Expanding horizon. Nairobi is a vibrant high-tech hub—and a place of violent unrest.

Photograph by Dominic Nahr for TIME
Rising
B

ONFACE MWANGI'S FIRST CAM-

ERA WAS AN OLD JAPANESE film

model, bought with $220 bor-

rowed from a friend. He'd been

selling books at his mother's

roadside stall in Nairobi since he was 15.

Then one day in 2003 he came across a biog-

raphy of Kenyan photographer Mohamed

Amin, whose pictures of the 1984 Ethiopian

famine, the book implied, led to Band Aid,

Live Aid and a new era of global humanitar-

ianism. "That book opened a new world for

me," says Mwangi. "Here was another high-

school dropout who went onto conquer the

world using his camera." Mwangi set out to

do the same. Within months his photo-

graphs were being published in Kenya, and

within a year he had won a national award

for Best New Photographer. His inches-close

pictures of the tribal bloodletting that fol-

lowed a disputed 2007 general-election re-

sult in Kenya earned him a slew of awards

and a grant from the New York City-based

Magnum Foundation.

For many, the story of the street hawker

who became a world-class photographer

seemed to epitomize the notion of an

emerging Africa: a continent awak-

ening from poverty and disaster, now

bursting with hope and opportunity.

Then Mwangi quit. He was haunted by

the idea that his success was built on his

country's turmoil. He wouldn't, couldn't

go on photographing the politicians he

heard promise Kenyans a new dawn, only

to rob them, ignore them and then, come

an election, allow violence to break out.

Whatever the cost to his career, the price

his country was paying for that kind of

excrement leadership—which led to more

than 1,000 murders during the 2007–08

election crisis, along with the theft of bil-

lions of dollars from the state—was far

greater. "We didn't vote for these guys for

them to screw us," he says.

So in 2011, Mwangi formed a group of

street artists, with whom he began staging

guerrilla art attacks across Nairobi. Aero-

sol stencils of vultures began to appear on

sidewalks and road crossings. Then more-

elaborate murals appeared—of vultures

urinating and wiping their backsides on the

Kenyan flag. One February night, Mwangi's
group painted a 40-ft. tableau on a downtown

wall, depicting a smoking, suited vulture

sitting next to a list of what the

artists saw as Kenyan politicians' crimes

since independence. "MPs—screwing Ken-

yans since 1963," read the caption. "Africa is

rising," says Mwangi, now 22. "But there's

also a lot of anger. There's trouble ahead."

As Africa marks half a century since it

began to free itself from colonialism, its fu-

ture lies in the hands of hundreds of mil-

lions of young Africans who, like Mwangi,

must choose between Africa rising and Af-

rica rising. It is not, as the cynics have it,

that Africa will never move beyond dicta-

tors and disasters, that it cannot and will

not develop. Africa's progress is real, dra-

matic and, by now, well established. The In-

ternational Monetary Fund says that since

2003, GDP across sub-Saharan Africa's 48

countries has risen an average of 5% to 7%

per year. In the past decade, six of the

10 fastest-growing countries in the world

were African, and this year five African

countries will outgrow China and 21 will

beat India. The result of all this growth? Af-

rica is in the midst of a historic transition,

and during the next few decades hundreds

of millions of Africans will likely be lifted

out of poverty, just as hundreds of millions

of Asians were in the past few decades.

Bob Geldof's evolution from Live Aid organ-

izer to, this February, the founder of a $200-

million Africa-focused private-equity fund is

emblematic of the transformation. "This

could be the African century," he says.

Old Habits

BUT IF AFRO-PESSIMISM IS OUTDATED,

undiluted Afro-optimism is premature.

Historically the continent labored under

predatory inequality and classless tyranny.

President Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire

(now the Democratic Republic of Congo)

would charter a Concorde airplane for

European shopping trips while his people

starved. Today, while Africa's economies

are modernizing, its rulers too often are

still not. "With a very few notable excep-

tions, our leaders are not part of account-

able governments," says Archbishop Emeritus

Desmond Tutu, chairman of the interna-

tional mediation body and rights watchdog

the Elders. "It's still, if they perform abominably, so what?"
The continent's leaders are, by one important

measure, less accountable than they were in

the past. Since it was set up in 2007 by

a Sudanese telecom billionaire, the Mo-

 Ibrahim Index of African Governance has

recorded a striking divergence: material

improvement along with political dete-

rioration. This year, for the third time, Mo-

Ibrahim's foundation declined to award its

$5 million prize for African leaders who

leave office peacefully and democratically.

"We are not completely out of the past and

into the future," says Ibrahim.

More than anyone else, it will be young

Africans who shape that future. The Arab

Spring showed what can happen when

corrupt regimes that oversee strong over-

all growth fail to share the gains or greater

political freedom with a connected and

well-educated youth. All those ingredients

exist in potentially even more explosive

proportions in Africa. The average African

is 19, while the average Middle Easterner

is in his or her 20s. Thanks to foreign aid,

hundreds of millions of Africans are bet-

ter educated than ever—and they expect

more rewarding jobs. And by 2016, there

will be over a billion cell phones in use on

the continent, according to industry ana-

lyst Informa Telecoms & Media, giving

nearly every African access to that most

esential tool of 21st century rebellion. It is a

recipe for simultaneously, entreprenu

rrialism and revolution.

Boombaton

AS KENYA'S CAPITAL AND EAST AFRICA'S

business hub, Nairobi encapsulates Africa's

transformation. Steel-and-glass skyscrapers

dominate colonial bungalows. From ven-

dors at traffic lights selling iPad chargers to

millions of neatly suited commuters, signs

of change are everywhere. Average incomes

have close to doubled in a decade, and if the

economy continues to expand 5% annu-

ally as expected, a nation of mud huts will

become a middle-income country by 2016.

Africa owes its takeoff to a variety of

accelerators, nearly all of them external and

occurring in the past 10 years billions of dol-

lars in aid, especially to fight HIV/AIDS

and malaria; tens of billions of dollars in

foreign-debt cancellations; a concurrent

interest in Africa's natural resources, led

by China; and the rapid spread of mobile

phones, from a few million in 2000 to more

than 760 million today. Business increas-

ingly dominates foreign interest in Afri-

can investment first outpaced aid in 2006

and now doubles it.

While these phenomena combine in a

tsunami of change at a continental level,

their local impact can be uneven, and Nai-

robi is a prime example. Pass through the
city center at noon and you'll find daily

protests by striking doctors, teachers and

university lecturers, all demanding in-

creases in what are, in some cases, risible

wages. Return at night and downtown is

deserted save for a small army of private

security guards protecting steel-shuttered

businesses against thieves who journey in

from outlying squatter camps. A short

minibus, or matatu, ride takes you to

the giant clapboard slum of Kibera, home to

250,000, where most evidence of either

development or the state—streetlights,
schools, paved roads—ends abruptly at the
township's edge.

Sipping a latte at a coffee shop in one of

Nairobi's new malls, Dennis Karemwa, 28,

is one of hundreds of young Nairobi tech-

ology entrepreneurs whose advances in

mobile banking and data plotting have
Growing Pains

Sub-Saharan Africa has the second fastest growing regional economy in the world, after Asia. But huge challenges remain, even in countries that are experiencing boom times.

NEW STAR
Ghana
GDP grew by an impressive 14.4% in 2011.
Primary-school enrollment jumped 20% in four years, reaching 100% in 2007.
But currently half of university graduates leave the country.

CONTINENTAL SHIFT
Africa’s population is about to soar

The future is young
18.6
Average age in sub-Saharan Africa, 2010
108 million
Increase in number of African schoolchildren in the next decade

But prospects may be poor
18% are out of school
40% have never been to school

By 2100, more than a third of the world’s young people will live in sub-Saharan Africa.

Although classified as an upper-middle-income country by the World Bank, South Africa has one of the most unequal societies in the world.

Zimbabwe, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Burundi are technically growing, but they have the lowest GDP per capita in the continent.

Sub-Saharan Africa
2,582

POWERHOUSE
Kenya
Kick-starting Africa’s mobile-banking boom, Kenya’s M-PESA service has grown by an average of 3.5 million customers per year since it started in 2007, reaching 34% of Kenyans in 2011.
But the capital, Nairobi, is home to one of the largest slums in the world.

QUIET ACHIEVERS
These island countries boast solid economic growth and high scores in health and education.

Sub-Saharan Africa
2,582

TIME December 3, 2012.
earned the city the nickname Silicon Savanna and attracted global investor interest. In January, his 13-month-old startup, Usalama, will unveil a technology that Karuma claims cuts ATM and mobile money fraud by 90% and which Karuma will market globally. “This is the time for Africa to change the world,” he declares.

But Karuma readily admits to being one of the lucky few. In his home village of Murang’a, in the Mount Kenya foothills north of Nairobi, there is almost no outlet for a young man with ambition. “Most of my friends survive by picking up occasional manual work,” he says. “Some are brilliant, but without opportunity they lose hope. You find them drunk, sleeping by the side of the road.” Worse, the government makes little effort to improve their prospects. So every weekend, Karuma returns to Murang’a to teach basic computer skills like typing, e-mailing and Googling.

The wasted lives of Murang’a’s young men reflect a pattern across Africa, governments are failing to convert growth into jobs. According to an August report by analysts McKinsey & Co., 275 million out of a total African workforce of 982 million are either unemployed or in informal day-hire work. By 2020 a youth surge propelled by the world’s highest birthrates, which will raise Africa’s population from 1 billion in 2009 to 2 billion in 2050, will add another 122 million Africans of working age. That would be a boon if they had work. But McKinsey calculates that in the same period, Africa will create just 54 million to 72 million more jobs. “If current trends continue, it’s going to take Africa until 2066 before employment levels reach those of East Asia,” says David Fine, one of the report’s authors. “The next part of Africa’s development is jobs,” agrees Geldof. “What will it take to fill that void?”

McKinsey argues that the answer lies less in Africa’s traditional extractive industries—which tend to be capital-intensive—and more in sectors such as tourism and retail, which employ more labor. But what happens if, as McKinsey predicts, the void cannot be filled? South Africa provides an example of a government paying the price for failing to share the gains of growth. Since the end of apartheid rule in 1994, South Africa, the continent’s biggest economy, has expanded by up to 5% a year. But 18 years in power has changed the African National Congress (ANC) from the party of Nelson Mandela’s righteous revolution into just another rapacious developing world elite. Unemployment runs anywhere from 25% to 40%, state-run education can be among the worst in the world, and inequality—stretched wider by a fabulously wealthy ANC-connected cabal—has increased.

The ANC is reaping the reward for this sorry record. In mid-August, 3,000 miners at platinum producer Lonmin’s Marikana mine in northern South Africa walked off the job, demanding a tripling of basic pay, from about $500 per month. On Aug. 16, after days of violence in which 19 people died, police shot dead 34 miners. The killings evoked the brutality of apartheid. Meanwhile, the militant anti-business, antigovernment strikes that erupted at other mines, then in other industries, continue today. These have exposed as nothing more than a hollow fraud the claims by the ANC’s ruling alliance that it represents the poor. With such a disconnect between government and people, Tutu says, the potential for upheaval in South Africa is “very great... When the big eruption happens,” he says, “it’s going to be very, very disturbing.”

Just as worrying is another type of unrest emerging in East and West Africa. Marginalization divides rich from poor, but it also aggravates existing tribal, racial and religious fault lines. A series of religious insurgencies is taking place below the Sahara. From the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean, young Muslims are taking up arms against governments they see as Westernized, corrupt and shutting them out of economic opportunity.

A Continent of Entrepreneurs

Amid such instability, it can be hard to imagine progress. Perhaps that’s why Africa’s successes can sound almost like fantasy. Take Ecobank, a global retail bank with assets of $18.5 billion, deposits of $13.4 billion and 23,500 employees in 32 countries—all managed from the small nation of Togo. Or the Ethiopian Commodity Exchange: a generation after a famine killed a million people, Ethiopia’s first yuppies are food traders at Africa’s first agricultural-commodities exchange. Non-Africans can find it hard to grasp the coexistence of such great promise with such great problems. The $40 billion-a-year aid industry retains a singular focus on crisis. Western bankers, meanwhile, seem to see only Africa’s prospects. But sub-Saharan Africa, with its 48 countries and 3,000 languages, is inevitably a place of adversity and opportunity. Geldof suggests the former might even lead to the latter. Where does Africa get its spirit of enterprise? he asks. “If you’re constantly scratching for a living, you’re an entrepreneur.”

The world’s emerging economic powerhouses, with their own experience of major transition, find it easier to digest Africa’s simultaneous potential and pitfalls. China has taken the lead. Two-way trade with Africa—often in infrastructure-for-resource swaps that have given the continent an infrastructure makeover that runs from roads and railways to airports and dams—hit $166 billion in 2011. (The U.S., long Africa’s biggest trading partner, recorded $126 billion.) Also in pursuit of Africa’s oil and gas, coal, timber, minerals and farmland are India, Brazil, Malaysia, Turkey and the Gulf states. “There is a great Game being played out in Africa,” says Geldof. “Yet much of the West ignores this geopolitical giant.”

That will inevitably change. Mozambique’s offshore Rovuma 1 block has bigger natural gas reserves than all of Libya, while initial estimates are that Somalia has as much oil as Kuwait. The continent has 60% of the world’s unused arable land. As Geldof says, “In the end, we all have to go to Africa. They have what we need.” And it is in that second scramble for Africa that the continent’s best hopes lie, because if the first scramble for Africa—as historians dubbed the period from the 1870s to 1900—was a European imperialist carve-up, the second should leave Africa as the big winner. The more needed Africa is, the less needy—and the more powerful—it can be. With the right governments, “we have the capacity to do wonderfully well,” Tutu says.

So tantalizing is the new hope across Africa, it infects even the most skeptical. Asked to imagine the future, Mwangi predicts one day returning to photography to capture a very different Kenya. “There are tough days ahead,” he says. “There will be violence. But eventually you’ll see an evolution. We’ll be a new country, stable and with a government with standards. We’ll be reborn. Out of the old will come the new.” With a bit of luck, that’s a story he’ll be shooting across all of Africa.