



Future of Africa Podcast

Episode 5: Educating the Next Generation

Transcript

September 12, 2025

[00:00:00]

The views and opinions expressed in this episode are those of the guests and hosts, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the podcast's partners.

Mark Leon Goldberg [00:00:10]

Welcome to the Future of Africa, a special series on Global Dispatches. I'm Mark Leon Goldberg, the host and founder of Global Dispatches, and in several episodes over the coming weeks, we will bring you in-depth conversations designed to explore Africa's future in the context of today's challenges and opportunities.

This series is produced in partnership with the African Union, the Elders, and the United Nations Foundation, and is hosted by the Kenyan journalist Adelle Onyango. I am truly thrilled to bring you this special project of Global Dispatches. We have some amazing guests in this episode and throughout the series. Enjoy!

Adelle Onyango [00:01:02]

Welcome to the Future of Africa podcast. I'm your host Adelle Onyango and this is a show where we explore the bold ideas and leaders who are shaping Africa's place in

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the world. Now Africa is home to the world's youngest, most ambitious, and increasingly tech-savvy population, but can our education systems keep up with the demands of a rapidly changing economy?

In this episode, we explore how education, innovation, and entrepreneurship must come together to equip the next generation for the future of work. Joining me for this powerful conversation are Minister Serigne Mbaye Thiam. He's the Chair of the Global Partnership for Education and former Minister of Education of Senegal. So, he's going to be bringing decades of leadership on inclusive education financing and system reform across the continent.

Minister Serigne Mbaye Thiam [00:01:57]

Investing in Africa's education, it's not charity. It's smart. It's about shared progress, about more stability and security in the world.

Adelle Onyango [00:02:09]

We're also going to be joined by Tina Muparadzi. She's the Executive Director for the Education and Transitions programming platform at Mastercard Foundation and she has a deep expertise in preparing young Africans for success in a fast-changing job market.

Tina Muparadzi [00:02:25]

So, in order to meet the scale of the employment challenge, young people must be thinking about creating work for others.

Adelle Onyango [00:02:34]

And lastly, we're going to be joined by Vimbai Masiyiwa. She's a social entrepreneur and founder of Batoka Africa, and she brings a youth-driven on-the-ground view of how tech and creativity are transforming career pathways in Africa. Together, they explore what it will truly take to future-proof Africa's workforce.

Vimbai Masiyiwa [00:02:53]

Startups, even though most of them are informal represents the continent's highest entrepreneurship rate. So, the ambition signals fertile ground, but it also underscores systematic gaps.

Adelle Onyango [00:03:05]

Let's jump right into it, starting off in Senegal with Minister Thiam's thoughts.

Adelle Onyango [00:03:16]

Thank you so much for making time to be with us today, High-level Envoy, Thiam.

Minister Serigne Mbaye Thiam [00:03:23]

Thank you for inviting me.

Adelle Onyango [00:03:25]

Based on your experience, I'm excited to dive into this because I know there's going to be so much that even I on a personal level will learn from you. And I think jumping into your role as chair at GPE, what successes and challenges have you seen in mobilizing global financing for education? Because that's a key part of making sure the education systems are sustainable.

Minister Serigne Mbaye Thiam [00:03:50]

Let's start with the successes because they have been remarkable. One of the best examples came during a very difficult time, the pandemic COVID-19. In 2021, Kenya's President Uhuru Kenyatta and UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson co-hosted GPE's replenishment conference. It was in London. And together, they helped raise an historic \$4 billion for education across 90 countries. But GPE didn't stop there. Through innovative financing, and strong partnerships, GPE mobilized an additional \$4.7 billion funding that simply wouldn't have gone to education otherwise. And perhaps the most powerful figures of all is the 372 million children who were reached by this funding. Children will now have access to better education and brighter futures. And GPE is still pushing forward. In fact, in this year's UN General Assembly, GPE will launch its the fifth replenishment campaign, aiming to raise \$5 billion to reach even more children and transform their life.

Now, after talking about example of successes, let's turn to the challenges, because challenges are real and they are serious. The biggest challenges we face is the perception that the world doesn't need to invest in education. If you look at the numbers, aid from donor countries has fallen from 9.3% of total aid in 2019 to just 7.6% in 2022. And government spending is also down, particularly in Africa. In Africa where most countries now invest less in education than they did before the pandemic COVID-19. Meanwhile, and this is deeply concerning, debt payment across Africa exceed what is spent on both education and health combined. And we have to ask ourselves as African, how can Africa grow without investing in its people? The truth is Africa's youth are already powering some of the world's fastest growing economy and most dynamic startups and education can supercharge that momentum. That's why, to conclude, that's why GPE's \$5 billion

campaign matters so much. It's not about reaching millions more children. It's also about unlocking billions more through innovative financing. And so, you can together give Africa's future workforce the skills, the opportunities, and the hope they deserve.

Adelle Onyango [00:07:39]

How can education systems partner effectively with governments, effectively with private sector, with civil society, so that when we take these kids and African youth through education systems, we also are creating an environment where this job creation and, as you've said, so many African startups are innovating solutions so we create an environment for them the entrepreneurs to thrive across Africa.

Minister Serigne Mbaye Thiam [00:08:08]

The truth is the landscape for jobs is changing very quickly in Africa and in the world with the artificial intelligence on one side, and climate change on the other side. So matching skills to jobs will require strong effective partnership. Let me give you a concrete example from GPE. GPE works with 90 countries to help transform the education systems. Now to access GPE funding, each country must first identify its education transformation priorities. It's a condition and here is how they do it. The country, the government bring all the stakeholders together in what we call in GPE, local education group. This local education group includes the private sector, civil society, and multilateral partners, as well as national stakeholders, like the association of students, the parent of students, the local government, or something else. And these stakeholders sit around the same table, they discuss openly, they identify the priorities of the country, and they set education policy together. And once these priorities are agreed upon, that's what unlocks GPE financing. So, it should be in a collaborative process to be able to unlock GPE financing. This model shows us something powerful. This model of partnerships shows us how different voices can be meaningfully brought into the policymaking process. And they have to assess the implementation after the policy. And today, it has never been more important to bring the private sector into this process early. You have to work together to anticipate what skills will be needed in 10, 20, even 30 years from now. And then we have to transform teaching and learning to make sure that these, those future skills are developed now by the education system. In other words, our dreams of growing African industry have to meet the reality of policymaking. And from what I have seen, the GPE education group model, this model of partnership gives us a very solid blueprint for making this happen. And it's a good example of partnership and accountability.

Adelle Onyango [00:11:30]

When we look at bringing it to the level of international partners, right, and international policymakers, and obviously from the work you're doing and the financing models that you've shared from GPE, I can already begin to see how your models, you're already tweaking them to really serve the countries that you're working with and that you're funding. What do you think needs to change when we look on the plane of international partners and policymakers? What else needs to change in the models on that level?

Minister Serigne Mbaye Thiam [00:12:09]

I think that we have to try to enhance ownership in setting policies. We have to try to improve the ownership at a national level. It's the way to implement long-lasting policies that could lead to change, real change in the country. It's the GPE model to make all the stakeholders accountable of the development of education in the country.

Adelle Onyango [00:12:38]

Yes, I completely agree with you.

Minister Serigne Mbaye Thiam [00:12:40]

But now, what innovative models of education, perhaps, transforming education, which is the strategic goals of GPE, really requires a mindset shift. It's not only about just passing one new policy or making a few small fixes. You have to think on a much larger scale. And the key question we should be asking is, how do we reach every single child in the education system? Reaching every single child means improving entire education systems and everything from financing and teacher training to climate resilient classroom to link with climate change to toilets for girls. If you don't have toilet for girls, girls are not going to school and school in remote areas also in Africa. And here is the point. All the parts have to work together. It's a puzzle. Governments, partners, and local communities. And all parts have also to be held accountable and aligned around better policies. It's not flashy. Last change depends on systems that functions as a whole, not separately.

Now, let's talk about the financing side. Transforming education systems requires financing that is committed, financing that is creative, and financing that is collaborative. Let's talk about stronger commitments in financing. African governments should aim to spend between 4 and 6 percent of GDP on education. It's on a national level. On an international level, donors should meet their 0.7% of gross national income at targets, 0.7% of GNI at targets, especially for education. And second, creative financing. Take the example of

GPE's Debt-to-Add initiative. This Debt-to-Add initiative helps, for example, Côte d'Ivoire turn \$77 million in debt to France into education investment. That way, they eased their debt burden. At the same time, they boosted funding for schools by transforming debt to investment in education.

And third, on the side of financing, collaboration. When we work together, everyone benefits. Educated African youth means more stability in African country, more stability in the world. Educated African youth means also more innovation. Educated African youth means also more global growth. So, investing in Africa's education, it's not charity. It's smart. It's about shared progress, about more stability and security in the world.

Adelle Onyango [00:16:15]

A theme that is coming out in almost every episode of this show is how interlinked these issues are. We're talking about education, but if you don't make sure, let's say, young girls have access to sanitary products, they're not going to come to school. So, you're going to have to sort that out. If their community is facing challenges because of climate change, they're not going to make it to school, or the school might be directly impacted by climate change. So, a lot of times we don't see these issues as interlinked. So, we go in trying to solve one, instead of coming in a more wholesome, collaborative way.

Minister Serigne Mbaye Thiam [00:16:55]

Yes, I can give you an example. With the funding of GPE in Senegal, we build the school with toilets for girls. Before it was shared toilets and we noticed that girls during one period of the month they don't want to go to school and when we build separate toilets, we noticed that the number of girls in school increased. So, as you say everything is interlinked. We have to deal with climate change in school, we have also to deal with some commodities in schools, facilities in schools.

Adelle Onyango [00:17:38]

And one of my key takeaways from talking to you is... still goes back to the question, how can Africa grow without investing in its people? And it's not charity, it's an investment.

Minister Serigne Mbaye Thiam [00:17:51]

Yes, it's an investment. We have to understand it. It's an investment. Investing in people, human resources is the key resources for the development of a country, for the development of the world. And it's also about figures. By 2050, one in every four workers in the world will be African. That's about one billion people. Now the thing is the job market

they face is changing very fast. The future is green, and the future also is digital. And by 2030, 230 million jobs in Africa will require digital skills. Given this, Africa's youth could be a powerful force for transformation, but only if they get quality education. And when I say quality education, I mean education that prepares them, not just for today's labor market, but also for the challenges of a changing world.

Here is where the urgency comes in. In many African countries, nine out of 10 children can't read by the age of 10. And without these basic skills, how can we expect them to read? How can we expect them to innovate or drive in a fast-changing economy. It's not possible. That's why you must act now. The problem is there is a \$77 billion gap in education funding across Africa every single year. And now the global partnership for education where I serve as High-level Envoy is helping countries close that gap. But most of the funding still needs to come from governments themselves. And that's actually a good thing, because it gives African governments ownership and control.

And what is the payoff of this investment? Well, the payoff is huge. Education has driven half of global economic growth over the last 40 years. With the right investment, Africa could double its GDP per capita by 2050. So, there are some immediate reforms we need. There are four urgent priorities. One is teaching and learning. Two is skills development. Three is promoting inclusion. And four is funding, financing education. And at the end of the day, Africa's youth are its greatest asset. It's greatest resources and quality education is the key to unlocking not only the potential of Africa's youth, but also the continent's future.

Adelle Onyango [00:21:35]

And you know what, sometimes people, there are some people who have a hard time grasping these issues from a social understanding. And I love when you talk about how investing in education impacts the GDP, because there are some people who understand the business of it. Whatever side you're coming from, it's good either way.

Minister Serigne Mbaye Thiam [00:21:57]

Yes, and I'll take my example. I was born in a remote village in Senegal, far from the capital city Dakar, without basic facilities, no tap water, no electricity. And if I am here standing in front of you to deliver these postcards in my capacity as former Minister of Education on Senegal, and now High-level Envoy of the Global Partnership for Education, trying to serve education of children around the world. That's because I was educated. I got the chance to be educated. So, with my example, you can see that education is the most powerful investment we can do.

Adelle Onyango [00:22:51]

Thank you for making so much time for us and for the work that you're doing at GPE.

Minister Serigne Mbaye Thiam [00:22:57]

Thank you very much.

Adelle Onyango [00:23:08]

Let's cross over to Tina Muparadzi and listen to how we're making sure that even the vulnerable populations within the youth in Africa are not left behind.

Adelle Onyango [00:23:29]

Tina Muparadzi, thank you so much for joining us.

Tina Muparadzi [00:23:33]

Thank you so much for having me, Adelle.

Adelle Onyango [00:23:35]

What do you think of the specific skills we should be prioritizing in our education system?

Tina Muparadzi [00:23:41]

You know, we are likely to have the biggest workforce in the world very, very shortly. So significant opportunity, but at the same time, such a huge obligation for us, the elders, and those that are able to, to make sure that we are equipping young people with not just the credential, that certificate that they walk away with when they leave school, but also with the skills, the mindset, and the leadership qualities that they're going to need to navigate a world, quite honestly, we might not fully know and understand things are evolving so, so rapidly.

So, I'll talk about four areas. Number one, entrepreneurship in school, not in school, this is so important. The formal economy on the continent cannot absorb the millions of graduates entering the labor workforce every year. It's not going to happen. So, in order to meet the scale of the employment challenge, young people must be thinking about creating work for others. So not only getting educated, but also thinking about how can I create employment? And in order to do this, we must be able to prioritize the skills that empower young people to create those jobs. Entrepreneurial thinking, practical problem

solving, exposure to income generating activities must become core elements from secondary school. And we know some practices on the continent where they're even starting at primary school, ensuring that that mindset is being ingrained. How can we help them understand their role in ensuring that they are imparting these skills for young people to build the financial literacy, creating a sense of agency for young people that they're not waiting for employment, but they're also going forward and looking for opportunities, the side hustles, as they call them, you know, how can those become more formal?

Another example that I can talk about is our work with a partner of ours called CAMFED and they're a youth-led leader guide model in secondary schools, you know, where they're augmenting entrepreneurship and access to capital. That becomes the next challenge. I have my enterprise, but I need access to capital. How can we work with those that do provide capital to ensure that they are local loans, that someone is taking a chance on giving loans to young people that don't have security for the loans that they are getting?

Adelle Onyango [00:26:34]

What would you say is the second thing we need to be thinking of?

Tina Muparadzi [00:26:37]

You know, by 2030, Over 230 million jobs are going to require some level of digital literacy. At the same time, over 3 million new green jobs are expected, especially in energy, power, and solar. And Africa's future is both digital and it's green. And so therefore we must align learning with us most dynamic and growing sectors from digital economy to green industries to agribusiness. That's where we see the future of jobs. Very importantly, we must ensure that young women and girls are fully included in this future. We have partnerships with organizations that focus on young women, and we are supporting them with girls' mentorship, academic support, leadership development in STEM. And we've seen powerful results from introducing women scientists into classrooms where they inspire girls, girls need role models, they work. And our work typically focuses on all girls, because we won't miss the boys. So, this is not some campaign, you know, to exclude boys. What we have found is when we program in general, we reach more young men. And when we program with intentionality on the girl child and the girl child in the rural areas, we don't miss the voice. You see, so that intentionality is really important. And Africa is going to need science in order to make the breakthroughs that we need to the issues that we confront. So, this focus on STEM is also important. The liberal arts are also critical because

we need our scientists to be thinking creatively as well. This is such an important area for us in our work.

Adelle Onyango [00:28:35]

I have actually interacted with one of your programs, the scholars program. And I went to Rwanda, and I met some of the young ladies would pass through the program. One of them actually got employed as a lab scientist stroke lecturer in the university that the program had taken her through and you can immediately see the impact of her, one person, going through the program and now impacting so many other young people in Rwanda. And I just wanted to say I actually have seen the testament of the work that you're doing across Rwanda, Uganda, and Ethiopia.

Tina Muparadzi [00:29:19]

We program and have a presence in seven countries on the continent, but we program across Africa. And our scholars program actually is this is an important segue to the third area. And the third area is actually what they're calling 21st century competencies. And our scholars' program is designed around what we call transformative leadership. So, in addition to getting the qualifications and that certificate, we are on a mission to train a hundred thousand young Africans to change figures in their communities, and in government, and across a whole spectrum of professions so that they can make a difference. So, I'm so pleased that when you see a scholar, someone who's been through our scholars' program, you can tell that in addition to the education, they do come across as a confident young person who's making change happen because that's primitive leadership is part of our agenda. You know, and so before people feel left out, what we are also seeing, you know, is that the partner institutions, the universities that we work with, and now I will call out Ashesi College in Ghana, they are now mainstreaming this to all the students on campus, Adelle, you know, this is magnificent. And once again, when you see any student, you can tell you know that the student looks like they've received what we would call holistic education.

Adelle Onyango [00:31:02]

You mentioned four, so I think we've gone through three. Do we have another skill?

Tina Muparadzi [00:31:06]

Yes, cultural identity. How can we make sure that as we educate young people and sometimes using education systems that we inherited, that we adopted from elsewhere, that the cultural identity is not lost. The power of youth leadership is so critical in

transforming communities, that a connection to their identity is very important. We also program the Indigenous youth in Canada. And what we notice there is that they are so rooted in identity and belonging. There was a long history of centuries, or in fact, years and years, hundreds of years of colonization. But they come from that perspective as well. So, we can really identify with them. And they believe, which we also want to encourage, that education must affirm who young people are and acknowledge where they are coming from. And so, through our programming, Indigenous-led organizations are involved in co-creating education pathways that reflect Indigenous languages, knowledge systems, and worldviews. So, imagine, the chiefs in the different communities, in different religions, have a role to play into finding what curriculum should look like. What an exciting world.

Adelle Onyango [00:32:38]

And do you know how important that is, Tina? Because there's a lot of, just even if I localize it to Kenya, there is a lot of information that is slowly dying with our older generations that we are not being taught about, that is not in books and will not be in books because you're not bringing the people who have that knowledge to the table.

Tina Muparadzi [00:33:03]

100%. And it's happening in all, I would say, in all spheres of life. Remember the aunties we call them tetes in Shona. That's where once and before you are bringing teaching you the ways of the world, you know.

Adelle Onyango [00:33:20]

Yes.

Tina Muparadzi [00:33:21]

All of that is being lost. There are efforts, we are very passionate as well about bringing back Indigenous ways of knowing. And there are movements on the continent that are actually trying to preserve all of those indigenous ways. So, more life to them. And this is part of what we need to encourage.

Adelle Onyango [00:33:43]

This is the first time I'm hearing of this and it's just like making me so excited because like one of my pain points of, you know, when I was back in high school is just not even learning a lot more of African history. And I just, you grow older and you're just like, why didn't I learn about this? You're playing catch-up right now.

Tina Muparadzi [00:34:03]

You're playing catch-up. A lot of curriculums though I think with the independence of countries is starting to pick up on the history of the country and so on, but it takes more, it takes more to ensure that we are holistically bringing up our young people. And now what we are seeing, and the evidence is suggesting that this can also be mainstreamed within education systems.

Adelle Onyango [00:34:31]

So, what do you think should happen in terms of partnership and collaboration across education systems, governments, private sector, civil society, so that we're all creating an enabling environment for young Africans to be more marketable and ready in terms of the job markets. What we should be doing in terms of collaboration across all of those fronts?

Tina Muparadzi [00:34:58]

Yeah, you know, I think education can't work in isolation. Teachers in their institutions need the support of everybody. You know, first of all, when we do our work, we co-create solutions with young people at the center. So that's the first thing that we do. And this is very, very important. We understand what the needs are. But we also don't work in isolation when we do this. Aligning with government policies is essential. And so, particularly in education, how do we make sure that any work that we do is aligned with national systems? This ensures sustainability. You know the problems now. Handing comes and goes and then nothing is left behind. So, governments are also responsible for setting education policies. And now, like everything else, these policies need to evolve.

Adelle Onyango [00:35:53]

Yes.

Tina Muparadzi [00:35:53]

These policies need to evolve in order for curriculum to change. Sometimes the school wants to and so on, but they need to align with what the government policy says about education and why this becomes so important, especially now when we are looking at whether we've got a dividend or we've got a crisis, you know, of you on the continent, you know, are they a dividend or not, is that we are losing so many young people in the education process.

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We tell the story of Nina, and we say when Nina starts school, ECD, preprimary, and there are 100 Nina's, Nina and the friends, there are 100 of them that are studying. By the time they get to upper secondary, only 27, Nina and 26 friends are making it. This is upper secondary, the last two years of secondary school we've lost, 73 of Nina's friends have been lost. So, education systems must ensure that we can keep Nina in school. Then government must also enable Nina's friends, the 73, to get back into school and to finish. And where it is too late for whatever reason, we need to provide them innovative ways to bridge so that they can finish. They have an economic contribution to make. So not to make them finish education is a loss to the country as well. This is when I want to say that the other stakeholders come in.

It takes a community, willpower of the heads in the community, the mothers in the community, and the fathers in the community to come together and commit to education, especially girls. So that's another stakeholder, very, very important stakeholder. One of our partners were in Malawi last week and they were telling us about what they're calling mother groups. They have now organized mothers in communities to take on that role. If a child is not in school, they are going to be knocking at the door. Why are you not in school? And we have the unfortunate situations where, and I always say, Nina's friend woke up today's Wednesday and she's terrified because on Saturday she's getting married to her father's friend because her father wants a few more cows. This is a reality across Africa. And so how can we make sure that government, philanthropy like us, development organizations, and communities are working together to ensure that young people can access and succeed in school. When they succeed, what does success look like? And young people who determine what does success look like. Success is I can get into a job. Yeah, some of us have to work.

Adelle Onyango [00:39:08]

Yes.

Tina Muparadzi [00:39:09]

We are not all entrepreneurs, especially when you didn't get the mindset, you know, when you were younger. Then the bulk we hope are going into entrepreneurship together with the training, the skills training, that's why technical and vocational skills training is so important, you know. And then further education. So, it must be an option and not like I don't have a choice. It must our legacy, as the elders, is that we must leave young people with choice in order for entrepreneurship to work, in order for schools, for those that want to go to work to get into jobs, the private sector must come to the party. So many rooms at

the moment are able to gather governments, regional bodies, United Nations, able to gather civil society, to gather together development organizations and agencies into the room. The voice that's often missing is private sector. At the end of the day, private sector will inform the sectorial skills that what do they need in terms of skills. You know, now we have a reputation of being outdated and not connected to the labor market. But yes, they must go and seek, but private sector must also know that there's a place they can go to for skills. And if they also contribute to building those skills, they will have the skills they need now and in the future. Because for them, bottom line, if they don't anticipate the future, they're out of business. They keep an eye on what is going on, what skills do we need, where do we get them, come back and talk to everybody and say this is what we need. So those stakeholders are extremely important. And ultimately creating an environment for job creation and entrepreneurship requires more than isolated programming. Sometimes you go into a country, there is so much good work that is going on, but it's happening independently. If we can all just put the young person at the center and gather our resources, our capabilities together, we got this problem, we can solve this problem in our lifetime.

Adelle Onyango [00:41:38]

I want us to dive into transformative leadership. When we talk about leadership, and even now when we talk about the leadership crisis, you seldom hear people bring up education, even though I think, yes, there are multiple solutions, and one of them is definitely education and our education systems. So, what role do you think education plays in nurturing Africa's next leaders and just borrowing from the transformative leadership approach that some of your programs have taken.

Tina Muparadzi [00:42:15]

You know, learning takes a particular path. The foundational competencies are very important. Numeracy, literacy skills, gaining that confidence to be able to do that is an important foundation upon which we build other things. You know, when we now look at, so what are some of these skills that are essential? And they do form a big part of what you do as a leader. These are skills like communication, collaboration, critical thinking, creativity, alongside the technical and academic content. This topic is so important. I'm so happy that it is gathering a lot of momentum, I am part of one of the councils for the World Economic Forum and it has been decided that the agenda for the next two years is going to be on those human-centric skills. So that is totally acknowledged. What then needs to happen is that yeah, we might miss a lot of this embedding of these skills at foundational level. And

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then we might catch up, you know, later on, you know, when we are transitioning into work. However, education is a big role to play. Look beyond that credential that I spoke about right at the start and think about what makes this young person whole and prepared. Then we need to build in those skills. Now, this is when we talk about government coming in, acknowledging that we want to develop the whole child, you know, and so what changes are we going to make to curriculum? Sometimes you find that this becomes extracurricular, and it's built into other programming that takes place. We've seen Ashesi [College] say we are mainstreaming this and so how can we do that on mass? I think when we build these leadership skills, and I spoke about our transformative leadership skills and talk about leadership crisis across countries; we now need to be focusing also on ethical leadership. We know student bodies that are set up. How are they held accountable for being ethical in and of themselves? How can they called the universities, the schools that are in accountable for good conduct. That way they also become influencers in ethical leadership when they step away and they go back into their communities. So that culture is very, very important. What we also find is that some of these good practices, once they are known, and I think people want to see demonstration effect. Where has worked and how would we do it? And so, I think that's when we all need to come in. Private sector is very, very good at holding each other accountable through audits and so on and ethical leadership. They need to come in and help the schools around them. How can they build this ethical leadership? We supported the setting up of the Africa School of Governance, which is based in Rwanda. And its mission is also; how do we make sure that the practice of good governance is embedded across the board? So very, very important. And what we've also seen in our scholars' program is that we've seen our scholars take up ministerial posts, take up very influential positions in academia, in private sector, in communities. Somehow the common thread across all of them is the give back. It's an urgent need for us to ensure that we've got ethical leadership. And so how do we scale good practices in all the areas that are important for the development, the socioeconomic development of Africa.

Adelle Onyango [00:46:19]

Thank you so, so much, Tina, for the work that you're doing and for making time to be on this podcast.

Tina Muparadzi [00:46:24]

Thank you so much for having me, Adelle.

Adelle Onyango [00:46:37]

Let's head over to Zimbabwe now with Vimbai and understand how private sector can play a role in equipping Africa's youth for today's workforce.

Adelle Onyango [00:46:58]

Thank you so much for making time to be on the show with us today.

Vimbai Masiyiwa [00:47:03]

Thank you for having me on the podcast today.

Adelle Onyango [00:47:05]

You've been creating jobs through your work. And if we look at your journey as an entrepreneur, what are some of the biggest challenges and maybe also the wins along that journey? And unpack for us what you think that says about the wider startup climate for young people in Africa.

Vimbai Masiyiwa [00:47:24]

Africa faces a massive youth employment crisis. So, Brookings Institute, for example, says each year, there's roughly about 12 million Africans that are entering the labor force, but only 3.1 million or about that number of formal jobs are created, which gives us a shortfall of over 1.5 million, needed every month just to keep up pace with the growth of the youth population. In Sub-Saharan Africa overall, youth unemployment, which is individuals 15 to 24, was around 10.5 % in 2024. But that figure hides massive disparities. So, for example, if we look at South Africa, they reported 62.4 unemployment rate for youth in Q1 of 2025. As you can see, we have a massive challenge on the continent.

Now, at Batoka, creating jobs meant confronting these realities. We operate in an area where formal hospitality skills are rare. The completion of high school education is also quite low. And we required major upskilling to provide the service that we were promising our guests. So, what we did was we hire for potential and then we built on a training driven culture from the ground up. And for us, that investment today has yielded strong returns. We've got team members who joined as front of house trainees and have become department heads, trainers of other staff members, and some have seated into their own micro-enterprises around hospitality services for the Greater Vic Falls area. And as a result of this, we've also had a lot of team members leave for other hospitality companies. Now I always said at the very beginning that this was not necessarily a negative thing for us because it meant that the skill that we were teaching allows them to further improve their

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quality of life and find opportunities elsewhere. Now, I think these experiences mirror what other young Africans are facing. Startups, even though most of them are informal, represent the continent's highest entrepreneurship rate. So, the ambition signals fertile ground, but it also underscores systematic gaps. There's limited capital access, inconsistent infrastructure, policy hurdles. But what that just means is that the start of climate is paradoxical. It's challenging. It's resource constrained. It's uncertain. But the ambition of young Africans is off the charts. Young people are launching ventures. They're learning, they're pivoting and succeeding when they're patient, resourceful and committed to developing talent.

Adelle Onyango [00:50:00]

When you look at the future of work, everybody's having the conversations now. Initially, we were having them only just looking at the digital landscape. Now we're having them by including AI. We really have no choice but to really think deeply about this in action. What skills or mindsets do you think young Africans really need to be focusing on today? And for us on the continent, accessibility is also an issue, so we need to make sure these skills are accessible. So, what are your thoughts around that?

Vimbai Masiyiwa [00:50:30]

So, to thrive in the future of work, it's a blend of soft and hard skills. So digital influence, financial literacy, and business acumen, and then having an adapted mindset. Now, what I mean by digital influence is there's a rise of ecommerce than tech, tech startups across the continent. In cities like Lagos and Accra, we are seeing a boom in SMEs by digital platforms. And even in our rural areas, e-marketplaces are expanding access, though still constrained by infrastructure gaps. Then financial literacy is, are we understanding profitability, cost structures, and the basic accounting that allows for early entrepreneurs to survive lean phases? When I interact with younger entrepreneurs. This is probably one of the biggest issues. And then number three is an adaptive mindset. Entrepreneurship anywhere in the world, but mostly Africa requires resilience. It's all based on problem solving and taking initiative and the ability to spot opportunities in a world of constraint. At Batoka, what we've done is we combine formal training with peer learning and mentorship. And this structure lets entry-level team members access both practical and technical training. So, for us, we'd be looking at something like standards of service. And it also helps with mindset development with ownership, because I think ownership of the vision is really important. Ownership of the problem and the solution to the problem is important. And then we also look at customer centricity initiative. We can make these solutions more accessible by pairing online micro courses or open access resources with mentorship as

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we've done, looking at peer-led communities, knowledge exchanges, having role models teach each other through small cohorts, and then private, public internship programs. So, at Batoka, we've hosted interns from hospitality institutes in and around Victoria falls in Zimbabwe and provided on the job learning that bridges the theory with the real-world operations. And I think having this kind of multimodal approach elevates adaptability and entrepreneurial thinking and makes them not just concepts, but daily practice.

Adelle Onyango [00:52:46]

Now, as much as we're talking about education in this episode, education can't do it alone, right? And the different programs that you have are really speaking to that. But what do you think is the best way for schools to team up with governments to team up with private sectors such as yourselves and even civil societies so that we are creating the right environment for job creation and for entrepreneurship across the continent?

Vimbai Masiyiwa [00:53:14]

Schools need to stop educating in isolation. To be honest, every stakeholder needs to stop working in isolation, and we need to plug into order ecosystems. So, when we look at how education works with government, we're saying policies incentivizing youth-led ventures. What are we looking at in terms of tax relief, small business grants? How are we making it a safer and more supportive environment for young people to start their own ventures? Are we facilitating easier business registration? Do we have microfinance structures? Are there hubs in rural areas to help with entrepreneurship. When we look at the private sector, we also play a role in co-designing curriculums that match industry needs. For hospitality, for example, we know in Victoria Falls that the primary driver of growth is tourism. So how are we working with educational institutions to prepare young people in the community for futures in hospitality.

We can also look at digital services and then are we offering internships, apprenticeships, exposure visits. One of the things I really enjoyed I had an opportunity to do when I was young in school was, we got to visit corporate offices during our studies, and I do think that's something that I see less and less these days, and I think that's such an important part for the private sector to play. We really have to open up young people's minds to seeing the potential of what they can do and what they can achieve. So, like I was saying with Batoka, we've partnered with regional hospitality institutes to embed these real experiential models, to create pathways and also find ways in which we assess, and we give feedback. A lot of students then graduate with workplace readiness. We've had a few students who stayed in our finance department and our marketing department and grown in their careers

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as part of some of this private sector partnering with education systems. On civil society and NGOs, I think their role is really to help with inclusion and how targeting marginalized groups, role youth, young women, newcomers and providing reach wraparound support and mentoring. I think by co-designing with institutes, with NGOs co-funding, and aligning with the government's incentives for vocational training, we really can help build an ecosystem that feeds itself. We can train youth, hire many into entry-level jobs, and over time, build an alumni of trainers, entrepreneurs, mentors, and build a circulating opportunity.

Adelle Onyango [00:55:52]

Thank you for the work that you're doing and thank you for just being so open with some of your insights on how we can take this to the next level.

Vimbai Masiyiwa [00:56:01]

Well thank you Adelle. I think you know you're also part of the solution with your business, my business. This is how we create the future of our continent.

Mark Leon Goldberg [00:56:27]

Adelle, thank you so much for those great interviews. This is such an important topic. To me, the entire reason we're doing this Future of Africa series in the first place is the demographic reality that 70% of Sub-Saharan Africa's population will be under 30 by 2030. So, a key determinant, at least to me, for the kind of lowercase future of Africa, will be how well these young people are equipped for the job markets of the near future.

Adelle Onyango [00:56:53]

Absolutely, and I think one thing that was stressed in all of the conversations that I had on this episode is that there is an urgency in equipping young people, not just with academic knowledge, but like with the mindsets and the leadership qualities to thrive and we really should be looking at four areas and this came up in the episode. So, we're thinking entrepreneurship, digital literacy, green jobs, cultural identity, because they connect education directly to the opportunities shaping Africa's future. And so that really came out to me in this episode.

Mark Leon Goldberg [00:57:30]

You know, one persistent problem, however, is youth unemployment, and this is a real key domestic challenge in so many countries in the region. What solutions to this challenge most resonated with you in your conversations?

Adelle Onyango [00:57:46]

Oh my goodness, so many, but let me focus on two. So first off was, in my conversation with Tina, I was really struck by her example of integrating entrepreneurship into schools when we're thinking about job creation and looking forward to how we're going to continue to tackle unemployment, right? Even something as simple as teaching financial literacy early is very important. Another thing that stood out for me in terms of solution was when I was talking to Vimbai and just really hearing how private sector links back to the workplace like how her company invests in training and mentoring young people and so that they can build adaptive mindsets and entrepreneurial skills on the job because if we're talking about tackling unemployment, if we're really serious about it, we've got to have job creation on the table and entrepreneurial skills and entrepreneurship is one avenue to that

Mark Leon Goldberg [00:58:45]

Well Adelle another great episode. We're at the about halfway point in this series and I'm so excited for what comes next.

Adelle Onyango [00:58:53]

Me too, Mark, because it's something I'm really passionate about that's coming up in episode six, which is African women and our rights and our dignity and our safety.

Mark Leon Goldberg [00:59:03]

Well, I am truly looking forward to that conversation as well. Thank you so much, Adelle.

Adelle Onyango [00:59:06]

Thanks, Mark.

Mark Leon Goldberg [00:59:16]

Thank you for listening to The Future of Africa, a special series on Global Dispatches produced in partnership with the African Union, the Elders, and the United Nations Foundation.

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I'm Mark Leon Goldberg, the host and founder of Global Dispatches. This series is hosted by Adelle Onyango. It is edited and mixed by Levi Sharp. You can find all episodes in this series and access episode transcripts at globaldispatches.org.