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# Unstoppable Africa 2026

# (UA2026)

***Theme:*** *Unstoppable Africa: Powering Business, Scaling Economies, Shaping the Future.*

**Venue:** New York Marriott Marquis, 1535 Broadway, NYC

**Date:** Sunday 20 & Monday 21 September, 2026

**Co-convened by:** United Nations, African Union

**Organized by:** United Nations Global Compact

**Overview**

Africa is no longer a story of potential waiting to be realised—it is a market being unlocked, shaped, and owned. The next decade will determine not whether Africa grows, but who captures the value of that growth.

At a time when global supply chains are being redrawn by geopolitical tension, energy insecurity, and shifting trade rules, Africa stands as one of the most consequential arenas for investment and industrial strategy. From critical minerals and green energy to digital platforms and creative industries, the continent holds assets the world cannot transition without. The question is no longer whether Africa participates—but whether it owns.

**Unstoppable Africa 2026 (UA2026)**, under the theme ***Unstoppable Africa: Powering Business, Scaling Economies, Shaping the Future***, positions African business at the centre of this shift. This is not about inclusion in global systems—it is about influence over how those systems are designed. Who sets the terms of trade. Who controls capital flows. Who builds, scales, and retains value across supply chains.

Across the continent, this transition is already underway. African firms are building cross-border payment and logistics platforms that are redefining regional trade. Manufacturers are moving up the value chain into higher-margin production. Technology companies are leveraging African data and talent to develop globally relevant AI and digital solutions. Creative industries are exporting culture while building globally recognised brands. These are not isolated success stories—they are the early architecture of a new economic model.

Taking place on 20–21 September 2026 at the New York Marriott Marquis in Times Square, Unstoppable Africa remains the leading African-convened business forum outside the continent and the flagship platform of the Global Africa Business Initiative. This year's edition is explicitly deal-focused and execution-driven—bringing together heads of state, CEOs, investors, and innovators to catalyse transactions, launch investment vehicles, and forge cross-border partnerships.

The focus is clear: scaling African markets by strengthening African ownership. This includes advancing local processing and green industrialisation in critical minerals and broader extractives, accelerating digital and financial infrastructure, and building companies with the governance, capital depth, and market access to compete globally.

Africa enters this moment with unparalleled strategic assets: the minerals powering the energy transition, vast renewable energy potential, expanding consumer markets, and the world's youngest workforce. Yet too often, value continues to be extracted rather than retained—exported as raw commodities, captured through external technologies, or diluted across fragmented markets.

Unstoppable Africa 2026 is designed to change that equation. Through high-level plenaries, CEO and investor roundtables, ministerial dialogues, startup showcases, and curated GABI Solutions Labs, the forum will drive one central outcome: more value created, owned, and scaled by African businesses.

This is Africa not as a frontier—but as a force. Not as a risk—but as one of the most compelling opportunity stories of the global economy. The markets are here. The capital is mobilising. The builders are ready.

Now is the moment to power, scale, and shape the future.

# Unstoppable Africa 2026 Agenda

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| **DAY 1: Sunday 20 September, 2026** | |
| **07:30 Registration & Tea/Coffee Networking**<br>**08:30 Ballroom Doors open** | |
| **DAY 1: 09:00 - 09:10 Introduction by MCs: Ms. Folly Bah Thibault,** Senior News Anchor, Al Jazeera Media Network - **CONFIRMED** & **Mr. Larry Madowo**, International Correspondent, CNN - **CONFIRMED** | |
| **Agenda Block 1** | **Trade at Scale: Owning Value, Shaping Markets** |

**DAY 1: 09:10 - 10:00 Conversation Starter:** From Raw Deals to Real Value: Critical Minerals, Infrastructure and a New Deal Playbook

Africa is done being grateful for raw deals. It is now about who owns the value created from African resources, markets and talent — and whether the next decade flips the script from exporting raw potential to building African firms that control entire value chains and the infrastructure around them. Africa already supplies 69% of the world's cobalt and 76% of its manganese, yet captures less than 1% of the global value from clean-energy manufacturing and refines under 5% of most critical minerals it produces — while UNCTAD warns that of 73 mineral partnerships struck globally, only 27 link developing and developed nations on terms built to move up the value chain, not lock them into extraction. This high-level panel reframes how Africa engages on critical minerals and infrastructure financing, focusing on clear frameworks of engagement that turn resource wealth into processing plants, logistics corridors, hospitality assets and conference centres on African balance sheets, not just ore shipped offshore.

With concrete examples of how mineral-linked revenues, fiscal tools and partnerships can support broader infrastructure ambitions, our powerhouse line-up of heads of state, industrial champions and financiers will dive straight into the moves that matter now — renegotiating extractive contracts, insisting on local and regional processing and technology transfer, tying off-take agreements to shared infrastructure, and crowding in capital that keeps ownership and upside in African hands. With global demand for these minerals set to climb sharply over the next decade the goal is simple and radical: a decade from now, Africa should be exporting fewer raw commodities and far more processed materials, climate-smart products, platforms and global brands, under deal frameworks that citizens can understand and leaders can proudly defend.

**Scene setter: African Heads of State**

**Panelists:**

- **Ms. Nolitha Fakude,** Chairperson, Anglo American South Africa **CONFIRMED**
- **Mr. Eddy Kioni,** CEO, BUENASSA (DRC) **CONFIRMED**
- **Mr. Tidjane Thiam,** General Partner, Allied Critical Minerals Fund **CONFIRMED**

**DAY 1: 10:05 - 10:25 Unstoppable Africans: Mr. Luol Deng,** Former NBA All-Star and President, South Sudan Basketball Federation - **CONFIRMED**

For the first Unstoppable Africa 2026 fireside chat, we welcome two-time NBA All-Star Luol Deng — for a moment where resilience meets inspiration. From fleeing war-torn Sudan as a child to becoming a global basketball icon, Deng's journey is a testament to his unstoppable spirit. As President of the South Sudan Basketball Federation, he has personally funded the national programme for four years — building courts, an indoor academy, and a pathway to Paris 2024 in a country that still has no indoor arena. Off the court, Deng has built a $200 million real estate portfolio through his firm D3N9, spanning the US, the Bahamas, and East Africa, and now channels that same capital discipline into the business case for sport: with only five of Africa's 54 nations holding arenas ready for top-tier competition, he argues infrastructure is the continent's next great investable frontier. Witness a living sports legend whose vision for Africa's future is as bold as his past is inspiring.

**DAY 1: 10:28 -11:45 HIgh Level Opening**

**DAY 1: 10:28 - 10:29 Introduction by UA2026 MCs: Ms. Folly Bah Thibault,** Senior News Anchor, Al Jazeera Media Network & **Mr. Larry Madowo**, International Correspondent, CNN

**DAY 1: 10:29 - 10:30 Official Opening Video**

**DAY 1: 10:30 - 10:40 Official Opening Welcome Remarks** introduced by **Ms. Sanda Ojiambo,** Assistant Secretary-General, CEO and Executive Director, United Nations Global Compact (UNGC) **CONFIRMED**

- **H.E. Mahmoud Ali Youssouf,** Chairperson, African Union Commission **CONFIRMED**
- **H.E. António Guterres,** Secretary-General, United Nations **CONFIRMED**

**DAY 1: 10:40 - 11:40 The Leaders Panel:** Powering Business, Scaling Economies, Shaping the Future.

Africa's economic transformation is no longer theoretical — African and global companies are already investing, building and adding value across the continent. This High-Level Opening Panel brings together African and international heads of state and CEOs to ask a forward-looking question: what leadership choices, in Africa and beyond, will ensure that Africa's agency, business growth and value creation help power business, scale economies and shape the next decade of global prosperity? The conversation is rooted in what is already working and focuses on how deeper cooperation with global partners can unlock larger markets, more resilient supply chains and new engines of green and digital growth.

Against the backdrop of critical minerals, fast-growing consumer markets, vast renewable potential and the world's youngest population, panellists will focus on practical, shared opportunities. They will explore how the AfCFTA and regional integration can scale existing success stories into continental value chains; how green and digital infrastructure can accelerate productivity and value addition; and how innovative financing and smarter trade and investment frameworks can de-risk and crowd in private capital at scale. The session will spotlight the collaborations, reforms and leadership choices needed now to power business, deepen value addition, scale economies and shape a more prosperous future for Africa and its partners.

**Panelists:**

- **Heads of State TBC**
- **Mr. Samaila Zubairu**, President & CEO, African Finance Corporation (AFC) - **CONFIRMED**
- **Ms. Mandy DeFilippo**, CEO of Americas, Europe, Middle East and Africa, Standard Chartered **CONFIRMED**

**11:40-12:00 Tea/Coffee**

**DAY 1: 12:00 - 12:25 Strategic Dialogue:** Building the System That Finances Africa at Scale

Africa is no longer just asking for fairer finance; it is building its own systems to change the game. With new African-led facilities and pooled institutions such as AfDB's New African Financial Architecture (NAFA) and its 11-point Abidjan Consensus, the African Union's new Africa-wide infrastructure financing facility, and the growing firepower of the Alliance of African Multilateral Financial Institutions (AAMFI), the continent is beginning to decide how capital moves, what it costs and who leads it. This session showcases that build-out: African institutions, pensions, banks and fintechs designing vehicles, guarantees and platforms that unlock African capital, strengthen regional financial institutions and firm up Africa's voice in global financial governance. The aim is clear: to make Africa's own systems a primary engine financing the continent — on Africa's terms, and in service of genuine financial sovereignty for the continent.

**Panelists**:

- **Ms. Nonkululeko Nyembezi,** Chairperson, Standard Bank Group - **CONFIRMED**
- **Ms. Stephanie von Friedeburg**, Managing Director, Public Sector Banking, Citi - **CONFIRMED**

**Moderator: Mr. Acha Leke**, Chairman (Africa), McKinsey & Company - **CONFIRMED**

**DAY 1: 12:25-12:40 Fireside: Mr. Massad Boulos,** Senior Advisor to the President of the United States on Arab and African Affairs - **CONFIRMED**

Massad Boulos' mantras for Africa are "peace, partnerships, prosperity" and "trade not aid." In this rapid-fire session, the Senior Advisor to President Trump on Arab and African affairs unpacks how Washington is approaching Africa's critical minerals, trade corridors, and path to peace. The conversation explores how the Trump administration is designing peace and stability efforts as platforms for long-term investment and partnership.

**DAY 1: 12:40 - 12:50 Unstoppable African Startup Spotlight**

**DAY 1: 12:50 -13:30 Panel:** Rules, Tools, and Architects: Putting Africa's Private Sector in the AfCFTA Driver's Seat

The AfCFTA was never meant to be a government-only project; it's the operating system for the people who create the jobs: African businesses. Yet in the evolution of the world's largest free trade area, firms are not yet the architects helping shape the rules, tools, and deals that can tilt global terms of trade in Africa's favour on everything from critical minerals to green industrial exports.

This high-energy working session asks a blunt question: what does it *practically* look like for the private sector to own and drive the AfCFTA? CEOs will bring real "pain points" from the field—rules of origin, NTBs, standards, customs, tax harmonisation, trade finance—and map them to the specific AfCFTA instruments and national policies that must change fast for the private sector to be able to take the wheel. Here policy makers engage with the private sector to move business from the consultation room into the design studio: standing seats on national AfCFTA committees, sector working groups co-chaired by business, national AfCFTA business compacts, and hard feedback loops powered by NTB platforms, business indices and dispute-resolution mechanisms that actually work.

**Panelists:**

- **Ms. Phuthi Mahanyele-Dabengwa**, CEO & Executive Director, Naspers & Group Executive Director, Prosus Group & Member, African Business Leaders Coalition (ABLC) **CONFIRMED**
- **H.E. Francisca Tatchouop Belobe,** Commissioner for Economic Development, Trade, Tourism, Industry and Minerals (ETTIM), African Union Commission (AUC) **CONFIRMED**

**DAY 1: 12:00-17:00 Side Sessions**

**DAY 1: 13.30 - 14:30 Networking Lunch (7th floor)**

| **Agenda Block 2** | ***Africa's Great Energy Leap*** |
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**DAY 1: 14:30-14:40 Unstoppable Africans: Ms. Rekik Bekele Ayele,** CEO, Green Scene Energy - **CONFIRMED**

**Rekik Bekele is an unstoppable force in Africa's just-energy transition.** An electrical and computer engineer, she leads a women-led Ethiopian clean energy company that has delivered more than 6MW of solar and battery systems to hospitals, schools, water utilities, and off-grid communities — proving that clean energy is not a luxury but a right, and impacting over 100,000 lives in the process. She designs, builds, and scales the systems that turn "last-mile" into first-mover: hybrid microgrids, solar water pumps, and TOLO, Ethiopia's first locally manufactured induction cookstove, now crossing borders through a Rwanda joint venture under the AfCFTA. Unstoppable Africa invites Rekik to the stage as proof of an Africa that is no longer waiting for solutions — it is engineering its own future, system by system, factory by factory.

**DAY 1: 14:40-15:00 Fireside:** The Great Energy Leap: Mission 300 and the Rise of Electrified Africa

- **Ms. Damilola Ogunbiyi,** CEO and Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Sustainable Energy for All and Co-Chair of UN-Energy **CONFIRMED**
- **Ms. Anna Bjerde,** Managing Director of Operations, World Bank Group **CONFIRMED**

**DAY 1: 15:00-15:40 Panel:** Power Shift: Who Will Be Africa's Next Energy Giants?

As the old energy order is deeply shaken by geopolitical chokepoints, supply insecurity, and price volatility, a new race is underway across Africa. This session asks which countries are turning disruption into advantage — building not just megawatts, but energy security, industrial capacity, and competitive edge through renewables, storage, mini-grids, and smarter grids. Few countries illustrate this better than Namibia, which has banned raw mineral exports to force local lithium and rare-earth beneficiation and is now building Africa's most advanced green hydrogen industry — anchored by the $10bn Hyphen project — to convert world-class sun and wind into industrial-scale value. From South Africa's storage revolution to Morocco's green industrial play and Kenya's race to renewables, we explore who is really moving first, where are the opportunities for African businesses and economies to grow fast, and what it will take to shift the continent from energy vulnerability to energy sovereignty at scale.

**Moderator: Ms. Veronica Bolton Smith**, CEO, The Critical Minerals Africa Group - **CONFIRMED**

**DAY 1: 15:40 - 16:00 In Conversation:** Solutions, Not Promises: Financing Africa's Clean Power Now

Speakers:

- **Ms. Tariye Gbadegesin,** CEO, Climate Investment Funds (CIF) - **CONFIRMED**
- **Ms. Norah Magero,** Co-founder & CEO, Drop Access - **CONFIRMED**

The climate crisis is here – and so are the solutions. This fireside revolves around one simple challenge: there is plenty of climate money, but almost none of it is landing as real megawatts and jobs in Africa. It's a fast-paced conversation between Tariye Gbadegesin, CEO of the Climate Investment Funds, one of the world's largest multilateral climate funds, and ClimateWorks' CEO Helen Mountford. They are joined by Norah Magero - the developer behind the groundbreaking VacciBox, a solar-powered portable cold-chain solution for vaccines and medical supplies in off-grid communities - to look at where clean energy and just transition solutions are already working in Africa, what it will take to move serious capital behind them, and how philanthropy can unlock much larger flows of private and public finance. Together they will chart 2–3 concrete steps to turn today's commitments into tomorrow's pipelines, projects, and country transitions.

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| **DAY 1: 16:00 Tea/Coffee** | |
| **DAY 1: 16:00 MAIN STAGE CLOSES** | |
| **DAY 1: 17:00 Close of DAY 1** | |
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| **DAY 2: Monday 21 September** | |
| **DAY 2: 08:00 Registration Starts** | |
| **DAY 1 Highlights video** | |
| **DAY 2: 09:00-09:05 Welcome** by **MCs Ms. Folly Bah Thibault,** Senior News Anchor, Al Jazeera Media Network & **Mr. Larry Madowo**, International Correspondent, CNN | |
| **DAY 2: 09:05-09:25 Fireside chat** | |
| **Agenda Block 3** | ***Africa's Playbook for Digital Transformation*** |

**Day 2 09:25-09:45 - Unstoppable Africans:**

**Turning Silence Into Signal: Elly Savatia** Launches Signvrse's Next Leap in Inclusive AI **- CONFIRMED**

At 10, Elly Savatia was dismantling radios in Western Kenya just to understand how they worked. Years later, in a Northern Kenya classroom of 300 deaf students with only one interpreter, he found the problem worth building his life around. Now 25, the Founder & CEO of Signvrse will take to the UA2026 stage to demo Terp 360 live — his AI platform that turns speech and text into lifelike 3D sign-language avatars — before launching its boldest leap yet: two-way translation and expansion beyond Kenya into Rwanda, Uganda, and South Africa. A builder who insists "you don't build solutions and take them to the people; you build with them," Savatia is proof that Africa's next AI breakthrough isn't just about scale — it's about who gets to be heard. 2025 Africa Prize for Engineering Innovation winner; Forbes Africa 30 Under 30.

**DAY 2: 09:45 – 10:30 Panel of the Future:** Building Digital Africa's Value Change-Makers

Artificial Intelligence is often hyped as a game-changer for Africa, yet in most countries it is being used at only a fraction of its potential. This session asks a sharper, system-level question: **what is the AI opportunity for Africa's institutions, and who owns and scales it?** At its core is a simple idea: Africa's digital transformation will come when we are creators before consumers—when (often young) African developers, engineers and entrepreneurs are the primary builders and owners of the AI, platforms and products that run on our own digital rails, and are embedded into real public and private systems rather than left as isolated pilots.

Anchored by leading policy, technical and entrepreneurial voices, the panel will explore three intertwined angles: Africa's data and diversity as a strategic asset; the gap between AI hype and actual use in education, health, governance and revenue systems; and how youth creativity and tech can be tied directly to public service and civic engagement. Participants will examine what "sovereign AI" really means in practice—models, data and computers governed and substantially owned on African terms—so that AI-generated value is recorded on African balance sheets, not only abroad.

This year's "Panel of the Future" brings together founders, ecosystem builders, talent platforms and infrastructure operators to ask one practical question: **how do we move from raw talent to refined value**, growing a generation of Africans who design, own and scale solutions that make Africa a co-author—not just a user—of the AI architectures, platforms and products driving its next systems leap.

**Panelists:**