



# MADE IN AFRICA

*Mteto Nyati is redefining Africa's potential in the Fourth Industrial Revolution, says Tamsin Oxford*

**MTETO NYATI** / CEO ALTRON

Powerful people don't always inspire the kindest monikers. But "telecoms turnaround powerhouse" Mteto Nyati should be very proud of his. Earned through sharp wit, dogged determination and a deep belief in the potential and opportunity of Africa, Altron CEO Nyati is on a mission to lead Africa successfully into the fourth industrial revolution.

A Yale University World Fellow on Global Leadership, Nyati grew up in Mthatha in South Africa's Eastern Cape, and holds a BSc in Mechanical Engineering. A passion for the complexities of ICT saw him rise through the ranks of IBM SA and Microsoft SA, before he landed the position of CEO at MTN SA. CEO of Altron – a JSE-listed company with a global footprint – is his latest role to date.

Committed to the growth and development of South Africa and Africa, Nyati takes a considered approach to how the continent will shape up against the developed world in the roaring onslaught of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

### VAST POTENTIAL

"We need to look at the potential benefits that stem from the fact we are not fully developed," says Nyati. "Other highly developed countries may be ahead in some respects, but we have a significant advantage in that we don't have legacy technology and infrastructure to overcome. We can leapfrog the old and into the new while other countries are stuck sweating their assets and seeking a return on investment."

Nyati believes that Africa sits in a space of potential. The key to unlocking this potential lies in how the continent collectively addresses the challenges that it faces and implements the solutions that can resolve them. Over the past 15 years, issues around infrastructure, connectivity, political upheaval and economic volatility have started to resolve thanks to investment and a rapid move towards democracy.

Nyati says: "There has been a shift towards democracy in Africa with almost all countries holding regular elections. This is a great tool to hold politicians accountable – we need to use this to banish corrupted individuals who are not delivering."

Nyati believes that corruption is what has kept Africa's infrastructure consistently lagging



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behind the rest of the world. Investment is made, infrastructure is built, but the money isn't being spent wisely and too much is being siphoned off into dishonest pockets.

"Society is returning to a focus on holding public officials accountable. This is pushing change and ensuring governments are making the right decisions for the societies they manage," he says. "We have seen huge investments in South Africa both in the public and private sector levels. As the private sector, we need to work with the government to ensure the investments they make into infrastructure are of high quality and to help find better ways of doing things to stretch the little dollar we have."

### MONEY WHERE THEIR MOUTH IS

Microsoft, Amazon Web Services and Google are just some of the notable names that are putting investment feet down on the continent. Microsoft has data centres in Cape Town and Johannesburg, while other companies are investing into research and development centres in Kenya, Ethiopia and Nigeria. With this level of commitment from high-end technology companies, surely Africa is not just en route to leapfrog legacy technology, but lead the way in the Fourth →

Industrial Revolution?

“No. We should not seek to be number one or lead the way. Instead we should be relevant,” says Nyati. “Global companies may be settling on local shores, but they need the insights of Africans to become relevant and to support their growth at a local level.”

It is Africans who will ensure that global technologies are relevant to the market. It is Africans who will leverage the technology of the revolution to resolve challenges and create innovative solutions. It is Africa that is poised to make good as the global breadbasket – not so that it changes to look like the developed world, but to remain true to its African history while capitalising on its African potential.

“We need to build partnerships between investors and global organisations so that technologies are relevant on a local level. It will be our understanding of the complexities and layers of Africa that will ensure that we can leverage the potential of the Fourth Industrial Revolution,” Nyati says. “Let us not

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aim to be leaders, let us aim to be relevant and equal partners. It is up to Africans to come up with ways that can accelerate our skills and development, transform our infrastructure and jump into the future. Our reputation as the breadbasket of the world has been used against us in the past, but it should be our proudest achievement and our biggest goal. We remain one of the richest resource continents and we need Africans to drive the beneficiation of these resources.”

It seems Africa is listening. Change is sweeping the continent and already African countries are leading the way in innovation and solutions. M-PESA from Kenya is redefining money management and accessibility for the unbanked, the first touchscreen medical tablet came from Cameroon, and the CAT scan was invented in South Africa.

“We need to stay true to our culture and our history,” concludes Nyati. “Our so-called backwards nature is our strength and an untapped business opportunity.” [➔](#)



