificial intelligence the continent embodies the promise of a new era of inclusive and sustainable prosperity. Our shared responsibility is to turn this extraordinary promise into an engine of growth, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals, Agenda 2063, and the Pact for the Future.

To seize this moment, we must unleash the full potential of the African Continental Free Trade Area, drive a green industrial revolution, and accelerate Africa's digital leap. Africa's sun and wind can power it, its critical minerals can sustain it, and its youth and innovation can define it.

We must also transform food systems, scale climate-smart agriculture, and empower smallholders especially women to turn Africa's vast arable land into a source of prosperity and food security for all. Yet none of this will be possible without finance that works for Africa. We need to cut the cost of capital, reform international financial institutions, and give Africa the representation it deserves in global decision-making.

Let us invest in Africa's people and potential and make Africa's rise undeniable, inevitable, and unstoppable.

H.E. Antonio Guterres,

United Nations Secretary - General and Board Chair of the UN Global Compact



“Africa is the opportunity. This event provides a platform to deepen partnerships to power the spirit of Unstoppable Africa.”

H.E. Antonio Guterres,

United Nations Secretary - General and Board Chair of the UN Global Compact

Foreword

I am very honored to participate in this meeting entitled Unstoppable Africa. It is a clear and confident ambition for an essential and lasting partnership. One of dialogue and interaction between governments and the private sector. In this regard, the United Nations Global Compact represents an ideal platform. It is a mechanism designed to align private sector practices with the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2063 Agenda.

Our Member States on the continent understand the importance of the private sector. Any successful economic model combines three factors: sustained growth, social justice, and sustainable resource management. The question remains: how can this be achieved? We therefore call for the establishment of an environment of trust between the United Nations, the African Union, our governments, and the private sector. This requires strengthening the financing capacities of African SMEs. Establishing transparent and rigorous monitoring of corporate commitments. Ensuring full synergy between the Global Compact, the 2030 Agenda, and the African Union's Agenda 2063.

Unstoppable Africa is not just a slogan. It is first and foremost an awareness of our potential, a willingness to take action to transform the daily lives of African citizens. Building a fair, sustainable, and prosperous world will be based on shared values: environmental preservation and equitable partnerships between governments, international institutions, the private sector, and civil society. I have no doubt that Africa will be the engine of global growth in the coming decades.



H.E. Mahmoud Ali Youssouf, African Union Commission Chairperson

Foreword

In an era of shifting alliances, rising debt, and fragmented supply chains, Africa's moment of opportunity has never been clearer. These global challenges present opportunities to accelerate the transition to clean energy, strengthen food systems, and build thriving, resilient economies. They offer a path for Africa to shape its own destiny, define its markets on its own terms, and lead. Realizing this vision demands reform — of a broken and outdated global financial architecture — to ensure fair representation, real debt relief, and mobilization of private capital at scale for investments in critical infrastructure. It also requires political will, bold private sector leadership, and inclusive multilateralism that engages governments, business, and civil society alike. Achieving the Sustainable

Development Goals and AU Agenda 2063 depends on the strength of collaboration.

“Unstoppable Africa 2025 will be a milestone to showcase Africa’s partnerships on the global stage... and it will mobilize the commitments needed to accelerate Africa’s transformation.”

H.E. Amina J. Mohammed,
United Nations Deputy Secretary-General

This is Africa's time — by Africa, for Africa — to build the future it envisions, and to lead the world toward shared prosperity and sustainable growth.



Foreword

In a multipolar world, we are presented with tremendous opportunity. Africa, alongside its partners in BRICS, represents more than half of the world's population and currently contributes approximately 44% of global GDP. This creates a significant opening for deeper economic integration and growth. To seize this moment, we must prioritize the digitization of customs processes, invest in shared and modern infrastructure, and expand access to finance for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Customs and border systems must become more efficient and SME-friendly, as the majority of new jobs are created by small businesses. If we can embed gender equality, digital transformation, and access to finance into our economic systems, we will not only strengthen SMEs but also accelerate our collective capacity to harness Africa's critical green resources and drive sustainable, inclusive growth.

Ms. Leila Fourie,

Group Chief Executive Officer,
Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE)



01. Executive Summary

The Unstoppable Africa 2025 convening crystallized a pivotal shift in the continent’s global narrative — moving decisively from a discourse on future potential to a demonstration of present-day agency. Across two days of high-level dialogue, leaders from business, government, and the creative industries articulated a unified vision: Africa is transitioning from its historical role as a raw-material supplier to a strategic architect of global markets. The event was defined by an atmosphere of optimism, underpinned by pragmatic, execution-focused strategies and concrete investment commitments.

As the world confronts shifting paradigms and evolving challenges, Africa is stepping forward with bold leadership, strategic partnerships, and a renewed vision for sustainable prosperity. As United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres affirmed,

“

“Africa is the opportunity! This event provides a platform to deepen partnerships to power the spirit of Unstoppable Africa.”

- António Guterres
UN Secretary General



Executive Summary

The convening embodied this spirit — a confident, collaborative, and forward-looking Africa stepping boldly onto the global economic stage.

The fourth edition of Unstoppable Africa, convened under the theme “The BIG Push: Africa Shapes the Markets,” recognized Africa’s pivotal moment in the global economic narrative — a moment where Africa is not waiting to be invited into global markets and systems but actively building new ones. Discussions converged around five strategic pillars forming the blueprint for Africa’s “Big Push”: Energy Access & Energy Transitions, Digital Transformation, Inclusive Trade, Creative Industries, and Sports.

As the United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed emphasized,



“Unstoppable Africa 2025 will be a milestone to showcase Africa’s partnerships on the global stage — and it will mobilize the commitments needed to accelerate Africa’s transformation.”

- General Amina J. Mohammed
UN Deputy Secretary-General



Executive Summary

That mobilization was visible throughout the convening, through concrete thematic announcements and sector-driven collaborations that reflect the continent's leadership in defining its development agenda. These themes, among many others, were reinforced by the speakers and panelists across their sessions. Alain Ebobisse, CEO of Africa50, made a compelling business case for Africans leading Africa's development agenda,

emphasizing the importance of both speed and scale of execution. Other leaders, including C.D. Glin, President of the PepsiCo Foundation, and Alice Ruhweza, President of AGRA, stressed the strategic role of sustainable action in strengthening Africa's food systems, as well as the critical role of the private sector in sourcing, producing, distributing, and delivering food products across Africa and beyond.



DRIVING THE TRANSFORMATION – KEY OUTCOMES AND THEMATIC ANNOUNCEMENTS

1. Clean Energy: Catalyzing the Green Industrial Revolution

In a powerful demonstration of Africa’s energy leadership and its commitment to pairing energy access with climate-smart industrialization, Sustainable Energy for All (SEforALL) partners announced the launch of two major initiatives: a \$100 million Clean Cooking Fund and a \$2 million Climate and Clean Air Coalition (CCAC) Challenge. These efforts aim to accelerate clean-tech solutions in Namibia, Nigeria, and Kenya. Complementary initiatives such as Mission 300—which targets electricity access for 300 million people—and Namibia’s green hydrogen strategy further underscore the continent’s resolve to drive sustainable industrialization and position itself as a key player in the global clean energy transition.

These commitments demonstrate Africa’s role in the global energy transition, affirming that green growth, localized innovation and sustainable industrialization are not opposing goals but complementary imperatives.

2. Digital Transformation: Africa’s AI Leap

One of the outcomes of Unstoppable Africa 2025 was the announcement of a significant investment in Africa’s AI infrastructure with **Cassava Technologies** announcing a landmark partnership with **Accenture** to advance sovereign AI solutions across Africa.

Leveraging Accenture’s **AI Refinery™ platform** and Cassava’s **GPU-as-a-Service (GPUaaS)** infrastructure, the collaboration will enhance the



Executive Summary

continent’s digital backbone and accelerate AI integration across key sectors. During the announcement, Strive Masiyiwa, Founder and Executive Chairman of Econet Global and Cassava Technologies, shared progress on the development of Cassava’s AI factories, which are slated for completion by 2026. This initiative positions Africa as a rising force in the global AI economy and a vibrant hub for homegrown innovation.

In a similar vein, **Meta’s Llama Impact Grants** also awarded six African startups \$20,000 each to scale AI-driven solutions in healthcare, agriculture, and education. Additionally, GABI also launched the **Action Pathway on Digital Transformation**, a continental platform to advance inclusive digital innovation and infrastructure development, anchoring GABI’s role in shaping the continent’s digital economy.

Together, these initiatives represent a deliberate move from technology consumption to technology creation — positioning Africa not just as a user of AI, but as a producer and proprietor of the digital future.

3. Trade and Finance: Unlocking Africa’s Institutional Capital

Financial innovation and market integration took center stage with the announcement of Africa Savings for Growth, a collaboration between the Africa Finance Corporation and African Pension Funds to unlock over \$1 trillion in institutional assets for continental investment. In parallel, the Lloyd’s Register Foundation, a UK-based global foundation supporting education, engineering-related research, public engagement, and scientific excellence—particularly across the maritime, energy, and transportation sectors,



committed \$1.8 million to expand its Oceans Centre in Africa. This investment is aimed at addressing critical safety and sustainability challenges within national ocean economies, advancing resilient, people- and nature-positive development.

Collectively, these initiatives reflect broader momentum across the continent toward deeper market integration and more diversified financing mechanisms. They underscore a growing capacity to mobilize capital at scale, strengthen institutional participation, and align financial flows with Africa’s development priorities—contributing to a more resilient, inclusive, and self-directed financial ecosystem.

4. Creative and Sports Economies as Hard Power

Unstoppable Africa discussions also highlighted the vast, under-capitalized potential of Africa’s creative and sports industries as core economic drivers. The global rise of Afrobeats, the \$10 billion economic impact of narrative-driven tourism in Ghana, and the job creation powered by the Basketball Africa League all illustrate how culture and sport are fueling tangible development outcomes. Unstoppable Africa reframed these sectors from “soft power” to bankable asset classes, central to Africa’s GDP growth, employment generation, and global influence.



5. Execution Imperative – A New Leadership Paradigm

A defining theme of the convening was the emergence of a new execution culture. Africa’s transformation is being driven by coalitions of private-sector leaders, entrepreneurs, and sub-national actors – including city mayors and governors – who are moving faster than traditional bureaucratic systems.

Platforms such as the United Nations Global Compact’s **Africa Business Leaders Coalition (ABLC)**—a CEO-led initiative mobilizing Africa’s leading companies to advance climate action and gender equality while amplifying the collective voice of the continent’s private sector on the global stage—are anchoring this momentum. With 75 member companies representing over **USD 170 billion** in combined revenues and nearly **one**

million employees, ABLC is aligning corporate action with clear sustainability objectives and measurable outcomes. Together, these efforts mark a decisive shift away from passive participation toward performance-driven leadership across the continent.

6. Health and Human Capital

Recognizing that economic transformation cannot occur without healthy populations, GABI launched the Health Action Pathway – a new mechanism to strengthen healthcare innovation, scale locally driven solutions, foster cross-sector partnerships, and channel investment into resilient health systems across Africa. By aligning health with productivity and inclusion, the initiative underscores that human capital is Africa’s greatest comparative advantage.



STRATEGIC VISION & GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT

Unstoppable Africa 2025 reaffirmed GABI's role as the premier platform for catalyzing sustainable business, trade, and investment opportunities for Africa. Through landmark partnerships, action pathways, and thematic investments, GABI continues to demonstrate that Africa's transformation is not a distant vision but an unfolding reality.

In the words of the United Nations Assistant Secretary General and CEO of the United Nations Global Compact Sanda Ojiambo,

As the continent's leaders, innovators, and institutions continue to deliver on the commitments made, the message resounds with clarity: Africa is not just participating in global markets – it is shaping them.

Backed by strategic partnerships, bold leadership, and a relentless execution drive, Africa's unstoppable momentum is powering a new era of shared prosperity – one that embodies the very spirit of the words that framed the convening: "Africa is Unstoppable!"

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“We are here to rewrite this new narrative for Africa. A narrative that presents the imperative to shift from doing business in Africa to doing business with Africa.”

- Sanda Ojiambo

United Nations Assistant Secretary General and CEO of the United Nations Global Compact



02. Key Themes & Trends

The discussions at Unstoppable Africa 2025 converged around five interconnected and mutually reinforcing strategic pillars. These themes represent the core of the continent’s evolving strategy, moving from discussions of potential to a clear focus on execution and market leadership. The analysis that follows will delve into each of these pillars, providing a detailed

examination of the key discussions, strategic implications, and data-backed insights that defined the event. Each theme reflects a crucial component of Africa’s “Big Push”—a concerted effort to harness its demographic dividend, control its economic narrative, and build a sustainable and prosperous future on its own terms.

2.1 THE GREEN INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION: AFRICA’S LEADERSHIP IN SUSTAINABLE ENERGY

A powerful and recurring theme at Unstoppable Africa 2025 was the continent’s pivotal role in the global green energy transition. The dialogue decisively framed Africa not as a passive recipient of climate solutions but as a future “green energy superpower” poised to lead. With **60% of the world’s solar resources**, as noted by **Martin Nagel** of Mubadala, but only **2% of global renewable energy investment**, the continent represents both a glaring injustice and an unparalleled opportunity. Discussions centered on leveraging these vast resources to achieve universal energy access, power a new wave of green industrialization, and build resilient, sustainable economies from the ground up.

2.1.1 Mission 300 and Universal Energy Access

The challenge of energy poverty was addressed with a sense of bold ambition, centered on the **Mission 300** initiative. This landmark

collaboration, led by the African Development Bank (AfDB) and the World Bank, aims to provide first-time electricity access to **300 million Africans by 2030**. **Wale Shonibare**, Director of Energy Financial Solutions, Policy & Regulation at the African Development Bank, outlined the initiative’s comprehensive, five-pillar approach: least-cost electrification, regional interconnections, scaling decentralized renewable energy (DRE), private sector engagement, and utility reform.

The scale of the challenge is immense, with 600 million Africans still without power. However, the strategy recognizes that a one-size-fits-all approach is insufficient. Commenting on the progress so far and the important role of partnerships, **Ana Bjerde**, Managing Director of Operations at the World Bank, noted that progress has been impressive, with \$30 million already mobilized toward the initial \$300 million commitment.

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“We need to bring the public and private sectors together in a blended approach to achieve the speed, scale, and partnership required as rapidly as possible.”

— Anna Bjerde,
Managing Director of Operations, World Bank



“

“We recognize at least 50% of the 300 million will come from off-grid electrification. Mini-grids and solar home systems have a role, but the business model still needs proving in many cases with viability gap funding.”

— Wale Shonibare,
Director, Energy Financial Solutions,
Policy and Regulation, African Development Bank



This highlights a key insight: achieving universal access requires a technology-agnostic strategy that combines large-scale grid expansion with agile, off-grid solutions like mini-grids and solar home systems. A major persistent challenge identified was the financial unsustainability of national utilities, with 58% in sub-Saharan Africa unable to cover their operational costs. Utility reform was thus presented as a non-negotiable foundation for attracting the private investment needed to meet Mission 300’s goals.

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“If we don’t accelerate our investments in Africa and in the energy sector in particular, our planet in the future will be less stable, less prosperous and less hopeful.”

— Dr. Rajiv Shah, President,
Rockefeller Foundation



Key Themes and Trends

Key policies such as South Africa’s Climate Change Act and the EU’s Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) were discussed as pivotal drivers of clean industrialization, alongside the Industry Decarbonization Program (IDP) by the Climate Investment Funds (CIF), which aims to support industrial decarbonization and clean technology supply chains. Tencent’s Carbon X program and the African Sustainable Industrialization Institute (ASII) were highlighted as innovative initiatives advancing Africa’s industrial transformation.

2.1.2 The Clean Cooking Crisis: A Health and Economic Imperative

The event brought sharp focus to the often-overlooked crisis of clean cooking, which affects **2.3 billion people globally** and causes an estimated **500,000 deaths of African women annually**. The dialogue successfully reframed clean cooking from a niche environmental issue to a core economic development, health, and gender imperative.

The Saudi-led **Forward7 initiative**, in collaboration with SEforALL, was showcased as a model for tackling this challenge holistically.

Mohammed Altayar, Program Director, detailed a multi-faceted approach that goes beyond simply providing equipment.

The session showcased impactful projects, including the Madagascar initiative, which harmonized cylinder standards across Africa through collaboration with the African Standardization agency, and the Tanzania school feeding program, which improved education and nutrition outcomes by providing clean cooking facilities in schools. Sierra Leone’s leadership in clean cooking was commended, with its President and First Lady driving the Mission 300 Compact to integrate clean cooking into national strategies.

The UK government’s strategic partnership with Saudi Arabia under Forward7 was announced, along with significant funding commitments from the Global Electric Cooking Coalition (GECKO) and



“We focused on enhancing access to cleaner energy, clean cooking, accessibility through connectivity, which actually allowed us to introduce E-health solutions and E-learning solutions in a very holistic manner.”

— Mohammed Altayar,
Program Director, Oil Sustainability Program and Forward 7



Key Themes and Trends

the Climate and Clean Air Coalition (CCAC). Notable funding initiatives included a \$2 million CCAC challenge program and a \$100 million institutional cooking transition fund from the Children’s Investment Fund Foundation.

The session highlighted a key strategic learning: solving the clean cooking crisis requires bundling solutions—combining energy access with digital inclusion, health services, and education—to create comprehensive community empowerment.

2.1.3 Namibia’s Green Hydrogen Blueprint

Namibia emerged as a powerful case study for how African nations can lead in the next wave of green industrialization.



“The green hydrogen is only telling us that we should now use the clean energy... which is the solar, the wind and to a certain extent - the wave, in order to produce that hydrogen. So basically it’s just part of the package for the development that we are looking for in the continent.”

– H.E. Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah,
President of the Republic
of Namibia



H.E. Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, President of the Republic of Namibia, called for a fair and equitable transition to clean energy, underscoring the vast opportunities presented by the country’s green hydrogen initiative.

James Mnyupe, Economic Advisor to the President of Namibia, outlined a visionary strategy that moves far beyond simply exporting raw green hydrogen.



“We started constructing what we called a Green Industrialization Blueprint, recognizing that the world will increasingly demand goods with lower carbon footprints. And to meet this emerging global standard, two critical components are required: clean electrons and clean molecules...So, we are using our renewable energy endowment to build complex products in Namibia.”

– James Mnyupe,
Economic Advisor to the President
and Green Hydrogen
Commissioner, Republic
of Namibia



Key Themes and Trends

Namibia's strategy focuses on using its abundant solar and wind resources to produce green hydrogen ("clean molecules") and then using that hydrogen domestically to create higher-value industrial products. A prime example is the plan to reduce iron ore imported from neighboring countries to produce green direct reduced iron (DRI), a key ingredient for green steel. This approach not only captures more value within Africa but also fosters regional industrial ecosystems and creates a blueprint for a decarbonized manufacturing future.

2.1.4 Sentiment Analysis

The sentiment for this theme was one of **ambitious pragmatism**. There was palpable excitement about Africa's potential to become a global leader in renewable energy and green industries. This optimism was, however, firmly grounded in the immense scale of the challenges, from the hundreds of millions living in energy poverty to the systemic financial and regulatory hurdles. The dominant mood was not one of wishful thinking but of rolling up sleeves to execute on ambitious, well-defined, and increasingly well-funded strategic initiatives.

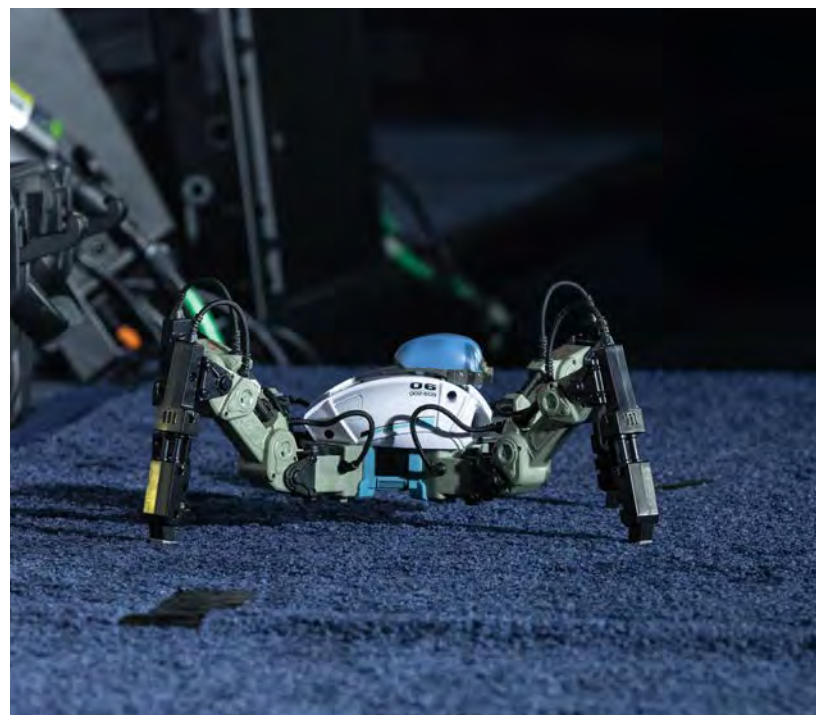


2.2 AFRICA'S PLAYBOOK FOR DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION: FROM AI FACTORIES TO GRASSROOT INNOVATION

The dialogue at Unstoppable Africa 2025 painted a clear and urgent picture: the continent is in the midst of a profound digital awakening. Discussions moved beyond acknowledging Africa's potential as a technology consumer to aggressively charting its course as a creator, innovator, and global competitor in the Artificial Intelligence era. The overarching sentiment was that the time for theoretical debate is over; the focus is now on building the foundational infrastructure, nurturing homegrown talent, and deploying AI to solve uniquely African challenges at scale. This is not a conversation about catching up, but about defining a new trajectory for development powered by digital sovereignty and innovation.

2.2.1 Infrastructure as the Foundation: Building Africa's Digital Backbone

A recurring and foundational theme was the non-negotiable need for robust, continent-wide digital infrastructure. Leaders emphasized that without the “plumbing” of data centers, fiber optics, and computing power, Africa's AI ambitions would remain unrealized. The discussions highlighted a strategic shift from reliance on external infrastructure to building a sovereign digital foundation.



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This foundational network is now being supercharged with AI-specific capabilities. A pivotal announcement was Cassava Technologies' groundbreaking partnership with Nvidia to significantly scale-up Africa's processing power. This initiative introduces the concept of "AI Factories," a new industrial paradigm where data is the raw material and intelligence is the manufactured product. **Strive Masiyiwa**, Founder and Executive Chairman of Econet Global and Cassava Technologies, underscored the extensive groundwork already completed. He described it as a 15-year strategic investment that

now positions Africa to harness the full potential of the AI revolution. Masiyiwa emphasized that, with the right infrastructure in place, artificial intelligence could **double Africa's GDP within the next decade.**

He further stressed the urgency of building AI literacy and strengthening STEM education across the continent, calling on African governments to adopt forward-looking policies similar to China's national mandate introducing AI education to children from the age of six.

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“Before our project, Africa had only 80 GPUs. We signed an agreement with Nvidia for 12,000 to be installed in five regional centers, which act as the focal nodes for the whole continent.”

– **Strive Masiyiwa**,
Founder, Econet Global and
Cassava Technologies



Key Themes and Trends

This massive leap in capacity is complemented by efforts from global tech leaders. **James Manyika**, Senior Vice President at Google-Alphabet, highlighted Google’s parallel investments, including undersea cables, distributed cloud infrastructure developed with Google Cloud, and programs providing free access to AI tools for students in eight African countries. The shared vision is to create a multi-layered infrastructure that is not only powerful but also accessible.

2.2.2 Fostering Homegrown Talent and Startups

The conversations consistently identified Africa’s demographic dividend—its young, digitally native population—as its most significant competitive advantage in the global tech race. The challenge, as articulated by multiple speakers, is to transform this raw potential into a skilled and empowered workforce.



“If we focus on digital infrastructure, especially the last mile connectivity, we will create more jobs for young Africans...We have significant opportunities for transformation on the continent that lead to jobs creation.”

– **Samaila Zubairu**,
President & CEO, Africa
Finance Corporation



“Our team in Ghana, for example, is working on plant phenotyping for food security. These are not just innovations for Africa. Sure, they’ll benefit Africa, but this matters globally. And that work is actually being led out of Africa, which is quite extraordinary”

– **James Manyika**,
Senior Vice President of Research,
Technology and Society,
Google



Kojo Boakye, Vice President for Public Policy in Africa, the Middle East, and Turkey at Meta, underscored Meta’s mission to enable human connection, situating its investments—such as the 2Africa subsea cable and the establishment of local offices—within this broader vision of expanding digital access and opportunity.

Ahunna Eziakonwa, Assistant Administrator and Regional Director for Africa at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), also highlighted the progress of UNDP’s Timbuktoo initiative, which is cultivating innovation ecosystems across sectors including agritech, healthtech, and mining tech. Ethiopia’s recent adoption of a startup act was cited as a significant

Key Themes and Trends

milestone in building a more supportive regulatory environment for emerging innovators.

Technology entrepreneur Silas Adekunle delivered one of the most compelling interventions, asserting that Africa’s leadership in AI will ultimately depend on sustained investment in its young people. Reflecting on his own experience, he noted:



“Africa will lead in AI because of young people. Invest in them. When we set out to prove that this could be built in Nigeria... there was a talent gap. We had to invest in closing that gap. But it was doable. There is a foundation that’s been laid already.”

— Silas Adekunle,
Co-Founder and CEO,
Awarri & Reach Industries



This sentiment was supported by on-the-ground evidence of a vast, untapped talent pool. **Tonee Ndungu**, CEO of Kytabu Inc, shared a compelling statistic from an AI hackathon in Nairobi:

“We did a call for an AI hackathon looking for 500 people. We got 13,800 applications from 18 countries.”

This overwhelming response illustrates a profound hunger for opportunity and skills development. To channel this energy, the event showcased crucial ecosystem-building initiatives. The UNDP Timbuktoo Accelerator Programme was frequently mentioned, with its supported entrepreneurs like **Shirley Gwenzi** (SoshoPay) and **Lindiwe Mutungamiri** (eighty-nine) presenting their innovative, AI-powered solutions. Similarly, Meta’s Llama Impact Grants were highlighted during the “Silicon Valley meets Digital Africa” session, rewarding startups like Easy Read Africa and Vombo AI that are leveraging AI to address local challenges in literacy, health, and language preservation.



“Our goal is to empower small businesses with affordable solar solutions and productivity tools so they can innovate, strengthen their livelihoods, operate with dignity, and help drive economic development.”

— Shirley Gwenzi,
Co-Founder and Sales
Experience Executive
at SoshoPay



2.2.3 Ethical AI and Cultural Preservation

A distinct and powerful narrative emerged around the need to build AI that is not just technologically advanced, but also culturally intelligent and ethically grounded in African values. There was a strong rejection of simply importing Western AI models and their inherent biases. The focus is on ensuring that the digital transformation enhances, rather than erases, African identity.

Several sessions highlighted the cultural significance of technology, likening Afrobeats as a digitized African phenomenon to the potential of AI to preserve Africa's biodiversity and genetic diversity.

Similarly, the joint session between Strive Masiyiwa and James Manyika reinforced this priority, referencing Google's work in training models in languages like Swahili, Zulu, and Yoruba amongst others and their upcoming high-level meeting at the Vatican to discuss AI ethics from a global perspective that includes Africa.

Phuthi Mahanyele-Dabengwa advocated for tech-friendly policies to support entrepreneurs and harness AI for innovation. She stressed the need for digital education and connectivity to empower Africa's youth, noting that by 2050, one in four people globally will be African.

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“Create an environment in your country where tech entrepreneurs can be able to develop their businesses without constraints... Create the environment for us to come in without a whole host of regulations so that we can be able to do that, push the businesses”

— Phuthi Mahanyele-Dabengwa,
CEO, Naspers South Africa



2.2.4 Launch of the GABI Action Pathway on Digital Transformation

The launch of the GABI Action Pathway on Digital Transformation convened leading voices from government, business, and the innovation ecosystem to outline practical strategies for accelerating Africa’s digital transformation. Discussions highlighted the continent’s growing technological momentum, drawing on examples from pioneering private sector leaders expanding digital solutions at scale. **Fred Swaniker**, Founder of the African Leadership Group, emphasized Africa’s opportunity to position itself as a global talent powerhouse. Togo’s Minister of Digital Economy and Transformation, **H.E. Cina Lawson**, outlined the country’s comprehensive digital policy framework—rooted in inclusion, infrastructure development, and robust data systems.

Rwanda’s fully digitized government platform was spotlighted as a benchmark for accessible, citizen-centered service delivery. **Tom Greenwood**, CEO of Helios Towers, showcased advancements in shared tower infrastructure that are bringing connectivity to underserved communities, while **Jeremy Awori**, CEO of Ecobank Transnational, illustrated how mobile money is reshaping financial inclusion across the continent. Safaricom’s digital finance innovations were also highlighted as a catalyst for broader adoption of mobile-enabled services. health superhighway, which connects hospitals nationwide through real-time data sharing.



“It’s all about sharing that infrastructure. So rather than each operator building their own sites, which is a large capital expense, we focus on how that infrastructure can be shared. That is the core of our business model—enabling shared access to infrastructure, which in turn accelerates the expansion and proliferation of networks.”

– Tom Greenwood, CEO of Helios Towers

Key Themes and Trends

The session emphasized the importance of affordable devices, digital literacy, and partnerships between governments and private sectors to bridge connectivity gaps and drive sustainable progress. With calls for stronger collaboration and actionable policies, the session underscored Africa's readiness to leverage technology for inclusive growth and economic empowerment.

Going forward, the Digital Transformation Action Pathway will serve as GABI's platform for convening key stakeholders to drive accountable, solution-oriented collaboration—aligning investment, innovation, and policy reform around priorities identified through the discussion tracks. To advance implementation, GABI will work with participating stakeholders to develop a white paper communiqué, formalizing shared commitments to deliver on the pathway's priorities and accelerate digital transformation across Africa.

2.2.5 Sentiment Analysis

The sentiment surrounding Africa's digital future was one of **urgent optimism and pronounced agency**. The dialogue was not aspirational; it was operational. Speakers were not asking if Africa could compete in the AI space, but were detailing how they are already building the infrastructure, talent, and ethical frameworks to lead. There was a palpable sense of immediacy—a recognition that the gap widens with every moment of inaction and that the continent's demographic and technological moment is now. The tone was confident, assertive, and focused on execution.

2.3 WINNING IN TRADE: THE DRIVE FOR VALUE ADDITION AND MARKET CONTROL

A central theme woven throughout Unstoppable Africa 2025 was the continent’s determined pivot towards economic sovereignty. This represents a strategic shift away from the historical model of raw material exportation towards building integrated domestic value chains, asserting control over key industries, and reshaping the rules of global trade. The dialogue moved from identifying problems to showcasing concrete strategies for beneficiation, market integration, and financial independence. The prevailing sentiment was that Africa will no longer be a passive “rule-taker” but an active “rule-maker” in the global economy.

2.3.1 The AfCFTA as a Game-Changer

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) was consistently framed as the most critical policy instrument for achieving this economic transformation. It was presented not as a distant aspiration but as an operational framework that, if fully implemented, could fundamentally alter the continent’s economic trajectory.

Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Director-General of the WTO, underscored its transformative potential. She highlighted the massive opportunity, noting that intra-African trade currently stands at only **15-20%**, compared to the EU’s 60%. Full

implementation of the AfCFTA, according to a statistic shared by the African Union Commission, could boost Africa’s real income by **\$450 billion** by 2035.



“For us in Africa, what we need to do is focus like a laser beam on actually making the African Continental Free Trade area work.”

– Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala,
Director-General, World
Trade Organization (WTO)



H.E. João Lourenço, President of the Republic of Angola and Chairperson of the African Union, emphasized the need for greater freedom of movement across the continent and the development of adequate infrastructure. He highlighted the progress of the Lobito Corridor as a key example, noting its potential to significantly enhance trade, attract investment, and drive development along the corridor.



“In order to promote trade, there must be the fluid circulation of people and goods... Therefore, one of the key difficulties for the success of the free trade zone in Africa has been the scarcity of important infrastructure so that logistics may flow freely between the many countries.”

– H.E. João Lourenço,
President of the Republic of Angola
and Chairperson of the
African Union



“It’s easier to get a flight and cheaper to get a flight from Africa to Europe or Africa to the US than Africa to African countries... You can see between countries, sometimes you find miles and miles of trucks queuing to cross a border.”

– Jeremy Awori,
Group CEO, Ecobank Transnational
Incorporated



However, leaders also pragmatically acknowledged the significant implementation hurdles. **Jeremy Awori**, Group CEO of Ecobank, pointed out the real-world friction that businesses face.

To overcome these barriers, discussions highlighted the crucial role of new digital and financial infrastructure, such as Afreximbank’s Pan-African Payment and Settlement System (PAPSS) and platforms like the MANSA repository, designed to facilitate smoother cross-border transactions and reduce dependency on foreign currency. Additionally, the World Trade Organization’s Investment Facilitation for Development (IFD) instrument—currently supported by 31 African countries—was highlighted as a mechanism with strong potential to attract foreign direct investment by lowering perceived risks and operational hurdles.

Complementing these large-scale investments, several high-impact social initiatives were recognized for strengthening community resilience. Programs such as Solar Mamas in Senegal, which trains women in solar panel assembly, and the Bridge to Prosperity project, which builds vital infrastructure for rural communities, were commended for their tangible results. The role of women in African trade was repeatedly emphasized, with calls to ensure their historic and ongoing contributions are fully integrated into contemporary economic frameworks.

2.3.2 The Value Revolution in Critical Minerals

The imperative to add value to Africa’s vast natural resources—particularly the critical minerals essential for the global green energy transition—was a cornerstone of the economic sovereignty discussion. There was a strong consensus that the era of exporting raw materials for others to process must end.

Green, sustainable, and social bonds, supported by Africa’s \$4 trillion domestic capital pools, were discussed as tools for financing industrial projects. Examples like Kamukakula’s copper processing using hydro energy and Gabon’s industrialization via the Arise platform demonstrated scalable models of value addition. The Dangote refinery and fertilizer production showcased Africa’s capacity to scale industrial projects, while infrastructure initiatives such as the Lobito Corridor were noted as vital for integration.



“Africa now must become a continent of innovation, a continent of beneficiation of its mineral resources and a continent of industrialization. We must move away from the practice of having our minerals carted raw and exported.”

– **H.E. Duma Gideon Boko**,
President of The Republic
of Botswana



Hon. Bogolo Kenewendo, Minister of Minerals and Energy for Botswana, shared her country’s successful model as a blueprint.



“We have managed over the years to strengthen the aspects around governance and our negotiating tactics that ensure Botswana is not only home of the minerals, but is part and parcel of the businesses that come out of our minerals.”

– **Hon. Bogolo Kenewendo**,
Minister of Minerals
and Energy, Botswana



This strategy is now being adopted continent-wide. **President Maada Bio** of Sierra Leone announced that his country is moving towards a policy of no longer exporting raw iron ore. The economic logic is compelling as reflected by **Samaila Zubairu**, President and CEO of the Africa Finance Corporation (AFC) that processing hematite domestically can increase its export value by **11 times**. The discussion framed Africa’s control over 30% of the world’s critical minerals not as a resource blessing, but as a powerful geopolitical lever in a world seeking to diversify supply chains away from China, which currently processes 90% of these minerals.



“Three critical areas that governments should look at if they are looking forward to moving up the value chain are affordable and reliable power, access to infrastructure and access to water. These essentials form the bedrock for processing, manufacturing, and enhancing competitiveness across sectors such as critical minerals, agro-processing, and beyond.”

— Veronica Bolton Smith,
Founder & CEO, The Critical
Minerals Africa Group



2.3.3 Tackling the “Africa Risk Premium”

A significant barrier to achieving economic sovereignty is the prohibitively high cost of capital. The Jeune Afrique Media Group deep dive session directly addressed this, identifying the “Africa risk premium” as a systemic issue rooted in misperception and poor data. Analysis revealed that borrowing costs for African entities are often disproportionately high, even when credit ratings are identical to those in other regions.



“The spreads that I described are for the same ratings. So why is Senegal paying higher rates than Nigeria with the same ratings? It’s the investor’s perception.”

— Dr. Ash Vasacha,
Head of Structured Credit,
International Court

To counter this, a key strategy emerging is the use of better data and transparency. The **Global Emerging Markets Risk Database (GEMS)**, a joint initiative facilitated by the European Investment Bank and International Finance Corporation, which collects performance data from multilateral development banks, was highlighted as a critical tool. This data shows that default rates on the continent are often lower, and recovery rates higher, than market assumptions. The session concluded with a call to action: African entities must proactively present this evidence-based narrative to investors rather than waiting for institutional reforms.

Furthermore, the role of African financial institutions in de-risking investments is growing. **Nana Maidugu** Head of Sustainability and ESG at the Nigerian Sovereign Investment Authority

(NSIA) explained how African sovereign wealth funds are acting as “market anchors,” using their patient capital and local expertise to take equity positions in projects, thereby demonstrating viability and attracting larger pools of international capital. Other solutions proposed included institutional reforms, better data collection, and the establishment of an African rating agency. Examples of investment-grade African credits, such as Africa Finance Corporation, East African Development Bank, and West Africa Development Bank, were highlighted as models of success.

“

“Cost of capital and funding is at the heart of the problems that constraints SMEs and in fact infrastructure. Ratings are often over-indexed on the downside of risk and does not always reflect the counterparty’s ability to pay or make good on deals that come under pressure”

— Dr. Leila Fourie,
CEO, Johannesburg
Stock Exchange



2.3.4 Sentiment Analysis

The sentiment was one of **determined and pragmatic assertiveness**. There was a clear and unified rejection of Africa’s historical role as a passive supplier in the global economy. While speakers openly acknowledged significant challenges—such as fragmented regulations, infrastructure deficits, and the high cost of capital—the tone was not one of complaint. Instead, it was focused on deploying concrete solutions like the AfCFTA, domestic value-addition policies, and data-driven financial advocacy. The prevailing narrative was one of taking control, building internal strength, and negotiating with the world from a position of undeniable value.



2.4 GAME CHANGERS: BUILDING AFRICA'S MULTI-BILLION DOLLAR SPORTS BUSINESS AND CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

A defining narrative at Unstoppable Africa 2025 was the strategic recognition of the continent's "soft power"—its vibrant creative industries, immense sporting talent, and rich cultural heritage—as a formidable and largely untapped economic engine. The dialogue shifted decisively from viewing these sectors as cultural ornaments to framing them as powerful drivers of GDP, job creation, and global influence. Speakers asserted that Africa's stories and sounds are not just entertainment; they are high-value assets capable of reshaping global perceptions and opening new markets. The prevailing sentiment was one of ownership, demanding that the economic value generated by African culture finally stays on the continent.

2.4.1 Building a Multi-Billion-Dollar Sports Industry

The sessions on sports made a compelling business case for investing in Africa's athletic talent and infrastructure. The continent, home to what **Mpumi Madisa**, CEO of Bidvest, called "disproportionately blessed" athletes, captures only a tiny fraction—**\$9-12 billion of a \$3 trillion global sports industry**, yet continues to produce some of the world's best talent.. The core challenge identified was not a lack of talent, but a lack of local ecosystems to nurture, manage, and monetize it.





“When I think about sport, I think about it as an ecosystem. It is an ecosystem that is not just about the athlete but also everything that is around the athlete from the medical team, to the coaches, infrastructures and the media.”

— Mpumi Madisa,
CEO, Bidvest



The Basketball Africa League (BAL),

a partnership with the NBA, was presented as a powerful proof of concept which serves as a pipeline for nurturing young talent and job creation. Infrastructure development was emphasized, with the Kigali Arena in Rwanda, built in a record six months, serving as a model for visionary planning. Zaria Court, part of Rwanda’s sports hub, was also celebrated for fostering community engagement.

Grassroots programs like the Junior NBA, active in over 20 countries, were recognized for their role in introducing basketball to young boys and girls. Partnerships with Safaricom in Kenya and Mohammed VI Polytechnic (M6P) University in Morocco were cited as examples of corporate

collaboration driving youth development. The story of Kamal Malawatch, an NBA draft pick who emerged from grassroots leagues and the NBA Academy, was shared as an inspiring testament to African talent breaking barriers

Clare Akamanzi, CEO of NBA Africa, shared compelling statistics on its early success.



“Because of the Basketball Africa League being in existence in just four years, we contributed \$250 million to economies in Africa and 37,000 jobs.”

— **Clare Akamanzi**,
CEO, NBA Africa



This demonstrated that professional leagues can be powerful economic catalysts. The discussion also highlighted the critical role of visionary public-private partnerships in building world-class infrastructure. The key insight was the need to view sports through a holistic, ecosystem lens—investing not just in athletes, but in academies (like the NBA Academy in Senegal), media rights, merchandise, and facility management to create a self-sustaining industry.

2.4.2 The Global Dominance of Afrobeats and the Creative Economy

The meteoric rise of Afrobeats served as the event’s prime example of Africa’s cultural power. Tiwa Savage, a global Afrobeats icon, described its journey from a grassroots movement with no infrastructure to the world’s fastest-growing music genre. Her message underscored a crucial strategic pivot: success came from focusing inward first.



“We were just building that industry, and we didn’t even care what the rest of the world was thinking. We are the moment, and we have been the moment. The world is just catching up.”

– **Tiwa Savage**,
International Singer-
Songwriter & Actress



This theme of self-validation and building internal infrastructure resonated across discussions on film, fashion, and art. Acclaimed filmmaker **Ava DuVernay** advocated for independent storytelling pipelines, proposing a “Blackflix” to ensure Africans own not just their narratives but also the distribution channels. In fashion,

designers like **Kibonen Nfi**, Founder & CEO of Kibonen New York LLC, and **Iona McCreath**, Creative Director at KikoRomeo, highlighted the need for financial products tailored to the industry’s unique cycles and for investment in the “missing middle”—the managers, agents, and technicians who form the backbone of a mature creative economy.



“I think there is often too much of a focus on the macro when it’s the micro that we really need to look at. As we said before, the artisans, the cottage industries, if we can shift the focus to actually targeting these specific individuals, that’s when we were really going to see the true economic change.”

– **Iona McCreath**,
Creative Director, KikoRomeo



On value retention in Africa, Dr. Shain Shapiro and Fotemah Mba both underscored the need for stronger intellectual property frameworks and data-driven strategies to ensure that value created on the continent remains on the continent, while also guaranteeing that African creatives are properly and sustainably compensated for their work.

2.4.3 Narrative Control as an Economic Tool

Perhaps the most profound insight was the explicit link between narrative control and economic outcomes. The power to tell one's own story was framed not as a matter of cultural pride, but as a direct driver of investment, tourism, and trade. **Boris Kodjoe**, actor and co-founder of Full Circle Africa, provided a powerful case study.



“We were able to take Ghana from 40,000 tourist visa to 1.2 million the next year, just by way of counteracting old narratives and by sharing content worldwide that told a different story... And that led us to \$10 billion added to the economy in seven years.”

— **Boris Kodjoe**,
Actor & Co-founder,
Full Circle Africa



This statistic powerfully demonstrated that shifting perceptions can translate directly into economic value. Building on this point, Xander Pratt issued a compelling call to reclaim Africa's narrative, urging Africans to fully embrace their heritage and inherent strength.

The conversation challenged stakeholders to treat the creative industries not as a “hobby,” but as the most critical tool for storytelling and reshaping global views of Africa. By controlling the narrative, the continent can control its economic future.

2.4.4 Sentiment Analysis

The sentiment in these sessions was overwhelmingly confident, assertive, and impatient for ownership. There was a palpable sense of pride in Africa's cultural achievements but also a strong frustration with the systemic barriers that prevent creators from retaining the value they generate. The tone was not one of asking for a “seat at the table,” but of building a bigger, better table. The dialogue was a call to action for investment in the infrastructure of creativity and for a fundamental recognition of culture as a premier economic asset class.



2.5 CITY POWER: THE RISE OF PRIVATE SECTOR AND SUB-NATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Across all major themes at Unstoppable Africa 2025, a powerful cross-cutting narrative emerged: the era of waiting for top-down, government-led initiatives is over. The “Big Push” is now being driven by a pragmatic and urgency-driven coalition of private sector leaders, entrepreneurs, and sub-national actors (mayors and governors) who are moving faster than national governments. This theme highlighted a fundamental shift in the locus of action, from policy corridors to boardrooms and city halls. The prevailing sentiment was that while enabling policies are crucial, real progress is happening on the ground, led by those with the agility and commercial incentive to execute.

2.5.1 The Private Sector as the Primary Engine of Transformation

The event showcased the African private sector’s evolution from a participant in the economy to a primary driver of the continent’s strategic agenda. **The African Business Leaders Coalition (ABLC)**, a CEO-led alliance convened by the UN Global Compact, was presented as a prime example of this new paradigm. Representing **75 of Africa’s largest companies with over \$170 billion in annual revenue**, the ABLC is not just advocating for change but actively funding and implementing it.

A key takeaway was the coalition’s proactive stance on climate action. As highlighted by Phuti Mahanyele-Dabengwa, CEO of NASPERS South Africa, the group is not waiting for external funding.



“I think as has been mentioned, for instance, with the Climate Report, we have managed to mobilize \$9.4 billion in climate finance since 2023, with nearly 90% of this capital being strategically directed toward high impact climate mitigation and renewable energy projects. And we are just beginning.”

– Phuti Mahanyele-Dabengwa,
CEO, NASPERS South Africa
And Co-Chair, ABLC



Key Themes and Trends

This self-funded momentum is already delivering measurable impact. Dr. James Mwangi, Group MD & CEO of Equity Group Holdings, highlighted the diversity of this emerging coalition and its growing influence in shaping the private sector-led development financing across the continent. He noted that the coalition is not only mobilizing capital but also actively engaging governments and the African Union to establish enabling frameworks for transformative investments.

Adding to this evidence, **Martin Ocheng**, CEO of Sasini PLC, shared that his company commissioned a 1.5-megawatt solar facility just six months after climate discussions at a previous summit—a concrete example of rapid execution inspired directly by coalition dialogue. Together, these actions illustrate a powerful feedback loop in which peer exchange accelerates corporate decision-making, reinforcing a private sector-driven development model that both complements and, increasingly, outpaces traditional public-sector efforts.



THE ART OF DEALMAKING

“Those listed companies can then be the channel for taking Africa to the world and bringing the world to Africa... If you look at Equity Bank, we have attracted global capital from all markets and from the most prestigious institutions. When we invest, we help break the barriers that Africa has historically faced in attracting investment.”

– Dr. James Mwangi,
Group MD & CEO, Equity Group Holdings



UNSTOPPABLE



2.5.2 “City Power”: Sub-National Actors as Innovation Hubs

The “City Power” panel revealed that mayors and governors are becoming critical agents of change, leveraging their local authority to foster innovation and build cross-continental partnerships. These sub-national leaders are tackling some of Africa’s most complex challenges with pragmatic, data-driven solutions, often without waiting for national government directives.

The dialogue highlighted the remarkable economic influence of urban centers, with Savannah’s port exemplifying a hub for global trade and cultural exchange. **Hon. Van R. Johnson II**, Mayor of Savannah, Georgia USA, highlighted the

strategic value of partnerships with Accra, Kumasi, and Cape Coast in Ghana, drawing on the concept of Sankofa to strengthen relational connections through cultural, educational, and tourism initiatives.

Meanwhile, **Shawyn Patterson-Howard**, Mayor of Mount Vernon New York, emphasized the potential of technology-driven growth, advocating for tech hubs and collaborative programs linking HBCUs such as Howard University with African universities. She pointed to initiatives like Earn Your Leisure’s Invest Fest, which channels investment into West Africa’s technology and entrepreneurial ecosystem, illustrating how local leadership can spark cross-border economic opportunities.



“We can look at how we bring business in... This is an opportunity for us to begin to use your business council and say, how do we get a pipeline of investment opportunities and present those to those sister cities not for their own funding, but for funding of the entrepreneurs, the business people who are within their communities.”

– **Hon. Van R. Johnson II**,
Mayor of Savannah, Georgia, USA



Mayor Yvonne Aki-Sawyerr of Freetown, Sierra Leone, provided a compelling climate-focused case study through her Freetown the Tree Town initiative. By planting over 1.2 million digitally-tracked trees, the program enhances climate resilience, generates employment, and establishes a model for monetizing environmental assets via carbon markets. As Mayor Aki-Sawyerr explained:



“Every single one of our trees is digitally tracked with a unique identifier code... The monitoring of the growth of those trees is done by the youth. As the trees progress, it’s created over a thousand jobs through that tracking system.”

— **Hon. Yvonne Aki-Sawyerr**,
Mayor, Freetown,
Sierra Leone



The success of Freetown’s program has inspired other cities, including Phoenix, USA, to adopt the tree-tracking system, demonstrating a two-way flow of innovation where African cities provide blueprints for global urban challenges.

A key insight from the panel is that private sector actors and sub-national leaders are increasingly collaborating directly, forming agile partnerships

that bypass traditional bureaucratic bottlenecks. While national-level policy harmonization—such as through the AfCFTA—remains critical for scale, immediate progress is being achieved through targeted, execution-focused alliances. By prioritizing relational, culturally grounded partnerships over purely transactional engagements, cities are fostering deeper, more resilient economic ties. In an era of fractured geopolitics, such nimble, non-state actor partnerships are emerging as essential drivers of sustainable development and global connectivity for African businesses.

2.5.3 Sentiment Analysis

The sentiment for this theme was **action-oriented, pragmatic, and decidedly impatient**. There was a palpable frustration with the slow pace of governmental and multilateral processes, coupled with a confident assertion that the private sector and city leaders have both the capability and the responsibility to lead. The dialogue was not about asking for permission but about demonstrating results. This “do-it-yourself” ethos reflects a new era of African agency, where execution, not just advocacy, is the primary measure of success.

2.6 HEALTH AND HUMAN CAPITAL

The Health session explored transforming Africa’s health systems into engines of innovation, trade, and inclusive growth, emphasizing the importance of investing in human capital to retain talent and strengthen the healthcare workforce through initiatives like the African Demographic Dividend Program. Discussions highlighted the need to address underinvestment, fragmented supply

chains, and limited local capacity. Key strategies included supporting local manufacturing of vaccines and therapeutics, establishing centers of excellence, deploying digital platforms for healthcare delivery, and harmonizing regulatory frameworks—all aimed at positioning Africa’s health sector as a driver of both public well-being and economic opportunity.



2.6.1 GABI Action Pathway on Health - A Strategic Roundtable

The GABI – Action Pathway on Health session entitled Health as Wealth: Building Resilient Healthcare Systems through Innovation, Trade, and Investment - convened key stakeholders to explore strategies for transforming Africa’s health systems into engines of trade, innovation, and inclusive economic growth. The discussion underscored the importance of collaboration in addressing persistent challenges, including underinvestment, fragmented supply chains, and the ongoing brain drain in the health sector.

Kanayo Awani, Executive Vice President of the Intra-African Trade Bank (IATB) at Afreximbank, highlighted the Bank’s \$2 billion African Health Security Investment Plan, designed to bolster local manufacturing of vaccines, diagnostics, and therapeutics. He also detailed the African Medical Center of Excellence (AMC initiative), a \$450 million facility in Abuja providing specialized care in oncology, hematology, and cardiology, positioning Africa as a hub for high-quality medical services.

Fred Swaniker, CEO of Sand Technologies, showcased the Health Operating System, a digital platform deployed across 18 countries that digitizes clinics, equips healthcare workers with AI-driven tools, and generates real-time health intelligence to improve decision-making and patient outcomes.

Aigboje Aig-Imoukhuede, Founder of the Aig-Imoukhuede Foundation, emphasized the broader economic potential of healthcare, advocating for policy reforms to attract private sector investment and accelerate growth in the health ecosystem.

Key Themes and Trends

Meanwhile, **H.E. Nardos Bekele-Thomas**, CEO of AUDA-NEPAD, outlined continental initiatives such as the Pharmaceutical Manufacturing Plan for Africa, African Medicines Regulatory Harmonization, and the African Union Smart Safety Surveillance (AUS system), which ensures the safety and efficacy of medical products.

Collectively, the session highlighted a forward-looking vision in which Africa's health sector not only improves public well-being but also serves as a strategic driver of economic opportunity, innovation, and intra-African trade. To implement the Health Action Pathway, GABI will convene key public and private-sector stakeholders to advance coordinated, solution-driven collaboration—aligning investment, innovation, and policy reform around priority areas identified through the discussions. As a critical next step, GABI will work with participating members to develop and launch a white paper communiqué, formalizing shared commitments to accelerate health system transformation and strengthen resilient, inclusive health ecosystems across Africa.

2.6.2 Sentiment Analysis

The Action Pathway on Health session conveyed a positive, forward-looking sentiment, highlighting Africa's potential to transform its health systems. Participants emphasized actionable solutions—including investment in human capital, digital health platforms, local manufacturing, and regulatory harmonization—while addressing challenges like underinvestment, brain drain, and fragmented supply chains. The discussion reflected confidence, collaboration, and determination to position Africa's health sector as a catalyst for trade, innovation, and inclusive growth.

3. Opportunities & Challenges

The discussions at Unstoppable Africa 2025 painted a landscape of immense opportunity, counterbalanced by persistent and systemic challenges. The dialogue consistently moved beyond a simple enumeration of Africa's potential

to a strategic assessment of the specific levers that could unlock that potential and the primary barriers that continue to impede progress. This section distills the most prominent opportunities and challenges that emerged from the sessions.

3.1 KEY OPPORTUNITIES

The event highlighted several powerful, converging trends that create an unprecedented window for Africa to accelerate its economic and geopolitical ascent.

The Demographic and Digital Dividend:

Africa's status as the world's youngest continent was repeatedly framed as its single greatest strategic asset. With **42% of the global youth workforce projected to be African by 2050**, this demographic is not just a labor source but a digitally native population ready to drive innovation. This was evidenced by the high per-capita adoption of AI tools in countries like Kenya. The opportunity lies in harnessing this energy by investing in targeted skills development to transform a population advantage into a globally competitive talent advantage.

Global Supply Chain Realignment:

The ongoing geopolitical shifts and the move to de-risk global supply chains away from over-concentration in Asia present a historic opening for Africa.

Leadership in the Green Energy Transition:

With **62% of the world's renewable energy potential**, Africa is uniquely positioned to not just solve its own energy deficit but to become a global superpower in clean energy. The opportunity extends beyond electricity generation to powering a new green industrial revolution. As demonstrated by Namibia's green hydrogen strategy, the focus is shifting to using cheap, clean electrons to add value to resources locally, creating export-oriented green industries that are more competitive than anywhere else in the world.

A Unified Continental Market (AfCFTA):

The AfCFTA was consistently identified as the key to unlocking Africa's economies of scale. The potential to create a single, borderless market of 1.4 billion people could, according to AU figures, boost continental income by **\$450 billion**. This unified market makes Africa a far more attractive destination for large-scale investment and enables African companies to build continental giants capable of competing on the global stage, finally addressing the paradox of it being easier to

Opportunities and Challenges

trade with Europe than with a neighboring country.

The Monetization of Cultural Capital:

The global explosion of Afrobeats, African fashion, and film has demonstrated that the continent’s “soft power” is a hard economic asset. The opportunity lies in building the infrastructure to own and monetize this cultural capital. The economic impact of narrative control was powerfully quantified by **Boris Kodjoe**, whose Full Circle Africa initiative contributed to a **\$10 billion boost to Ghana’s economy** by reshaping its global image and driving tourism.

Diaspora Influence:

The African diaspora represents a powerful economic and diplomatic force capable of driving investment, entrepreneurship, and skills transfer into the continent. With growing global visibility in culture, technology, and business, the diaspora shapes narratives, attracts tourism, and amplifies Africa’s economic potential—similar to how cultural movements have already boosted national economies. Mobilizing diaspora capital and expertise can accelerate innovation, strengthen global partnerships, and position Africa more competitively in global markets.

Skilled Workforce for the Continent and the World:

Africa’s rapidly expanding youth population offers a unique opportunity to develop a globally competitive talent pool, with 42% of the world’s youth workforce projected to be African by 2050. Investments in targeted training—especially digital,

technical, and green-economy skills—can turn this demographic surge into a strategic export of skilled labor to the world. A strong skills base will not only meet global talent demands but also support domestic industrialization and innovation across key sectors.

Strengthening Value Chains on the Continent:

Africa’s control of critical minerals and raw materials creates a strategic opening to develop end-to-end regional value chains. By shifting from exporting raw materials to producing finished goods, the continent can capture significantly more economic value and reduce dependency on external markets. Harmonizing standards under the AfCFTA and investing in regional manufacturing can transform Africa into a major hub within global supply chains.

Sports as an Accelerator for Economic and Infrastructure Development:

Sports serve as a powerful catalyst for job creation, tourism, and large-scale infrastructure development—from stadiums to transport systems. Africa’s global prominence in athletics and football offers a platform to build competitive sports industries that drive commercial investment and youth engagement. Strategic sports development can strengthen national branding, attract international partnerships, and stimulate local economies through events and associated industries.

3.2 PERSISTENT CHALLENGES

Despite the optimism, speakers consistently identified four major structural challenges that must be addressed to unleash the continent's full potential.

The Prohibitive Cost of Capital:

The “Africa risk premium” remains the most significant handbrake on development. Discussions revealed that the perceived risk of investing in Africa is dramatically higher than the statistical reality, with African infrastructure projects showing a default rate of 1.9% compared to 6.6% in the U.S. This misperception leads to disproportionately high borrowing costs, stifling both public and private sector investment.

The Critical Infrastructure Deficit:

Foundational infrastructure gaps continue to limit growth across all sectors. This includes a massive energy deficit, with 600 million people still without electricity; a logistical bottleneck, where trucks can wait for days at borders; and a digital divide, with household internet connectivity at only 18%. Without reliable power, seamless logistics, and ubiquitous connectivity, the vision of a unified, industrialized continent cannot be fully realized.

Fragmented and Inconsistent Regulatory Landscapes:

Doing business across Africa's 54 different regulatory environments remains a primary source of friction and cost. Speakers highlighted inconsistent tax policies (e.g., higher taxes on EVs than on fossil-fuel vehicles), a lack of harmonized standards, and protectionist national policies that undermine the spirit of the AfCFTA. This fragmentation prevents businesses from achieving continental scale efficiently.

The Talent Development Mismatch:

The event highlighted a critical paradox: a massive, young, and underemployed population coexisting with a severe shortage of skilled labor for the industries of the future. Tech leaders reported struggling to find qualified talent, pointing to outdated, colonial-era education systems that do not equip youth with the critical thinking and digital skills required by a modern economy.

Powering the SMEs (Formal vs Informal):

SMEs—especially informal enterprises—are the backbone of Africa's economy, accounting for up to 90% of businesses and dominating supply chains across agriculture, retail, manufacturing, logistics, and services. Bringing them into the formal ecosystem is essential for building resilient value chains.

4. Evolving Narratives

Beyond the specific themes discussed, Unstoppable Africa 2025 was notable for the significant evolution in the overarching narrative about the continent’s role in the world. The tone, framing, and language used by leaders from business, government, and creative sectors marked a clear departure from traditional

development discourse. The event captured four pivotal shifts in dialogue: a move from discussing potential to demonstrating agency; a rejection of aid in favor of demanding partnership; a pivot from top-down policy to bottom-up execution; and a turn from seeking external validation to building internal ecosystems.

4.1 FROM “AFRICA RISING” (POTENTIAL) TO “AFRICA SHAPING” (AGENCY)

The most fundamental narrative shift was the move from discussing Africa’s future potential to showcasing its present-day agency. The “Africa Rising” narrative of the past decade, which often framed the continent as a passive beneficiary of global trends, has been replaced by a more assertive story of “Africa Shaping.” This was the

explicit theme of the event—

“The Big Push: Africa Shapes the Markets”
—and it permeated every discussion.

This evolution was articulated as a move from being a “rule-taker” to a “rule-maker.”



“Africa is well on its way to moving from being the source of raw materials for the world, to being the hub of innovation, creativity and industrialization. This is the future we are building.”

– H.E. Duma Boko,
President of Botswana



“It’s about Africa as a rule maker, not a rule breaker, not a rule taker. And this is already happening.”

– Mr. Larry Madowo,
International
Correspondent, CNN



4. Evolving Narratives

This sentiment was evident in strategic conversations about critical minerals, where leaders argued that Africa must dictate the terms of their extraction and processing. It was also central to the dialogue on AI, with a strong push for Africa to be fully engaged in shaping global governance from the outset, ensuring that new

technologies are aligned with the continent's development goals and ethical values. The narrative is no longer about asking for a place at the global table, but, as **Ms. Folly Bah Thibault** stated, about “acknowledging that Africa is building a bigger and even bigger and an even better table.”

4.2 FROM SEEKING AID TO DEMANDING PARTNERSHIP

A powerful and unified rejection of the aid-dependent narrative was a defining feature of the event. The dialogue consistently repositioned Africa from a continent in need of assistance to an indispensable partner whose resources, talent, and markets are critical for global prosperity. This shift was articulated with a newfound confidence, rooted in a clear-eyed assessment of Africa's strategic assets.

One panelist powerfully captured this change in mindset by framing the continent as the central prize in global negotiations.

This perspective was reinforced at the highest levels of global trade policy.

Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala recounted her arguments in trade negotiations, making it clear that engaging with Africa is a matter of strategic necessity for global businesses, not charity.

This narrative reframes the relationship as one of mutual benefit, where Africa's demographic dividend and resource wealth are key levers for negotiating equitable and sustainable partnerships.



“Africa needs to not believe that it is asking. They want it. Africa needs to understand that it's the prize... If they want you, then they have to understand that there's a price and that there is something that can be gained from this alliance.”

— Pamela Coke-Hamilton,
Executive Director, International Trade Centre



4. Evolving Narratives



“First, I look at Africa not as a continent looking for aid, the aid is gone anyway, but as a big market. The way that we present it... is here’s the market of the future. Here’s the place with the young talents.”

— Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala,
Director-General, World Trade Organization (WTO)



4.3 DRIVING PRIVATE SECTOR ACTION FOR AFRICA AND THE WORLD

While high-level frameworks like the AfCFTA were lauded as essential, the event’s energy was unmistakably focused on the “doers”—the private sector leaders, entrepreneurs, and sub-national actors who are driving tangible progress on the ground. There was a palpable sense of impatience with the slow pace of top-down policy implementation and a celebration of those who are moving forward regardless. The United Nations Global Compact’s African **Business Leaders Coalition (ABLC)**¹ exemplified this shift. Instead of waiting for global climate funds, its members have independently mobilized **\$9.4 billion for climate action**. This private sector-led execution demonstrates a new model where business doesn’t just respond to policy but actively shapes and funds the development agenda.

This bottom-up momentum was also evident at the city level. **Mayor Yvonne Aki-Sawyer’s** climate resilience initiatives in Freetown showcased how local leaders can implement sophisticated, data-driven solutions that create jobs and attract international partners, often moving faster and more nimbly than their national counterparts. The overarching narrative was that while national and continental policies create the enabling environment, the real engine of transformation is now the execution-focused leadership of businesses and cities.

Africa Business Leaders Coalition (ABLC) is a CEO-led coalition mobilizing Africa’s top private-sector leaders to advance **climate action and gender equality** and amplify the collective voice of Africa’s private sector on the global stage.

4. Evolving Narratives

Membership of the Coalition has grown to 75 companies collectively representing USD 170+

billion in revenue and nearly one million employees across the continent.

4.4 FROM EXTERNAL VALIDATION TO INTERNAL ECOSYSTEM BUILDING

A particularly potent narrative shift came from the creative and technology sectors, which have historically sought validation from Western institutions. Leaders from these fields made a passionate case for turning inward to build self-sufficient, world-class ecosystems.

Tiwa Savage forcefully articulated this sentiment in the context of the global music industry.

This call for self-reliance was echoed by **Ava DuVernay**, who spoke of the need to own not just the stories but the distribution channels, envisioning a “Blackflix” to ensure African narratives cannot be silenced or marginalized. In the same spirit, **Sabrina Dhowre Elba**, Actress

and CEO of S’Able Labs, championed the need to amplify Africa’s opportunities, counter stereotypes and establishing lasting legacies. Through her ethical beauty brand, she celebrates African heritage, addresses the needs of melanin-rich skin, and advocates for fair treatment of women across the beauty supply chain.

This inward-looking strategy is not about isolation but about building a position of undeniable strength. By creating robust internal markets, platforms, and standards of excellence, Africa’s creative and tech industries can force the world to engage on their terms, making them too significant and successful to ignore.



4. Evolving Narratives

“

“We almost try to get validation from the Western world... Why don't we build our own award system? ... We need to get validation from ourselves. No one is going to value you until you value yourself.”

– Tiwa Savage,
International Singer-
Songwriter & Actress



“

“More and more now, I think it's actually less about this platform that I'm building, but more about what will I leave behind. What is that legacy that I want people to remember me for? And I don't want it to be what dress I wore... I'd love for it to be whose story I lifted up.”

– Sabrina Dhowre Elba,
Actress and CEO of
S'Able Labs



5. Strategic Recommendations

The insights gathered from Unstoppable Africa 2025 translate into a clear set of strategic imperatives for the key actors shaping the continent's future. The following recommendations are distilled directly from the event's core themes

and are designed to provide actionable guidance for policymakers, investors, and business leaders to capitalize on the current momentum and address persistent challenges.

5.1 FOR POLICYMAKERS

Fast-Track AfCFTA Implementation with a Corridor-Based Approach:

Rather than attempting to harmonize all 54 countries at once, prioritize the full implementation of AfCFTA protocols along key, high-potential economic corridors (e.g., Lobito Corridor, Lagos-Abidjan). Focus on eliminating specific non-tariff barriers, digitizing customs, and harmonizing standards within these corridors to create demonstrable "quick wins" that build momentum for broader continental integration.

Mandate Value Addition and Enforce Local Content:

Adopt and enforce legislation that links mineral and resource extraction rights to mandatory in-country processing and beneficiation, following the models discussed by leaders from Botswana and Sierra Leone. As one speaker noted, this must be backed by technical specifications in procurement that favor local manufacturers, ensuring local content policies are practical, not just aspirational.

Create Expedited Regulatory Channels for Strategic Technology Investment:

Develop regulatory sandboxes and streamlined "Startup Acts" specifically for high-growth sectors like AI, fintech, and green tech. As articulated by tech leaders, entrepreneurs need clear, predictable, and consistently applied rules of engagement. Creating these expedited regulatory channels will attract the foreign and domestic capital needed to build Africa's digital and green industries.

Digitalization of Public Infrastructure:

Policymakers should prioritize the modernization and digitalization of public infrastructure to enhance efficiency, transparency, and cross-border integration. This includes implementing interoperable digital platforms for government services such as customs, licensing, taxation, and health systems, while ensuring data protection and cybersecurity standards.

5. Strategic Recommendations

Strengthening the African Credit Risk

Management Agency:

Enhancing the capacity of the African Credit Risk Management Agency is critical to lowering the perceived investment risk in Africa and improving access to capital. Policymakers should standardize credit assessment frameworks, expand coverage to SMEs and subnational entities, and leverage continent-wide financial data to improve transparency. By supporting risk-sharing mechanisms and promoting international recognition of African credit ratings, the agency can help reduce borrowing costs, attract long-term private investment, and enable financing for critical infrastructure and industrial projects.

Economic Activation of Regional Blocks:

Regional economic communities (RECs) should be leveraged as engines for implementing AfCFTA and driving continental integration. Policymakers can activate these blocks by promoting sector-specific industrial clusters, harmonizing regulatory and trade frameworks, and coordinating infrastructure investments along strategic corridors. Facilitating the free movement of goods, services, and talent within RECs, while deepening regional capital markets, will unlock economies of scale, strengthen value chains, and position Africa's regional blocs as competitive hubs in the global economy.



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5.2 FOR INVESTORS AND FINANCE LEADERS

Re-evaluate African Risk Models with Better Data:

Actively challenge the “Africa risk premium” by incorporating new, evidence-based data sources. Utilize platforms like the **GEMS Database**, which, as one panelist noted, shows significantly lower default rates for African infrastructure projects than in developed markets. This data-driven approach will allow for more accurate pricing of capital and reveal undervalued investment opportunities.

Mobilize Domestic Capital with Targeted Financial Products:

Develop and promote investment vehicles designed to channel a fraction of Africa’s **\$1.5 trillion in pension funds** and sovereign wealth into domestic infrastructure and venture capital. This requires creating financial products that match the long-term horizons of these funds and de-risking mechanisms, like those being pioneered by the

AfDB and AFC, to make local investments more attractive than overseas alternatives.

Invest in the Ecosystem, Not Just the “Star”:

Recognize that sustainable returns in the creative and tech sectors depend on a robust ecosystem. As highlighted in the creative industries panel, capital should be directed not only to frontline talent (artists, founders) but also to the “missing middle”—the managers, agents, data analysts, and legal experts who provide the critical infrastructure for success.

1. Global Emerging Markets Risk Database (GEMs) Consortium is the largest credit risk databases for the emerging markets operations of its member institutions – multilateral development banks and development finance institutions. The primary purpose of the database is to provide pooled data on credit default rates from projects funded by the participating institutions and recovery rates from defaulted projects. As the database is a collection of data from several institutions the results are a better representation of the entire market than any individual institution of the Consortium could have on its own. The database comprises sovereign, public and private counterparts across a wide range of loan and guarantee types.

GEMs was established in 2009 as a joint initiative between the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the International Finance Corporation (IFC). Since then, the GEMs consortium has grown to include all major MDBs and DFIs worldwide.

5.3 FOR BUSINESS LEADERS

The message for the private sector was clear:

Take the lead. Business leaders were urged to be more assertive in driving the continental agenda, collaborating across borders, and investing in the foundations of future growth.

Adopt a Continental Business Model:

Design business models, products, and services for continental scale from day one. This means actively engaging with the AfCFTA's tools (e.g., PAPSS) to navigate cross-border trade and building regional supply chains that leverage the complementary strengths of different African markets, as exemplified by the Senegal-Sierra Leone gas and iron ore collaboration.

Invest Proactively in the Future Talent Pipeline:

Move beyond complaining about the skills gap to actively solving it. Forge direct partnerships with universities and technical colleges to co-create

curricula, fund specialized training programs, and offer apprenticeships. As stated by **Cheikh Camara**, VP and Managing Director of ServiceNow Africa, it should be “all hands on deck” to upskill Africa’s youth and build the workforce required for the AI and green energy revolutions.

Become Policy Advocates, Not Just Business Operators:

Recognize that in Africa, engaging with policymakers is not an external activity but a core business function. Proactively provide governments with the data and expertise needed to craft effective, business-friendly regulations. As **Dr. Nouredine Tayebi**, CEO and Founder of Yassir emphasized, it is the “burden of companies like ours to be proactive and persistent” in educating decision-makers and pushing for the necessary reforms.

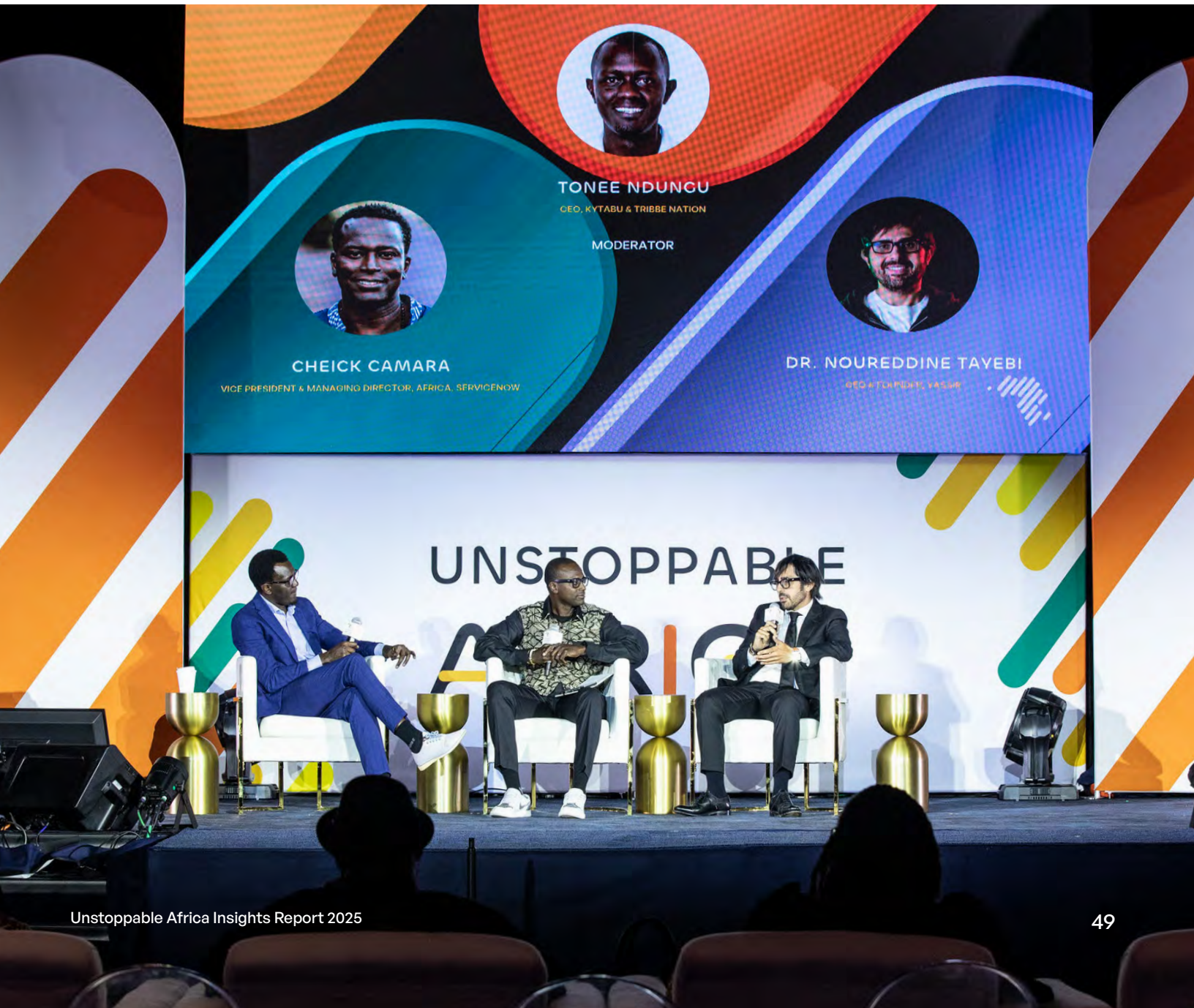


5. Strategic Recommendations

Encourage the Power of Coalitions for Cross-Border Collaboration:

Business leaders are urged to harness the strength of coalitions to drive continental growth and innovation. By forming cross-border partnerships, companies can pool resources, share expertise, and co-invest in regional projects that no single entity could achieve alone. Such coalitions enable the creation of integrated supply

chains, support large-scale infrastructure development, and amplify Africa's negotiating power in global markets. Beyond commercial gains, these collaborative networks foster knowledge transfer, enhance resilience, and position the private sector as a central driver of Africa's economic integration and long-term competitiveness.



6. Conclusion



“In 2022, we planted the Global Africa Business Initiative to change the story of Africa, to grow a table where the world looks us eye to eye as partners. GABI convenes. GABI connects. GABI champions and GABI catalyzes for Africa!”

– Amina J. Mohammed,
United Nations Deputy Secretary-General



GABI will play a pivotal role in translating strategic recommendations into actionable outcomes by leveraging its Action Pathways on Digital and Health. Through these pathways, GABI provides practical guidance, capacity-building programs, and sector-specific insights that empower African businesses to adopt innovative solutions, strengthen digital infrastructure, and scale resilient health systems. By connecting the private sector with policymakers, technical experts, and development partners, GABI ensures that companies are equipped to navigate regulatory frameworks, access financing,

and implement solutions that drive both economic growth and social impact across the continent.

In addition, GABI convenings serve as a platform for the business community to align on shared priorities, foster cross-border partnerships, and exchange knowledge on best practices. These forums enable the private sector to collaborate on regional initiatives, identify investment opportunities, and collectively advocate for policies that support industrialization, digital transformation, and sustainable development.



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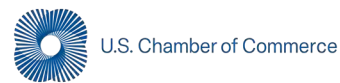
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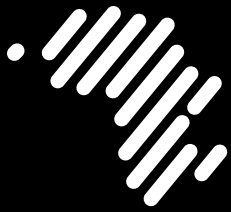


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