

Tanzania is among the top 5 world's most stunningly beautiful countries to visit: *with the incomparable plains of the Serengeti - 6,000 square miles of savannah teeming with hordes of wildebeest, gazelles and zebras and their predators. Their annual search for new pasture and waters is the largest remaining unaltered animal migration in the world. Tanzania can also boast Africa's highest mountain, Kilimanjaro, whose forest slopes and savannah are a last refuge for many endangered species.* Is this all? No. If you look at it from Mohammed 'Mo' Dewji's perspective "It is connected directly to the Indian Ocean giving it trade links to Asia and sits in between the ocean and 6 landlocked countries (Uganda, DRC, Rwanda, Burundi, Zambia and Malawi) that rely on Tanzania for passage of goods. The country has 3 deep water ports (Dar es Salaam, Tanga and Mtwara) that are servicing the neighbouring countries". Today, Tanzania is the second fastest growing economy with a

projected real GDP growth of 6.9% for 2016 (IMF). Both, Tanzania's superb performance coupled with access to capital has played instrumental role in enabling Mo's growth and success to date. What else? "And since its independence in 1961, the country has never experienced a civil war or any major internal strife." Issues from a business perspective? "Capital is still a major challenge in Africa both short-term and long-term" But Mo doesn't look at his country merely from a business perspective. In his *astounding* interview to Primo Piano Scala c, he lists two main challenges that Tanzania faces today: electricity and education. Access to electricity continues to be a fundamental opportunity that millions of Africans don't have the luxury of enjoying. As Obama outlined: "It's the light that children study by; the energy that allows an idea to be transformed into a real business. It's the lifeline for families to meet their most basic needs. And it's the connection that's needed to plug

Africa into the grid of the global economy." As Unesco indicates, in Sub-Saharan Africa alone, there is an average of 1 mathematics textbook per 3 pupils and similarly, 1 in 3 primary schools don't have toilets. In some countries such as Tanzania, the average class size is 72 pupils. All of these statistics are troubling and highlight the true gaps that exist despite a large number of students being enrolled. If this will change it will have an impactful role in re-shaping the future of Africa, that is in the hands of its youth: "they are the champions of our future economic and social growth". Trust Mo! Something that we learnt from his story? That "God teaches us patience during delay". Read it and your view on Africa will be different from now on.

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DEWJI

AFRICA IS READY. ARE WE READY FOR AFRICA?

“ Today, accessing capital for many African companies still has its challenges but I am optimistic that financial institutions interested in making good investments will see investing in the African business community as a sound business decision. Much of the growth of our economy and job creation will come from the same businesses that today struggle to access capital. ”

Telos: A successful businessman with interests in different markets, and with an international standing: which factors have been crucial in your pathway? Do you consider yours as a not-replicable experience, or rather other people could follow your footsteps?

Mohammed Dewji: My success has been a great reflection of my country's performance. The socio-economic landscape that has made Tanzania an attractive investment destination, has played a massive role in the growth of MeTL and my professional career. It's strategic location, abundance in natural resources, and favourable political stability, all have been crucial in my path to progress. It is also one of the most peaceful and politically stable countries in Africa. And since its independence in 1961, the country has never experienced a civil war or any major internal strife. The country's geographical location has also been greatly beneficial, it has been instrumental in the expansion of business cross East and Central Africa.

In addition to my country's performance, one of the key factors that has been critical in path has been the ability to raise capital. Capital has been instrumental in my ability to execute MeTL's growth plans as it has enabled us to successfully facilitate massive expansion strategies for several of our subsidiaries. Today, accessing capital for many African companies still has its challenges but I am optimistic that financial institutions interested in making good investments will see investing in the African business community as a sound business decision. Much of the growth of our economy and job creation will come from the same businesses that today struggle to access capital. And yes! I do believe my experience is replicable and can be mirrored and tailored to suit one's own path in life. As long as individuals are able to seize the opportunities available, they will be able to follow the path that is best designed for their growth.

When you were appointed Forbes Africa's Man Of The Year you dedicated the award to your employees and to Tanzania's youth. Which meaning underlies, and which message did you intend to send with this dedication?

MeTL Group currently employs 28,000 people in Tanzania. This is approximately 3-4% of formal employment. Now, by looking at these figures you can see how people have and always will be the center of my business. Overtime I realised that our employees are by far the best advocates for our work but more so, they have proven to be my greatest asset throughout my professional career - putting in all those productive hours of work, sharing insights to support our growth, and being a watchful eye in market alarming us of any risks before they arise. MeTL simply could not and cannot succeed without the success of its people, and this is why the award was dedicated to them. Investing in youth development and expanding their opportunities not only prepares them to become purposive citizens of the globe but to be the powerful owners of our collective future.



Mohammed Dewji 'Mo' is a Tanzanian businessman, entrepreneur, philanthropist, and former politician. He represented the Singida Urban constituency in the National Assembly from 2005 to 2015, when he announced that he was resigning from active politics. He owns 75% of MeTL Group and serves as its Chief Executive Officer. In March 2015 *Forbes* magazine named him as the 21st richest persons in Africa, with his net worth estimated at US \$1.25 billion, having also been the first billionaire in Tanzanian *Forbes* magazine in 2013. In 1992 his parents decided to send him to America for his High School years. Mo continued with his university education in USA - Georgetown University in Washington D.C. - majoring in International Business and Finance and taking Theology as a minor subject. In 1998 Mo headed straight back to Tanzania and joined the family business. He became Chief Financial Controller at Mohammed Enterprises Tanzanian Limited (MeTL) a Tanzanian conglomerate his father founded in the 1970s, active in textile manufacturing, flour milling, beverages and edible oils in eastern, southern and central Africa. In 2000 he stood in the elections as a member of Parliament. In 2003, he became MeTL CEO and during his tenure the company has grown 30 folds and diversified in many sectors like Agriculture, Finance, Distribution and Manufacturing. In 2001 Mo decided to marry his childhood sweetheart Saira and they have two children, Naila and Abbas. He takes off Sundays, when he spends time with his family and totally shuts off from work. "Until about four years ago, I also used to work on Sundays, until my wife almost divorced me," he jokes. His [Mo Dewji Foundation](#) provides scholarships for poor Tanzanian children and in 2014 he was granted the award African Philanthropist of the Year by the [African Leadership Magazine](#).

In recognition of this, in January this year, I launched the Mo Entrepreneurs Competition, an avenue for me to enable and support young entrepreneurs who are running highly potential startups but lack further support in form of growth capital, networks and mentorship which could accelerate the growth of their companies. The end goal of the competition is to provide an interest-free loan to a select number of finalists coupled with an accounting software package and capacity building on financial literacy. Over the past month, I was fortunate enough to spend several hours each day with 20 young entrepreneurs vetting their business pitches. Their passion, drive, and determination to grow very much resembled my ambition 20 years ago. Therefore, when I dedicated the award to Tanzanian youth, it was in recognition of the young men and women, all of whom are playing an instrumental role in shaping the future of the Tanzanian economy.

Not only a businessman, but also a successful politician: in a continent so complicated and full of contradictions as Africa this is both a pride and a responsibility. It is almost unavoidable for us to ask you which are the major continent's issues to be tackled, in your opinion, and how.

There are several issues that grapple Africa, many of which range from poor access to electricity, water availability, large scale youth unemployment, inadequate access to quality healthcare services and most notably the affordability of high-quality education. For the purpose of this question, I will focus on two factors: electricity and education. Decades after many African countries have gained independence, access to electricity continues to be a barrier to development. The 48 countries of Sub-Saharan Africa (with a combined population of 800 million) generate roughly the same amount of power as Spain (with a population of 45 million). On average, only 69% of connected households actually have electricity that works most or all of the time, according to the African Barometer. In some countries less than 10% of people have access to electricity at all. As Obama rightfully outlined: "It's the light that children study by; the energy that allows an idea to be transformed into a real business. It's the lifeline for families to meet their most basic needs. And it's the connection that's needed to plug Africa into the grid of the global economy." In-order for this to be addressed, massive large-scale infrastructure investments need to be championed by governments across the continent. The private sector should play a role in continuing its interest in renewable energy investments and facilitate unlocking the potential for hydropower. While it already represents one fifth of the overall production, only 10% of the estimated potential is being utilised, according to The World Bank. The second major issue that requires much attention is, education, which for the last 15 years has been predominantly focused on access and enrolment. The quality of education however, is one of the critical factors affecting the learning outcomes of young people in Africa today. While quality is difficult to define, it is shaped by factors such as class size, the availability of textbooks and access to basic services, including potable water, sanitation and electricity. In order for the continent to begin reaping the benefits of affordable high-quality education, governments need to increase spending on education in support of abolishing school fees in order to increase attendance, upgrade facilities and increase the employment of skilled teachers.

We are curious to listen an anecdote about your life as politician. Do you have a story for us?

In 2000, Tanzania hosted its second multiparty elections where I ran for my home constituency of Singida as a Member of Parliament (MP). To my surprise at the time, I won the preliminary votes for Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM), the ruling party, with overwhelming majority but this joy was short lived. Because of my age, being 25 years old at the time, I was deemed too young to hold the seat in Parliament. Despite the decision of the party, I chose not to lose hope. I humbly supported the candidate who replaced me for the MP seat and did my best to campaign in support of his nomination. It was a very important lesson I learnt that day the first of many scenarios where I made sure the party's interests were a given priority over my own ambitions. Luckily, my patience and perseverance paid off - in 2005 during the third multi-party elections in Tanzania, I campaigned again to become MP and won a landslide victory with over 90% of the total votes. Subsequently on 29th December 2005, I was sworn in for the first time in my career (not the last), as MP for Singida. Being sworn in was a monumental moment in life. My discouragement transformed into forbearance. And in that moment, I knew, every good thing in life has its time.