The Unaudited Genius of a Continent

Youth, History, and the Ledger Africa Never Gets to Keep

By Jagun Quareeb Alabi. Nigeria

Every economy runs on a ledger. Somewhere, someone has to write down what came in and what went out so people can trust the numbers later. The trouble is, Africa has never been allowed to hold the pen for its own ledger.

I grew up watching people whose brilliant minds never made it onto any official record. I knew a local tailor who could look at a person's body, read their shape with just his eyes, and cut a perfect suit without writing down a single measurement. There was a neighbourhood boy who could bring a dead radio back to life using random parts he scavenged from three different scraps. I watched a woman run her household finances so tightly that not a single kobo went to waste, even though no formal accountant ever gave her a certificate for it. None of this was documented. None of it counted in the way the global system decides what matters. Yet, every bit of it was real.

This is exactly what mainstream development talk completely misses. We are told over and over again that Africa has potential. Honestly, I have come to hate that word. Potential is just a polite term for wealth you choose to ignore. Africa doesn't just have potential; it has active genius that has simply never been audited. Our continent produces quiet brilliance every single day, but none of it gets written into the big book the world looks at when deciding who is important.

This erasure is not new; history casts a long shadow over this exact pattern. Long ago, the Yoruba people used a system called *ARO*, where farmers took turns working each other's land. It was a community-based insurance system built entirely on mutual trust, not paperwork. Up north, the Sokoto Caliphate ran its own courts, schools, and legal administrative structures at a time when parts of Europe were still struggling with basic literacy. Down on the Swahili coast, merchants traded across the Indian Ocean centuries before any outsider showed up to draw a map of the continent. These weren't primitive footnotes waiting for European correction. They were working, living systems run by people who kept their own records, their own way, long before foreign accounting arrived to make them invisible.

That is the legacy I carry, and it is the core of my complaint. Young Africans did not lack talent or ability. What we lack is a ledger where our work can be recorded before someone else steps in and claims to have "discovered" us. The African Union's Agenda 2063 says this too, though in much more diplomatic terms, by putting African identity and youth right at the center of our future. The African Youth Charter of 2006 even tried to turn this into law, stating that young Africans have every right to build their own societies, not just inherit pre-written ones. But while both documents

exist on paper, neither has managed to close the gap for the everyday youth still waiting for a single honest opportunity.

The solution is actually much smaller and less glamorous than most people expect. Africa does not need another summit on youth potential. It needs the basic, boring machinery of memory. We need to fund the recording of oral histories right now, before the last elders who hold our memories pass away. We need to give young researchers quick, small grants instead of making them fill out long, exhausting applications that take longer to process than the emergency itself. We must integrate African languages into digital text and audio archives today, before modern technology evolves and leaves our voices behind. And finally, we need to give young delegates actual seats and real votes at the tables where African diplomacy is decided, so the ledger is written by the very people it impacts.

None of this is a plea for charity. It is a demand for an audit. Africa has been quietly generating brilliant ideas and systems for centuries without anyone keeping the books. I am not writing this piece to look for sympathy. I am writing it to demand an accounting.

About the Author

Jagun Quareeb Alabi is a Nigerian writer, researcher, youth advocate, and final-year History and International Studies student at the University of Ilorin, Nigeria.

He is passionate about the intersections of African history, culture, leadership, and social development. His writing explores how history shapes African self-identity, champions the value of indigenous knowledge, and advocates for structural pathways that turn youth talent into meaningful societal contributions.

Beyond academia, Quareeb collaborates with youth-led initiatives and research projects across the continent to foster critical dialogues about Africa’s present and future.



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