

Tamkine Tribune

Stop Branding Africa — Start Listening to It

(“The Focus Group That Never Happened”)

The room is dimly lit. A dozen experts sit around a sleek table. Slides flicker on the screen: “Africa Rising,” “The Cradle of Opportunity,” “Invest in the Future.” Logos are tested. Color palettes debated. Someone suggests adding more sunshine, less sorrow. A tagline is born: “Africa: Ready for Takeoff.”

Everyone claps. Except Africa. Because Africa wasn’t in the room.

Let’s be honest. Somewhere along the line, the continent stopped being a place and became a campaign. A brand. A narrative to be managed. Something to be reframed, repositioned, rebranded; from famine to potential, from fragility to resilience, from war to fintech. Not to honor its complexity, but to make it digestible. Sellable. Palatable for development brochures and pitch decks.

Africa, we’re told, is the future. But we’re not asked *which* Africa, or *whose* future. The slogans have gotten smoother as the stories have gotten thinner. And in the rush to inspire hope, we’ve often amputated reality.

At the Tamkine Foundation, we’ve sat in those rooms. We’ve seen the campaigns. The glossy videos. The influencer summits. We’ve watched as pain was turned into aesthetic, and struggle into content. “Let’s tell a different story,” they say; but they mean a cleaner one. One without the sweat of injustice. One where innovation glows but land is still stolen. One where youth are “empowered” but still unpaid. One where the voices featured are the ones that fit the frame.

But Africa doesn’t need a better brand. It needs to be heard, not reworded.

Because branding simplifies. Listening complicates. Branding edits. Listening restores. Branding sells. Listening stays.

Africa is not a slogan. It is 1.4 billion contradictions. It is poetry and protest in the same breath. It is sacred land, stolen data, ancestral recipes, biometric surveillance, plastic flip-flops and quantum physics. It is elders who speak in proverbs and children who code in cafés. It is Lagos’s traffic and Malian desert silence. It is grief without translation. And laughter you’ll never find on a PowerPoint.



We are tired of the buzzwords: *scaling, empowerment, inclusion, leapfrogging*. We do not leapfrog over history. We do not “empower” people who have been silenced; we step aside and let them speak. ***We do not simplify complexity to make outsiders comfortable. We dignify it by sitting inside of it.***

Tamkine does not brand Africa. We listen to it, in all its noise and nuance. We build systems that ask, before solving. That map needs, not narratives. That allow learners, families, communities, to define their own trajectories; even when they don’t look like “success” on a donor dashboard.

We don’t want your logo. We want your ears. And maybe, your silence; long enough to hear what’s already being said.

Africa isn’t rising. It never fell. It just wasn’t always looking your way.

#Tamkine_together_we_will_succeed

Tribune by Dr. Abdelilah Kadili, President of the Tamkine Foundation