

## THEBE IKALAFENG

Ikalafeng is arguably one of Africa's foremost brand authorities. A global African thought leader, advisor, commentator and author; he is the founder of the Brand Africa initiative, the award-winning Brand Leadership Group and Brand Leadership Academy. Find out more about Brand Africa at [www.brandafrica.net](http://www.brandafrica.net) or @brandafrica



## YES, AFRICA IS RISING

*During the inaugural Brand Africa Forum, in 2010, Jay Naidoo, Chairman of the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition remarked profoundly: "China has an agenda in Africa. India has an agenda in Africa. The US has an agenda in Africa. We are naïve to think that the people who come into our countries, even the ones who are here to help us, have no agenda. Everyone has an agenda. What is Africa's agenda?"*

*"Africans still need to accept who we are. If we don't do this, we can't move forward."*

Two years later, on Africa Day 2012, at the Brand Africa Roundtable in Nairobi, Kenya's Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Information and Communication, Dr Bitange Ndemo, reiterated this sentiment. "Every major power has an agenda for Africa. But only Africans have no agenda for Africa," he said. "Just recently at the World Economic Forum in Ethiopia, there were a number of statistics that were scary in that the trade among African countries is about 17% and the rest is trade with the outside world. If we improved that intra-Africa trade by 5% we could make up to \$400 billion."

This is the story of Africa; one of opportunity. It is a reality which Brand Africa seeks to drive by inspiring proactive, independent and non-political and active citizenship to drive Africa's advancement, for Africa and by Africans. We're inspired to change perceptions of Africa, create a competitive African identity and reputation and a catalytic environment for investment and tourism across the continent. Central to this is the championing of active African citizenship. For me, that's the most critical component of our vision.

The world is already taking notice of Africa's potential. The International Monetary Fund projects the continent will grow at a combined 5.4% in 2012, while the United Nations Development Programme believes African growth could rise to 7% by 2015, given the investment rush. You only need to consider the shift in opinion by the respected Economist magazine which, in 2000, ran a headline declaring Africa to be 'The Hopeless Continent'. In 2011 they declared: 'Africa Rising'.

Pick a country around the world and you can focus on the negative. People come to Africa and emphasise poverty and political instability. But when you travel around the continent you feel the pulse of Africa, the creativity of its people and the adaptability of societies.

This is a continent on the rise. To take advantage of growth and progress we, as Africans, need to take pride and confidence in our vibrant continent and accept who we are: 54 unique nations at different stages of development. We don't have to make excuses about our culture, traditions or way of life. We must celebrate them. We need to stop blaming CNN or BBC for labelling us. We must create channels to tell our own stories. We must stop blaming, begging and borrowing.

As it's often said, 'what gets measured gets done.' Brand Africa also seeks to quantify how African nations rank relative to the world and how our brands shape up. MTN is the top brand in Africa, according to our research, conducted in conjunction with Brand plc and TNS. It's a quality, international, home-grown brand and that speaks well for our future as Africans. SABMiller is one of the world's top corporate brands – proudly African. There are hundreds of others, and there is a growing recognition that Africans can create brands that meet and exceed needs of both Africans and the world. Indeed, the 2010 Soccer World Cup spoke to Africa's ability to create and deliver world-class African solutions.

Africans are gaining confidence and we must use that as a platform to create. I'm very confident about Brand Africa, because Africa IS rising! ■