

This could be a big year for Africa

By [Lamin Momodou Manneh](#)

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Let me start by noting that every new beginning provides significant new opportunities in all spheres of life. This year, 2019, is a very promising year for the African continent. There is a lot of optimism about the return of the Africa rising sentiment.



Lamin Momodou Manneh, director, UNDP Regional Service Centre for Africa, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Following the various momentous events and achievements in 2018 - from the encouraging signs of recovery in economic growth; to restoration of a more peaceful environment in many parts of the continent, especially in the Horn of Africa; to the launching of innovative initiatives for youth empowerment; to more successes in the promotion of gender equity; better management of migration issues; and the launch of the African continental free trade area, a lot is expected from the stakeholders in the various sectors, both private and public.

With all these developments, 2019 could turn out to be a great year for the continent.

■ What can we look forward to in 2019 from UNDP?

UNDP is set to support African countries even more in fostering inclusive transformation and development, entrenching of genuine democratic governance, better leveraging of the demographic dividend and more effective responses to climate change.

We are already witnessing some historic developments, including the just-ended elections in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), in which an opposition politician, Felix Tshisekedi won, ending Joseph Kabila's nearly 20-year rule. This certainly heralds a new beginning for DRC. It constitutes the first peaceful transfer of power in a country that has known only mayhem, conflict, mismanagement of its rich resources and bloodletting, since gaining independence in the early 1960s.

DRC is a country with vast potential resources, but held back by deadly politics and mismanagement. Success of its democratic experiment could provide immense positive demonstration to much of the Africa continent, coming on the heels of earlier successes in democratic transition in countries such as Liberia, Sierra Leone, Madagascar, etc, in the course of 2018.

UNDP has an important role in helping the consolidation of these successes through its governance programmes.

■ How will Africa lead?

Africa can only progress when leaders elected into public office are held accountable by the people who elected them. It is equally important to ensure that institutions are set up to maintain checks and balances, reinforcement, and become completely independent from control of external forces within and beyond the country.

Africa can lead when the narrative of the continent isn't always portrayed as a place that is in perpetual conflict and on a low equilibrium growth path; always in constant need of donor aid or support.

Furthermore, on the issue of aid, there is a need to put an end to the seemingly unending humanitarian crises and annual appeals for humanitarian assistance, as the continent has the potential to be self-sufficient in food production to ensure food security, even in emergencies.

Africa's people not only deserve better health, sanitation and educational services, these are also key factors for inclusive development and stability.



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■ What are the key factors driving growth, economic development and political change?

The key drivers for powering growth and economic development in Africa should be transformational initiatives in all sectors, infrastructure development and entrepreneurship. There is, therefore, a need to boost the capacity of youth, who are vital forces for growth and stability in the continent. But currently realisation of their full potential is hobbled by high levels of unemployment and underemployment, in particular.

It is therefore encouraging that visible progress is being realised, though, uneven across the continent in these areas. Some countries are beginning to perform much better as a result of education, skills development, youth empowerment, gender equality and social inclusion.

■ What gives you hope in Africa today?

Hope for a better tomorrow is an inherent part of being an African. One would assume that given the challenges faced as a continent, we would be one of the saddest people alive today, however, the hope we have for a better tomorrow is what inspires a lot of African people to strive towards higher levels of development.

Today there is a continuously improving enabling environment for the people to grow exponentially towards achieving their full potential and actualising their dreams and aspirations. I have no doubt that we will continue seeing all this in 2019. UNDP will continue to work in even smarter and more innovative ways in the support provided to African leaders and their people towards the realisation of a more peaceful, prosperous and transformed continent.

**Lamin Momodou Manneh was interviewed by Louise Marsland, Bizcommunity.Africa Editor.*

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