Charles Kié: Future Africa Foundation

Sharon Ravitch
Gul Rukh Rahman
Reima Shakeir Shakeir

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Charles Kié: Future Africa Foundation

Abstract
The founders of Future Africa created the Foundation (FAF) in 2013 to give underprivileged children the chance to access good quality education in a healthy environment. One of its stated aims is to educate the masses about environmental issues including plastic waste, recycling and preservation with a view to building healthy environments and creating sustainable businesses for improved livelihoods. The Foundation differentiates itself by taking a 360° view of multiple intertwined problems: lack of access to quality education, women's empowerment, environmental protection practices, sustainable businesses – all through improved waste management solutions. The Foundation aims to dive deep and address the root causes of these burgeoning issues. It takes a circular economy-like approach to maximize resource utilization and minimize waste, both material and human. This business-like approach with clear KPIs is one of the factors differentiating it from its peers.

Keywords
frontier Philanthropy, Women's empowerment, Global South Philanthropy, Future Africa Foundation, Impact Philanthropy

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Charles Kié: Future Africa Foundation

Environment – Education

“A fundamental concern for others in our individual and community lives would go a long way in making the world the better place we so passionately dreamt of.”

—Nelson Mandela

Introduction

Indigenous philanthropy is an integral part of African culture and society. Informal giving has built deep-rooted social solidarity within communities. However, there has been limited recognition of the fact that Africa has had local, long-standing philanthropic practices unbeknownst to outsiders. This is what researchers at the Graduate School of Business, University of Cape Town referred to as the horizontal form of philanthropy. As Wilkinson-Maposa et al. (2005) have described, in the horizontal form of philanthropy, families or communities give to each other and in times of need, they reciprocate each other’s generosity, which in turns builds social solidarity; this has been practiced in Africa for centuries.¹

The last 2 decades have seen a rise in more formal types of giving, addressing specific needs and creating formal structures like foundations and trusts. As wealth is created in Africa, some high and ultrahigh net worth African individuals are looking at the issues of development and the role of philanthropic capital on the continent. Foundations like Aliko Dangote Foundation in Nigeria, the Chandaria Foundation in Kenya, and the Ghana-based African Women’s Development Fund are some examples of local engagement in a formal structure.

According to Cape Gemini World Wealth Report of 2017, there were 167,970 high net worth individuals (HNWIs) in Africa with a combined wealth of $1.7 trillion. However, the scale of giving is not known; many HNWIs give anonymously or remain reluctant to publicize their donations. This leads to limited and skewed data on philanthropy in Africa.

On the other hand, for decades, Africa has been a “favored child” for donors, multilateral development agencies, and Western philanthropists. The stereotypical image of philanthropy in Africa has historically been one of Western philanthropists or foundations handing out books and school bags in Kenya or participating in photo-ops of digging water pumps in remote villages in Nigeria. George Ayittey, a leading economist from Ghana, stated: “There’s another enduring tragedy, and that tragedy is that there are so many people, so many governments, so many organizations who want to help the people in Africa. They don’t understand . . . But helping Africa has been turned into a theater of the absurd. It’s like the blind leading the clueless.” Colonialism and its political and economic legacy have left the continent with uneven development and significant dependence on foreign aid. Foreign development aid, investments, and international philanthropy have had inherently limited impact. According to UNCTAD’s World Investment Report 2020, Foreign Direct Investment inflows into Africa was about $45 billion in 2019; this was barely 2% of the continent’s $2.2 trillion nominal GDP. Enter a new kind of African business leader and philanthropist: Charles Kié. Charles Kié is a highly respected banker and investor and founder of Future Africa Foundation in Cote d’Ivoire. Charles Kié is part of “a new breed of Africans who brook no nonsense about corruption. They understand what accountability and democracy is. They’re not going to wait for government to do things for them. That’s the Cheetah Generation, and Africa’s salvation rests on the backs of these Cheetahs.” Charles Kié represents the Cheetah generation in that he is an engaged investor both in capital markets and in human development. He has set up a family foundation with an unwavering conviction that local in-depth knowledge of social and cultural norms, economic realities, technical expertise, and local leadership are needed to identify and solve

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any specific problem through engaging local expertise and leveraging it as iterated knowledge of that issue.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution has brought in a new era of economic growth and disruption with unknown consequences for the world. As Africa approaches its Fourth Industrial Revolution, it is clear that the continent did not reach its full potential in the last digital revolution. The World Economic Forum’s Global Competitiveness report 2019 showed that the human capital pillar is the one where Africa as a whole faces some of its greatest challenges.⁵ In philanthropy, however, “two major trends have emerged: growth in the number of models through which philanthropy can take shape, and economic growth and innovation across the continent” (Agler, 2009).⁶ Charles Kié works from the understanding that combining emerging trends with the United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in relation to family philanthropy in partnership with business can transform lives of people in Africa. As Kié explained, “Our ethos in business is to drive the value creation in our investments by leading their long-term transformation; we employ similar ethos in our philanthropic practices. Our giving practices must create sustainable and viable models and bring positive change in the lives of people.”⁷ Many identified issues, such as unemployment, poverty, hunger, lack of access to quality education, and others are encapsulated in the UN SDGs.⁸

**Background and Context**

The Republic of Côte d’Ivoire is located in West Africa and shares borders with Liberia and Guinea to the West, Ghana to the East, and Mali and Burkina Faso to the North; to the South lies the Atlantic Ocean. According to World Bank estimates of 2019, Côte d’Ivoire has a

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⁷http://newafricancapital.com/our-leadership/; Charles Kié

⁸www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals.html
population of 25,069,230. Abidjan is the economic capital of Côte d’Ivoire with a population of 4.7 million. Yamoussoukro is the seat of government.

According to the World Bank, Côte d’Ivoire is one of the fastest growing countries in the world with a GDP estimated at 7.4% in 2018. There are concerns about economic upheaval, violence, and negative impact on growth as national elections are likely to be held in October 2020. Côte d’Ivoire faces several social, environmental, and development challenges. In 2018, the country ranked 170th among 189 countries on the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Human Development Index and has a low human capital index score of 0.35, according to World Bank rankings. Despite maintaining economic growth, poverty remains high at 46.3% and it remains one of the countries with the highest gender inequality rates in the world. Adding to these challenges are rapid deforestation and expanding urban slums with limited employment opportunities for a bulging youth population.

Because of these various factors, family philanthropists and responsible businesses have begun to develop practices of giving. If Côte d’Ivoire is to reach its commitments to the SDGs, its private sector and family philanthropy will need to take a lead role in addressing social and development issues. Currently, not much is known about Côte d’Ivoire’s private philanthropy. In addition, a review of the French and English literature on private philanthropy in the country yields sparse findings. We aim to add to the limited literature with this case study.

**Case Study Methodology**

The case of Future Africa Foundation and its founder Charles Kié, a private investor and philanthropist, focuses on Kié’s entrepreneurial mindset toward human development. In this case, the human development aspect sits on three interconnected pillars: (a) education, (b) empowerment of women, and (c) environmental sustainability via waste management. This is the story of how the founder employed a strategic approach and technological innovation to
create a sustainable business model around waste management that integrates women as key players in the supply chain as a holistic social intervention.

The case study is an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project in a “real life” context. It highlights the challenging relationships between domestic politics, international development agencies, and private philanthropy. The primary purpose of this case study is to generate in-depth understanding and knowledge of this specific philanthropic approach in order to inform policy, professional practice, and the public more broadly about the life cycle(s) of the problem and its potential solutions.

Instead of using a single qualitative or quantitative research method, the case study authors have used multi-method approaches. For complex, uncertain, and multi-faceted social phenomena, multi-method approaches are more suitable, as they leverage the unique strengths of each research method and generate insights that may not be obtained using a single method (Bhattacherjee, 2012). The theoretical and methodological framework that informs how the authors have approached this case study has drawn from theories of decolonizing methodology, critical rhetoric, intersectional post-colonial theory,⁹ and affective economies (Ahmed, 2004). Decolonizing methodology recognizes that research as an industry is steeped in a Euro-North-Americentric worldview (Smith, 2012).

The social identities of two of the authors, Dr. Reima Shakeir and Gul Rukh Rahman, whose backgrounds are rooted in the Global South, inform this research. Rahman has spent the past several years building the EmpoweR Families for Innovative Philanthropy (ERFIP) platform at the Edmond de Rothschild Foundations. ERFIP’s¹⁰ mission is to reassess the context

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⁹ Research has been a cite of colonization. The location of the researchers is a push back and decolonization of case study research that has been done on frontier philanthropy by Eurocentric, White researchers.

¹⁰ERFIP (Empower Families for Innovative Philanthropy) is a unique platform for Frontier Philanthropists and businesspeople. It gathers principals, professionals, and practitioners in an intimate and thoughtfully structured environment to build and share knowledge to address some of the most pressing social and economic challenges of our time.
of global development and more actively engage private philanthropy and family business across frontier and emerging economies. The platform is rooted in the notion that development through innovation, cross-sector collaboration, and private-public partnership should not begin and end in the offices of international development agencies. Rather, it requires building closer financial and technical cooperation with local philanthropy, well-positioned to advise on and implement sustainable solutions (Ladak, 2014). The cases are supervised by methodological expert, Dr. Sharon Ravitch, whose professional work has for many years been anchored in regions such as India, Nicaragua, etc. Dr. Ravitch’s work emphasizes intersectional allyship and a lifelong process of building relationships based on trust, consistency, and accountability with marginalized individuals and/or groups.

Critical case study is a tradition that situates case studies as a means to effect social transformation. The primary goal of critical case study is to examine audio/visual texts as concrete philanthropic activities and practices that are anchored in their own specificity (e.g., religious, cultural, values-based) and not as adjacent objects to the milieu of the Western development initiatives in which they exist (Chilisa, 2020). These cases are narratives of private families who leverage their intimate knowledge of contextual realities on the ground to address social challenges and implement sustainable solutions.

In addition, because of the material-discursive intersections of this project, the theoretical and methodological tools we draw on are interdisciplinary and cross-contextual. We identify this as methodological push-back against mainstream case study methods that only allow for tokenized inclusion of emerging and frontier markets in philanthropy research. Perhaps this tendency in philanthropy research is symptomatic of how the field itself is institutionally moving toward a focus on binary/neocolonial frameworks, and in doing so, misses critical interrogations of how power has reproduced hierarchies of race, class, caste,
Thus, decolonized intersectional frameworks are a counter-hegemonic strategy against the imposition of structures and methods that adopt frameworks and design logics developed through neocolonial hierarchies that have not been adequately unpacked or examined in honest relation to Global South everyday contexts.

This study uses a phenomenological case study approach. The primary purpose of phenomenological case studies is to illuminate the specific phenomenon in context, to identify phenomena precisely through and within how they are perceived by the actors in a situation or setting, in this case, a family philanthropy. This requires a specific approach to data gathering and analysis wherein gathering “deep” information and layered perceptions through inductive, qualitative methods (e.g., interviews, literature review, text analysis, site and participant observation) are the focus. It then requires specific phenomenological data analysis that retains a fidelity to the emic, or spoken, terminology of the focal participants.

Phenomenology is concerned with the study of experience from the inner perspective of the individual, “bracketing” taken-for-granted assumptions and usual or normative ways of perceiving. Humanist and feminist researchers refute the possibility of starting without preconceptions or bias; they emphasize the value of (a) illustrating how interpretations and meanings have been placed on findings, and (b) making the researcher visible in the “frame” of the research as an interested and subjective actor rather than a detached and impartial observer (e.g., see Plummer, 1983; Stanley & Wise, 1993). Thus, this case study invokes narrative inquiry to further address these validity issues, emphasizing:

The researcher who engages in narrative inquiry is interested in determining the meaning of a particular experience or event for the one who had it, and tells about it in a story . . . to further particularize the narrative and to enhance perspective, the narrator not only “tells” the story from a point of view but also situates it in a particular social, cultural, or political context. (Kramp, 2004, p. 108)

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As well, a narrative approach helps the researchers to critically explore the embedded stories of the philanthropists’ visions, their giving strategies, and their specific philanthropic experiences within the country contexts in which they developed and in which they currently operate. In particular, the research explores the socio-political and cultural specificities that pertain to their giving practices. This is vital, since these family philanthropies emerge from local need and resource, and the mediating variables and realities of each context are an important part of a philanthropy’s journey story, as well as their implementation plans and responsive organizational developments over time.

The Man Behind the Vision

Charles Kié is a Côte d’Ivoire-based visionary investor who is known as a formidable banker across Africa. He was born in Bouake, the 2nd largest city of Côte d’Ivoire, in 1962. His mother, Flore Nguessan, was working for the state-owned telecom company and his father, Albert Gohi Bi Kié, was a deputy governor (sous-prefet in French), after which he became mayor and governor (prefet in French) in several large cities in the country, ending his impressive career in Abidjan, the economic capital city of Côte d’Ivoire.

Charles Kié spent most of his youth in Bouake where he, early on, opted for clergy life; he became a seminarist at the age of 11 (preparing to become a priest) and was interested in how he could work in the service of others to impact their lives in positive ways. During his studies at the famous Catholic College St. Viateur in Bouake, Kié chaired several associations, including Jeunesse Etudiante Catholique and Association des Mouvements d’action Catholique. From an early age, Kié was involved in philanthropic work, including assisting youth in their education, engaging in environmental work, teaching during his own vacation times, and helping out in whichever ways he could, particularly in the various cities where his father held office (Odienne in the North of Côte d’Ivoire, and Katiola and Dimbokro in the center of Côte d’Ivoire).
In 1980, Kié left Bouake to attend College Notre Dame d’Afrique in Abidjan, where he received his baccalaureate. In 1987, Kié graduated from Ecole Supérieure de Commerce d’Abidjan, the leading Ivoirian Business School. He then went on to graduate from University Clermont Ferrand (France) with a post-graduate degree (DESS in French) in Corporate Restructuring, after which he received an MBA from HEC Paris, London School of Economics and NYU Stern before attending the Advanced Management Program of Harvard Business School.

When asked about the story of Future Africa Foundation, Kié explained that philanthropy was always part of his and his family’s life in the form of a deeply ingrained desire to help and support others:

Incidentally, the way we came about being involved in structured philanthropy was through a personal emotional experience as well as inspiration from my son. We discovered a public dump in the capital city. I followed a garbage truck into something like a squatter camp where people made a living from scavenging, sorting and recycling garbage. The number of children that we saw in that public landfill with their mothers; with some children playing in an environment where nobody in normal circumstances would ever go. Families were living dangerously close to an open landfill, many afflicted with ill health and little resources to send their kids to school. I was shocked at the misery and decided to do something about it.

The site to which Kié is referring is the Akouédo dump in Abidjan. This site has been operational since 1965 and was managed by a company named Pisa Impex, under the supervision of the Mission for the Conduct of Municipal Operations. The site neighbored Akouédo village.

From Kié’s point of view, this was not simply a problem of an open landfill in the middle of Abidjan. It was a complex, multilayered humanitarian and environmental disaster that needed attention. As Kié once said in an interview, “I’ve had a long experience of turnaround
assignments, with Citi, Ecobank and Banque Atlantique. If I could turn around ailing institutions, I sure can attempt to turn around lives of people living around the landfill.”

As Kié has explained,

I guess to better understand the foundation and the vision of what we are doing, it is good to go back to the true meaning of philanthropy. For avoidance of doubt, when people talk about philanthropy, the impression it gives is that of wealthy people giving or giving back over and above what they already have. Which is quite a comfortable position to come from. But the way we have taken it is the other way around. Which is giving from the heart, whatever funds or resources we have, so long as it touches the lives of the people we are interacting with; therefore, trying to see the impact on their future, without any form of personal interest at stake. Coming from that angle and mindset, we as a family decided to focus on two pillars of development which are part of the SDGs—education and environment. We would like to fill in the gaps in access to education in the country.

In discussing Future Africa Foundation’s second pillar, environment, Kié says, “it is crucial from all angles . . . The way people live and interact with issues like treatment of domestic waste, deforestation, ocean pollution and more; there is an impression that under developed countries do not care about environment while we are the most affected. I believe that is one of the reasons why we have taken this at heart.” For Kié, the process began by identifying and asking the following cross-sector action questions:

**Education**

- Here is a multilayered and complex problem; can we address it and, if yes, how?
- Is there a school around and what condition is it in?
- Should we address only one aspect of this problem, which is to get children off the dump in a school and back where they belong?
- Is there a school around and what condition is it in?

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**Advocacy**

- If we cannot do anything in the first place, can we advocate for a solution around the landfill that can be found by competent authorities?

**Environment**

- Besides advocacy, what can we do about the open landfill?
- Can we engage with the government at any level to address the waste management problem?
- Will the private sector be a willing player in any possible solutions?
- What would be the most important challenges we should be aware of?
- What are the emerging ways of reforestation?

**Environmentally Friendly Sustainable Businesses and Women’s Empowerment**

- On the back of any solution around waste management, can we help build sustainable businesses?
- Can we bring dignity to women who collect garbage, thereby organizing them in a better manner?
- Is there an opportunity to build a sustainable business model out of waste collection and environmental protection?
- Do we have a good enough and most cost-effective solution for the problem at hand?
- Can we measure the impact of solving a problem and is the impact of solving the problem quantifiable?

These questions surfaced as critical questions that needed to be explored before embarking upon this critical and ambitious journey. “This has been a journey for all of us as a family,” said Kiè. He explained:

As a family, we wanted to make a contribution in a manner which would change and impact peoples’ lives for better. These questions are both roadmap of what we want to do as a family and as the foundation. As family, one of sons has been deeply involved. Tomorrow, if I am not around, there should be someone to carry...
on the legacy. As we were preparing for the case study interview, I, the foundation staff and my son, we all agreed that this was an opportunity to think pragmatically and intellectually how and what the foundation should be doing. It allowed us to take a step back and re-calibrate.

**Future Africa Foundation (FAF) Verticals in the Context of the UN SDGs**

In 2015, United Nations member nations adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a universal call to accomplish 17 integrated global development goals. Among these agreed-upon global humanitarian priorities to achieve by 2030 are ending poverty, alleviating hunger and starvation, providing quality education, engaging in climate action, and more. The integrated nature of the goals, as stated in the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals 2030 report, are illustrated as follows:

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. At its heart are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are an urgent call for action by all countries—developed and developing—in a global partnership. They recognize that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth—all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests. . . . The 17 SDGs are integrated—that is, they recognize that action in one area will affect outcomes in others, and that development must balance social, economic and environmental sustainability.¹⁵

Access to universal education is listed as the fourth SDG: “Achieving inclusive and quality education for all reaffirms the belief that education is one of the most powerful and proven vehicles for sustainable development,” as stated in the SDG 2030 report.

There are clearly established links between poverty, hunger, malnutrition, and stunted growth; access to quality health care, education, and employment opportunities; and the ability to reach one’s full potential and lead a productive life. Additionally, it is imperative to recognize the links between poverty and environment. The environmental problems and their socio-economic effects on communities pose serious risks to the sustainable development goals.

¹⁵ www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals.html
As Charles Kié explained, the SDGs and, before them the MDGs, are all excellent high-level ideals, but to build sustainable and equitable societies, more than high ideals are necessary. From Kié’s point of view, while the SDGs offer a framework that can guide countries to do better in major areas of development, it is challenging to achieve universal education or make sure no child is actually left behind when resources are inefficiently used or, at times, political considerations take precedence over what is good for the country. As Kié has implored others in his country to ask and examine:

Let us not kid ourselves, Africa is drowning in plastic, an environmental disaster, and who sort garbage and sell reusable trash are mostly children and women. How can you succeed in achieving relative success in SDGs when hundreds and thousands of children, men and women sustain themselves by garbage collection? How can these people achieve their full potential with rampant poverty, mal-nutrition, ill health, and lack of any employment opportunities?

Kié understands the operating environment and that these intersecting social problems are best addressed at the education and school level, as he shared with his partners:

At our end, to address the issue of out of school children who worked on the landfill, as a first step, we decided to look for the closest school. We felt that bringing education with environmental awareness would have a long-term impact on the communities’ health as well as living conditions. So, what have we done and what is the impact we have seen?

Let me build verticals around this question. We started off by supporting families. You must remember these families, in one way or another, live or work around the landfill. They hardly make ends meat. For them to send children to school is a dream most cannot afford to have.

To address this particular problem, Kié decided that every year, they will identify a group of children who will need learning packs, which include basic school supplies, because their families will not have the means to buy these for them. Kié has decided to make it available to them to make sure that these learning packs were available to both the schools they support in the city and schools in the northern part of the country.

For example, for the school year 2015-2016, the foundation offered 100 learning packs to the most disadvantaged children in the village of Akouedo, according to Kié. In addition, a
technology room equipped with computers, printers, a telephone line, and an internet connection has been offered to all the schools of the Akouedo Village school group. Protective grids have been manufactured for this purpose to ensure the protection of the equipment.

With time, the foundation continues to add schools to its list. And, importantly, it consistently assesses and adapts to the needs of local communities. In 2018, the foundation also added canteen support. In September 2018, the foundation, in partnership with a French company Miniweight, distributed a total of 3,475 kg (approximately 7,661 lbs) of rice to six school groups: Akouedo Village, Cocody Est, Cocody Cité des arts, Akouedo Camp, Anono, and Riviera Golf.16

Given the demonstrated evidence that stunted growth and malnutrition can prevent people from achieving their full potential, this must be addressed as a mission mode. As Future Africa Foundation has stated, “The country’s Global Hunger Index of 25.9 in 2018 is still classified as ‘serious’ and suffers from the triple burden of malnutrition, represented by high micronutrient deficiencies undernutrition.”17 There are several underlying reasons for this, including poverty, low education and literacy rates, lack of awareness of health and proper nutrition, and so on. Figure 1 shows that nearly half of the Ivorian population is living below the poverty line, which translates into serious malnutrition and negatively impacts Cote d’Ivoire’s efforts to meet the SDG of no hunger and quality education for all.

16 https://fondationfutureafrica.com/education/activites-2018/#1567423816876-f80c1f7d-0a8a
17 https://www.wfp.org/countries/cote-divoire
Regarding the work of the foundation, Kié explained, “Our second vertical was to improve school environments. There is enough research to show that school environments and design can support better learning outcomes.” As Kié shared, most public school buildings were built in the 1960s and have not been upgraded ever since. For Future Africa Foundation, improving the school environment has meant revamping the schools, getting into rehabilitation and construction, and in many cases, building new classrooms. According to UNICEF, one of the biggest barriers to education in Côte d’Ivoire is lack of physical classrooms. In 2019, UNICEF estimated that 15,000 new classrooms were needed across the country.

Because of these school infrastructure challenges, private schools have become a big business in the country. Investments in education are a critical need for Côte d’Ivoire, given its ongoing recovery from the political and public health challenges of the last 2 decades. As explained by UBS Optimus Foundation, “The World Bank estimates that only 15% of children in the country achieve the minimum primary school proficiency in both reading and math. Given that private schools serve more than half of all Abidjan schoolchildren, they play a key role in providing a quality education.” And as Kié explained, “We focus on public schools because children in those schools come from the most underprivileged segment of the society.”

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18 https://www.wfp.org/countries/cote-ivoire
19 Barret, Peter, Fay Davies, Yufan Zhang, Lucinda Barrett
https://d7d3e509-q0ca-488q-90a94167b5689991.filesusr.com/ugd/902e4a_d33424a2211540881a98ccbc7719dc.pdf
20 Banking ON Education; Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire – 2018; UBS Optimus Foundation
Cote d’Ivoire will grow and develop as much as its own children. In the absence of opportunity and hope for these hundreds of thousands of children, the country misses out on the promise of a better tomorrow.

The third vertical is the improvement of teaching. Kié explained that he has not encountered direct resistance from teachers regarding efforts to improve teaching methodologies and teacher quality. Rather, the teachers are open to interventions, though their motives of accepting outside interference are at times unclear. Kié explained that some teachers want to see what benefits them:

Sometimes there are demands and we meet some of their needs to keep them engaged. It can be as simple as installing a computer to something more demanding. Teachers are overworked, underpaid, and under-appreciated. To ask them to be involved in something which benefits the school they teach at, we have to incentivize them.

If we can’t do it at the earliest, we wanted to setup a system where we could evaluate childrens’ learning. We set up annual exams in French, English, and Math to assess their abilities in respective subjects. After these exams, we select a group of children for scholarship and accompany them for the next 4 years.

Culturally, parents are not involved in schools or school related activities. They leave it to teachers to work with children at school. Parents play a key role in keeping their children in school. Most parents whose children are in these schools are illiterate and therefore cannot oversee the work kids do at school. This is a huge gap. The foundation has been able to address this by identifying a teacher who would work and support children on scholarship.

This explanation by Kié highlights the process of accompanying them for the next 4 years and the impact it can have on reduced drop-out rates.

Kié described the fourth and fifth verticals focus on the environment as follows: “Waste management and reforestation. Let me start talking about the waste management issue first. All kinds of waste management whether industrial or domestic is an issue in Côte d’Ivoire. It is a public policy failure.” According to UNICEF:

every day, in Côte d’Ivoire, Abidjan produces 288 metric tons of plastic waste, including a large number of plastic bottles. In the absence of a real waste management
policy, the recycling rate is just 5%. All the other bottles end up in open dumps, polluting the air, soil, streams, and even children’s playgrounds.\textsuperscript{21}

Kié shared:

We started by serving the communities which worked and lived around the landfills, says Kié and thus it was our aim to work towards returning dignity to those women who worked at these dumps. One way of doing that was to organize women involved into waste collection to sort garbage; and look at the means to industrialize that process or at-least partner with those entities that will be involved in industrialization of that process. This is where the work we did with UNICEF in building schools through plastic-made bricks has been important.\textsuperscript{22}

Kié’s strategic acumen and unfolding success make it clear that building strategic partnerships is a key matrix of success.

In Kié’s words, “The fifth vertical that [Future Africa Foundation] added on to our core is to explore new ways of doing reforestation. The rate at which deforestation is happening in Côte d’Ivoire is excessively high and we would like to help reduce carbon impact. The protection of the remaining forests in Côte d’Ivoire and the restoration of forest cover should be a priority.” According to the UNEP report on Côte d’Ivoire -Post-Conflict Environmental Assessment, “The damage will not be reversed by a few well-intentioned actions at local level. Rather the government needs to examine the totality of forestry and protected areas, considering all ecological, agricultural, industrial, socioeconomic, and security factors that are involved.”\textsuperscript{23}

To contextualize what other factors have led to environmental degradation, Côte d’Ivoire is a natural resource-rich country and was an economic success post its independence from France in the 1960s. It used to be one of the leading producers of cocoa and coffee. According to United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), “economic growth of Côte d’Ivoire surpassed any other in the region between 1960 and 1979, a period known as the ‘Ivorian miracle.’ However,

\textsuperscript{21}https://www.unicef.org/stories/turning-trash-building-blocks-childrens-futures
\textsuperscript{22} (See section on Sustainable Business for more)
\textsuperscript{23} Côte d’Ivoire - Post-Conflict Environmental Assessment, https://postconflict.unep.ch/publications/Cote%20d%27Ivoire/UNEP_CDI_PCEA_EN.pdf
economic decline and over a decade of internal conflict has rolled back these gains and damaged the nation’s environmental resource base.”

Two civil wars between 2001 to 2011 have led to serious losses in socio-economic, environmental, and development goals. As Kié explained, “At the intersection of my business and philanthropic effort is the aspiration to play our part as responsible citizens in sustainable development of our country.” In a further explanation via the UNEP report, “The city of Abidjan has doubled its population during the conflict period while urban service provisions have stagnated or deteriorated.” This has resulted in serious economic and environmental issues like lack of proper hazardous waste management and related health issues, land degradation, and more.

Exacerbating the environmental problem, in 2019, the government passed a new law that removed legal protections from thousands of square miles of classified forest and unprecedented power handed to industrial chocolate manufacturers. The majority of Côte d’Ivoire’s 7,700 square miles of protected forests are considered heavily degraded, with levels of deforestation at 75% or more. Civil society groups and environmental campaigners argued that this will encourage unsustainable cocoa production and legalize large-scale deforestation in already ravaged areas.

This is where political interests stand in contrast to environmental protections. In the context of the adoption of the SDGs in the areas of education and the environment, and assuming ownership of SDG achievement by 2030, the government of Côte d’Ivoire has committed to their implementation:

The government has prepared a new National Development Plan (NDP 2016-2020). The plan is the reference framework for public and private sector projects. It is also the SDGs implementation framework and political dialogue framework.

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26 View Appendix
for creating conditions for Côte d’Ivoire emergence in 2020. The objectives of this new framework reflect the efforts made by Côte d’Ivoire to ensure achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).²⁷

The government is also aligned to SGD-13 on climate action through its strategic Pillar 4 on development of infrastructure distributed throughout the country and environmental preservations.

Alignment of National Priorities With the SDGs²⁸

Since the country’s emergence from a period of prolonged conflict in 2011, the education system has been expanding rapidly. According to a UN report, “to promote education for all, the government has established free and compulsory school for every child till age of 16. The net education rate went from 68% in 2012 up to 87% in 2016. Grant of special scholarships to girls in secondary school.”²⁹ However, as the primary school system approaches universal access, the quality of education needs to be improved. In addition, according to Kié, access to learning for children who live in rural communities or farthest from urban areas will have to be taken into account in order for Côte d’Ivoire to achieve its SDG commitments (see Figure 2).

Re-focusing on environment and waste management issues in Côte d’Ivoire, as Kié explained:

unless we start addressing employment creation and create sustainable business opportunities, deforestation on one hand and lack of proper waste management will continue. Both hazardous and non-hazardous waste ends up in and around cities. This begs the question: why is it difficult to put a waste management policy together and implement it?

In answering the above question, Kié stated, “I want to remain humble in how we approach our successes and how we deal with failures.” Following this, Kié addressed some of the challenges the foundation has been facing within the space of its education efforts and its scaling up prospects. The foundation’s first challenge has been that it has not been efficient in mobilizing resources around the philanthropic work it carries out. Kié further explained that they have not been good at either getting into crowd funding or getting their work known to

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generate outside interest. We have not focused on publicity or any public relation exercise, elaborated Kié. He said:

We had kept our heads down and have been focused on work and our goals. The consequence of not putting ourselves out there has been that we limited in what we do because our funds are limited. We, as a family fund the Foundation. It is a given that international donor agencies, multilateral and related businesses will have deeper pockets and together we can have a much larger impact and scale. Nevertheless, we have been able to build some partnerships over the course of these years, but these have been on project base. For example, to support us in refurbishing schools or we had partnered with a rice trading company to provide to the canteens.

To summarize, the foundation’s first challenge has been to scale up on each of its dedicated pillars to the extent where it could attract donor interest for scale and further impact. Kié declared, “Our work needs to be more visible and its impact more quantifiable and sustainable.”

This brings to fore the notion of sustainability for the foundation and its programs. Philanthropic foundations have to be self-sustainable in the long term to ensure impact. Since smart integrated double bottom line models can be created, should Future Africa Foundation move away from donor dependency to a partial revenue generating model? “Sustainability is something we grapple with every day and we define it beyond financial sustainability,” said Kié. He furthers averred:

Sustainability to us means that we ensure anything we do can stand on its own feet once the Foundation exits, particularly when it comes to environment, whether its rehabilitation of schools, reforestation or waste related issues. Take the example of one of the schools we rehabilitated. Once we finished it, our task was to make sure that ownership is taken by teachers and students by themselves; keeping some level of cleanliness by embedding the right habits in terms of clean environment. We need to consistently and continuously work on these aspects.

The foundation is trying to put a scheme whereby making it almost mandatory for children to clean the school every day when they come in. One of the traditions of Japanese education is that students do o-soji (cleaning). Japanese parents and educators say that kids learn important life skills and learn to respect their surroundings. When
that is embedded, children will be more sensitive to keeping their environment clean. Kié hoped that this kind of training at the earliest will help children learn the value of keeping their surroundings clean.

Côte d’Ivoire has a problem with both classrooms and class size. There are about 70-80 children per class on an average. A teacher can only focus on 10% of the class. The rest are left on their own. How do you assess basic learning competencies of all these children? Preventing drop out and keeping children is one issue while making sure they learn basic numeracy and literacy is another. Under nourished bodies and minds cannot learn as efficiently, addressing this aspect remains another challenge in pursuit of quality education for all. The issues in education sector are huge. Kie mentioned:

[Our] third challenge: Parents’ involvement in public school here is negligible. As opposed to Europe, here parents are not engaged; it is not even common to invite them to see what children are involved in. What it does is put undue pressure and responsibility on shoulders of teachers. Even in our environmental and cleanliness drive, parents are not present. This is deeply cultural, and we need to work on changing behaviors.

Kié is very aware of existing challenges and, thus, wants to maximize resource use. He does not believe that throwing money at any problem is the solution. A well thought out strategy with right partners and stake holder buy-in are all ingredients of potential success.

Recognition of some of these challenges and hurdles to overcome them can only happen by putting systems in place to bring systemic and systems change. The very foundations of Future Africa Foundation have been built on this belief. It is a circular economy like approach where every potential waste opportunity—human or material—is mitigated and a regenerative set of principles ensure fair growth and opportunity for all.
Next Steps: Where We Go from Here

After describing the main challenges of the Côte d’Ivoire landscape, Kié examined the next steps for education in his country. He said: “Our experiences in these schools have shown us the enormity of problems within the education system—how bad it is, state of schools and communities, lack of awareness of environmental disasters and their impact on children and their growth.” The state of public-schools does not allow for a child’s natural curiosity to flourish. Many times school structures stand apart from the community it aims to serve. Research has shown that architecture and school design should be in harmony with its surroundings and part of the community it serves.

The foundation aims to achieve this principle in a methodological approach. However, their first step needs to be further institutionalization of its work in education. The foundation recognizes that in order to have long term impact, it needs to scale up through expanding its school operations. In order to do this, Kiè said they will need to have some minimum requirements met; for instance, once the foundation rehabilitates a school, there must be standard operating procedures for environmental awareness, cleanliness student engagement, and so on. We have to work towards standardization and institutionalization of these practices.

To involve teachers in this process, the foundation will be creating teacher specific awareness programs because teachers must take the lead in environmental awareness programs within schools. The foundation has to help bring teachers up to speed: there is a huge gap between what teachers are expected to do, what they are trained for, and the tools they have. The foundation works in poor environments and, thus, it is imperative that the foundation continues to support children so that they do not drop out of school.

Introduction to the use of technology and access to internet and new teaching aids remain a challenge for teachers and children. The foundation is working to build new partnerships that will help it deliver technology-based teaching solutions. However, a good
teacher cannot be replaced by a technological tool, remarked Kié. At the moment, the foundation is looking at scale from two angles: either concentrate on an area and go as far as one can and change the whole ecosystem around schools and related communities. This is Kié’s preferred route. Or, start spreading small interventions, but the challenge with this approach is that it will require far more time and resources before one could see the impact.

However, resources remain a challenge. Providing good quality education is thereresponsibility of a state. Public education in many countries have shown signs of deterioration as public funds have shrunk, teacher-student ratio has increased and educators have not been able to keep up with innovative approaches. It is the same in Kié’s country. He said:

The government is not supporting the schools as they should be supported, either in terms of providing the minimum required for the schools to be kept in good shape or even just ensuring that the teachers do what they are supposed to do. If the government was doing what it was supposed to do, you would not find 70 students to a class. We have a tendency to look towards France in particular and Western countries in general and no where will you find 70 students to a class.

This brings to the fore the question of the role of government and any potential of partnership.

**Role of Government**

In discussing the role of government in implementing shifts that support local and public schools, Kié said, “The schools which we work in and you visited are public schools; so obviously one may ask himself/herself the question how come we got into this level of depilated state?” He lamented:

There is enough literature and research out there to show that beyond 25 students to a class, the teacher cannot decently teach and get the children to follow. When you have 4 to 5 times that number to a teacher, we shouldn’t be surprised of drop off rates in the schools system and the quality of education.

For example, when we take our exams every year to select laureate, the average pass mark is not 25-30 percent of the children on all the schools we have. This is just the pass mark. In 2019, there was a whole school that did not meet even the minimum requirement. It made us ask and question the level of teaching
because if an entire school did not perform, it cannot be the children alone. We concluded that we must develop a program to support these kids moving forward, which means that when they sit for exams they can at least reach the pass mark.

In September 2015, the government adopted a law on compulsory education for children aged 6 to 16 to address the situation of the nearly 2 million children and adolescents of this age group who remain out of school and those at risk of dropping out.

What good can a law do when there is no investment in issues like lack of schools and basic facilities within them like clean water or toilets, shortage of qualified teachers. It is also a fact that at times, schools are located far away or do not exist at all. And children with disabilities have no chance to be educated at public schools because they are not equipped to address physical or emotional challenges of these kids.

In answer to a question related to partnering with government, Kié was cautious:

When you go that route where a private foundation uses government budget to rehabilitate public schools, improve quality education, lower class size and deliver on the KPIs that we have set for ourselves; for them it is an acceptance of failure and inefficacies.

He further explained:

There are huge gaps and the foundation is trying to fill in the gaps. Are we a substitute to the government? No, and this is not what we are aiming for. Education should remain a government priority and we can play a complementary role. It is not sexy to say you are involved in education. But we are engaged and involved because we are talking about the future of a whole continent, a whole country. If nothing is done, some of the issues we are facing today, lots of kids in the street, it’s a social time bomb which will explode even before we realize.

Political sensitivities are deeply rooted. In 2020, as the foundation works under the radar, it is not a problem. But as it scales up and its work is amplified, there are two ways it can go with government. Kié stated:

Either we can be seen as a threat as the foundation’s success can be taken as a reproach to failure of public action or the government can welcome these interventions, which rarely happens. The needs and challenges are so huge that for now we have been left alone.

As in most countries, governments loathe the idea of being labeled as a failure, particularly in sectors like education and health. So, this is deeply political.
Challenges of Waste Management Policy Implementation

Kié shared reasons for the difficulty of developing and implementing a waste management policy. He explained, “Waste management is a huge industry. This is lucrative business not just in Côte d’Ivoire but across the globe. Our problem is that we do not have enough waste management infrastructure, lack of funding and political will at the same time.” Kié averred that the scope of environmental work of the foundation was touching a raw nerve; it was a red-zone and the foundation could immediately see government’s reaction. According to Kié, “the reaction could be summarized as, ‘please do not get involved; we do not want you to be involved in conversation around moving the public dump site or even trying to organize women.’”

The issue of waste management and government involvement implied by Kié’s comments is best illustrated by the 2006 Trafigura disaster. That year, Trafigura, an oil trading commodity giant created one of the worst environmental and human disasters by dumping toxic waste illegally in Côte d’Ivoire. According to Amnesty International:

Trafigura produced the toxic waste on board the ship as a result of refining a dirty petroleum product called coker naphtha. . . . Trafigura knew the waste was hazardous but hadn’t figured out how to dispose of it safely.

Trafigura tried and failed to get rid of the waste in five countries: Malta, Italy, Gibraltar, the Netherlands and Nigeria. Its attempt to dispose of the waste in Amsterdam sparked an environmental incident when residents complained of the overwhelming smell and experienced nausea, dizziness and headaches after some of the waste was unloaded. Trafigura rejected an offer from a disposal company to deal with the waste safely in the Netherlands for the equivalent of $620,000.

Instead, the toxic waste was finally dumped illegally in Côte d’Ivoire by a local company, Compagnie Tommy, that Trafigura hired to dispose of it for just $17,000—a fraction of the price. . . . On the night of August 19, 2006, lorries dumped the toxic waste in at least 18 locations in and around the main city of Abidjan.31

One must ask why the Trafigura disaster is important in the story of waste management in Côte d’Ivoire? First and foremost, the lack of political will to hold Trafigura accountable had manifested itself when the Dutch government could not conduct investigations in Côte d’Ivoire. Various stakeholders within the Ivorian government were reluctant to allow for an inquiry. It can be safely concluded any conclusive investigation would have unearthed collusion of many political stakeholders. As explained by Amnesty International:

In 2008, a Dutch court found Trafigura guilty of illegally exporting the waste from the Netherlands and fined it €1 million. But Dutch authorities decided not to prosecute Trafigura for the dumping in Côte d’Ivoire because they said it appeared impossible to do so after various attempts to conduct an investigation in Côte d’Ivoire.32

“Why do the big industrialized countries . . . dump in a country which has no treatment structure: it’s a nastiness. We are treated like we have no value.”33

A resident of Akouédo

Akouédo is one of the first neighborhoods in which Kié focused his philanthropic efforts. In 2019, the government announced the closing of the Akouédo landfill that contributed to these issues and promised to build an urban park. Until recently, the site had been sealed off and was not an active landfill. According to Global Recycling,

The NGO Afrik Environnement planned to create a plastic waste recycling center in the town of Abidjan in 2010 that ‘has not seen the light of day.’ The intent of building a composting factory on the outskirts of the Akouédo landfill was supposed to begin in 2014 but seems to have been postponed because of several open decisions on available land and the position of the collection points. The capture and exploitation of biogas at the Akouédo landfill in Abidjan—anticipated costs: 18 million Euro—was ‘mobilized for funding’ in 2015.

There are many other cases that demonstrate similar stories of why no policy has ever been able to stick. For example, in 2014, then Prime Minister Daniel Kablan Duncan launched a plastic bag collection, processing, and recycling project. It was estimated at 26,000 Euro and found appropriate to create 10,000 long-term jobs.34 However, since small bags are used widely

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in Africa to package water, the water sellers’ union protested against the ban, which would potentially put thousands of water sellers out of work.

Despite many failures and stalled projects, Kié said the government is adamant that the foundation not get involved. Why? As Kié explained:

There is too much money involved and the moment we get involved in that value chain, we are seen as disruptors. We are seen as disturbing the ecosystem in which people have been making money illegally for so long on the back of these women. This is why we are not welcomed.

As Kié pointed out, “besides lack of infrastructure, the most important issue in handling waste management is political will or lack thereof.”

**Gender and Waste Nexus**

More than 270 million tons of waste are recycled across the world each year, according to the World Bank. This is equivalent to the weight of 740 Empire State Buildings. At times, it is referred to a kind of “straw-into-gold process” that can be remarkably profitable. But this “straw-into-gold process” is not true for those (primarily women, but also children and men) working on landfills. Waste management cuts across the interlinked issues of education, health, poverty, food security, resource management, gender equality, and climate change (UNEP 2015). The SDGs have made environment, climate action, and sustainability part of their goals, which include the reduction of waste generation through prevention and recycling.

In last few years, like many other sectors, the role of gender in waste management has been under discussion by international agencies. In fact, existing gender inequalities largely shape how waste management is worked out in many social and economic systems because women make up the bulk of waste pickers across emerging markets. They are a low-income, informal labor force without legal or social protections. According to UNICEF:

Abidjan produces 300 tons of plastic waste every day, most of which ends up in landfills in low-income communities. Only about 5% is recycled, mostly informally by women who take it from landfills and sell it at very low prices.35

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For many women, the job is a last resort. A UNEP report titled, “When Waste Works for Women” further confirms the direct correlation between gender inequality and waste, quoting women waste workers to illustrate this relationship:

“There were no jobs and we had to feed ourselves, we had to feed our kids,” says Boronema, a 28-year-old mother of four. She often has to bring her younger children with her to the landfill because she cannot afford to leave them at daycare and there are no schools nearby.

“What we are trying to do is struggle to make ends meet so our children don’t have to do the same jobs as us,” Adja says. “Sometimes plastic is not selling well and we have to store it in our houses for weeks. Our children get sick because of this, but we don’t have any other option except waiting till the price rises again,” says the mother of three.36

Kié explained that the issue of gender inequality in waste management has an important role in the philanthropic vision of the foundation:

This is why we created the foundation. This is the community we serve, children and parents. We want to formalize the sector by organizing these women in cooperatives. It allows them to have more negotiating power vis-à-vis the middleman who buys recyclable plastic at very low cost. Our ambitious vision is to be able to cut out the middleman and these women become part of the direct supply chain. We are some years away from reaching that goal.

Even in waste management, women are at the bottom of the food chain reflecting general trends in gender discrimination and lack of better opportunities for most women. Kie’s work around women collectives is trying to address this issue through sustainable business training and opportunities.

**Sustainable Business & Women’s Empowerment**

To counter government’s resistance to the foundation’s involvement in waste management, Kié decided to find a strategic partner. UNICEF was working on an innovative program to transform plastic waste into construction materials for new schools. Conceptos Plásticos, a social enterprise from Columbia, partnered with UNICEF to use bricks made by

plastic via a recycling process to tackle a huge shortfall of classrooms in Côte d’Ivoire with
three test sites according to the UNICEF press release:

Conceptos Plásticos’ plastic brick factory in Bogotá buys its material from
15,000 collectors, who work individually or in collectives. The company is now
building a larger factory in Yopougon, a suburb of Abidjan. Abidjan alone
churns out 300 tonnes of plastic waste a day, typically by female pickers,
according to Sophie Chavanel, head of communications for UNICEF Côte
d’Ivoire.37

Kié explained that this is:

a perfect convergence of education and environment. We could organize these
women to be the providers of the raw materials that factory would need. This is
what we had hoped to convert into sustainable business for these women, in
particular. Needless to say, that there were some challenges. First one was, to
have UNICEF involved into a privately managed project which is clearly what
they are not meant to do. The project ran into issues even before implementation
because of the tensions between private and public domains. UNICEF’s way of
operating and thinking is different than how a privately-operated project works.
However, its involvement meant that one could get approvals from government.
The government would possibly allow any international body to work on it—
just not local foundations as they see them as political threat.

Pickers currently earn around 1,000 FCFA (West African CFA francs) per day (approximately
€1.50), but are at the mercy of middlemen. Currently, it is difficult for pickers to determine
which type of plastic middlemen will want to buy in a given week—flip flops, sheeting, or
bottles.

The first schools were built by the raw material, which is still being imported. The
company hopes to build further classrooms with local raw material. As Kié explained:

Our aim is to have our plastic waste recycled into economically viable project and
provide opportunities to these family. Until that is done, we still need to set up a
collection mechanism that can then lead to better sorting practices and improved
income for these women and families.

Kié said these bricks can become viable businesses or off-shoots, and this practice has the ability
to disrupt the entire ecosystem around plastic and waste management. For Kié, this further

explains the government resistance: “The level of disruption we bring in the value chain is unwelcomed by the government. We continue to scratch our heads to figure out a way to iron these issues particularly those related to women collectives.” Kié ended his interview by expressing his frustration at how government can suffocate and slow down the development of progress just because someone senior at a ministry or ministries feel threatened for their own political lives and self-interests.