

We Seek To Build Bridges And Not Walls- Pascal Lorot On The Institut Choiseul-Africa Nexus

By Ajong Mbapndah L

Our ambition is to take on Africa with confidence and optimism and to showcase the formidable assets this continent has, says Pascal Lorot Chair of the Institut Choiseul, a leading French think tank with focus on economic governance, leadership and networking.

With the Choiseul Africa Business Forum 2021 coming up on the 24 and 25 November, Pascal Lorot fielded questions from PAV on the booming ties between the Institute and Africa, with special emphasis on the Choiseul 100 Africa, an annual ranking that identifies the 100 most talented economic leaders under 40 years old.

Could we start with an introduction of the Institut Choiseul that you lead, when and why was it founded?

The Institut Choiseul is an independent think tank founded in 2010 focusing on economic governance, leadership, and talents networking. We produce studies, particularly young leaders' rankings, and organize high-level business events with the ambition to create dialogue spaces at the crossroads of the political and institutional worlds, of the economic scene and the sphere of ideas, to inform debates on today's key challenges.

In the context of the 21st century, how do you situate the importance of Institut Choiseul?

In an ever-changing world, characterized by the emergence of new players and the shift of power relations and value chains, Institut Choiseul aims at giving visibility to decision makers. Thanks to our reports and high-level events, we strive to feed the collective intelligence and to give operational knowledge to those who shape the economy. Adaptability, reactivity and anticipation are indispensable



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qualities for who wants to be competitive.

Moreover, Institut Choiseul projected itself internationally at an early stage, taking an interest in Africa and Russia. Our objective is to work towards the creation of a new type of business dialogue between France and these actors in a context that challenges us to explore new forms of bilateral cooperation. Nowadays more than ever, it appears necessary to build bridges and not walls.

May we know the nature of relations or ties between the Institute and Africa?

The Choiseul Africa initiative was launched in 2014 with the creation of the Choiseul 100 Africa, an annual ranking that identifies the 100 most talented economic leaders under 40 years old. Our ambition was to take on Africa with confidence and optimism and to showcase the formidable assets this continent has. More than a ranking, the Choiseul 100 Africa has become one of the most influential pan-African networks of the young generation comprising 400 active

members spread out across 46 of the continent's 54 countries.

Throughout numerous encounters organized alternately in France and in Africa, systematically following an invitation from the heads of State and government (Algeria, Angola, Ivory Coast, Egypt, Morocco, etc.), the Choiseul Africa network has become a platform of synergies and exchange between the political and economic spheres at the highest level, implementing projects that are structural for the continent.

One of your leading programs is the Choiseul Africa Business Forum, can you shed light on it for us?

The Choiseul Africa Business Forum is an event dedicated to the development of business opportunities in Africa and with Africa, as well as to the sharing of experiences and the deciphering of trends in the African business environment. Taking place in the city of Nice, the forum is an opportunity for both business communities and international senior executives to meet the soaring Africa. It's a place

of interactive encounters, which provides a space for discussion around operational and multisectoral workshops on several topics.

How long have the Choiseul Africa Business Forums been going for, and may we have an idea on the profile of people who typically attend?

The Choiseul Africa Business Forum was launched October 2019 and comprised around 25 operational working sessions and 110 speakers selected with care for their expertise. The event gathered close to 600 African and European leaders among the most influential of the private, public and institutional spheres of these two continents: corporate leaders, international funders, heads of government and ministers, representatives of the African and European business communities. More than 50 countries and nationalities were represented at this Forum.

We understand that the Choiseul Africa Business Forum 2021 will take place on the 24

and 25 November, how are the preparations going and what should participants expect?

The preparations are going smoothly. For this new edition, we are collaborating with European and African high-level key players, most of them renewing their trust after the success of the first edition. Many leaders from both continents have already confirmed their presence. They are enthusiastic to meet again after these long months of sanitary crisis. We have built an ambitious program that should please them.

For businesses and people out there who are hearing about the Choiseul Africa Business Forum for the first time, can you make a pitch to them on its importance and what they stand to gain from attending it?

The Choiseul Africa Business Forum has two main specificities. The first one is high-level networking, as our teams pay much attention to the selection of profiles attending. Thus, the participants will have the opportunity to meet key players in their respective fields and the finest minds of the young African generation who are driving the continent's innovation. Furthermore, during the event, speech is given to Africa and more than 80% of the speakers will come from the continent to provide



Pascal Lorot with Tanzanian business magnet Mohammed Dewji one of the high profile names on previous Choiseul 100 Africa lists.

us with high value-added insights on African business.

Let's talk about Choiseul 100 Africa which is focused on young African talent. The next edition of the ranking is expected to be announced in December 2021. What criteria is typically used in the selection of those who make it on Choiseul 100 Africa, and may we have a few prominent names across

the continent who made it in previous selections?

To rank the selected profiles, several criteria are taken into account such as standing and reputation, background and skills, current position and functions, influence and networks, potential and leadership. Our methodology aims at representing all African regions and as many countries as possible to showcase the gems all over the continent, as well as all value-creating sectors (16 sectors).

rankings so far across different sectors and regions, all of them comprising prominent personalities. For instance, Emmanuel Macron topped the two first editions of the French ranking in 2013 and 2014. He attended many Choiseul meetings and even hosted our African laureates when he was the Minister of Economy. We always try to bring together the Choiseulians from different countries or sectors to decompartmentalize the business world.



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Selecting a few names is naturally a difficult task but we can quote Sami Agli (Algeria), Head of the Algerian employers' organization, Mohammed Dewji (Tanzania), CEO of MeTL and youngest African billionaire, Vera Songwe (Cameroon), the Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Africa, Kabiru Rabi (Nigeria), Managing Director of Bua Group, or Rania Al-Mashat (Egypt), the minister of International Cooperation. We have launched at total of 8

Any last word as we wrap up this interview, any major developments or projects in coming up that you would like to share?

We have new ambitions for 2022. We wish to strengthen our notoriety in English-speaking Africa and create more business connections between France and this part of the continent. We are working towards the organization of an event in Africa and are currently in touch with several countries which would like to welcome us. Finally, we aspire to connect all our networks (Africa, Russia, France) to create a unique meeting platform of young business leaders on a worldwide scale.