

Africa's surprising future

By Kennedy Odede

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Entrepreneur invests in next generation 07:16

Story highlights

Kennedy Odede: Africa's population could grow to 4 billion by 2050

Mobile penetration exploding across Africa, writer says

increase from just over 1 billion today to more than [4 billion](#) by the end of the century. And while countries like the United States, Japan and many of those in Europe are aging, within the next 35 years, [40% of all our planet's children will likely call Africa home](#).

Some analysts worry that the continent isn't prepared for this youth bulge. Yet the reality is that as Africa grows, its economies, cultural dynamics and aspirations are evolving with it. It's something I've seen myself. And in fact

Editor's Note: Kennedy Odede is co-founder and CEO of Shining Hope For Communities ([SHOFCO](#)) and the co-author of the upcoming book "[Find Me Unafraid: Love, Loss & Hope in an African Slum](#)." He was also a featured speaker at [CGI Middle East and Africa](#) this week. The views expressed are the writer's own.

(CNN)—Africa's population is growing rapidly -- and unlike much of the world, it's also getting younger. Based on current trends, the continent's population is poised to

optimistic about what is awaiting the next generation of African leaders.

Perhaps the most encouraging trend in Africa today is the growing role of women and girls in economic and social development. As Chelsea Clinton mentioned during her tour of Clinton Foundation projects last week with former President Bill Clinton, girls have [nearly achieved parity](#) with boys in primary schools worldwide. In Kenya, girls actually outnumber boys in primary schools, although that progress isn't sustained at later ages.

This is especially important to me as my organization, Shining Hope For Communities ([SHOFCO](#)), works to combat gender inequality and extreme poverty in urban slums by linking tuition-free schools for girls to holistic social services for all. I will never cease to be inspired by the parents at our school who volunteer five weeks per year in exchange for their daughter's free education. They believe, as I do, that with education, their daughter will not only improve her life, but she can change the lives in our community and beyond.

It's also heartening that Sub-Saharan Africa is one of the world's [hotbeds of female entrepreneurial activity](#). In Uganda and Namibia, almost equal numbers of women and men are starting businesses. Leaders like James Mwangi of Equity Bank, alongside partners like the Mastercard Foundation, are making such commitments to continued and quality education real, proving change is possible.

Meanwhile, progress has been made in government, too. In fact, women are better represented in [African legislatures](#) than they are in many Western nations.

While we should all remember that there is still much work to be done to achieve gender equality, there is much reason to believe that across Africa, women are better poised to lead than ever before.

Another encouraging development has been the focus on entrepreneurship, something that has really caught fire across the developing world. There's good reason: Small and medium-size enterprises are the main providers of jobs and contribute significantly to economic growth. As a result, there is a push to prepare young people to become the employers of tomorrow. Young people are accessing cell phones, using Twitter and demanding change while leading innovation.

Mobile penetration has [exploded across Africa](#), with people in cities and villages alike relying on cell phones to keep in touch, find a doctor, and pay their bills. But now there is a movement in Africa towards not only using technology, but spearheading it as well. The ever forward-looking [Ashesi University](#) in Ghana, for example, is introducing a new engineering major, with an eye on preparing women to develop innovative solutions to some of the region's greatest challenges.

Meanwhile, internationally known tech leaders such as Zimbabwe's Strive Masiyiwa, founder of wireless communications company Econet, along with his wife, Tsitsi Masiyiwa, exemplify a commitment to social change and are inspiring the ambitions of Africa's millennial generation.

With increased innovation, I have seen firsthand that an increasing drive to demonstrate the efficacy of efforts to transform our continent. For example, we have designed an innovative user-ID system that tracks each usage of our services and the impact of each of our investments through a real-time data system. The integration of business technology alongside new leadership ensures that investments made in development across the continent actually work.

I grew up in Kibera, one of Africa's largest urban slums. Yet in a place that is supposedly a hopeless environment, people are turning the thinnest threads of opportunity into hope for those around them. I will never forget my own mother's struggles to feed our family, her dreams that we would live a better life. It was within this crucible of struggle and wonder that I became who I am -- the CEO of my own social enterprise, a member of the Clinton Global Initiative community, and a fervid believer in the potential of young Africans to create a better world.

emerging to lead a younger Africa towards a brighter future, and this is exactly what my continent needs.

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