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5 ASSETS AFRICA CAN TURN INTO GOOD JOBS AT SCALE

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Africa's jobs challenge is not simply unemployment; it is a question of scale, productivity, and the speed of structural transformation. Over the coming decades, the continent will experience the fastest labor force expansion in the world: The World Bank projects a net increase of roughly 740 million workingage people by 2050, with about 12 million young Africans entering the workforce each year, against only 3 million new formal wage jobs.¹ Yet these same numbers also represent a unique, momentous advantage. No other region will add as much talent, entrepreneurial energy, and consumer demand in such a short period.

This demographic surge can become a workforce dividend if Africa implements the necessary policies to convert its assets into opportunities for largescale job creation. The real shift needed, however, is to move beyond a narrow focus on job quantity. Africa needs more jobs, but also better jobs—work that is productive, stable, safe, remunerative, and dignified. Structural transformation becomes selfreinforcing only when workers invest in skills and firms invest in people.

In this essay, I explore how five of Africa's current assets—a young

workforce, a continental market of unprecedented scale, the entrepreneurial dynamism of millions of small firms, expanding digital connectivity that can boost productivity, and vast agricultural potential capable of anchoring agroindustry—can be activated to provide a path to large-scale, high-quality job creation.

Transforming demographic growth into a talent advantage

Africa's most powerful asset is its young people.² Young Africans are entrepreneurial, mobile, and increasingly connected. What remains missing is alignment between training, employers, and real market demand. Three priorities can help close this gap.

- **Create skill-to-career learning compacts** focused on competency rather than access alone. These should strengthen foundational literacy and numeracy, build digital fluency, and deliver job-relevant technical skills while aligning curricula, training providers, employers, and governments around measurable standards, apprenticeships, and verified placement outcomes.

The real shift needed, however, is to move beyond a narrow focus on job quantity. Africa needs more jobs, but also better jobs—work that is productive, stable, safe, remunerative, and dignified.

¹ African Development Bank Group, *Jobs for Youth in Africa: Strategy for Creating 25 Million Jobs and Equipping 50 Million Youth 2016-2025* (2016).

² "Africa's Greatest Assets Are Its Young People," *Africa Renewal*, April 11, 2013.

- **Expand work-based skilling**, including apprenticeships and modular micro-credentials that reward demonstrated mastery rather than time spent in classrooms.
- **Treat inclusion as a productivity strategy** by expanding access to child care, safe transport, and social protection that enable all workers, especially women, to participate fully and advance.

Together, these priorities will match Africa's rising talent with its youth employment ambitions while sharpening the focus on what truly matters: security, decency, productivity, retention, earnings growth, and dignity in work.

Using the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and economic corridors to create markets for job-creating firms

No economy industrializes behind a fragmented market. This is why the AfCFTA is one of Africa's most powerful latent job assets. Its scale is unprecedented: 55 member states, a market of more than 1.3 billion people, including a rapidly growing middle class, and a combined GDP exceeding \$3.4 trillion.³ This continentwide market is not only a trade story; it is fundamentally a jobs story. Larger and more predictable markets allow firms to scale, scaling enables specialization and productivity gains, and productivity makes better wages and more stable employment economically viable.

The opportunity is immense, but implementation is the hinge. Despite ratification, fewer than half of member states were actively trading under the AfCFTA framework as of September 2025.⁴ This implementation gap constrains job creation, yet a corridor-led industrialization strategy can help close it by concentrating public action where it compounds most powerfully. This strategy should include the following:

- **Trade logistics and border reforms** that cut time to market. In labor-absorbing sectors such as agroprocessing, light manufacturing, and tradable services, time and reliability are often more binding constraints than wages.⁵
- **Mutual recognition of skills and professional mobility.** A truly continental labor market requires transferable certifications and easier movement for technicians, truckers, nurses, coders, and artisans, especially along high-potential corridors.
- **Reliable power and digital connectivity.** These systems boost firm productivity, expand market access, and lower transaction costs while enabling new digital sectors that generate employment.⁶ When paired with transport infrastructure, they further amplify job creation and attract higher levels of foreign direct investment.⁷

A practical design shift is to **move beyond isolated industrial parks toward corridor-based "good jobs zones,"** integrated clusters that combine infrastructure, training pipelines, supplier development, and enforceable labor and safety standards.

Converting Africa's entrepreneurial density into job multipliers

Africa's labor market is already dynamic, with the private sector serving as the continent's primary employer. Private firms generate roughly 90% of all jobs, even though many remain small because of financial constraints, weak infrastructure, and fragmented markets that limit their ability to grow.⁸ A quality-jobs strategy must therefore be two-track: helping a subset of firms scale into job multipliers while improving the quality of self-employment for the majority.⁹ In practice, this means creating pathways from survival businesses to growth businesses and from precarious work to dignified work.¹⁰

3 World Bank, *The African Continental Free Trade Area: Economic and Distributional Effects* (World Bank, 2020).

4 Amarachi Orjude-Ndibe, "Ethiopia Joins 24 Others Trading under AfCFTA," *Finance in Africa*, October 10, 2025.

5 Mengistu Alamneh Wassie et al., "Revisiting the Impact of Trade Facilitation Measures in Africa: A Structural Gravity Approach," *The Journal of International Trade & Economic Development* 34, no. 7 (2025): 1604–34.

6 Lennox Yieke, "Africa Investment Forum Showcases Advances in Regional Corridors and Connectivity," *African Business*, December 17, 2024.

7 Arti Grover, "Wired for Work - How Digital Infrastructure Is Powering Job Creation in Emerging Economies," *International Finance Corporation*, December 2025.

8 "Jobs: The Most Effective Pathway Out of Poverty," *International Finance Corporation*.

9 Pierre Nguimkeu, "A structural econometric analysis of the informal sector heterogeneity," *Journal of Development Economics* 107 (2014): 175–191.

10 Pierre Nguimkeu, "Entrepreneurship in Africa: Laying the groundwork for success," *Brookings Institution*.

The scalable lever is effective upgrading/formalization, which means bundling services and incentives that expand market access, reduce risk, and raise productivity, rather than formal registration for its own sake.¹¹ This includes:

- **Digital rails** (identification, e-payments, e-invoicing) which enable firms to build transaction histories and mobile data that strengthen creditworthiness and expand access to finance.¹²
- **Procurement ladders** which allow credible firms to graduate from microcontracts to larger opportunities based on performance and standards.
- **Lightweight business services** which comprise basic accounting, marketing, inventory tools, and quality standards which lower operating costs and can be delivered through platforms and associations, with sector-specific modules for traders, agro-processors, logistics providers, and artisans.

This agenda is essential in a region where informal employment accounts for roughly 85% of the labor force.¹³ A jobs strategy that ignores informality cannot reach scale, and one that focuses only on formalization without raising productivity will fail. The goal is to breed more productive firms, regardless of initial formality status.¹⁴

Building a digital jobs engine while closing the usage gap

Digital connectivity is now a core jobs lever in Africa, not a luxury. By the end of 2023, nearly 44% of people in sub-Saharan Africa (about 527 million people) subscribed to a mobile service.¹⁵

A jobs strategy that ignores informality cannot reach scale, and one that focuses only on formalization without raising productivity will fail.

Yet more than 900 million people remain offline, and 76% face a usage gap: living within network coverage but lacking the means or skills to use digital services.¹⁶ Closing this gap is a labor market strategy with the potential to unlock millions of

livelihoods across three channels:

- **Platform-enabled self-employment and microenterprise upgrading.** Digital commerce can create new “iWorkers” and expand markets for small firms. Up to 80 million young people could benefit from digital commerce by 2030, earning income through gig work or platform-based services.¹⁷
- **Remote work, business process outsourcing (BPO), and tradable digital services.** Online gig work is expanding rapidly and already accounts for up to 12% of the labor market in emerging economies.¹⁸ Sub-Saharan Africa has seen the fastest growth in online job postings, more than doubling between 2016 and 2020 (130%).¹⁹ This momentum can translate into real jobs in BPO, cybersecurity, data analysis, software development, and freelance professional services, connecting African talent to both local and global markets.²⁰
- **Productivity gains in offline sectors.** Digital tools raise productivity in agriculture, logistics, and retail by improving payment systems, information flows, and coordination across value chains.²¹

But digital job creation must be matched with a quality framework. A decent digital work package should include mass digital literacy and job-specific skills; transparent rules for pay, ratings, and grievance mechanisms on platforms; and transferable, contributory social protection that follows workers across gigs and jobs.

11 Pierre Nguimkeu. “A structural model of informality with constrained entrepreneurship.” *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 70, no. 3 (2022): 941-980.

12 Pierre Nguimkeu and Cedric Okou. “Digital technologies could be key to boosting gains for African micro-entrepreneurs” *Brookings Institution*.

13 “Informal Economy in Africa: Which Way Forward? Making Policy Responsive, Inclusive and Sustainable,” *International Labour Organization*, May 2022.

14 Pierre Nguimkeu and Cedric Okou. “Leveraging digital technologies to boost productivity in the informal sector in Sub-Saharan Africa.” *Review of Policy Research* 38, no. 6 (2021): 707-731

15 GSMA, *The Mobile Economy Sub-Saharan Africa 2024* (2024).

16 Ousmane Diagana and Romuald Wadagni, “Accelerating Africa’s Digital Revolution to Boost Jobs and Growth,” *World Bank Blogs*, November 17, 2025.

17 “New Research Shows 80 Million Young People to Benefit from the Rise of Digital Commerce in Africa,” *Mastercard Foundation*, February 27, 2019.

18 Namita Datta et al., *Working Without Borders: The Promise and Peril of Online Gig Work* (World Bank, 2023), 51.

19 Datta et al., *Working Without Borders*, 113.

20 Pierre Nguimkeu. “Africa’s growing gig economy: What is needed for success” *Brookings Institution*.

21 Pierre Nguimkeu and Cedric Okou. “Can Mobile Technologies Enhance Productivity? A Structural Model and Evidence from Benin Food Suppliers.” *International Monetary Fund*, 2024.

Using agro-industry to absorb labor in rural and secondary cities

Agro-industry is Africa's most scalable employment frontier because it links land, labor, domestic demand, and regional markets on a continent that holds 60% of the world's uncultivated arable land.²² The binding constraint is productivity, especially in inputs, logistics, and processing. Africa applies only 22 kilograms of fertilizer per hectare on average, while the global average is seven times higher at 146 kilograms. Though many countries use fertilizer far above the rate needed for high productivity agriculture, Africa's low usage impedes crop growth on the continent.²³ Yet the continent also holds a latent input advantage: Morocco alone has more than 50 billion metric tons of phosphate rock, representing roughly 70% of the world's known reserves of this essential, nonsubstitutable ingredient for modern fertilizers.²⁴

Africa can generate large-scale employment by transforming agriculture into a food systems industry. Priorities may include:

- **Strengthening soil health and input systems** with smarter fertilizer blends and distribution, which can quickly raise yields and incomes and unlock major productivity gains for millions of smallholder farmers.
- **Expanding irrigation and water control**, which reduces climate risk, stabilizes production, and enables multiple cropping seasons that dramatically increase labor demand.
- **Building cold chains and storage**, which reduce post-harvest losses, preserve value, extend market reach,

and create new jobs in logistics, maintenance, and temperature-controlled transport.

- **Developing processing clusters** linked to economic corridors and AfCFTA-enabled regional markets to capture more value locally, support rural industrialization, and connect farmers to larger, more predictable regional demand.

These investments can create stable wage jobs in agro-processing and logistics across rural and secondary cities, while raising farm incomes, boosting productivity, and enhancing the dignity of self-employment in allied sectors. Stronger local opportunities can also ease high-pressure migration into already congested urban labor markets.

Conclusion

Africa's five assets—its young workforce, continental market, dynamic firms, expanding digital opportunities, and vast agricultural base—can become a powerful engine for job creation when they are activated together, rather than treated in isolation. The shift required is to move from fragmented projects to coherent, corridor-led, market-shaping strategies that help firms scale, help workers advance, and turn informality into productivity.

By aligning skills with employer demand, connecting firms to finance and markets, expanding digital inclusion, and transforming agriculture into a food systems industry, Africa can convert demographic pressure into a workforce dividend. The ingredients are already in place; the task now is to connect them into a transformation engine capable of generating millions of productive, dignified jobs.

Africa's five assets—its young workforce, continental market, dynamic firms, expanding digital opportunities, and vast agricultural base—can become a powerful engine of job creation when they are activated together rather than treated in isolation.

22 Zainab Ayodimeji. "What are the Most-Produced Cash Crops in Africa?" Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2022.

23 David Malpass, "A Transformed Fertilizer Market Is Needed in Response to the Food Crisis in Africa," *World Bank Blogs*, December 21, 2022.

24 Mowafa Taib. "The mineral industries of Morocco." 2020-2021 *Minerals Yearbook*. (U.S. Geological Survey, 2025).

Investing in Africa's growing young population for prosperity¹

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Africa stands at a pivotal juncture: Between 2025 and 2050, the continent is set to undergo one of the fastest expansions of the working-age population in world history, with total population rising from about 1.4 billion today to as many as 2.5 billion by mid-century.² Central to this surge are an estimated 830 million youth aged 15–35³—an unprecedented concentration of young talent. Will this demographic dividend fuel transformation or deepen fragility? The answer lies in Africa's ability to equip its youth with the skills, health, and education to compete effectively in a 21st century labor market. Only by investing in its youthful population will Africa claim a prosperous 21st century. This youth potential can only be unlocked when personal competencies are matched by state systems that provide stability, good governance, and an economy dynamic enough to create opportunities.

Only by investing in its youthful population will Africa claim a prosperous 21st century.

Below are recommended policy foci which could be used to turn pledges into concrete results that deliver progress for Africa's youth.

1. Strong start: Health and nutrition for life, especially in early years

Youth development begins long before school. While there have been successes—a 22% reduction in under-five mortality⁴ and a 27% decline in stunting⁵ since 2000—a

- 1 This writeup is based on the following publication: World Bank, *21st-Century Africa: Governance and Growth*, ed. Chorching Goh (World Bank, 2025).
- 2 U.N. Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *World Population Prospects 2019: Highlights* (United Nations, 2019).
- 3 World Bank, *The Next Generation Africa Climate Business Plan - Ramping Up Development-Centered Climate Action* (2020).
- 4 Estimates from the United Nations Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation (United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations Economic and Social Affairs Population Division, World Bank, World Health Organization).
- 5 United Nations Children's Fund, World Health Organization, and World Bank Group joint child malnutrition estimates.

child born in Africa in 2020 is expected to achieve only 40 percent of their potential human capital.⁶ Data from seven countries in eastern and southern Africa shows that only 18% of children aged three and four are on track in literacy and numeracy.⁷ These realities block the path to building a skilled workforce for the 21st century. Overcoming them will require strong action to expand immunization, improve maternal health care, and strengthen social protections that lift families out of poverty while ensuring children have access to proper nutrition and quality pre-primary education.

2. Beyond access: Turning schooling into learning

Primary school enrollment in Africa rose from 57% in 1985 to 77% by 2010.⁸ But progress in educational access masks a deeper crisis. In 2022, over 86% of children aged 10-14 in Sub-Saharan Africa were learning poor: either out-of-school or learning deprived.⁹ Expanded access has also not been equal, with only 27% of adolescent girls completing secondary school due to barriers like unsafe environments, cultural norms, and lack of reproductive health education.¹⁰ Reducing learning poverty requires strengthening early-grade teaching by providing well-trained teachers, structured learning materials, and regular assessments to ensure children master foundational skills. It also calls for expanding access to quality schooling—especially for marginalized groups—through investments in safe classrooms, targeted remediation programs, and effective community engagement.¹¹

FIGURE 8

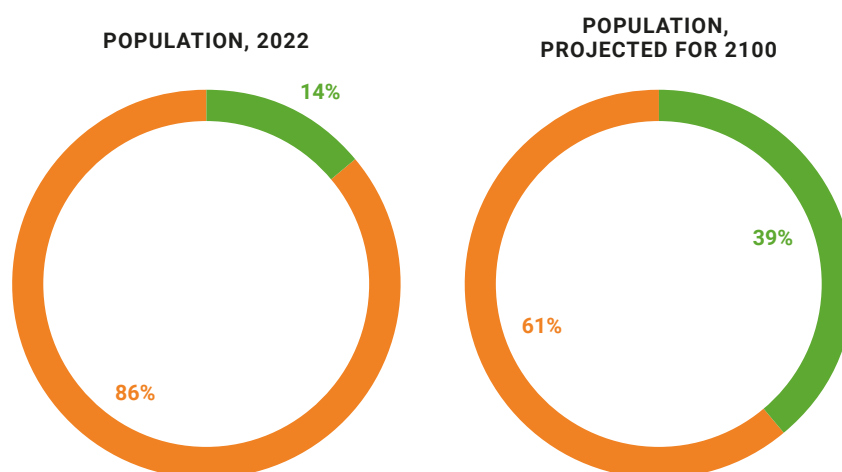
Africa's share of global labor supply

Percentage of the world's working-age population: Africa versus rest of world (2022 and 2100)

- Africa
- Rest of the world

Note: Africa has a young and fast-growing population, such that it is expected to make up almost 40% of the global labor force by 2100.

Source: World Bank, *21st-Century Africa: Governance and Growth*.



6 World Bank, "Human Capital Index (HCI) (Scale 0-1), 2020," *Human Capital Data Portal*, 2020.

7 "African Region's Maternal and Newborn Mortality Declining, but Progress Still Slow," *WHO Africa*, April 7, 2025.

8 Veronika Samborska, "Since 2010, Progress in Primary School Enrollment in Sub-Saharan Africa Has Stalled," *Our World in Data*, December 9, 2024.

9 World Bank et al., *The State of Global Learning Poverty: 2022 Update* (2022).

10 Uraidah Hassani, "A Critical Moment to Prioritize Girls' Secondary Education in Sub-Saharan Africa," *World Bank Blogs*, April 19, 2024.

11 World Bank, *21st-Century Africa: Governance and Growth*.

3. Future skills: Preparing youth for tomorrow's jobs

Even graduates often lack the skills demanded by the labor market, particularly in STEM and digital competencies. Bridging this gap between education and work will require expanded youth employment programs, particularly those tailored to young women. This includes apprenticeships, vocational education, and entrepreneurial training targeted at fast-growing sectors. At tertiary levels, it calls for advanced technical training as well as research and development. Finally, it is crucial to broaden the skill mix to include soft skills such as problem-solving, managerial competence, and teamwork.

4. Resilience under pressure: Shocks, climate, and inequality

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the fragility of youth systems, disrupting learning, health services, and early job prospects. Climate change further compounds these pressures, from rising food insecurity to migration. Both shocks risk reversing gains and widening inequality. Building resilient systems demands sustained financing (especially for health and climate adaptation), governance reform, and public-private partnerships that foster innovation and create jobs.

Twin pillars: Governance and growth to power people

While the core of Africa's transformation is investment in people, human capital flourishes only when anchored in two mutually reinforcing pillars. The first is a committed, capable, and credible state that ensures peace and stability, delivers services efficiently, and builds trust in institutions. The second is sustained economic dynamism—driven by private investment, regional trade, and digital innovation—that generates jobs and opportunities for a rapidly growing labor force. Expanding access to digital tools, green industries, and diversified markets not only fuels growth but also connects Africa's youth to global value chains. Together, these twin foundations—effective governance and vibrant economic growth—will make human capital not just an aspiration, but Africa's engine of prosperity in the 21st century.

Women and the gig economy in Africa

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Digital technologies are transforming the world of work.³⁵ This transformation has brought improvements in employment opportunities and earnings for African women. For example, three years after mobile internet became available in Nigeria, female labor force participation went up and the share of households in extreme poverty fell by 7%.

Digital job platforms are one such technology revolutionizing work in Africa. These “gig work” platforms match potential workers with clients requesting tasks—from delivery services to domestic work. In this viewpoint, I explore the opportunities and risks that gig work presents for women in Africa, highlighting both the potential benefits and challenges faced in this rapidly evolving sector.

Characteristics of Africa’s gig work platforms and how they work

Gig work platforms supply an algorithmic infrastructure to match those seeking a short-term job with those seeking a provider of services. They typically include a governance structure, rules for work to be carried out, and a payment mechanism. Many firms operating gig work platforms in Africa are global giants in the gig work outsourcing field (e.g., Uber, Fiverr, Upwork) while others are regional, national, or local (e.g., Onesha in Kenya, Asqua and Findworka in Nigeria, or Move, the car-sharing app based in Rwanda).³⁶ Gig workers enter into formal agreements with the platform to provide services to the platform’s clients in return for compensation mediated through the platform. The gig worker does not have a relationship with the client beyond the task assignment and has the flexibility to decide when they work and what work they want to do subject to the rules of the platform.

There are two types of gig work platforms:

- Those offering **location-based gig jobs** (microtask work) such as taxi, delivery, or in-home services such as cleaning or care. In this case, the platform owner

³⁵ Tania Begazo et al., *Digital Africa: Technological Transformation for Jobs* (World Bank, 2023).

³⁶ Namita Datta et al., *Working Without Borders: The Promise and Peril of Online Gig Work* (World Bank, 2023).

usually plays a strong role in setting the terms of service (task, pay) and selecting the workers, who are then employed as dependent contractors.

- Those offering **online gig jobs**, which can be done by workers and for clients anywhere in the world (sometimes referred to as “crowdwork”).³⁷ In this case, the role of the platform varies regarding the selection of workers, terms of the task, and compensation. In platforms matching freelance tasks with potential workers, a bidding system is often used to set compensation, whereas in microtask work (small, simple, and often repetitive tasks that can be completed in a short amount of time), jobs are standardized and the pay per task is set by the platform.

Women lag men in online gig work; in 2023 they comprised only 27% of the online gig workforce in sub-Saharan Africa.

Challenges women face in using gig work platforms

Women lag men in online gig work; in 2023 they comprised only 27% of the online gig workforce in sub-Saharan Africa.³⁸ One reason for this is the 37% gender gap in access to digital technologies in Africa—one of the highest of any region—caused by financial and social costs that impact women disproportionately.³⁹

In addition, compared to their male counterparts, more female online gig workers identify access to training as a top need (36.6% compared to 26.1% for males).⁴⁰ These results suggest online female gig workers lack access to training, owing partly to the digital access gap mentioned above, but also to other structural and societal barriers such as low digital literacy and poorly designed curricula that don't consider gender-specific needs and constraints.

Apart from access to training, World Bank data shows that female gig workers identify access to credit for purchasing equipment like computers as the second most important need, followed closely by access to health insurance. Notably, while health insurance features among the top three needs for female gig workers, it is a distant fifth for their male counterparts. This suggests that female gig workers also face barriers to entry such as high costs of working capital and lack of access to social protections and benefits like health insurance. The latter is of particular importance in the African context given that women are usually the primary carers for the sick in their families and communities.⁴¹

Analysis of women's experiences with online work platforms finds that many of the existing structural gender inequalities in the labor market transfer to the digital environment. These include occupational segregation, gender pay gaps, and vulnerability to harassment.⁴² For example, a study of 1,150 Kenyan women platform

37 World Bank, *Africa's Pulse, No. 28, October 2023: Delivering Growth to People through Better Jobs* (World Bank, 2023), 69.

38 Ibid, p.84.

39 Victoria Kwakwa, “Accelerating Gender Equality: Let's Make Digital Technology Work for All,” *World Bank Blogs*, March 7, 2023; Matt Shanahan, “The Mobile Gender Gap Report 2022,” GSMA, March 20, 2025.

40 Natnael Simachew Nigatu, “Working Without Borders: The Promise and Peril of Online Gig Work” (World Bank, 2023)

41 Kui Muraya et al., “Applying a Gender Lens to Understand Pathways through Care for Acutely Ill Young Children in Kenyan Urban Informal Settlements,” *International Journal for Equity in Health* 20, no. 1 (January 6, 2021).

42 Uma Rani et al., “Women, Work, and the Digital Economy,” *Gender & Development* 30, no. 3 (2022): 421–35.

workers found that in location-based sectors, one-quarter of workers reported experiencing harassment, mainly verbal abuse and payment withholding.⁴³ African women working from home on platforms, balancing paid gig work and household unpaid work, also report both social isolation and fatigue.⁴⁴

Gig platform algorithms can also disadvantage women. For example, transportation platforms such as Uber and Move incorporate surge pricing: higher pay when demand is highest. However, women are often least able to work during these times, either due to the gender-based dangers associated with driving at night or because of weekend childcare responsibilities.⁴⁵ Studies in several countries have also shown evidence of gender bias in customer ratings, in that women in gig work receive systematically lower customer ratings than their male counterparts.⁴⁶

Many of the existing structural gender inequalities in the labor market transfer to the digital environment.

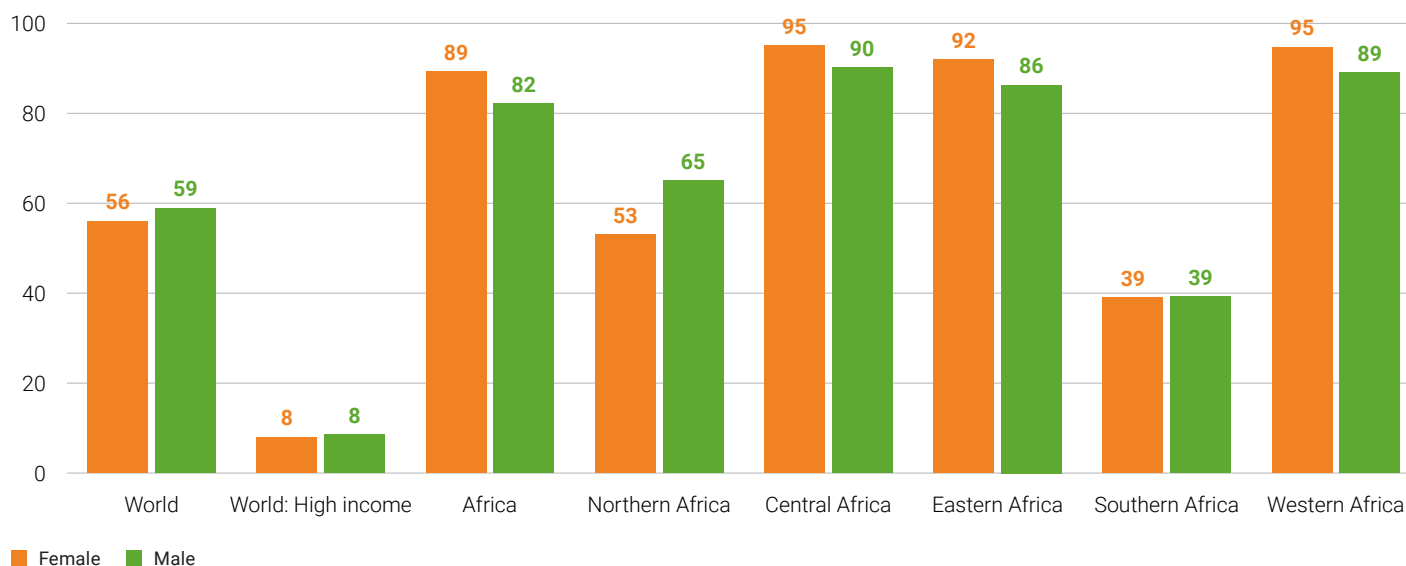
Opportunities for women in gig work platforms

Considering these challenges, why do millions of African women choose to engage with gig work platforms? The main benefits of gig work are increased access to clients, learning opportunities, and flexible hours. The latter is especially appealing to women.

FIGURE 9

Participation in the informal economy for African regions by gender

Informal employment as a % of overall employment in 2025



Note: The informal economy makes up a greater share of employment in Africa than in other parts of the world. In most of Africa, women are more likely than men to work in the informal economy.

Source: SDG Labour Market Indicators (ILOSDG) 2025, "SDG Indicator 8.3.1"

43 International Labour Organization, ed., *Digital Labour Platforms in Kenya: Exploring Women's Opportunities and Challenges across Various Sectors* (International Labour Office, 2024), xix.

44 Anwar, "Platforms of Inequality," 757–58.

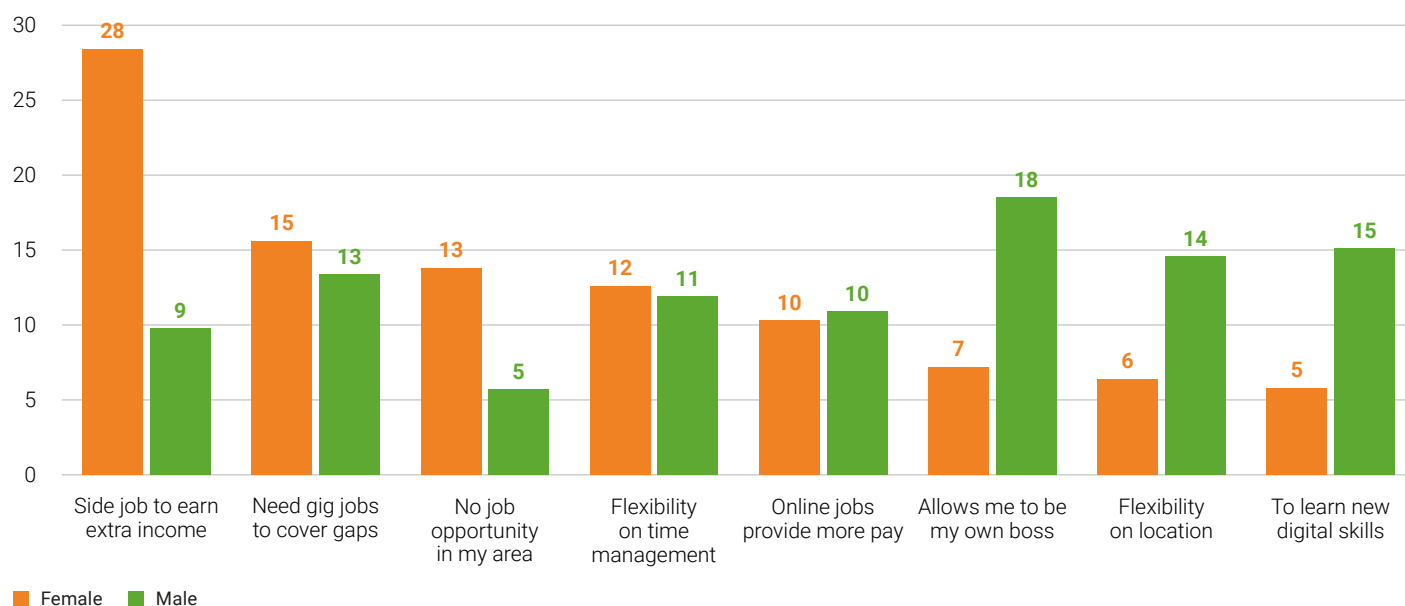
45 Mohammad Amir Anwar, "Platforms of Inequality: Gender Dynamics of Digital Labour in Africa," *Gender & Development* 30, no. 3 (2022): 754–55.

46 Rani et al., "Women, Work, and the Digital Economy."

FIGURE 10

Gig work motivation by gender

Percentage of respondents in 17 countries citing the following as the top reason for participating in online gig work



Source: Datta et al., *Working Without Borders*.

The previously referenced World Bank study shows that while men typically choose gig work for a desire to be their own boss or learn digital skills, women are more likely to cite their need for additional income and the lack of alternative jobs in their area (see Figure 10).⁴⁷ Studies within Africa have also found that women are far more likely than men to report gig work as their primary or only source of income.⁴⁸ For women, gig work is often an attractive opportunity given its flexibility and the lack of suitable alternatives in the formal economy. Platforms have also offered incentives to help women workers break into predominantly male sectors like transportation.⁴⁹

Policy implications

African governments have several tools at their disposal to make gig work more inclusive for women:

- **Reduce costs of participation in the gig work.** Africa has the highest internet costs in the world,⁵⁰ and costs of electricity and mobile devices can also be prohibitive. African governments can lower tariffs on digital devices and use competition to bring down internet costs. Lower costs especially benefit women, who have less access to financing.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Datta et al, *Working Without Borders*, 22.

⁴⁸ Anwar, "Platforms of Inequality," 754.

⁴⁹ Celen Ebru Paytoncular, "Uber's Marjorie Saint-Lot on Inclusion and Sustainability in Africa," *Connecting Africa*, October 24, 2023.

⁵⁰ International Telecommunications Union, *Measuring Digital Development: Facts and Figures 2024* (ITU Publications, 2024), 13–14.

⁵¹ Hanan Morsy, "Access to Finance: Why Aren't Women Leaning In?," *Finance & Development*, March 2020.

- **Support training programs for women** to enhance their digital skills as well as the “soft” skills needed to effectively bid and negotiate compensation. Governments should partner with international agencies or NGOs such as the International Labour Organization, who run the Women In Digital Business training initiative; Germany’s GIZ, which has a Gig Economy Initiative in Ghana; or the Soronoko Academy or ImpactHer, who provide training and help women access funding to purchase necessary equipment.
- **Increase demand for digital workers through e-government programs and include pro-women elements in bidding documents.** Examples include encouraging local platforms bidding on contracts to digitize public records, offering loans for purchasing digital devices to use for online gig work, or connecting women aspiring to become gig workers with training opportunities.
- **Update labor laws as necessary** to ensure that gig workers are covered by anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policies. For international platforms, this may require revisions to dispute resolution systems.⁵² Law enforcement officers may need to be trained on how to enforce anti-harassment policies in the context of digital service platforms.
- **Encourage or require licensed platforms to use third party monitoring systems** to ensure that platform incentive and compensation systems do not disadvantage women. One example is the Fairwork Foundation, which rates platforms on aspects such as the extent to which a platform ensures fairness in pay, fair working conditions, representation, etc.⁵³ Fairwork Foundation ratings could be used as a quality factor when platforms bid for government contracts.

Together, these avenues could maximize the opportunities for women in Africa’s growing digital gig work sector, while mitigating risks.

⁵² International Labour Organization, *Digital Labour Platforms in Kenya*, 29, 249.

⁵³ Datta et al., *Working Without Borders*, 164.

The rise of Africa's creative economy

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When Universal Music Group acquired a majority stake in Nigerian record company Mavin Global (valued at \$150-200 million)¹, it was investing in the continent with the fastest growing music industry in the world.² Mavin's roster, which features Afrobeats stars Rema and Arya Starr, achieved a combined 6 billion streams in 2023.³ Beyond music, Africa has also seen major growth across fashion, film, and gaming. Africa's gaming industry reached \$1 billion in 2024, with 66 active studios across 23 countries.⁴ SONY partnered with the International Finance Corporation (IFC) to establish a \$10 million Sony Innovation Fund to back African startups across the film, fashion, sports, gaming, and music industries.⁵ One of these startups, gaming publisher Carry1st, has created one of the most downloaded games in the U.S. and raised \$60 million since 2018, becoming the largest creative startup in Africa.⁶

These are just a few examples of Africa's robust creative economy, which by 2030 could be valued at \$200 billion,⁷ making up 10% of global exports in creative goods⁸ and offering unprecedented opportunities for strategic investors, who are seeking the next frontier within the creative industries sector. I explore these opportunities in my book *Realizing Africa's Potential: A Journey to Prosperity*.⁹

Key trends and investment opportunities

The burgeoning creative industries offer investment opportunities all across the continent. Dakar has become a fashion and art capital, Morocco has hosted

- 1 Dan Rys, "Universal Music Group Buys Majority Stake in Nigerian Label Mavin Global," *Billboard*, February 26, 2024.
- 2 Udi Aghogho, "Why Investing in Africa's \$58 Billion Creative Industry Is a Tightrope," *Finance in Africa*, June 19, 2025.
- 3 Andre Paine, "Mavin Unveils New Signing Lifesize Teddy as Label Marks Six Billion Streams," *Music Week*, August 14, 2023.
- 4 Aghogho, "Why Investing in Africa's \$58 Billion Creative Industry Is a Tightrope."
- 5 Tiara Njamfa, "Banking on Culture: Why Investors Are Betting on Africa's Sports & Creative Industries," Medium, *Included VC*, July 16, 2025.
- 6 Aghogho, "Why Investing in Africa's \$58 Billion Creative Industry Is a Tightrope"; Njamfa, "Banking on Culture."
- 7 "Africa's Creative Goldmine: Unlocking Growth Amid Gendered Challenges," *Mastercard Foundation*, May 16, 2025.
- 8 Landry Signé, "Africa's Creative Boom," *Project Syndicate*, June 10, 2025.
- 9 Landry Signé, *Realizing Africa's Potential: A Journey to Prosperity* (Brookings Institution Press, 2025).

Hollywood movies on their film sets, and South Africa has become a hub for gaming and esports. A few industries stand out:

Music industry momentum: Africa's music sector is a commercial validation of the continent's creative investment potential. For example, along with Universal Music Group's majority stake of Mavin Global, Warner Music Group fully acquired one of Africa's leading independent music distributors, Africori, allowing its stable of over 7,000 artists to be distributed through both companies.¹⁰

Gaming and esports expansion: Africa's gaming industry offers tech-enabled scalability with proven monetization models, reaching \$1 billion in 2024¹¹, and projected to grow to \$3.7 billion by 2030.¹² Africa's growth in tech-savvy youth is driving this expansion, with opportunities for industries like mobile money to enable microtransactions.

Film production and content creation: Strategic policy interventions have created regional production hubs within the film and content production industry. Kenya's 20-30% film rebate scheme attracted Netflix and Amazon productions,¹³ Morocco's Ouarzazate studios hosted Hollywood blockbusters like *Game of Thrones* and *Gladiator*,¹⁴ and Nigeria's Nollywood earns \$590 million a year.¹⁵

Fashion and E-commerce: The IFC estimates that the continent's e-commerce market could grow by \$14.5 billion between 2025-2030.¹⁶ Digital platforms are helping African artisans within the fashion industry to reach global markets.

The human capital advantage: Investors will find one key advantage that permeates all these different types of creative industries: human capital. Unlike manufacturing or routine service jobs, the employment in the creative industries resists automation while leveraging technology for scale. Even in a tech-intensive creative sector like gaming, human ingenuity is required to create narratives and characters that are later brought to life with technology. This unique characteristic creates a powerful business case suited to African demographics where the median age is 19 and approximately 60% of the population is under the age of 25.¹⁷ Africa will soon have the world's youngest workforce entering their most creative and productive years. Investing in Africa's creative industries will create decent work for millions¹⁸

Investors will find one key advantage that permeates all different types of creative industries: human capital.

10 Warner Music Group, "Warner Music Group Completes Its Acquisition of Africori," *Press Release*, February 12, 2025.

11 Aghogho, "Why Investing in Africa's \$58 Billion Creative Industry Is a Tightrope."

12 Njamfa, "Banking on Culture."

13 "Africa's Creative Industry Projected to Hit \$50B by 2030 — But Policy May Decide the Payoff," *The Creative Brief*, September 17, 2025.

14 Jon Jensen and Alex Court, "Filming 'Game of Thrones' Where Winter Never Comes," *CNN*, March 5, 2015.

15 Stanislas Diouf, "Africa's Creative Industries: Unleashing Economic Growth," *Africa CEO Forum*, September 9, 2024.

16 International Finance Corporation, *IFC Invests in E-Commerce Platform ANKA to Support Africa's Creative Artisans*, September 19, 2023.

17 Declan Walsh, "Old World, Young Africa," *The New York Times*, November 7, 2023; Camilla Rocca and Ines Schultes, *Africa's Youth: Action Needed Now to Support the Continent's Greatest Asset* (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2020).

18 International Labour Organization, ed., *Promoting Decent Work in the African Cultural and Creative Economy* (International Labour Office, 2023).

(UNESCO estimates that film and audiovisual industries alone could create 20 million jobs¹⁹) and improve human development by increasing incomes, while also offering sustainable returns for investors that is built on human capital that appreciates with experience, as young Africans will be producing the future content and driving the future global trends.

However, several obstacles still remain to unlocking the full business and human development potential of Africa's creative industries. First, structural barriers and infrastructure deficits can deter investors. Approximately 84% of Kenya's 275,375 creative enterprises are unregistered²⁰ and less than 5% of creative businesses can secure traditional bank loans.²¹ Limited infrastructure such as cinemas (Africa has 1 screen per 787,000 people compared to 1 screen per 50,000 in Europe²²), unreliable electricity, and lack of large-capacity venues create operational constraints and limit possibilities.

Second, intellectual property vulnerabilities create revenue leakages. Approximately 50-75% of revenues are lost to piracy in Africa's film industry,²³ while musicians in Ghana and Tanzania have lost monetization opportunities due to outdated royalty systems.²⁴ Third, purchasing power realities constrain market capacity. Companies have had to rethink their approaches after seeing declines due to purchasing power. For example, despite having 3 times the population of South Africa, Nigeria's cinema revenue is significantly lower (\$7.5 million compared to South Africa's \$29.9 million). Meanwhile, the pay-for-TV company MultiChoice's subscriptions declined by 18% in 2024 due to customers cancelling.²⁵ While challenging, these barriers are not insurmountable, and companies have already found ways to navigate the current environment and find a competitive edge.

A strategic path forward for investors

To overcome these barriers and find success within the broad creative transformation Africa is undergoing, investors should keep three principles in mind.

1. **Scale through accessibility:** Affordable pricing remains a key feature for scaling in African markets. Boomplay, for example, is Africa's most popular music streaming platform, one that was able to penetrate the market through a tailored strategy. The app is preinstalled in one of the continent's leading phone makers, Transsion, and the cost is low, helping them to reach 2 million new subscribers a month, with 44 million total downloads.²⁶ Other partnerships are also opening the industry to more users. For example, Orange partnered with Spotify to bundle its

19 "Lights, Camera, Action! African Film Industry Gets a Boost with African Audiovisual and Cinema Commission (AACC) Launch," *African Union*, May 30, 2024.

20 *Invest in Africa's Creative Industries: There Is a Renaissance Going On* (InsightsOut Africa, 2024).

21 "Africa's Creative Industry Projected to Hit \$50B by 2030."

22 Aghogho, "Why Investing in Africa's \$58 Billion Creative Industry Is a Tightrope."

23 *The African Film Industry: Trends, Challenges and Opportunities for Growth* (UNESCO, 2021).

24 "Africa's Creative Industry Projected to Hit \$50B by 2030."

25 Aghogho, "Why Investing in Africa's \$58 Billion Creative Industry Is a Tightrope."

26 "Have a Look at Boomplay, the African Spotify," *Sonosuite*, n.d.

mobile subscription with free access to Spotify, starting in the DRC, Madagascar, Mali, and Guinea.²⁷ Mobile-first, free-to-play models are currently dominating alongside platforms that optimize for low-data downloads and offline functionality.

2. **Infrastructure as a first-mover advantage:** Strategic investments in infrastructure can offer competitive advantages. From digital platforms, to venue rental marketplaces, to mobile production equipment, many firms are moving quickly to fill gaps in the entertainment industry. Between 2013 to 2023, Concerts SA, a joint Norwegian/South African live music support program created over 27,000 jobs for musicians and technicians across 13 African countries, hosting over 1 million attendees.²⁸ Live Nation also expanded into South Africa, partnering local companies to launch a new large-capacity venue in Johannesburg.²⁹ In Nigeria, companies like OgaVenue are taking advantage of the country's concert "renaissance" by offering online booking platforms for events, finding a lucrative business opportunity to support the creative economy's growth.³⁰
3. **Leverage the diaspora's distribution power:** The diaspora's estimated 200-million-person market with already-engaged purchasing power is an underutilized target for investment in Africa's creative economy.³¹ For example, the diaspora has elevated African and Afro-descendant designers in the fashion industry to the global market with the aid of platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. The demand for African textiles and prints have driven Western and Asian luxury brands to seek out African partnerships.³² With over \$15 billion in African exports of textile, clothing, and footwear a year,³³ African designers and brands are growing, launching new stores and popups (Zuri, Dye Lab), collaborating with Western fashion companies (Lemlem), and being put on display at the forefront of fashion at the Met Gala (Adebayo Oke-Lawal and Thebe Magugu).³⁴ Creative industries are steeped in storytelling, self-expression, community, and culture, thus the need to actively engage the diaspora to invest in (and consume) African creative goods.

With these three principles in mind, and by capitalizing on the areas for growth listed above, investors can take part in the upgrading of Africa's creative industries, as well as contribute to Africa's ownership, monetization, and export of its cultural renaissance.

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28 "Celebrating a Decade of Investment in Live Music," *Concerts SA*, April 18, 2024.

29 Mandy Dalugdug, "Live Nation Expands in South Africa and Portugal," *Music Business Worldwide*, November 28, 2024.

30 Ifeanyi Ndiomewese, "How OgaVenue Is Taking Hold of the \$20 Billion Events Industry in Nigeria," *Techpoint Africa*, May 1, 2017; Emmanuel Chibuzo, *Nigeria's Concert Culture Is Experiencing a Renaissance, Seyi Vibe Stadium Show Confirms This*, n.d..

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32 Ramata Diallo, "When the African Diaspora Redefines International Fashion Codes," *Africa Fashion Tour*, September 14, 2025.

33 *The African Fashion Sector: Trends, Challenges & Opportunities for Growth* (UNESCO, 2023).

34 Nesrine Malik, "From Gallabiyas to Kaftans, How African Style Went Global," *The Guardian*, June 4, 2025.