

10 WE'RE IN THIS TOGETHER

'To be young in Nigeria comes with mixed feelings for me. I'm aware of the awesome things young people are doing – talking about tech, talking about art and culture, talking about science – but then the government isn't making things easy. They come up with horrible policies that serve as barriers to the growth of the average young person. They are not helping out in any way. It's frustrating because every young person in Nigeria is doing their best. It's like an abusive relationship – we love our country so much but it's crazy.' Osinachi, 30

'Nigerians are very tenacious and hard-working because there are a lot of things against us. If you can survive in Nigeria, you can survive anywhere. I think of myself over the last 10 years and imagine if I was in a space where we didn't have electricity issues and when you want to start a business, they don't put a lot of tax and regulations. Housing is expensive, it's hard to live a decent life. But people go through all this and still manage to build lives for themselves. I think our situation has strengthened us. We push on regardless. We are young, we are not like our parents' generation, where you can shut us down. My dream is to put Nigeria in the forefront, to help people understand that we have people here who are amazing animators, amazing designers, to export Nigerian talent, to make them see us. That's the future I want to see.' Bolanle, 28

'Honestly, I don't know how it will be. I don't like to be pessimistic but disposable income is shrinking daily as inflation on the price of food rises. What you could buy for 10,000 naira

two months ago has been basically cut in half. The currency crisis is weakening the naira. In 2015, the dollar to the naira was about 150; today it is 500. These are very real issues that affect some people more than others. A lot of our population lives on less than a dollar a day. They are living in extreme poverty and those people know the challenges more than I do. But reiterating that Nigeria has problems doesn't do much good for any of us. I don't feel comfortable saying things won't get better because that's very defeatist and who does it help? We are all in this together and we can only hope that as we move forward, things get better.' Odunayo, 28

'Nigerians always figure something out. We are the most energetic, lively, hopeful and brightest minds in the world. When we go abroad and see what people in the West complain about, we say, "is that all!" We have much bigger issues to face and we hit the ground running. So, I am hopeful about the future of Nigerians. But there is a survivorship bias to our stories. The people who make it, get the emphasis. We don't hear about the many who didn't. When I was younger, I used to say, "if I can do it, you can", but I know now that my drive and motivation comes from my experiences growing up. It's unfair to expect the same results from someone who had a deprived upbringing. Jesus said: "To whom much is given, much is expected." I have a dream to create a not-for-profit project, a leadership programme that picks young Nigerians with potential and lets them expand their world view. An intensive programme that includes travel and work overseas, so they can learn and then effect change at home. We deserve to be heard in the farthest points of the world. We deserve the right to experience our potential at the highest level. No one can choose the circumstances of their birth and we all deserve opportunity.' John, 34

How does it feel to be young in an otherwise ageing world?
There are issues, of course, but while things aren't always

easy there is real hope. A 2021 intergenerational UNICEF survey found that 57 per cent of young people aged 15 to 24 feel the world is progressing towards a better future.¹ Across the globe, young people are more positive and more globally minded than those over 40. Born into a digital, interconnected and diverse reality, they see a world that is largely a better place than the one their parents grew up in.² And it is respondents in the Global South who are the most optimistic about the future, with 69 per cent believing they'd be better off than their parents, compared with just 31 per cent in the Global North.³

Young Africans looking to the future confirm this surge of optimism. 'The top line finding in our research is that Africa is not the hell that is so often described', says Kantar West Africa managing director Ndeye Diagne. 'I mean, we live here, we know it's not all bad, but what was mind-blowing for me was how positive overall as a continent we are and how optimistic. Our survey showed people across the continent to be strongly grounded, positive and striving to achieve. There is a real belief that things will keep changing for the better. That is a powerful mindset and I think it is one of our real strengths. If you compare this with Europe or Japan, where less than 30 per cent felt positive about the future, in Africa people are very strong and optimistic. That is the power of Africa. We don't go through life through the prism of the rest of the world.'

In this book you have met a host of young Nigerians, heard their stories and felt their energy and creativity, their self-belief and strength of purpose. The Soro Soke generation is filled with optimism and hope, anger and frustration, drive and ambition. There is a sense that emerges in these conversations that everything is possible. New and transformational forces – including access to technology and growing urbanisation – are reshaping their lifestyles, life choices, economic opportunities, values and culture.

For this generation, being Nigerian and being African has new meaning. Living in urban conurbations that offer a host of opportunities, enabled by their creativity and by the possibility of setting their own narratives, this generation is celebrating its identity and is using music, fashion, literature and film to inspire the rest of the world.

Technology lies at the heart of this cohort's transformation, enabling it to unearth novel solutions to some of the continent's more intractable problems. For young Nigerians, leveraging the Fourth Industrial Revolution is not about copying traditional approaches from the West but conceiving, creating and delivering entirely new, pan-African opportunities. Entrepreneurial at heart, this generation is focused on turning problems into business opportunities and does so with a sense of social justice.

'I like money, it is a very useful tool and I want to make a shit tonne of money. I don't think only arseholes should be billionaires. If I had Bezos' money, there wouldn't be hunger in Africa', says 25-year-old S. I. Ohumu. 'I don't have as much disdain for capitalism as most of my people do. I think there is a way to make money and not destroy the environment. I think there is a way to make money in climate action. There is a lot of money to be made from helping people live in liveable cities. We all progress, when we all progress.'

This cohort evidences a real sense of community. It has a 'we're in this together' mentality, which encompasses everything from improving wealth and opportunity, to accessing power and even breaking down gender stereotypes. 'The rules of happiness in Africa are not the same as elsewhere', says Diagne. 'Community is very strong here and it is more important than material things. There is a saying that the poorest man is not someone who doesn't have money – the poorest man is someone who doesn't have people. Community makes people feel grounded and

resilient. It engenders a strong sense of self-belief and helps build new narratives of hope for better and for more.’

Social media is another great enabler, connecting this generation to the rest of the world on an equal footing and helping to engender a pan-African and global mindset. It is also triggering higher expectations. By enabling comparisons with other lives, social media is raising consciousness, highlighting what is no longer tolerable and offering alternatives. Young Nigerians recognise the need for change and social media is empowering them to speak out and realise that change. In the search for equality, greater security and improved prospects, they are using social media to disrupt the status quo and fight for better governance.

This generation stands at the brink of materialising a demographic dividend that is set to change not only the quality of their opportunities but also to reposition the continent’s place in global affairs. A technologically, culturally and socially powerful Africa that, far from being an irrelevant corner of the globe, can emerge as a key change-maker of the 21st century. In spending time with young people in the cities of Lagos and Abuja, it quickly becomes clear that they have a bold, positive vision of their country’s possibilities. And it is the Soro Soke cohort – children of cities, entrepreneurial creative disruptors who own and solve the problems they’ve inherited, who use their voices to speak out and all the while celebrate their distinct identity – who will be at the helm.

‘I think we have a long way to go but there is hope’, says 32-year-old Michael Elégbèdé. ‘The tenacity is there, the drive, the desire and the talent and the education. The world has gotten so small. Access to information and access to education is now more available; if you have a cellphone, you have access to research by the best people in the world. Nigerians are intelligent and driven people, and you see all that information and people getting access

to it and you see things are happening and you just know that it's going to be amazing. It's a land of opportunity and now those opportunities are becoming so much more vivid and being able to attain them is becoming more real. And we are the focal point of the world right now and I think that's a great thing.'