

Africa's future hangs in the balance

By [Sthe Shabangu](#)

18 May 2017

Africa is standing before a small window of opportunity to grow future-ready leaders equipped to take on a new era of industry. It will be our ability to come together and develop those leaders that will determine whether we fly or fall.



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The tough reality is that radical disruption to skills requirements in the workplace is headed our way as we edge towards the next Industrial Revolution.

Research presented at the World Economic Forum on Africa last week shows that in South Africa alone, 39% of the core skills required across industries will be completely different in three years' time.

Yet, the Forum also brought forward concerning statistics which paint a picture of a continent that is struggling to develop skills for today, never mind skills for tomorrow.

Indeed, WEF's Human Capital Index reveals that sub-Saharan Africa currently captures just 55% of its human capital potential, when compared with the global average of 65%.

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On the one hand, employers say an under-skilled workforce is holding their businesses back - as many as 41% of all firms in Tanzania and 30% in Kenya. But on the other hand, just 50% of Africa's school-age children are enrolled in secondary school, and a startlingly low 7% in tertiary education.

The gap between skills required and skills administered is greater in Africa than in any other region in the world. Radical intervention is needed. It's simple, if we fail to adequately upskill our youth, we will be guilty of throwing away the future of an entire continent.

By 'we' I don't just mean the government or education providers, but you and I, the people and private entities who wake up each morning on this vibrant continent we call home.

The opportunity

The good news is that every challenge also presents an opportunity. While the next Industrial Revolution will bring a massive wave of disruption, it also brings the promise of completely new job descriptions which will call on dynamic and exciting skills sets.

According to findings from WEF, our continent will need young individuals who can combine digital and stem skills with more traditional skill sets. Africa is going to need significant numbers of digital-mechanical engineers and business operations data analysts, to name a few.

How do we get there?

The million dollar question is: how do we grasp hold of this golden opportunity to see our continent transition into a new industrial era? I believe the answer lies in the stories that belong to remarkable young individuals like Ken Gitonga.

Ken is the administrator of the Samsung Engineering Academy in Nairobi. The Academy, which was launched in Nairobi in 2014, revolutionises traditional education by providing technical and vocational training for school learners, tertiary students and employed youth.

As will become evident from Ken's story, the strength of the Academy lies in its ability to provide talented individuals like Ken, not only with the skills they need to succeed, but also to invest back into their communities.

Ken has been making things from as young as six years old, when he built himself a toy car out of wire and wood. He would use sticks, wires and just about any empty household item he could find, to create his own 'gadgets'. As he didn't have a lot of money growing up, these gadgets were his toys.

While Ken was given the opportunity to develop his considerable skills by attending the Academy himself, he now uses his

talents to help grow the skills of the next generation.

His analytical mind serves him well in this pursuit. Through his planning and logistical genius, he has created a bespoke work station programme that enables students to effectively learn about a particular electronic device. Every day, Ken prepares the course materials needed by the Academy's lecturers and helps deliver course content when needed.

His is just one of the many stories currently unfolding as Samsung continues to drive the development of skills-for-employability amongst the youth in Ethiopia, South Africa, Ghana, Kenya and Nigeria through the Engineering Academy Initiative.

As a continent of individuals and entities, both private and public, we need to come together to push forward initiatives like these so that we can grasp hold of the unique opportunity that stands before us; growing a generation of talented young individuals ready to take the continent forward.

Together, we can be unstoppable.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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