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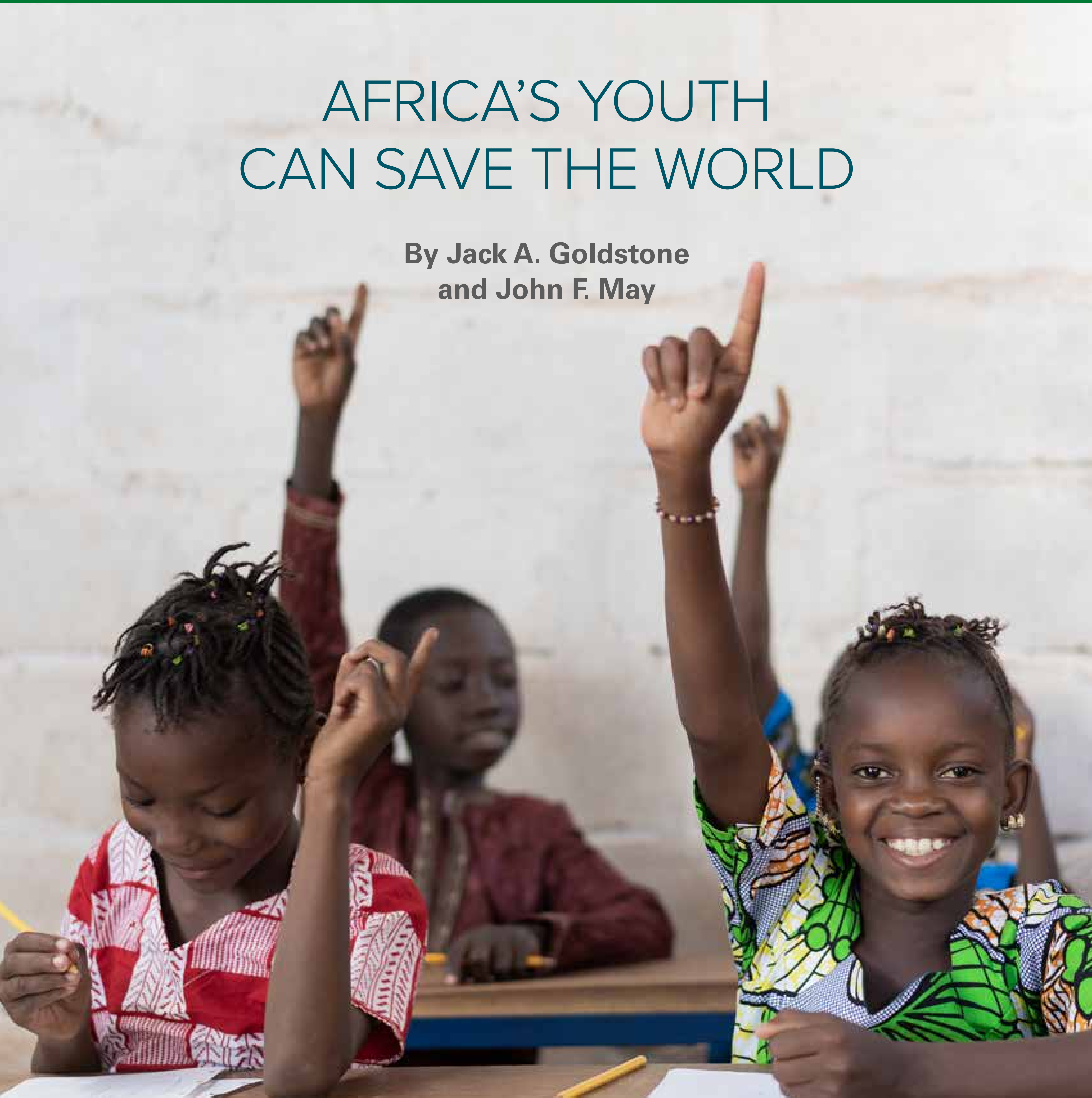
# AFRICA'S YOUTH CAN SAVE THE WORLD

By Jack A. Goldstone
and John F. May



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*Cover: Girls in school, Africa (Riccardo Mayer / shutterstock.com)*

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*Kampala, Uganda (weesam2010 / CC BY 2.0 / flickr.com)*

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

When the G20 gave permanent membership to the African Union in September, Zambia's President Hakainde Hichelma went to X (formerly Twitter) to announce that this "means [Africa] has been recognized as a key player in the world economic landscape." Can the continent of Africa—with its 54 diverse countries—be a new motor of sustainable development and economic growth? In the next two decades, as China rapidly ages and the rest of Asia follows close behind, 96% of the entire net increase in the world's prime working age population (ages 15–49) will come from the African continent. If Africa's leaders succeed in realizing the potential of their youthful populations as they pioneer clean energy growth, they will not only improve the lives of Africans, they will also deliver huge benefits to the entire world.

As China did before it, African growth can transform the global economy. China's GDP per capita was just half that of Ethiopia today at the beginning of its great boom. Urbanization, education (especially at the secondary level), and foreign investment drove China's remarkable growth. Africa possesses many of the same qualities.

The looming climate change crisis means that Africa's growth must be green, however. By 2060, Africa's 2.9 billion people will be as many as China and India combined. If its development depends on fossil-fueled energy, its increased carbon emissions will more than offset any CO2 reductions by Europe, the United States, and China. Fortunately, the continent boasts enormous potential for clean wind, solar, and geothermal energy, as well as its already plentiful hydropower. While the entire world will benefit from a green and growing Africa, its exceptional vulnerability to droughts and food insecurity means its citizens may reap the greatest benefits.

> **"By 2060, Africa's 2.9 billion people will be as many as China and India combined.** If its development depends on fossil-fueled energy, its increased carbon emissions will more than offset any CO2 reductions by Europe, the United States, and China**."**

Africa is more often viewed as a source of problems for the world than a place that offers solutions, but nothing could be more mistaken. In fact, Africa's social and economic development likely holds the key to solving many of the problems facing other countries. If the continent's leaders can unite their people behind policies that drive economic growth, spur education, and create conditions attractive to foreign investment, Africa's youth can lead a global economic boom.

Other countries must pursue a course with African countries that values cooperation over competition. As the developed countries go "grey," young people will become the scarcest resource. African countries will need support to develop that resource through outside investments in health, education, and clean energy. Africa must succeed for the global economy to prosper.

# INTRODUCTION

In February and March of 2023, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen visited Senegal, South Africa, and Zambia, First Lady Jill Biden arrived in Namibia and Kenya, Secretary of State Antony Blinken visited Ethiopia and Niger, and Vice President Kamala Harris traveled to Ghana, Tanzania, and Zambia. In January and February, Russian Foreign Secretary Sergei Lavrov met with officials in South Africa, Mauritania, Mali, and Sudan. These visits were intended to challenge the dominant role in Africa that has been taken by China. In January 2023 alone, Chinese Foreign Minister, Qin Gang, visited five African nations (Ethiopia, Gabon, Angola, Benin, and Egypt), as well as the Headquarters of the African Union in Addis Ababa.

The world's great powers are again seeking influence in Africa, just as they did in the 19th century. The earlier era saw these nations arrive to gain control of territory and extract resources. Today's great powers come to donate and invest, build markets and infrastructure, and seek partnerships with sovereign states.

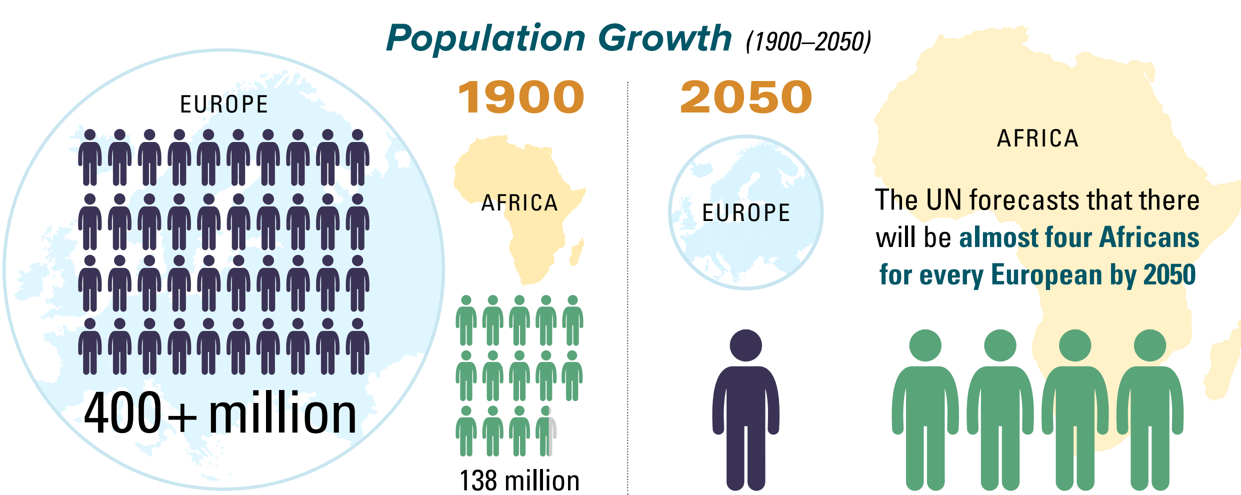
To be sure, great powers also still seek access to resources—oil and gas, copper and gold, diamonds and platinum, cobalt and cocoa. But the export of raw materials will soon become secondary to Africa's real resource in the 21st century: the human capital of its youthful population. And African leaders already are seeking to guide the continent's leap forward into a clean energy economy.

If Africa's leaders succeed in realizing the potential of their youthful populations as they pioneer clean energy growth, they will not only improve the lives of Africans. They will also deliver huge benefits to the entire world.

# A WORLD TURNED UPSIDE DOWN

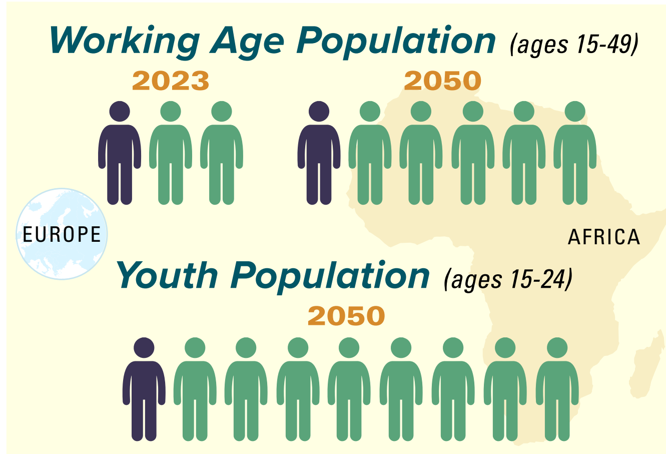
In 1900, the total population of Africa is estimated to have been 138 million people. Given that the African continent comprises about one-fifth of the total land area of Earth, its population density was staggeringly low: 4.5 people per square kilometer. By comparison, that is just one-hundredth of India's present population density.

Europe in 1900 was already swollen by the growth that followed the Industrial Revolution. In that era, its population of just over 400 million was three times as large as Africa's total. Thus, Europe outpaced Africa in sheer numbers, as well as in technical and economic development.



That past dynamic is now being turned upside down. Advances in global public health and medicine have reduced the ravages of disease, and the threats posed by both wild and human predators have also decreased. From 1900 to 2000, Africa's population went from one-third the size of Europe to being slightly larger in total. What had been the case in 1900 will be completely reversed by 2050. The United Nations Population Division forecasts that there will then be almost four Africans for every European (based on their most historically accurate projection, the "high variant").[1]

The ratios are even more lopsided if we look at the most economically important groups: the prime working-age population (ages 15–49), and the youth population just entering the labor force (ages 15–24). As recently as 1950, Europe's prime working age population was almost three times that of Africa. Even in 1990, it was still slightly larger.




But Africa was slightly ahead by 2000—and then the explosion in Africa's youth population became telling. Africa's prime working age population now is already twice as large as Europe's, and, by 2050, it will be fully five times as large. The youth population numbers are even more startling: drawing on UN projections, there will be almost eight African youths for every person of the same age in Europe by 2050.

Such data and projections often are used to arouse fears of uncontrolled immigration, or of Europe being overwhelmed or transformed by non-Europeans. Yet that is not the only—and certainly not the most productive—way to look at this situation. Africa's youth are not a threat, but rather a remarkable opportunity. The prosperity of the entire world depends on recognizing and promoting it.

## GLOBAL GROWTH NEEDS ANOTHER MOTOR—AND ONLY AFRICA CAN PROVIDE IT

Despite all the innovative miracles of the last thirty years, the most advanced economies of today are deeply concerned about labor shortages. Japan—the most robot-friendly country in the world—predicts a shortage of 6.4 million workers, or about 10% of its labor force, by 2030. Germany, facing an unprecedented shortage of workers, is expanding and incentivizing immigration. Earlier this year, the US Chamber of Commerce stated that even if every currently unemployed person in the United States found a job, 4 million job openings would remain vacant.

Not only does labor remain relevant to economic growth, but younger workers, armed with the latest education and proclivity to innovation, remain critical. Adding more younger, higher-skilled workers to the labor force is a far more powerful impetus to growth than trying to augment the output of older workers whose productivity generally peaks at 40 years of age.

These observations are borne out by the shape of global economic growth in the last four decades. Despite all the incredible technological innovation that has taken place in the United States, Europe, Japan, and South Korea since 1980 (from cell phones and laptop computers to commercial solar and wind power and reusable space rockets), the largest portion of global economic growth came from the increasing volume and productivity of workers in an initially much poorer and technologically backwards country: China.

From 1980 to 2020, fully one quarter of the entire increase in global GDP was due to China's growth—a larger contribution than from the United States (22%), the European Union (12%), or Japan (4%). And from 2010 to 2020, when the United States and Europe were still in a slow recovery from the Great Recession, the world depended even more on China. That decade saw China's growth account for over 40% of the world's total rise in real GDP.

Where will the world find another motor of growth to play the role that China has played in the last forty years? The days of China's rapid growth are likely over. India is often touted as the "next China," but that too is unlikely.

The factors that drove China's growth engine are now stalling or going into reverse. The main driver of China's post-1980 miracle was a massive surge in the labor force. Plus, its burgeoning productivity was multiplied many times over by a shift from low-productivity rural agriculture to much higher productivity work in mining, construction, and factories.

Yet China's future promises no larger wave of far better educated workers. Decades of declining birth rates mean its prime-age workforce is already in decline; it will plummet by another one-quarter in the next 20 years and by one-third over the following decade. Then add an already overbuilt housing sector and infrastructure, wages too high to dominate low-cost manufacturing, a high-tech sector not yet ready to compete with advanced economies, and a senior population that will grow by 200 million to 2050 to the equation. Faced with such headwinds, China will be fortunate to sustain any significant economic growth in the next two decades. At this moment, China's economy even now is delivering meagre growth, instead of the expected rapid post-COVID expansion.

All eyes have therefore turned to India as the "next China." But despite some evidence, that, too, is unlikely. India has enjoyed rapid economic growth in recent years, and its population has just overtaken that of China. These developments have produced a burst of optimism that India will catch, or even surpass, China's economy.

Yet this optimism is misplaced. India's population growth in the coming decades will come mainly from greater life expectancy, rather than any increases in births. Just as in China, India's crude birth rate has plummeted in recent years. India's fertility—the number of children an average woman will likely bear in her lifetime—has fallen from 4 children per woman in 1990 to just 2 today. In fact, India's total population in the 15–24 age group—the same educated youth cohorts who will drive rapid productivity growth—*has already peaked* and is projected to decline by about 15% between 2020 and 2050.

India's current 1.43 billion population *is* projected to increase to 1.61 billion by 2040—a gain of 180 million. Yet less than one-quarter of that increase, or only 43 million, will be a gain in the prime-age (15–49) workforce. At the same time, the number of Indians who are age 60 or older will increase by over 100 million between today and 2040, more than twice as much as the prime-age workforce. That is hardly a recipe for rapid economic growth. Indeed, after 2040, India's prime-age workforce will start to decline, joining China's prime-age workforce in a downward trend.[2]

In essence, China and India's trends reflect a global pattern. Over the next twenty years, most of the world will face both declining youth cohorts and shrinking labor forces as they also must care for an exploding number of seniors. With total fertility rates ranging from 1.0 to 1.3 in East Asia, from 1.5 to 1.7 in the United States and Europe, and averaging 1.9 in Latin America, there is virtually no region of the world in which a declining youth population and rapid aging will not be the dominant feature. This trend is also "baked in" for the next few decades, since virtually all children who will be age 15–24 in 2040 have already been born, as have almost all the women who will give birth over the next twenty years.

The countries that differ in regard to this trend are mainly found in Africa. Although a number of African countries—usually smaller nations and islands such as Mauritius, Réunion Island, Cabo Verde, Saint Helena and the Seychelles—have already lowered their fertility to at or near replacement (2.1), many of Africa's largest countries remain among the world's fastest growing. Thirty-nine countries in Africa have fertility rates of 3.0 or higher, with several above 5.0, including Nigeria (5.1), Angola (5.2), Mali (5.8), the Central African Republic (5.9), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (6.1), and Niger (6.7). The average fertility rate across the continent is currently 4.24 children per woman, roughly twice that of the rest of the world. The reasons why this is so despite considerable gains in child survival and income per head, are still debated.

*Woman handing out books on International Literacy Day. (Ivan Bruno de M / shutterstock.com)*

African family structure and education provide one compelling explanation. At present, in many African countries, too many families are unable to count on stable and effective government or fair market exchange to help them meet their needs. In these conditions, one's family remains the most valuable resource to meet both future needs and unexpected crises. Having a large family, with multiple siblings providing future networks of aunts, uncles, and cousins, multiplies opportunities for gain and provides vital insurance against setbacks. Adults in West and Central Africa, especially—both men and women—respond to surveys by saying they desire large families, often with five to seven children being the ideal.

The potential effects of secondary or higher education for women on fertility rates are also worth examining. According to UNICEF, about 41% of girls across West and Central Africa marry before reaching age 18. It is well documented that girls who complete secondary education are much less likely to marry early. In fact, completion by all girls of secondary school would reduce child marriage by 66%. Also, the education and earning power that women gain in school empowers them to earn more, providing a value to their family that exceeds child-rearing. One study found that in sub-Saharan Africa, for each year of schooling completed, women's earnings rise by 14.5%.

Many demographers expect that universal quality secondary education on the continent may create a dramatic decline in fertility. But, at present, African countries continue to have some of the lowest secondary school enrollment figures in the world, especially for women. According to the World Bank, only four in ten girls of high-school age are enrolled in secondary education throughout most of Africa. In several of its largest countries, such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, and Tanzania, this figure is under one-third. In Uganda, it is less than a quarter. And the poor quality of educational services also remains a major concern. Yet this pattern can be broken—in Botswana, Gabon, Ghana, Namibia, South Africa,

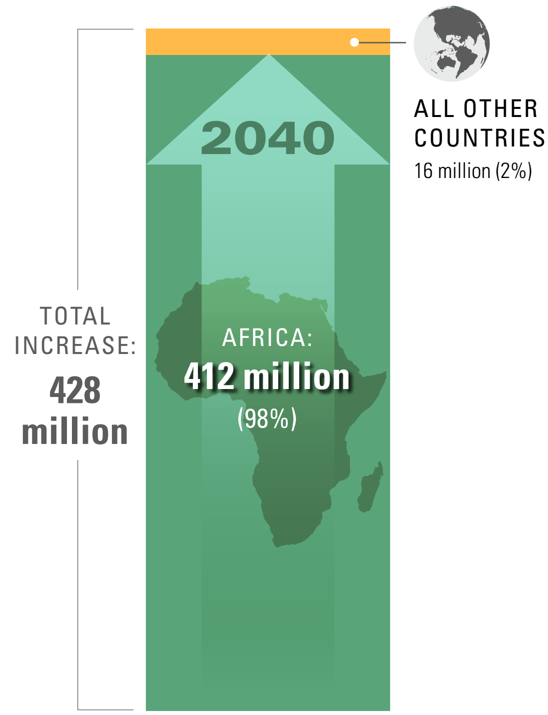
*Girls at school in Harare, Zimbabwe (Richard Juilliart / shutterstock.com)* as well as most of Africa's island nations, the portion of women enrolled in secondary school is over 70%. Many African countries, notably South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Nigeria, are starting to develop a strong university sector, with diverse public and private institutions. Yet a stronger focus is needed on preparing secondary school teachers for the entire continent, not just professionals for governments.

While there are signs that Africa's exceptionally high fertility may be starting a stronger decline, the high fertility over the last several decades has made Africa the world's last great harbor of young people. This year alone, one out of every three children born in the entire world will be born in an African country. And, as a result, one of every three youths in the world aged 15–24 will be an African in 2040.

This growth extends across the board. By 2050, the prime-age working population of Africa will be five times as large as that of Europe, and larger than that of India and China combined. Another way to view the coming decades is to note that the entire world's age 15–49 population will increase by 428 million between 2020 and 2040. Of that increase, 412 million will be in Africa, with only a 16 million increase in that age group *in the entire rest of the world*. As the shrinking labor force in Europe, China, and the rest of East Asia offsets growth elsewhere, we have already entered an era in which African youth will account for *96% of all the net labor force growth in the world.*

Africa's youth has the potential to transform the global economy. A glance backward gives a clue as to how it can do so.

**Global Population Increase** *(ages 15–49)*




"…we have already entered an era in which **African youth will account for 96% of all the net labor force growth in the world.**"

## UNEXPECTED GROWTH IN UNEXPECTED PLACES

In 1980, China was a desperately poor, predominantly rural country recovering from the chaos of the Great Cultural Proletarian Revolution. It lacked markets, education, and infrastructure. China's GDP of $423 billion dollars (in constant 2015 $US) was barely larger than that of the Netherlands, and its GDP per capita was $431 per year, just half that of Ethiopia today. Over the next 40 years, however, as Mao's fantastical economic schemes were replaced by Deng Xiaoping's more pragmatic and open economic policies, China expanded its prime working age population by over 200 million people, and equipped them with the tools to be more productive workers. It also attracted global investment and grew its economy by thirty-fold. The lesson from China, and also from South Korea and Hong Kong, is that even the poorest countries can develop rapidly if they invest in their people, encourage productive investments, incentivize local officials to promote growth, and rely on competitive markets to guide them.

Over the next twenty years, Africa will increase its prime working age population by 400 million workers and reach a total prime-age working population that is 50% larger than China had in 2020. If even half of these workers achieve the same productivity gains as China (or all of them achieve on average half of China's productivity gains) in the next 40 years, Africa would increase its GDP by fifteen-fold. This gain of $52 trillion also would produce a 60% increase over the world's total 2021 GDP.

It may seem like a pipe-dream to argue that Africa's diverse 54 countries are capable of producing a productivity miracle like that of China. But it is precisely the belief that it *is* a pipe-dream that could be the greatest obstacle to realizing that growth. In 1980, the idea that China would soon surpass Japan to have an economy not only larger than Japan, but to rival that of all of Europe or the United States, would also have seemed ridiculous.

China's growth is not the only evidence that rapid development can arise in unexpected places. Bangladesh offers another example. At its independence in 1971, torn by war, impoverished, and ravaged by natural disasters, it was dismissed by US Undersecretary of State Ural Alexis Johnson as an "international basket case." Yet, despite its often questionable governance (and its lack of natural and energy resources that Africa possesses in abundance), Bangladesh has grown its GDP by five-fold in the last thirty years. Life expectancy has leapt from 47 years at independence to 74 years today. Infant mortality plummeted from 158 per 1,000 live births in 1971 to just 26 today. If the African continent can achieve even "Bangladesh-level" growth, a five-fold increase in its GDP over the next thirty years, that expansion would still add $15 trillion to the global economy—about the same contribution as China made from 1980 to 2020.

Such growth is not mere fantasy. From 1980 to 2020, sub-Saharan Africa has already tripled its GDP (in constant 2015 $US), from $600 billion to $1.9 trillion. Nigeria has nearly tripled its real GDP from 2000 to 2020, while Ethiopia's real GDP has grown five-fold. If these countries can build on this performance and carry other African economies with them through greater regional integration, a generation of young Africans can create a global boom.

No other region of the world is capable of producing anything like the potential growth of Africa. But there are models to examine. East Asian countries (along with other developmental state economies like those of Ireland and Israel) also have experienced stunning growth. They have created their own paths to it by investing in the education and training of their youth. Yet they have also encouraged foreign investment and prodded their own firms and innovators to compete in the global economy.

These nations provide a partial guide for African leaders to propel their economies forward. Yet Africa must also advance in new ways to be successful. Recognizing Africa's potential—and developing it sustainably—is the only way the global economy can continue to achieve the growth of recent decades when China's development served as the primary engine of the world economy.

## WHY GROWTH IN AFRICA MUST BE DIFFERENT

Another characteristic of China's growth is that it followed the pattern of early industrialization in the West: grow dirty and clean up later.

Relying first on coal for energy, and then on liquid and gas fossil fuel combustion, China's economic growth was an environmental disaster. China has polluted the air, drained aquifers, turned rivers into sewers, and added more greenhouse gases to the air in recent years than any other country. (Fully one-quarter of global greenhouse gas emissions—twice the total created by the United States—come from China.)

China's growth also has made it far more difficult to achieve a "clean-up" in the time required to prevent the planet from heating to dangerous levels. If Africa's development were to produce another China-sized amount of greenhouse gas emissions over the next three decades, those emissions would eclipse global climate mitigation goals—even if China, Europe, and the United States all met their most ambitious targets for emission reductions.

As we have seen this past summer alone, as unprecedented waves of heat and fire struck the United States, Canada, Europe, Latin America, China (and even Antarctica), severe and costly climate shifts are emerging faster than ever. Poorer countries will be especially hard hit, as their people and economies lack the resources to be resilient to climate impacts. African nations are thus in a race to develop their economies before the effects of heat, drought, floods, heat-driven insect infestations, and other climate impacts wreak further havoc on their economies.

*Solar construction site with a boabab tree (Tukio / shutterstock.com)*

Growth across the African continent must therefore be clean, both in terms of generating energy and not despoiling the continent's resources of rainforest and species diversity. Fortunately for Africa, the continent boasts plentiful hydro, solar, wind, tidal, and geothermal energy resources. It is also developing at a time when technological advance has lowered the price of clean energy by an order of magnitude from just a few decades ago. Indeed, in most places, renewable energy sources are now cheaper than burning coal. New methods of large-scale energy storage, from stored hydro and pressurized gas to improved batteries and capacitors and green hydrogen, also will soon make it possible to overcome the intermittency problems of solar and wind power.

African leaders already recognize the need for clean development. Both the Kigali Communique, ("*Ensuring a Just and Equitable Energy Transition in Africa,*" signed by ten African countries in May 2022), and the *African Common Position on Energy Access and Just Transition* (led by the African Union Commission) present a vision for an energy future powered by development and job creation based on clean energy and sustainable electricity production. The inaugural Africa Climate Summit, hosted in September of this year, highlighted Africa's promise as a "green industrial hub."

Achieving that vision will take substantial resources, as well as partnerships across the continent and also between Africa and the developed world. Today almost 80% of Africa's electricity is generated by fossil fuels. Few countries have begun to develop alternatives, nor is the electrical grid well suited to distribute electricity from new sources. In 2020, just five countries (South Africa, Egypt, Morocco, Algeria, and Senegal) accounted for 87% of installed solar generating capacity in Africa. Three nations (South Africa, Egypt, and Morocco) accounted for 83% of all wind power on the continent.

*Night view of Earth's city lights from space (berni0004 / NASA / shutterstock.com)*

Providing African countries with the financing and technology to achieve a shared vision of clean and sustainable development is vital. Kelly Sims Gallagher of Tufts University has suggested establishing a Green Bank (similar to the World Bank) that would specialize in financing green energy projects in developing countries via grants and low-interest loans. If Africa's economic growth is stymied, or takes the path of dirty growth, the rich world will suffer too. Today, most efforts to tackle climate change focus on reducing the emissions of today's largest greenhouse gas producers. Although that is essential, it is also futile if the world's fastest growing populations and potentially most rapidly growing future economies are not put on a clean growth path.

Fortunately, Africa's many nations also have many paths forward. For some countries, such as Morocco and Mali, extensive solar power development may be best. For countries with large natural gas reserves, a longer fossil-free trajectory may require multiple steps: replacing coal-fired power plants with natural gas, exporting gas and green hydrogen to replace coal burning power plants abroad, and replacing village wood-burning with gas stoves. Still other countries may do best by emphasizing hydro and geothermal power. Each nation will need to determine its own best transition to a clean energy economy based on population, geography, and economy.

Enhanced regional integration will also be necessary to foster the supply of clean energy. Africa's development must be as rapid and as clean as possible, and not blocked by unrealistic constraints. Modest increases in fossil fuel use now, when economies across the continent are relatively small, will not be terribly harmful—and may even be vital to growth. Yet continued dependence on fossil fuels a decade or two from now, when Africa's economy may be five to ten times larger, must be studiously avoided. Foreign investment and expertise also will be necessary to build a new clean-energy future. But foreign investors who partner with Africans and African leaders must design such plans to meet African needs, as well as develop Africans' skill levels and ability to innovate to shape their own future.

## AFRICAN GROWTH IS NOT ZERO-SUM

In a world with many urgent priorities, focusing on the African continent may seem an extraneous concern. Africa's economy today is relatively small, and it is often treated as a minor part of the global economy. African countries contribute little in the way of greenhouse gases at present, and clean energy policies focus on heavier emitters. And because Africa has not played a leading role in global affairs—or in science and technology—for many decades, there is an assumption that this will not change. The confluence of these views is that Africa is more likely to be a source of problems for the world than a place that offers solutions.

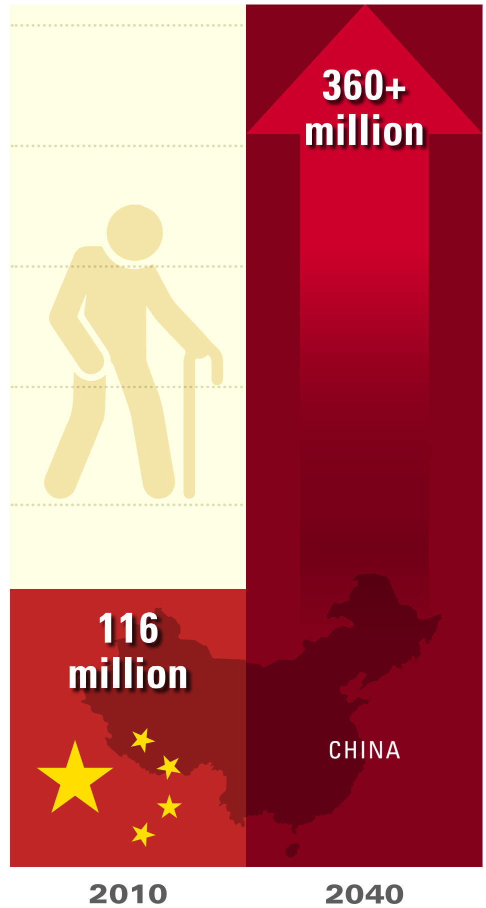
Nothing could be more mistaken. Such attitudes face the future with eyes firmly fixed on the past, rather than standing in the present and looking forward. In fact, Africa's social and economic development likely holds the key to solving many of the problems facing other countries.

One of the biggest problems for the rich world, both in terms of fiscal burdens on government and overall quality of life, is how to provide housing, health care, and pensions for their exploding number of older citizens in a time of shrinking workforces. Today, the United States' Medicare and Social Security programs are forecast to require additional taxation or reduced benefits in just ten years, after past surpluses are exhausted and when future revenues are expected to fall short of expenses. Many state pension funds are in much worse shape. The number of workers paying into pension funds has been shrinking for decades in rich countries relative to the growth of the older population. This trend is about to accelerate as the second, larger half of the baby-boom generation (born 1951–1961) enters retirement.

This problem is common to the entire rich world. In Europe, the over-65 population grew by 30 million from 1990 to 2010, but is set to jump by 70 million to 2040. China's change is the most dramatic: its over-65 population will explode from 116 million in 2010 to over 360 million in 2040.[3]

The ratio of younger people of working age (20–64) to those over 65 is also shifting. In the United States, in 2010 there were almost five people of working age for every senior; by 2040 that will be halved, at 2.5. In Europe, the support ratio in 2040 will be even lower, at 2.1. China in 2010 had fully 7.6 people of working age for every senior in 2010; by 2040 it will be just 2.3, roughly the same as the United States.

***China's Senior Population Growth Projection** (ages 65+)*




It might be thought that immigration would help solve this problem by bringing in more young workers. But immigration on a scale that would substantially alter these age ratios is inconceivable. It will be difficult enough to simply bring in enough home care, hospital, and elder support workers for a senior population set to double in the next thirty years, given that such workers are already in short supply.

There are better solutions already being chosen by millions of seniors which take advantage of two global trends. First, the costs of health care are nudging patients to practice "medical tourism" and have procedures done abroad. Surgeons in India, Thailand, Costa Rica, and elsewhere provide much cheaper medical care with results that rival public hospitals in the United States and United Kingdom. For example, a heart bypass in Costa Rica costs about $27,000, compared to $123,000 in the United States.

Second, many developing countries are wooing American and European retirees, offering visas to those who invest in property and other incentives. Retirees find they can obtain housing, food, and various support services for a fraction of what similar amenities would cost in the United States. Already, hundreds of thousands of Americans have retired to Panama, Ecuador, Mexico, Belize, Costa Rica, and other developing countries with warmer climates and lower living costs.

Achieving a modicum of political stability and security holds the prospect that countries such as Morocco, Tunisia, Kenya, Mozambique, South Africa, and Tanzania also could compete in this domain. In the next thirty years, Europe and the United States will have a combined 270 million people over age 65. If just one quarter of them found hospitable retirement abroad, and in doing so cut their medical and retirement costs by one-half, then based on average living and medical costs of $65,000 per retiree per year, that would represent an annual savings of over *$2 trillion per year.* That is as much as the United States spends today on Social Security and Medicare combined.

> **"In the next thirty years, Europe and the US will have a combined 270 million people over age 65.** If just one quarter of them found hospitable retirement abroad, and in doing so cut their medical and retirement costs by one-half, then based on average living and medical costs of $65,000 per retiree per year, that would represent an annual savings of over $2 trillion per year."

There is no reason African states cannot compete in this market, with the advantage of bringing not only well-off retirees, but also local employment for doctors, nurses, and other service workers to care for them. Rather than fearing migration from Africa as a problem, rich countries flooded with retirees should look at migration to African shores as a solution.

Again, this may seem a pipe-dream. But when thinking twenty years out or more, it is important to look at a nation such as Mexico. Americans once worried about immigration from Mexico to the United States. In the years before COVID-19, however, more people moved from the United States to Mexico than the number of Mexicans moving to the United States.

The southern border of the United States is stressed by migrants from Venezuela, Haiti, Honduras, Guatemala, and other countries where development has failed. The best antidote to immigration pressures on Europe and the United States is stable economic development in the source countries of immigration.

While Europe and the United States need immigration in moderation, they fear it in excess. A moderate flow of work migrants from Africa to the developed world will be necessary to help meet demands for labor but uncontrolled surges of refugees (like those from Syria, Libya, and Afghanistan to Europe in the 2010s in the wake of civil wars, or from Ukraine today) can undermine trust in government and generate nationalist xenophobia.

An additional 400 million young men and women seeking work by 2040 means that development failures and political instability in Africa could create immense pressures for migration abroad. One of the best investments that the world can make for its future stability and prosperity is supporting providing quality secondary education to young men and women in Africa. This investment would produce several global benefits: fertility would decline; more working men and women would lay a foundation for sustainable development and a higher return on capital investments; and outmigration pressures would be reduced.

In addition, this investment would unlock a demographic "bonus": the immense latent talent in Africa's population. Africa is where humanity first developed, and it has developed there for tens of thousands of years longer than the regions elsewhere. As a result, studies have shown that the genetic diversity of Africa is greater than in any other region of the world. It is likely that among Africa's youth are the world's greatest future talents in engineering, science, music, art, medicine, and literature.

One of the most successful immigrant communities in the United States hails from Nigeria—and it has produced professors, physicians, entrepreneurs, and business leaders in impressive numbers. At a time when the number of young people elsewhere in the world is essentially stagnant, while Africa adds hundreds of millions to the most diverse population on Earth, not ensuring quality education and opportunities for Africans would starve the world of an immense treasure of human talent.

For centuries, outsiders have invested billions of dollars in Africa to find and refine valuable minerals not readily found elsewhere. We are entering a future in which young people will be a scarce and fixed resource almost everywhere except Africa. Outsiders should again invest to make a scarce resource—youth—productive, not just for the benefit of Africa, but because it is vital to their own future.

## WHAT MUST BE DONE: GLOBAL COOPERATION, NOT COMPETITION, ON THE AFRICAN CONTINENT

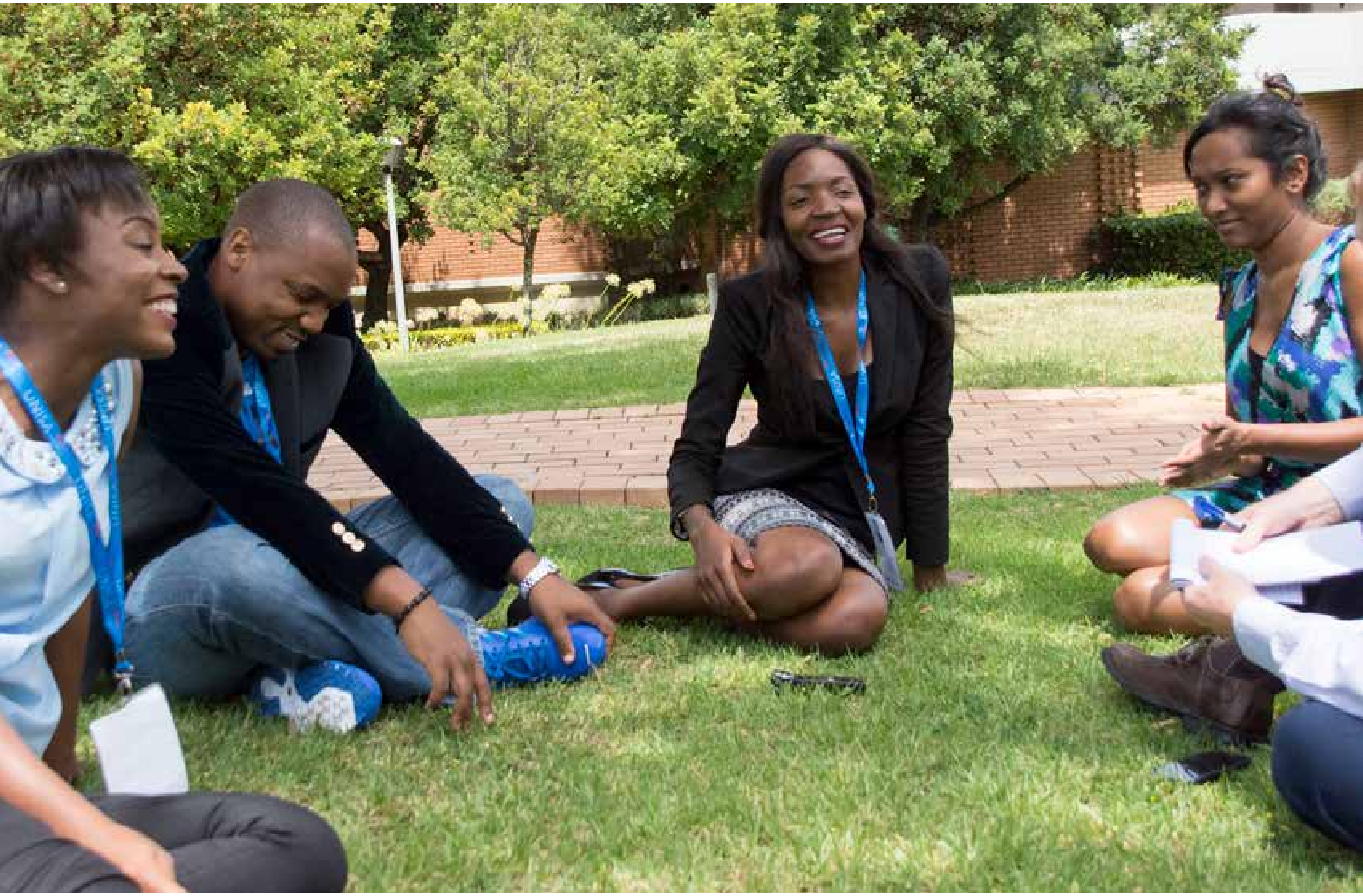
In viewing the African continent today, one of the most important tasks is to look past (but not overlook) obstacles. Many of the limits to Africa's development once were marshaled to explain why South Korea, or Singapore, or Bangladesh, or Mexico, could never develop. It is well known what the English once thought of the Irish—and yet today the GDP per capita of Ireland is more than twice that of the United Kingdom. In 1960, India was producing only 10 million tons of wheat a year, and its population growth spurred concern about future crises. Thanks to the research behind the Green Revolution, India now produces 112 million tons of wheat—an increase five times as large as its population growth. What is possible depends on what we believe is possible, and the skeptics and pessimists are often proven wrong.

It is true that much of the development aid provided to African countries has been wasted. But that is in part because it has so often taken the form of projects designed to promote the personal interests of African leaders, or foreigners, rather than bottom-up market-driven investments to serve local demands. Other countries' experience has shown that special economic zones, a focus on infrastructure, education, and international competitiveness, and government that holds local officials accountable for disorder but rewards them for presiding over economic growth can do wonders.

What is mainly needed is for African countries to work with each other through greater regional integration, and with other regions, to create an institutional climate that attracts private investments. Charitable foundations, such as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, have shown that relatively small amounts of money, carefully spent, can produce great results in improving health. Funds to support secondary education and improve its quality—whether from charitable foundations or governments—can pay similar dividends. Paired with investments in voluntary family planning (research has shown that every $1 USD invested in voluntary family planning produces $120 in future economic, social, and health gains), investments in secondary education can create mutually reinforcing benefits. But many investments that create jobs in tourism, services, light manufacturing, heavy industry, design, entertainment, retail, shipping, publishing, communications, and finance will have to come from the private sector.

We are seeing major steps in the right direction: Africa's welcome into the G20; the progress on the African Continental Free Trade Area; and Africa's first climate summit held in September 2023 in Nairobi. Yet Africa's progress remains constrained by debt and lack of capital for green energy investments; it is here that international support for African development remains vital.

The recent US-Africa Leaders' Summit, held December 13-15, 2022 in Washington, D.C., produced several useful elements of a vision for US cooperation with Africa. The *Young African Leaders Initiative* (YALI) recognizes the importance of developing the potential of Africa's youth. Support for Africa joining the G20 is welcome; funding to promote resilience, clean energy, and new rules for free trade are important; and support for health initiatives is worthwhile.



*Young African leaders participating in the first cohort of the YALI (USAID / CC BY 2.0 / flikr.com)*

Yet the word "education" is not mentioned even once in the White House statement on the Summit, and the *Vision Statement for the US-Africa Partnership* omits any role in supporting education and improving its quality for Africa's youth. Somehow, this grand plan has missed the most important and fundamental step to realizing success: making quality secondary education more widely available, affordable, and worthwhile for African youth.

It is also essential that nations cooperate, and not compete, in contributing to African development. With almost one billion Africans being added to the population in the next two decades, and a desire for quality education, investment, and development, there are plenty of opportunities and challenges to share. A complementary approach to assistance, perhaps with Europe taking the lead on education, the United States on agriculture and health, China and Japan on infrastructure and job-training, the World Bank on support for commercial, financial, and administrative infrastructure and projects, and a Green Bank on clean energy—will provide greater progress and less waste, as long as efforts are coordinated.

Perhaps even African leaders are thinking too small. The World Bank and the leaders of several West and Central African nations met in Accra in June 2022 to create and support a "*Western and Central Africa Education strategy.*" Its goals include reducing "the inability to read and understand a simple text at age 10 from 80 percent in 2020 to 66 percent by 2030" and increasing "girls' secondary school gross enrollment from 43% to 57.2% by 2030."

*Students in a classroom in secondary school in Soroti, Uganda (Richard Juilliart / shutterstock.com)*

In 2030, West and Middle Africa will likely have over 120 million children aged 12–18. If two-thirds of them remain illiterate at age 10, and almost half of all girls remain outside of secondary education, prospects for truly rapid development will be limited. Perhaps seeking to reduce 10-year-old illiteracy to one-third, rather than two-thirds, and enroll three-quarters of girls in secondary school, rather than just over half, is overly ambitious—but high ambitions are what fuel rapid growth.

Major improvements in the quality of educational services are also needed. As the eminent development economist Lant Pritchett has observed, "Schooling ain't learning." Today, African schools are often plagued with high teacher absenteeism and irregular learning plans.

However, there is a revolution underway in the use of "scripted teaching," in which teachers are provided with hour-by-hour and day-by-day lesson plans that are proven to advance education and key skills. Much as airplane pilots and surgeons follow detailed procedures to ensure best practice and reduce errors, so scripted lesson plans are proving successful in guiding teachers to utilize the most effective proven approaches to education. Recent tests in Kenya and Nigeria have shown that such scripted lessons, distributed to teachers on electronic tablets, produced a vast improvement in student achievement, even for the lowest income students. They also keep teachers in schools and engaged, as teachers have to log in every day and follow the lesson plans daily. The spread of this technology could help revolutionize education in Africa.

For too long, views of Africa have been shaped by its recent past, rather than its potential future. Global demographic trends are now placing the African continent front and center as the one region that can sustain global growth. Contributing to Africa's development offers a host of benefits to the entire world. Working *with* African leaders, innovators, and workers is a golden path to benefits for the entire global economy. Africa demands our attention, not just to support African countries, but because it is vital for all of us.

*Dar es Salaam, Tanzania (Kehinde Temitope Odutayo / shutterstock.com)*

# ENDNOTES

1 The Africa population estimate for 1900 is from Massimo Livi-Bacci, A Concise History of World Population, 6th ed. NY, Wiley Blackwell, 2017, Table 1.3. All other population data and projections are from the UN Population Division, UN World Population Prospects, 2022 (latest) revision https://population.un.org/wpp/, using the most historically accurate projection for each region (the "high" variant estimates for Africa, "constant fertility" for China, and "medium" variant estimates for Latin America, the United States and Europe). Urban population data is from the UN World Urbanization Prospects, 2018 (latest) revision https://population.un.org/wup/publications/Files/WUP2018-Report.pdf.

2 For source of Chinese and Indian population data, see note 1.

3 Population Data as in Note 1.

*Members of a local business association hold a meeting (USAID / CC BY 2.0 / flikr.com)*

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*Tanzanian children in a class at the Mawenzi Municipal Primary School in Moshi, Kilimanjaro (Alexander Gafarro/ shutterstock.com)*