



Challenging the African Narrative

For generations, the single story for Africa has been one of despair, famously headlined as the “Hopeless Continent” by *The Economist* magazine, some years ago. Historically, the narrative around Africa has been filtered through a lens of famine, poverty and foreign aid. Vestiges of the old story elements are still around: the horrors of the Ebola epidemic; twin campaigns of terror of Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab on different sides of the continent; and persistence civil unrest from Burkina Faso to the Democratic Republic of Congo.

However, Africans are far from being a single people. While technically comprising 54 or 55 countries, the continent’s political boundaries are a relatively recent colonial legacy. Even among the official countries, there is unevenness and many contradictions. Yet, when a team from an African country competes in the FIFA World Cup, or an African wins the Nobel Prize, the continent rejoices. The newer single story about Africa is that of “Rising Africa.” Since the #AfricaRising movement in the early 2000s, there has been a move from victim-to-victor depiction of the African people.

The new African audience is more tech-savvy and globally connected. Research has shown that Africa currently ranks third among world regions in real growth terms despite the fact that household, disposable income has remained stagnant in sub-Saharan Africa. It is important to tell the stories that depict the ingenuity, innovation and heart of Africans in a way which does not ignore the socio-economic challenges. It is important that we do tell the whole story; that we highlight the lack in Alexandra Township, but that we also proudly show the high-rises in Sandton, just a few kilometres away. It is about balance.

African stories are not second-rate. They can stand their ground on the international stage. True, authentic African stories are best told from within the African context because story-telling is a deeply ingrained part of the culture. The stories of Africa tell of Nana Akua Birmeh, the founder of Ghana’s first women-led architecture firm, ArchXenus, who won the 2018 Africa Women Innovation and Entrepreneurship Forum Award in the Creative Industry category; and of Cameroonian-born NJ Ayuk, the 38-year-old attorney who runs one of Africa's most successful law conglomerates, featured in *Forbes Magazine*.

Iconic Ghanaian journalist for the BBC, Komla Dumor, quoted this African proverb in his 2012 TEDTalk titled, *Telling the African Story*:

"Until the lion learns to write, every story will glorify the hunter."

The media is important in defining narratives and informing what the world believes about Africa, and what African believes about itself. The opportunities in Africa are many and lucrative. Africans need to start telling their stories themselves.

Adapted from: <https://www.brookings.edu/research/it-is-time-to-get-past-the-single-story-about-africa/>
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