



# Go green, Africa

From upcycling to eco-tourism Africa is upping her green credentials.  
Words by **Nana Ocran**

Whichever way you choose to define the term green economy, the elements attached to it have often been spoken about without much thought for Africa.

For many off the continent, images of choking generators, the chaos of fume-laden traffic jams, and a general lack of eco-friendly marketing speak are some of the images and notions attached to Africa.

However, before recycling (or upcycling) became a trendy buzzword in the West, Africa proved itself time and again to be persistently resourceful, typically through the re-use of reclaimed and

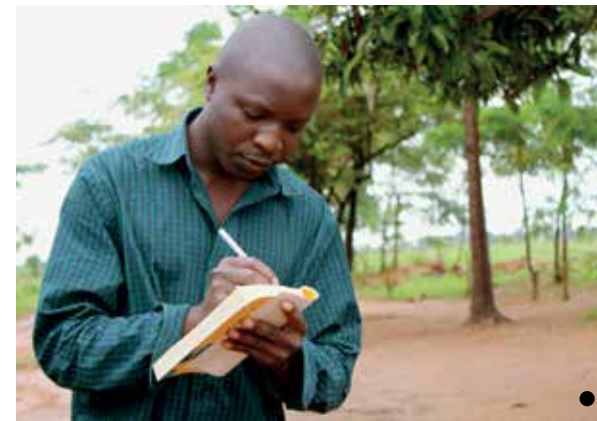
natural materials in ways that are creating a new language of innovation – going hand in hand with inventions in science, education and culture. It seems that in terms of the many components of the green ecosystem, from the use of renewable energy to refashioning scrap metal, Africa’s green credentials are on the rise.

Much of the sustainable activity that exists on the continent has come from the younger generations. At the tender age of 9, Richard Turere from Nairobi, developed Lion Lights to successfully scare the Kenyan predators away from his family’s cattle. LED

lights placed around a cowshed were powered by car batteries, which were in turn charged by a solar panel.

Self-taught engineer Kelvin Doe was only 13 when he built his own Sierra Leonean-based radio station using scrap metals for transmitters, batteries and generators, while Malawian William Kamkwamba was 15 when he used bicycle parts, scrap materials and gum trees to build a windmill for powering electrical appliances.

There’s also the much talked about (and also varyingly contested) Nigerian Maker Project in which a group of schoolgirls created a urine powered generator. Workable



or not, if successfully developed it’s a venture that could have positive implications about the future treatment of waste to develop electricity.

It’s Africa’s natural resources that are obviously key to harnessing new ideas and addressing specific environmental challenges, many of which have global connectivity at the heart of them. The Hello World project in Nigeria is one program with education and global connectivity at its core. Not unlike Samsung’s solar-powered schools, Hello World provides solar-powered computers for adults and children in outdoor hubs in Suleja, Niger State. Set up

under the umbrella of Projects for All by founder and CEO Katrin Macmillan, the project’s green status comes from the fact that local engineering and community teams are trained to a level in which international teams don’t have to be repeatedly flown in, and when the Projects for All team visits the area, they stay with the host community rather than opting for hotels or guest houses. A second Nigerian hub is in the pipeline, as well as plans to establish the project in the Democratic Republic of Congo and India.

Perhaps a tenuous link can be made with other initiatives that are more closely linked with tourism.



**Through the re-use of reclaimed and natural materials Africa is creating a new language of innovation**





Richard Turere created Lion Lights ▲  
 The Jaekel House in the Ebute Metta suburb of Lagos ●  
 The Hello World project ●



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The Hello World project, photographed by Tom Saater

In Lagos, the Legacy Project, an historic environmental interest group campaigned tirelessly to preserve the eco-friendly Jaekel House and its surroundings in an old railway compound in Ebute Metta. Now fully restored as a museum, the colonial building with natural, non air conditioned features has a carbon footprint that the majority of energy-guzzling properties in the country can't match. There's been a long relationship between Legacy and the Nigerian Conservation Foundation whose vital projects include the Lekki Conservation Centre, which protects the wildlife that gets caught up in the urban sprawl of Nigeria's

southwest coastal areas. Lastly, the politics of eco awareness or environmentalism is seeping into the language of more and more African governments, with parties including the Green Party of Ghana campaigning for 'natural and human capital balance for present and future sustainability,' and the Democratic Green Party of Rwanda which calls for the 'fair distribution of national resources and the protection of the environment' as part of its sizeable mission statement. 📍

[www.projectsforall.org](http://www.projectsforall.org)  
[Nigerian Conservation Foundation](http://Nigerian Conservation Foundation)  
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