

**EXCLUSIVE: Paul Kagame Interview** **South Africa:** Oscar Pistorious, twists and turns

**Tanzania:** Election fever! Who goes, who stays? **Sport:** Rugby and the politics of race

**+ BLACK HISTORY MONTH: THE MOORS, AFRICA'S GIFT TO EUROPE**

NEW AFRICAN

# NewAfrican

October 2015 • N°554 • An IC publication

*The bestselling pan-African magazine since 1966*

## AFRICA'S TIME

### The Thinkers Issue

**Guest Edited by UNECA Chief – Dr Carlos Lopes**



*This issue's contributors include (l-r):  
Dr Ngozi Ikonjo-Iweala,  
President Paul Kagame,  
Dr Carlos Lopes, Thabo Mbeki  
and Achia Leke. Also inside:  
Prof Alioune Sall &  
Prof Edwin Muchapondwa*

• Euro Zone € 5.00 • UK £4.00 • USA \$5.95 • Algeria DA 240 • Angola 700 Kwanza (AOA) • Australia A\$ 7.50 • Bahrain BD 2.00 • Canada \$6.50  
• CFA Zone CFA 2.600 • Cyprus 3.85 • Denmark Dkr 35 • Egypt EE 22 • Ethiopia R 65 • Gambia Da 120 • Ghana GH¢ 10.00 • Indonesia R35,000  
• Jamaica \$680 • Jordan JD 3.500 • Kenya KShs 350 • Kuwait KD 1.500 • Lebanon LL 7500.00 • Malaysia RM 15.90 • Mauritius MR 150  
• Morocco Dh 30 • Nigeria N 500 • Norway NOK 59 • Oman OR2.00 • Qatar QR 20 • Rwanda RWF 3000 • Saudi Arabia Rls 20 • Sierra Leone LE 20.000  
• Singapore \$7.50 • South Africa R40.00 (inc. tax) • Other Southern African Countries R 35.10 (excl. tax) • Sweden SKr 33 • Switzerland Sfr 8.70  
• Tanzania TShs 5.400 • Tunisia TD 4.5 • Turkey 10.00YTL • UAE Dh 20 • Uganda USh 8,700 • Zambia ZMK25



07

M 03114 - 552 - F: 4,50 € - RD





Dr Carlos Lopes, named on our annual list of 100 Most Influential Africans in 2014, is a leading voice on Africa's economic development discourse. The UNECA (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa) Chief graciously agreed to guest-edit this issue, and this abridged, yet diverse interview, shows why *New African* made the choice.

## “Africa is ready for a big revolution... but we need a new narrative”

**NEW AFRICAN:** As Guest Editor for this edition of *New African*, which is an exciting experience for our readers and us too, what is the message you wanted to send across to our readers?

**CARLOS LOPES:** We have been talking for a while about the new [African] narrative and I have been concerned that most of it is centred around opportunities. Yet, to a large extent, these are opportunities for those who are already more or less engaged with Africa and just want to increase their opportunities in terms of business and recognition, from a continent that now has as much to offer as other frontier markets. I think this type of narrative is very narrow. It's not African and it's not for Africans. The only way to reframe it differently is if we [as Africans] take control of the new narrative. So I think it was important to call [for this edition] some of the voices that are constructing this new approach to a narrative that has an African perspective.

You have spoken about the importance of original thinking or disruptive thinking. Do you think there's a lack of leadership among African thinkers and academics in our institutions in terms of new ideas, and coming up with think exactly what it is that Africa and Africans, need and want?

I think there is a lot of laziness on the part of the academic community and African scholars. I am quite familiar with the various networks and I can see that the evolution of thinking and discussions, mirrors international trends. There has been a lot of emphasis on the role of democracy and popular movements, gender issues, and more recently issues of how you deal with religious influence. All this is fine, but I think it's very narrow.

I believe there is a need for African scholars to find their own agendas and frame these

The new narrative is about Africa transforming its positive growth into real change.





international debates, within agendas that are proper to the continent. It's not very different from what we are doing with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This SDGs debate right now is a universal debate and Africans have to have a very important role in it. They have to push their agenda within the adopted new Goals and they have done quite well in that regard. But confusing SDGs with our own African Development Goals (ADGs) is a big mistake.

Yes, Africans have to define their own goals but I think the ADGs have been defined in a very scattered and fragmented way through various frameworks that have been adopted by heads of state, the African Union and so on. The ADGs require greater coherence and deeper thinking. What we want to do with the economic structure of transformation for instance is very crucial, we cannot just keep it as a slogan, we have to define the details of what it means.

**So how can academics and intellectuals be mobilised to think, research and write differently to help determine a transformative agenda?**

I have witnessed a great deal of enthusiasm on the part of economic agents, like banks, the financial sector and others who do research about opportunities which Africa offers. On the other hand however, as I earlier stated, I have noticed what African scholars mainly discuss is the role of the state and popular movements – basically governance issues. And then there are those external agents in the global academic community whom we call the Africanists – the ones interested in the social dimensions of things. But I see these silos as counterproductive. True, we need the academics but also the ECA as an institution [for example], should contribute and see that these different groups talk more with each other, in order for the [African] agenda to converge. One way to do this is by giving a very prominent role to African think tanks. There are many think tanks in Africa. In April this year we hosted the African Think Tank Summit, which at least 60 or more attended. We realised that there is a need for this group of institutions to drive this convergence [of ideas]. It is a very important contribution we ought to make.

**What original ideas have you been exposed to or have you seen recently which you think African leaders should consider and adopt?**

Going back to the issue of the narrative, for most of us, this narrative is not just about branding Africa in a better image, that's not the core of the issue, although it is equally important. The new narrative is about whether Africa is going to transform the current positive growth performance indicators into real change. To do that, we need to define transformation.

How I define that is basically to boil it down to industrialisation – in this area Africa is two generations behind what other regions have done, sometimes three, and we need to catch up!

But in doing that catching up, we cannot do it the same way as others have done. We have to take advantage of being latecomers who have learnt from others' mistakes. As latecomers we can also leapfrog to the latest solutions, taking note of the existing current

social ecosystem, which is very different from what others had when they industrialised. But beyond just talking about industrial policies, the end result is about the full transformation of societies in Africa.

In terms of ideas, it's about the way we deal with education in today's world because people now have access to remote forms of education. But how do we insert that into strategies that are coherent? Nobody is doing research in that area. It's about how we can make sure that the proposed solutions for systematising prevention in healthcare, for example, are taking advantage of technology. Africa has pockets of innovation here and there but there is no systemic way innovation is assessed. It's about making sure that peace and security is perceived as a problem born of economic causes, and studying those economic causes so that we can find solutions. For instance in Darfur, access to water and means of production are some of the reasons for the conflict. But there is no research about it. We therefore really have huge gaps.

**What is the thinking of African leaders in this narrative?**

They themselves are realising that. I, myself, have been asked by about ten leaders so far, to engage with them in strategic thinking, which is very encouraging, it shows that there is appetite and that appetite is growing.

**You have mentioned that Africans are great adopters of other people's ideas without necessarily thinking of the consequences those ideas brought in. What can be done differently to change this?**

As the new-kids-on-the block, because the independence of African states came later than all the others, there is a huge eagerness to please and to comply with international systems, and international laws that come with the need for legitimacy and recognition. It's similar to being a kid who finds himself accepted and recognised as a grown-up, and all of a sudden he is one of the grown-ups. It's this eagerness to be recognised and accepted as "grown-up" which African countries have indulged in and they have in the process really omitted [themselves] from discussing the issues that are important for Africans. It is even typical today to find a reformist-minded African leader who is doing great things to transform their country, still inviting some European or American gurus to certify that they are doing the right things.

**You spoke about self-confidence. Is there a lack of self-confidence, again in the intellectual space, in terms of ideas?**

I wouldn't say self-confidence is the main problem, but rather defensiveness. I think most of the energy of our intellectuals is very much oriented towards being defensive and still needing to prove [something about Africa]. And a lot of research is going into proving ourselves. I think we have passed that stage to be honest – we have to get over it.

**What exactly do you mean by that – "prove"?**

I will give the example of Hegel, the German philosopher who once said that Africa had no history.





I mean, it was and still is a ridiculous statement. But at the time he said it, it was very powerful because everybody respected Hegel as he was considered the most prominent philosopher of his times.

But we are in 2015, and are we still going on and struggling with Hegel and his statement? A lot of African scholars are. They still want to prove that our history is as important as that of the Roman Empire and [that it] is important to define one particular small entity that existed somewhere in the desert and try to compare it with a European equivalent. They use terminology that tries to make acceptable that the political entities of Africa were equivalent to [Western history]. And I am not just talking about historians, so we really have an issue here.

**But isn't history important? It gives people context, a sense of identity and self-confidence.**

It is, but we need to get over the defensiveness. Africans need to demonstrate agency in different moments of history as a way of building their self-confidence. I actually love it that we do so. But I don't really approve the focus on trying to prove ourselves in order to make ourselves acceptable: first our existence, second the definition of our existence and then the characteristics of our existence. Come on, I mean, we are in 2015!

**You say that you are someone who has been brought in to do that disruptive thinking on behalf of others, to make them see and analyse things differently. Do you think that there are areas where Africa still needs to learn, or experiment with and make its own mistakes?**

Yes, I absolutely agree with that statement. I think normally when people are pessimistic about the continent and they are outsiders I am dismissive, and they get irritated. When people are pessimistic and they are African, I say that's proof of impatience and I say let's use that drive, that energy, because it's that impatience that eventually is going to address the issues someone will raise. It's good to talk about leapfrogging, which is good for technology and certain solutions but it doesn't really take us away from the need to work, and put in place step-by-step what will make us solid. I don't like to use the word sustainable in this context, because it has been a bit abused as a word. Therefore I will use the

**Africa will suffer from the current global environment but still be the region with the fastest economic growth, says Dr Lopes**

phrase – make us solid.

Look at Singapore, which is an example followed by many leaders in Africa. Singapore is solid, no matter which angle you look at – the authorities there have thought about it and done the hard work. They have not just made proclamations. Many leaders in Africa content themselves with proclamations. They say we are going to be an emerging country by horizon X, you know, in 2030 or something, and yet their people don't even understand what they are actually putting in place or how much work goes into transforming a country.

**What then drives that transformation?**

It's three factors. First is ambition, but in order for you to be ambitious you have to be self-confident, and you cannot have self-confidence if you don't have a base; that is why I think [economic] growth today is a propeller of self-confidence. The next step is to transform that self-confidence into ambitious targets and practice.

**You mention growth; people say that the growth is going to slow down across many countries, especially the powerhouses because they are driven by high commodity prices, even though there has been economic diversification. Is this a cause for concern for you, or on the contrary a cause for optimism because countries need to change and change more quickly?**

It's both. Commodities are very important for exports in Africa and they are very important for some countries' earnings. The ones that depend the most on them however are also the ones that are less indebted. So their capacity to use their earnings, some even their sovereign and reserve funds, as a cushion is a big help. I will therefore not be as negative as many are projecting, even in light of commodity prices going south. That said though, I think it's a wake-up call. Let us take the entire mining sector as an example, because it's sort of the most important paradigm. This sector represents less than 7% of Africa's GDP and only produces about 1% of Africa's formal employment. Come on, it's time to really change this model.

My prediction therefore, is that Africa is going to significantly suffer from the current global environment but we are still going to be the region with the fastest [economic] growth and all other regions will be behind us, particularly the ones that were ahead, which is southeast Asia, because they are going to be much more affected by China than by Africa.

**What gives you the most cause for hope about Africa?**

The young people. I think there is an incredible energy coming from the young people, we see it in the arts, and even without the support of the marketing and the very sophisticated modes that other parts of the world can afford. I think it doesn't take much to see that Africans are really amongst the most creative and most sophisticated. Yet this is just one demonstration through which the youth easily manifest themselves. If given the same space in politics, access to capital and the economic side of things, I think we are really ready for a big revolution. **NA**