

Unleashing Africa 4.0 through innovation

By [Saidah Nash Carter](#)

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There is an African proverb that says: “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together” - and this certainly rings true now more than ever before. There is so much growth and opportunity in the emerging markets and particularly Africa, but if we are honest, we will acknowledge that in many cases the opportunities are too complex to be fully unlocked by one single entity.



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Possibilities are unleashed when we are able to look through a new lens – one that is supportive of- and open to- innovation and co-creation. In fact, the value we can bring the world when big companies share vision and purpose cannot be underestimated. Neither can the power to convene, to share risk and to share reward. With authentic connections and passion for impact we create a runway to think big and solve big.

If we are to achieve what I term an Africa 4.0 – an era that could unlock the potential of emerging technologies with use cases that benefit business and communities across the continent – we need to harness the power of co-creation. For it is only together that we can go faster and further.

Africa's perpetual problem: Transport

A perfect case in point is one of Africa’s perpetual problems – transport. It is also a very solvable problem. Potholed roads and missing rail links get in the way of economic growth and intra-regional trade. Just consider the implication when transport costs can make up [50-75%](#) of the retail price of goods in Malawi, Rwanda and Uganda.

Africa needs to focus on improving transport logistics infrastructure, the high cost of logistics services and the lack of

skilled workers in the industry as a whole. Failure to address this, on a rapidly growing continent, can be detrimental to Africa's trade capabilities so it makes perfect sense that the solutions to address such a challenge should be home-grown.

And this is exactly what GE, the world's premier digital industrial company, and Transnet, Africa's largest and most developed rail and ports operator, have considered and it is for this reason that they have partnered to digitise Africa's transport sector. Their proposed plan will deliver a digital solution that will seamlessly connect shippers and transport operators, making it dramatically easier for a company to understand pricing and capacity on the network, plan a shipment and get their goods to market.

Optimising freight efficiency

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This co-creation is born from a near decade relationship – one that started small and through trust and the understanding of what strength in combined capabilities can achieve, has grown substantially where today, the planned partnership will further strengthen the already existing relationship – and tackle the complex challenge of Africa's supply chain.

This in itself is a massive step in the right direction in not only changing the transport sector in Africa but, the repercussions of a more streamlined, transparent and digitised supply chain has the potential for substantial social impact, if we consider that more visibility and transparency in the supply chain can go a long way in eradicating human trafficking and money laundering for example. Through such a partnership it is evident how co-creation has the potential to truly shift how companies and organisations approach a common goal and by drawing on the strengths of all stakeholders involved, it results in a win-win outcome for everyone. We must remember, solutions to the world's most pressing problems cannot reach scale in silo.

In order to uplift Africa and create the future, we want to see we need to embrace the power of collective impact. Bestselling author Gary Zukav mirrors the Africa proverb perfectly when he sums it up by saying: “There is no such thing as being alone in the universe, and so there is no such thing as creating alone. Everything – every impulse, every creative gift of beauty, everything is a co-creation.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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