



Current Path

Changing narratives in and about Africa

Jakkie Cilliers

Last updated 14 December 2024 using IFs 8.34

Changing narratives in and about Africa

In recent years, the narrative surrounding Africa — both within the continent and globally — has undergone a significant transformation. Historically, Africa has been frequently depicted through a narrow and often negative lens of stereotypes, focusing predominantly on issues such as poverty, conflict and disease. These portrayals were largely shaped by colonial legacies, skewed media representations and a lack of diverse voices from within the continent. However, this storyline is shifting, driven by a confluence of factors that are reshaping how Africa is perceived and understood on the global stage.

A key driver of this change is the emergence of African voices in media and storytelling. A growing number of African journalists, filmmakers, writers and artists are now telling their own stories, challenging outdated stereotypes and presenting a more nuanced and diverse picture of the continent. These voices are critical in reframing Africa as a continent of rich cultures, vibrant economies and resilient communities, moving away from the reductive depictions that have long dominated global discourse.

The digital revolution and the rise of social media have further accelerated this shift. Digital platforms have democratised storytelling, providing African content creators with a global stage to share their experiences and perspectives without the filter of traditional Western media. This has enabled a more authentic and varied portrayal of African life, showcasing the continent's complexities and dynamism.

Cultural movements such as Afrofuturism and a resurgence of Pan-Africanism have also played pivotal roles in reshaping Africa's narrative. Afrofuturism, which blends African culture with technology and speculative fiction, has gained prominence as a way of envisioning Africa's future potential. Similarly, Pan-Africanism has reemerged as a powerful force, promoting unity, cultural pride and self-reliance across the continent. These movements celebrate African identity and offer counter-narratives to the often one-dimensional portrayals in mainstream media. Africa's cultural influence is expanding through music, film, fashion, and art reaching global audiences and reshaping perceptions. This cultural diplomacy strengthens Africa's international relationships and enhances its ability to project influence. The global popularity of African culture also opens up new avenues for cultural exchange and collaboration, further integrating Africa into the global cultural fabric.

The changing narrative is also evident in global media, where African stories and perspectives are gaining representation. International platforms like Netflix are investing in African content, and African films and series are reaching a global audience. This increased visibility is helping to normalise African cultures and experiences in the global imagination, further dismantling the outdated stereotypes that have long prevailed.

Further, educational and cultural exchanges between Africa and the rest of the world are fostering mutual understanding and respect. These exchanges are crucial in breaking down misconceptions and promoting a more accurate and respectful understanding of Africa's diverse realities.

Africa's economic landscape is rapidly evolving with countries like [Nigeria](#), [Kenya](#) and [South Africa](#) emerging as significant tech hubs. This economic transformation is gradually altering the global perception of Africa, from a continent characterised by dependency to one that is increasingly defined by entrepreneurship, innovation and potential.

As the portrayal of Africa moves away from outdated stereotypes and towards a more balanced and nuanced understanding, the continent is increasingly recognised as a significant player in the international arena. This evolving perception is not merely a matter of image; it carries tangible effects on Africa's geopolitical influence, economic partnerships and diplomatic engagements.

The changing narratives are empowering African nations to assert themselves more confidently on the global stage. Its

leaders are gaining greater leverage in institutions such as the G20 and BRICS. This shift is evident in multilateral forums where African voices are becoming more prominent, advocating for issues such as climate change, global trade reform and peacekeeping initiatives. The continent's growing assertiveness is also reflected in its ability to shape regional and global agendas, including through platforms like the African Union and its engagement with global powers.

A more positive and diverse narrative around Africa is attracting increased foreign investment and fostering stronger economic partnerships. As global investors and corporations recognise the opportunities presented by Africa's emerging markets, they are more likely to engage in long-term investments in infrastructure, technology and industry. This influx of investment is not only crucial for economic growth but also enhances Africa's strategic autonomy, reducing its dependency on aid and enabling it to negotiate from a position of strength.

African nations are increasingly seen as equal partners rather than aid recipients, leading to more balanced and respectful international relationships. This shift encourages collaboration on a wide range of global issues, from health and education to technology and climate change. However, this also presents challenges, as African countries must navigate the complexities of a global system that still harbours remnants of the old perceptions. The challenge lies in ensuring that the new narratives are not just superficial changes but reflect genuine shifts in power dynamics and mutual respect.

Finally, the changing narratives are also impacting internal dynamics within Africa. As African nations and people embrace a more positive and empowered view of themselves, there is a growing sense of continental unity and identity. This Pan-African sentiment is fostering greater cooperation among African states, as seen in initiatives like the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which aims to create a single market for goods and services across the continent. A united Africa, confident in its identity and potential, is better positioned to engage with the world on its terms.

The evolving narratives about Africa have significant strategic implications for the continent's role in global affairs. As Africa reshapes its image and asserts its place on the world stage, it will play an increasingly important role in shaping the future of politics, economics, and culture.

Donors and sponsors



Reuse our work

- All visualizations, data, and text produced by African Futures are completely open access under the [Creative Commons BY license](#). You have the permission to use, distribute, and reproduce these in any medium, provided the source and authors are credited.
- The data produced by third parties and made available by African Futures is subject to the license terms from the original third-party authors. We will always indicate the original source of the data in our documentation, so you should always check the license of any such third-party data before use and redistribution.
- All of our charts [can be embedded](#) in any site.

Cite this research

Jakkie Cilliers (2024) Current Path. Published online at futures.issafrica.org. Retrieved from <https://futures.issafrica.org/thematic/01-africas-current-path/> [Online Resource] Updated 14 December 2024.

About the authors

Dr Jakkie Cilliers is the ISS's founder and former executive director. He currently serves as chair of the ISS Board of Trustees and head of the African Futures and Innovation (AFI) programme at the Pretoria office of the Institute. His 2017 best-seller *Fate of the Nation* addresses South Africa's futures from political, economic and social perspectives. His three most recent books, *Africa First! Igniting a Growth Revolution* (March 2020), *The Future of Africa: Challenges and Opportunities* (April 2021), and *Africa Tomorrow: Pathways to Prosperity* (June 2022) take a rigorous look at the continent as a whole.

About African Futures & Innovation

Scenarios and forecasting can help Africa identify and respond to opportunities and threats. The work of the African Futures & Innovation (AFI) program at the Institute for Security Studies aims to understand and address a widening gap between indices of wellbeing in Africa and elsewhere in the world. The AFI helps stakeholders understand likely future developments. Research findings and their policy implications are widely disseminated, often in collaboration with in-country partners. Forecasting tools inspire debate and provide insights into possible trajectories that inform planning, prioritisation and effective resource allocation. Africa's future depends on today's choices and actions by governments and their non-governmental and international partners. The AFI provides empirical data that informs short- and medium-term decisions with long-term implications. The AFI enhances Africa's capacity to prepare for and respond to future challenges. The program is headed by Dr Jakkie Cilliers.