



The Katse Dam in Lesotho: The country is Africa's biggest exporter of clothing to the U.S.

THE AFRICA YOU HAVEN'T HEARD ABOUT

Why Africa is no longer the disaster area many Americans think it is

Africa sometimes gets a bad rap. The images that come to mind for most Americans are of famine, genocide, corrupt governments, and wars. So it may come as a surprise to hear that a number of experts are suggesting a new way to think of the continent: as an economic dynamo.

Europe and the United States continue to struggle to get their economies growing after the global recession. Meanwhile, the

WORDS TO KNOW

- **entrepreneur** *(n)*: a person who starts his or her own business
- **sub-Saharan** *(adj)*: relating to the region south of the vast Sahara desert, which divides North Africa from the rest of the continent

International Monetary Fund (IMF) expects Africa to have the fastest-growing economy of any continent over the next five years. And six of the world's 10 fastest-growing economies from 2001 to 2010 were in Africa, according to *The Economist* magazine.

China's Role

Two factors are driving Africa's growth. The first is a burst of international investment, especially from China. Chinese companies are particularly interested in Africa's natural resources, such as minerals, oil, and gas.

Clothing companies are also looking to Africa. For example, Lesotho, a small country surrounded by South Africa, is Africa's biggest clothing exporter

to the U.S. A textile company from Taiwan now has three factories and a denim mill in Lesotho. Its 8,000 workers make jeans for Levi's and other American companies.

"While America may largely misperceive Africa as a disaster zone, China sees the continent's promise," says *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof.

"Everywhere you turn in Africa these days, there are Chinese businesspeople seeking to invest in raw materials and agriculture. But American businesses seem to be only beginning to wake up to the economic potential."

That potential is enormous. This year, according to the World Bank, a third of the economies of the 49 **sub-Saharan** African countries will likely grow 6 percent or more.

Men pan for gold in a mine in Mozambique.

Bethlehem Alemu started a successful shoe company in Ethiopia.

of artisans making sandals in her grandmother's house. It has grown into a multimillion-dollar company that sells fashionable footwear internationally.

Where the Growth Is

Projected growth for the world's fastest-growing economies, 2011-15



SOURCE: International Monetary Fund (IMF)

(The U.S. economy is expected to grow 2 percent this year.)* Over the past decade, the portion of Africans living in poverty has fallen about 10 percentage points—from 58 percent to 48 percent.

The second factor in Africa's recent growth is a surge in female **entrepreneurs**. According to the World Bank, the rate of female entrepreneurship in Africa is the highest in the world.

In Uganda, Lovin Kobusingye, 29, started Kati Fish Farms, which now sells 1,100 pounds of fish sausages every day. "I always knew I was a businesswoman," she says.

In Kenya, Ory Okolloh, 23,

helped found Ushahidi, a Web platform that allows people around the world to report news using their cell phones or computers. Their reports are immediately uploaded to an online interactive map so users get instant updates.

Ushahidi, which means "testimony" in Swahili, was started to track political violence after Kenya's presidential election in 2007. It's since been used to track the 2009 outbreak of swine flu and the 2010 earthquake in Haiti.

Bethlehem Tilahun Alemu, 33, founded her shoe company, soleRebels, in 2004 in Ethiopia.

The business began with a handful

Not "Swatting Flies"

SoleRebels' has become one of Africa's best-known shoe companies. In 2012, Alemu was named one of *Forbes* magazine's "100 Women to Watch." With each pair of shoes, she says, she seeks to change people's minds about Africa.

There's an "urgent need," Alemu explains, to create more African-owned brands that sell products globally, to overcome the image of Africa as a place of despair.

"Let's face it," Alemu says. "It's pretty hard to convince someone to buy what you are selling when someone else has convinced them you are solely occupied with swatting away flies from your face."

—Josh Kron, with reporting by Nicholas Kristof of The New York Times

GREAT DECISIONS

What do you think?

How might China's increased investment in Africa affect the U.S.?

*Although economic growth in many African nations is impressive, keep in mind that these countries are starting from a much smaller base. For example, Ethiopia's GDP in 2011 was \$95 billion, compared with \$15 trillion for the U.S.