

Africa: Changing the Narrative

ENDURING poverty and conflict are so stark in Africa that it is sometimes difficult to see what else is happening.

In April 2011, a study published by the *Columbia Journalism Review* titled “Hiding the Real Africa” documented how easily Africa makes news headlines in the West when a major famine, pandemic, or violent crisis breaks. But less attention is given to positive trends and underlying successes.

In many cases, despite accelerated economic growth over the past 10 years, the rise of a middle class of consumers, and a more dynamic private sector attracting indigenous entrepreneurs, the narrative about Africa has remained focused on the bad news.

Recently some have started to change this. The World Bank published a book on African success stories, titled *Yes Africa Can*. And the Tunis-based African Development Bank marked 50 years after independence from colonialism for many African nations with a study called *Africa in 50 Years' Time: The Road Towards Inclusive Growth*.

The study says that “Over the past decade, despite the successive global food and financial crises, Africa has been growing at an unprecedented rate. Though it will take decades of growth to make major inroads into Africa’s poverty, there is now a growing optimism about Africa’s potential.”

This issue of *F&D* explores that potential, epitomized by our cover showing Kenyans Susan Oguya and Jamila Abass, cofounders of AkiraChix, who developed a mobile phone application for farmers in rural areas. They are working in a technology hub for IT investors and tech companies. The lead article by Harvard professor Calestous Juma says a growing middle class is shifting perceptions about Africa’s prospects. The middle class may have comparatively little to spend by Western or Asian standards, but the traditional focus on eradicating poverty in Africa “distracted both African authorities and international donors from serious consideration of ways to promote prosperity infrastructure development: technical education, entrepreneurship, and trade,” he says.

In our “People in Economics” column, we profile Nigeria’s economic czar, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, who is shaking things up in Africa’s most populous country. She says Africa has to make up for lost time in the global race to be competitive.

Undeniably, much remains to be done. Articles in this issue discuss how to tackle poor infrastructure and power shortages and guard against famine.

Separately, we have articles looking at prospects for the euro area, emerging markets, and commodities, and explain econometrics.

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