

The Bestselling Pan-African Business Magazine

African BUSINESS

An IC Publication | 54th Year | N° 473 | May 2020

FEATURES

Tourism sector braces for the worst
African healthcare faces biggest challenge
Online gaming targets lockdown boom
Ethiopia-Egypt dam dispute drags on

SPECIAL REPORT AFRICA'S TOP COMPANIES



CORONAVIRUS

This changes everything

• Euro Zone €5.00 • UK £4.00 • USA \$6.50 • Algeria DA 500 • Canada \$6.50 • CFA Zone CFA 2 900 • Egypt E£ 60 • Ethiopia R 150 • Gambia GMD 200
• Ghana GH¢ 20 • Kenya KShs 350 • Liberia \$5 • Mauritius MR 150 • Morocco Dh 40 • Oman OR 2.00 • Qatar QR 20 • Rwanda RWF 3000
• Saudi Arabia Rls 20 • Sierra Leone LE 40,000 • Singapore \$7.50 • South Africa R40 (inc. tax) • Other Southern African Countries R 35.10 (excl. tax)
• Sweden SKr 33 • Switzerland SFr 8.70 • Tanzania TShs 6,500 • Tunisia DT 5 • Turkey TL 10.000Y • UAE Dh 20 • Uganda USh 15,000 • Zambia ZMW 50



0 5

M 03136 - 473 - F: 5,00 € - RD



The AfCFTA holds out great possibilities for Africa's private sector. **Samba Bathily**, Chairman of ADS Group and a founding partner of the AfroChampions Initiative talks to Dounia Ben Mohamed about the ways his company and the Initiative are working to help bring about economic transformation on the continent.

“The AfCFTA is an opportunity for companies that want to change Africa”

INTERVIEW: SAMBA BATHILY, CHAIRMAN, ADS GROUP

You are one of the founding partners of AfroChampions. Its mission is to drive regional integration. What's the role of the private sector and civil society in the AfCFTA?

Yes, it is our role, and more importantly, our responsibility. There are a number of African companies from which we can draw inspiration, the likes of Ecobank, MTN, Dangote. The African private sector needs to be the driver of the continent's development, it cannot happen any other way. When I look at my team, it becomes evident that a truly African company transcends borders. We have Rwandans, Beninese, Malians, Nigerians, Ghanaians, Senegalese, Guineans, Ivorians, South Africans, Cape Verdeans... It makes for a formidable team, with continental if not global ambitions.

You've been working closely with the African Union, putting forward proposals in terms of the AfCFTA. It seems that your voice is being heard...

The partnership with the African Union has been extremely fruitful since it was officially concluded in March 2018 at the Extraordinary Summit for the signing of the AfCFTA in Kigali. Our proposals have been well received, both with its Chairperson, Moussa Faki Mahamat, and within the different departments,



including the Commission for Trade and Industry headed by Ambassador Albert Muchanga.

We have been working with the AU teams on various practical initiatives – road shows to explain the AfCFTA to the private sector, launching the Pan-African Fashion Initiative, creating mechanisms to support our craftsmen, developing new approaches for vocational training, giving advice to help countries frame their economic development plans within the AfCFTA framework. The objective is to make sure that this agreement translates into real opportunities for the private sector, from the SMEs and startups to larger businesses.

And in February we saw the heads of

state endorse our ‘Trillion Dollar Investment Framework’, which will trigger \$1 trillion of investments by 2030, to help the implementation of the AfCFTA. Through this mechanism countries will be able to receive funding for AfCFTA-enabling projects. A fund will also be created to invest in high growth and high potential companies, the champions of tomorrow.

Given what we're currently going through, it is also hoped that this investment framework can be a vehicle for strengthening our health infrastructure – physical infrastructure, hospitals, drug and equipment manufacturing plants, of course, but also human infrastructure – by increasing the number of skilled health workers and practitioners in Africa.

From what you're saying, you have committed to mobilising \$1 trillion for the AfCFTA, and to promoting the “AfroChampions” companies. This is an important moment...

Yes, the AfroChampions of tomorrow are companies with great potential. But these companies need to be able to be part and lead projects of significant scale and they will need financing to achieve this. We need African companies to be more involved in the development of

major projects on the continent even if we recognise the expertise that foreign players bring to the table.

I'm all for partnerships, and we collaborate with international partners, such as what we have done with IDEMIA, the global leader in ID and authentication. We've seen this also in the Gulf where they've brought in international expertise but developed their own world-class organisations.

Today, when you look at the life of an African, he wakes up and consumes imported soap, drives an imported car, drinks imported water. An African who earns \$100 spends \$95 to buy goods imported from outside Africa. We are told that our industry is not competitive and that the unit cost is high, because the basic inputs – water, energy, transports – are high. So it becomes a chicken and egg problem. My response to this is that it

is up to Africans to create the conditions for the industrial development of the continent.

There are some simple, easily implementable solutions. In fashion, buy African for example. We need to create 20m jobs a year over the next 10 years to avoid crises, unrest, and popular uprisings. The fashion and creatives sector is just one of many sectors where these jobs can be created. Imagine having to dress 1.3bn people. Such demand naturally brings down production costs and you develop a whole ecosystem around this.

If you want, you can say that AfroChampions is a project that aims to achieve greater economic justice, where we capture wealth on the continent, as well as the establishment of (truly!) mutually beneficial, win-win partnerships with external counterparts. We've shown that it can work. Africa Digital

Right: Samba Bathily, Chairman, ADS Group.
Left: Students at the Solekra Solar Academy in Diarniadio, Senegal.



Solutions, a subsidiary of ADS, that has partnered with Tata Telecommunications, the Indian group, is developing the Western Africa Digital Pool, a project to provide interconnectivity in West Africa (see box, right).

Your group ADS can be considered an AfroChampion. Your business operates in energy, infrastructure, telecoms... Does the growth of your group depend on regional integration?

Indeed, regional integration is the driving force behind the development of ADS. From the very beginning, the group has been designed as a pan-African player, and if you look at the chronology of our activities, you will see that we started to operate very early on outside of Mali, my home country.

It seems logical to have a regional or continental perspective. Why limit yourself to one country, when being multi-national allows you to generate more substantial revenues. But what drives us – and I am careful to recruit people who share the same vision – is the transformation of the continent. Major projects have a greater transformative impact. In Africa, you can make money, but you can also change lives.

Our perspective when looking at projects is always multi-country and how it can be scaled or replicated at a regional level. It's something that you see throughout our group: Solektra, off-grid electrification project, has been deployed to 1800 localities, and we have two solar academies in Bamako, Mali and Diarniadio, Senegal. STML, our maritime and logistics subsidiary, whose first projects aim to connect the West African coast and Cape Verde by sea – the boats are expected this summer and we will hopefully be able to see what role they can play in opening up Cape Verde once the borders in Africa have reopened.

The AfCFTA is therefore an important mechanism to help companies such as yours in the creation of jobs and value? The AfCFTA is an opportunity for companies that want to change Africa. I have read about entrepreneurs and businesses that are worried about increased competition from the AfCFTA. They also worry about more complexity through added red tape and regulation. I tell them that what it does is to offer a new market for their products and ideas. But it's up to us to take advantage of it.

AfroChampions has joined with the African Union and Africa CDC to create

ABOUT THE WESTERN AFRICAN DIGITAL POOL

The Western African Digital Pool (WADP) is the first phase of the Single Africa Digital Market initiated by the Smart Africa Alliance. It is a programme that is supported by African Heads of State with the primary objective of ensuring connectivity across the continent, either by interconnecting existing networks or deploying relevant technologies for under-connected areas.

The WADP aims to interconnect seven countries, including Guinea-Conakry, Mali – whose networks have, since February 2020, been interconnected with those of Guinea-Conakry – Senegal, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, and Guinea-Bissau.

They are using traditional technologies, such as fibre optic, as well as innovative variations (aerial fiber, free-space optical cable) to enable connectivity in all seven countries.

Africa Digital Solutions, as well as Tata Telecommunications, has partnered with Google and others to help ensure complete interconnectivity using technologies that are most appropriate given the geographical and geological complexities of the targeted countries, where fibre optic may not be the most viable technology.

Covid-19 has highlighted the importance and power of technology. Connectivity is providing solutions to keep businesses going as well as helping governments deploy services.

With the WADP, Samba says it is one example of a company delivering a big project at scale that will impact numerous industries as well as help accelerate 'smart government' programmes. As well as the physical infrastructure ADS will offer digital related solutions to both consumers and government.

"If we do not have that ambition for ourselves, who will?" says Samba. "In February 2019, the report presenting the interconnectivity model was released at the Mobile World Congress. One year later, in February 2020, two countries are already interconnected. With the Western African Digital Pool, we are demonstrating that it is possible to deliver big projects rapidly. At the end of the day, it is about creating a better African living experience."

a special fund to help the continent respond to the Covid-19 pandemic. Can you tell us more about it? What is your personal involvement?

It is a platform designed to bring together as many people and businesses as possible to address the risk of the pandemic, under the aegis of the African Union and the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC). It is important to adopt a pan-African approach, with central coordination – precisely so that all countries can be supported, otherwise there is a risk that only those with the strongest economies will be able to withstand this.

The partnership aims to raise an initial \$150m for immediate needs to prevent transmission and up to \$400m to support sustainable medical response to the Covid-19 pandemic by pooling the resources required for the procurement of medical supplies and materials for protection and treatment, and distribution in a way that is aligned with national needs, in public and private hospitals.

I'm following this project personally. If we do not show African solidarity on this issue, then nothing we have done so far – the AfCFTA, the regional integration programmes – will be credible. I am already raising the awareness of my network of business partners and inviting them to contribute to this fund, because there is no point putting forward these proposals and ideas if you don't have skin in the game.

Volontaires d'Afrique, the foundation that I have had the honour to chair since 2014, is getting ready to donate more than \$1m in diagnostic and protective equipment to 12 African countries (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Rwanda and Senegal).

This is a project that we had in mind even before the launch of the fund, but rather than acting on our own and without consultation, we are in contact with the CDC to coordinate and ensure the effectiveness of this initiative.

Let me also mention that ADS Group's health subsidiary, Equally Africa, is currently working on aggregating solutions for the treatment of severe cases of Covid-19 and, above all, solutions for quick and easy diagnosis and telemedicine that can be used in hospitals and beyond, for example in transport infrastructures and in companies. Equally, teams are already responding to calls received from several African countries. ■

africanews.

The Newsroom of Africa

African & International news
with a pan-African perspective

Now available on **DStv** & **GOtv**

DStv channel #417 - GOtv channel #47 (#143 Ghana; #343 Uganda)



ON ALL DEVICES 24/7, IN ENGLISH & FRENCH

africanews.
YOUR VOICE

Sales House contact: **EURONEWS** & africanews.
marianne.michelet@euronews.com

ADS, an African group dedicated to African integration

In the face of the multiple challenges of the early 21st century, regional integration in Africa has the potential to unlock the continent's human capital and enhance its competitiveness on the global stage. In line with this vision, the Africa Development Solutions Group (ADS Group) is positioning itself today as a key player in this change, through its seven areas of activity: project-financing and consulting; new technologies, telecommunications, media; industrial development; renewables and access to water; retail and franchising; infrastructures, construction, real estate and hotels; automobile, maritime transport and logistics. Hereinafter is a special focus on ADS Group's ICT, transportation and logistics as well as clean tech projects.

Information and Communication Technologies

In the field of ICT, ADS Group has been active for more than 15 years on the continent, where it deploys its expertise in the development of fibre optic networks and innovative IT solutions. ADS Group is firmly committed to the Single Africa Digital Market project led by the Smart Africa Alliance, which aims to accelerate the advent of cross-border interconnectivity. To this end, since May 2019, ADS Group's subsidiary Africa Digital Solutions has partnered with Tata Communications Transformation Services Limited (TCTS), one of the world leaders in the provision and management of telecommunications services. At the heart of this strategic partnership is the deployment of an integrated fibre optic network in West Africa, a true "West African Digital Pool" and the keystone of the successful interconnectivity of this region. Africa Digital Solutions and TCTS are already putting in place a state-of-the-art Internet connectivity infrastructure

that will serve seven African countries: Guinea-Conakry, Guinea Bissau, Sierra Leone, Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia and Mali. The first fibre optic interconnection of the networks of the Republic of Guinea and the Republic of Mali was completed in February 2020 and the others will follow shortly. As for the technologies used, they include aerial fibre optic cables and Free Space Optical Cables (FSOC), all chosen to ensure optimal quality at competitive prices.

Transportation and Logistics

Transportation and Logistics is another key element for the success of African economic integration. ADS Group has therefore recently set up the Société de Transport Maritime et Logistique (STML), a subsidiary specialising in logistics services for the transport of large equipment and consumer goods. This creates an offer based on the differentiation levers that make up the major port platforms: international maritime transport, port operations and multimodal logistics for goods and dredging. The improvement of intra-African connectivity also involves the development of waterways, which is essential to improve links between the continent's interior and its coasts. STML therefore also explores innovative models for the transport of populations to develop in the future tailor-made solutions adapted to the needs of African countries.

Cleantech

Finally, ADS Group is a committed player leveraging energy solutions to support manufacturing projects across Africa and integration through industrialisation. Key ADS Group subsidiaries include Multi Industries Group (MIG), Solektra and the Solektra Solar Academy, which is composed of training centres in Bamako, Mali, and Diamniadio, Senegal. With MIG, which has a manufacturing facility

located in the new city of Diamniadio, Senegal, the aim is the optimisation of solar technologies, to be used to power innovative solutions such as solar streetlamps (35 000 units targeted at full capacity) and electric vehicles (bicycles, scooters, tricycles 15,000 at full capacity) that are then exported across West Africa and throughout the continent. Moreover, thanks to a strategic partnership with Haier, a world leader in home appliances and consumer electronics, the company plans to assemble computers and tablets (200,000 units targeted at full capacity), the long term objective being to master the entire production process in Africa.

Solektra is also pursuing this energy integration approach by providing water and electricity, via solar technologies to African communities in rural and off-grid areas. The company, which operates throughout Africa, is already responsible for the electrification of 1800 African localities, with more than 7 million people benefiting from its solutions. Furthermore, a Smart Solar Ecosystem is currently being developed to facilitate internet connectivity in rural communities, like the very encouraging pilot project in Tumba, Rwanda, which offers new job opportunities and a range of innovative services (mobile clinic, business centre, etc.).

These positive developments can only encourage wider deployment on the continent, and justify the launch in Bamako of the Solektra Solar Academy, Africa's first academy for solar professions, which will train workers, technicians and engineers from all over West Africa, particularly in the care and maintenance of the company's mini-grids.

