

Youth survey resets global narrative on Africa

The African Youth Survey 2020 reveals a rising Afro-optimism among the continent's youth, driven by a strong sense of individual responsibility, a post-colonial mindset, entrepreneurialism and confidence in a shared African identity.

Africa's youth believe they can solve problems collaboratively and are hopeful of fighting corruption, achieving peace and improving their personal living conditions.



Image source: Gallo/Getty Images

These findings, which are in stark contrast with global stereotypes and outdated narratives of a hopeless continent, were unveiled by the Ichikowitz Family Foundation.

The Survey was conducted across 14 African countries in an unprecedented attempt to pulse the aspirations, motivations and viewpoints of one of the world's key demographics.* Transatlantic polling firm, PSB Research, conducted interviews in Congo Brazzaville, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Togo, Zambia and Zimbabwe – a total of 4,200 in-depth, face-to-face interviews.



Afro-optimism in focus at BizTrendsLIVE!2020

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A loud wake-up call to all the Afro-sceptics

The Survey reveals young people who are self-starters, pan-African, digital and media savvy, tolerant but mindful of the challenges that could blight their 'African Century', such as corruption, the lack of new jobs, limited start-up capital, water scarcity, fake news, terrorism and poor education systems.

They were asked their opinions on their identity as Africans; on social cohesion in their communities, on the environment; on political stability and democracy; on foreign relations; on entrepreneurship; technology and the media; and, their views of the future.

Ichikowitz Family Foundation chairman, Ivor Ichikowitz said:

“ The results of the African Youth Survey are a loud wake-up call to all the Afro-sceptics. We have found that youth in Africa are imbued with optimism about the future – and want to shape their own destiny. We have found a youth that refuses to shy away from the very real challenges of Africa, that is honest about what needs to be done and what their role has to be to achieve this – and they are overwhelmingly keen to make that difference. The Afro-optimism that’s flourishing among young Africans does not rest on hope, but on their ability to seize the opportunities provided by the modern world. The findings underscore entrepreneurship as the greatest aspiration of African youth, who are embracing digital technologies to shape their futures. If there were ever doubt in the ‘Africa-Rise’ narrative, this research provides us with strong evidence that Africa’s time is here, and that it will continue to rise – carried forward by a new generation of innovative, responsible and confident leaders. ”

Afro-optimism underscored by a belief in Afro-capability

Former President of South Africa, Kgalema Motlanthe, a guest contributor to the report said: “I am encouraged by the youth of Africa’s common vision of a pan-African identity; of a love of their fellows that transcends colour, creed, class or nationality; and, of their commitment to fight the corruption. I am immensely heartened too by their Afro-optimism, underscored by their belief in Afro-capability.

“We have much work to do if we are to stand a very real chance of making the dream of the African Century a reality for our people, but this survey shows that in our youth, we have the very best chance yet, which truly is something to celebrate, to encourage and to look forward to.”

The results seriously challenge the old African stereotypes and cynics:

- **Optimism:** African youth are overwhelmingly positive about their personal future and the African Century: 65% believe that the 21st century will be the African Century, 72% are confident about their financial future, they feel more optimistic about the future of the continent than their country’s future (63% unhappy with own country, 49% unhappy with Africa)
- **Entrepreneurship:** The next African generation are entrepreneurs and self-starters who are resolute in their goals and ambitions: 76% want to start a business in the next five years, over 60% have an idea for a business or social enterprise, 75% feel they positively change their communities through their work
- **Technology:** African youth are well-connected and technology and media savvy with a great interest in current affairs: 79% believe that Wi-Fi access should be a fundamental human right, 81% believe that technology will change the fortunes of Africa, 59% use their smart phones for more than three hours per day, 89% use it for social media

- *Media*: Social media is the second biggest source of news (54%) after television (72%). The least trusted sources of news are Facebook (53%) and WhatsApp (50%). 'Fake News' is viewed as problematic: 67% saying its impacting their ability to stay informed; 25% know someone or have personally been victims of online bullying
- *Environment*: African youth are not concerned by climate change as such, but rather about more specific environmental challenges like water scarcity (86%), plastic waste (79%) and poaching of wildlife (69%)
- *Climate Change*: Nearly two thirds of African youth (57%) believe that developing countries have equal responsibility to address climate change – their Afro-optimism is grounded in a belief in Afro-capability
- *African Identity*: The nation state remains a strong source for collective identity but 76% of African youth overwhelmingly agree that a shared African Identity exists, brought forth by common culture and the values epitomised by Nelson Mandela (86% believe Mandela's values are still relevant today)
- *African Unity*: Many young Africans say the continent is headed in the wrong direction and 63% call for unity to bring Africa forward, 72% believe the AU can unite Africa
- *Community Cohesion*: Young people in Africa are deeply embedded in their local communities, which many describe as ethnically, religiously and economically diverse
- *Democratic Values*: While African youth are divided on whether democracy (48%) or stability (48%) is more important for the continent, most believe in the democratic values of participation, tolerance and freedom, although critically, very few see a political career as a key aspiration to improving their own lives
- *Foreign Relations*: African youth are conflicted in regard to foreign influence: on the one hand, many are wary of new forms of economic colonialism but at the same time most consider the influence of specific countries to be positive; the USA, China and EU have the greatest influence and Donald Trump, Bill Gates and Mark Zuckerberg are the leaders who will have the greatest impact over the next five years
- *Challenges*: Young Africans see infectious disease and terrorism as the continent's two biggest threats of the last five years, but the future being defined by job opportunities, innovation and entrepreneurship, and bedevilled by corruption

A roadmap for private and public sectors in Africa

Robyn de Villiers, founder and chairperson of BCW Africa, the African network to the third-largest global communications agency, BCW (Burson Cohn & Wolfe), and the most established network of independent communications firms on the continent, describes this study as inspirational. "The Africa Youth Survey reveals the hopes, aspirations and concerns of African youth, but most importantly, it also brings to light the sheer optimism of the largest and fastest growing demographic on the continent. These insights are extremely valuable for those in the private and public sectors – anyone doing business of any kind on the continent."

"Africa's youth, measured just in sheer numbers, will be the world's most important demographic in 30 years. The purpose of this study is to provide a roadmap for governments, policymakers, investors and young people across the continent, who will be the world's largest source of human capital, consumers, entrepreneurs and innovators of tomorrow. Ignoring their voices would be a catastrophe for the world," concluded Ichikowitz.