LAPID LEADERS AFRICA

WOMEN OF PURPOSE SUMMIT 2026

BUILT FOR THE MARATHON

Beyond Representation: What Will Women's Leadership Build?



9 OCTOBER 2026 • OLE SERENI, NAIROBI

Leadership that builds institutions.
Institutions that shape Africa's future.

A FIELD REPORT FROM THE ROOM

What will become possible for others because we led?

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THE STORY INSIDE

The 2026 Summit asked what must change in how we lead, what we build into our institutions and the opportunities we create for those coming after us. This report follows the conversations, records what was and was not committed, and points to the work that continues beyond the room.



Women of Purpose Summit 2026 · Leaders gathered in Nairobi

Beyond representation, what will women's leadership build?

Women across sectors already carry expertise, institutional responsibility and influence. The Summit asked what would become possible if that presence translated into stronger institutions and wider impact.



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WHY NOW

The forces shaping this moment

AI AND WORK

Technology is changing tasks and the ways younger people learn. Leaders must create new pathways into experience.

SHIFTING FUNDING

Institutions must rethink financial models, priorities and dependence on external resources.

CHANGING NEEDS

Businesses must test assumptions and build useful products people can afford and sustain.

The deeper responsibility is to create opportunities to learn, work, build and contribute—and the institutions capable of sustaining them.

WHERE THE QUESTION BEGAN

Women of Purpose grew from encounters with women elders whose organising and public leadership helped secure freedoms we now inherit. At Karura Forest in June 2024, women were asked what they were building that would still matter sixty years into the future.

That question shaped Under the Baobab. Built for the Marathon carries it forward: building takes courage, patience, collective support and institutions able to continue across generations.

THE QUESTION BEHIND THE SUMMIT

What are we building that will still matter sixty years into the future?

THE SUMMIT PROGRAMME

The day at a glance

9 OCTOBER 2026 · OLE SERENI, NAIROBI

The Summit followed a connected journey through personal leadership, institutional transformation and collective action.

01 **Opening under the Baobab** — p. 9

What have we inherited and what must we build?

The intergenerational perspective that shaped the day: what earlier generations made possible and what remains to be built.

02 CHAPTER ONE — p. 13

Build Self

What does the work require of us?

How we lead. Change personal habits, question inherited measures of success and enable other people to contribute.

03 **Rethinking the mirrors we lead** — p. 14

What are you going to make sure you do not reproduce?

The standards and inherited habits through which we judge ourselves and others.

04 CHAPTER TWO — p. 16

Build Institutions

What survives the leader?

What we sustain. Embed purpose in decisions, develop people with real authority and learn from evidence.

05 CHAPTER THREE — p. 19

Build Futures

What does our influence make possible?

What we make possible. Create pathways into capability, opportunities for meaningful work and stronger community institutions.

06 **The Unbuilt Future: Working Labs** — p. 24

What must we build?

What remains unbuilt, which assumptions need challenging and what could be built together.

07 **From ideas to action: the Next Gen Commitment Studio** — p. 26

The point where reflection began to translate into practical commitments.

BEYOND REPRESENTATION

Presence is where the work begins

Women now lead in technology, healthcare, finance and public life. The Summit's opening conversation asked what that presence has changed. A woman can be indispensable in running an institution yet absent from decisions about what it should become. The question was whether women are challenging barriers and opening opportunities for others, or becoming effective operators of systems that remain exclusionary.



Mama Wahu Kaara at the Summit

AUTHORITY, NOT ONLY PRESENCE

Mama Wahu Kaara distinguished leadership that enables others to contribute from what she called rulership, in which authority dominates. She urged women to understand how power works and to develop their own vision, and asked why the energy of the 1990s women's movements seemed to fade after the 1995 Beijing conference.

QUESTIONING THE SYSTEM, NOT ONLY SUCCEEDING IN IT

Mama Wahu also asked whether adapting mainstream financial systems to African communities is enough, or whether African leaders must also consider building alternatives based on different principles. She argued that external systems of influence can draw capable people into serving priorities that do not reflect local needs.

THE TENSION

Are women changing institutions, or learning to succeed within the rules that already exist?

The speakers also cautioned against placing the whole burden of change on individuals. Courage matters, but so do institutions that allow ethical disagreement and locally informed decisions.

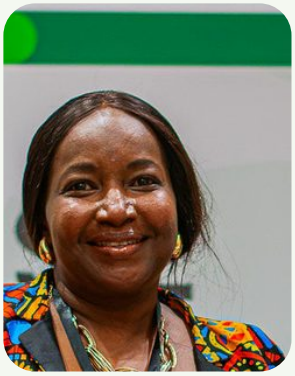
Using a position to open doors



USING A POSITION TO CHANGE THE SYSTEM

Catherine Muraga

Recalled being heavily pregnant at a former employer and noticing there was no lactation room or comfortable seating. Rather than only complain, she used her access to the CEO to propose improvements and arranged visits to other companies as examples.



USING DATA TO SHOW THE GAP

Evelyne Munyoki

Used employee data to show women lagging behind men in engagement and helped develop mentorship in response; she said almost 200 women had been through the mentorship programme. She also observed that women can enter organisations in strong numbers yet remain underrepresented in senior leadership.



OPENING DOORS FOR OTHERS

Dr. Sheila Macharia

Took on an assignment to build a regional office and develop young professionals from across Africa, preparing them for influential rooms they might never have imagined entering. She also described mentoring mid-career women through a Women in Tech programme, on career advancement and challenges such as imposter syndrome.



MAKING CONTRIBUTION VISIBLE

Carolyne Kendi

Her exercise asked participants to name what they are proud of. Women who work behind the scenes often fear sounding boastful, yet the room found that sharing one's story gives others permission to share theirs.

The measure the Summit offered: not only who is represented, but whose future becomes better because someone gained influence.

THE EXPERIENCE IN THE ROOM

Voices that moved the conversation



Dr. Vongai Nyahunzvi and Elizabeth Gathai



Esther Mwaniki with Evelyne Munyoki, Catherine Muraga and Cherrelle Druppers

INSTITUTIONS AND LEADERSHIP

Elizabeth Gathai
Regional Head, Africa, Women's World Banking
Spoke about purpose embedded in organisational culture.

Dr. Sheila Macharia
Managing Director, FP2030 East and Southern Africa Regional Hub
Examined how leaders develop others.

Dr. Vongai Nyahunzvi
Founder & CEO, Equinexus Partners · Author, *Borrowed Mirrors*
Challenged inherited measures of success.

Nancy Matimu
Founder and CEO, Serrari Group
Brought the discipline of listening to customers and changing course.

FUTURE-BUILDING AND COMMUNITY

Catherine Muraga
Managing Director, Microsoft Africa Development Centre
Explored AI and African technology talent.

Evelyne Munyoki
Director of Human Resources, Britam Holdings
Used data and mentorship to help women thrive, and spoke about keeping pathways into work open.

Cherrelle Druppers
Head, Jackfruit Foundation
Described building with communities.

Carolyne Kendi
Founder and CEO, CK Marketing Coaching Limited · Former Chief Marketing Officer, Absa Bank Kenya
Invited leaders to recognise their own contribution.

Alumni Michelle Wanjiku, Sarah Nderitu and Mary Kiguru shared lived lessons.

Mama Wahu Kaara, whose work spans women's organising, human rights and debt justice, and Sasha Chepkoech Ng'eny, a Green Ambassador, connected the day to the responsibility we owe future generations.



OPENING CONVERSATIONS UNDER THE BAOBAB

What does it take to move from recognising what needs to change to building something that changes it?



OPENING CONVERSATIONS UNDER THE BAOBAB

At Lapid Leaders Africa, we develop people with the capacity, courage and sense of responsibility to build Africa's future. The opening conversations returned to Mama Wahu's image of women as social surgeons: people who combine care and competence to restore the health of society.

The work begins with an open heart—listening deeply enough for people's realities to challenge our certainty. It also requires expertise, preparation and the humility to bring in what we do not yet have.

Care, competence and courageous action



Listening at the Summit

MORE THAN AN OPEN HEART

Just as a surgeon works to restore health, social surgeons play a role in restoring society's health. A product may sell and an institution may meet its targets while people's needs remain unmet.

Empathy helps us recognise what our measures have missed. Competence helps us understand the causes, develop our skills and involve those with the expertise we lack.

The work can mean repairing a failing system—or building the institution or opportunity that does not yet exist.

FROM CARE TO COURAGEOUS ACTION

Esther Mwaniki pointed to Harriet Tubman, whose work shows how care, courage and capability reinforce one another. Knowledge, trusted relationships, careful planning and coordination made it possible for her to help others secure freedom.

An open heart sounds gentle. Acting on it may require us to change the very systems through which we became successful.

Why social surgeons need marathon thinking



Panellists at the Summit

01 / THE SPRINT

Speed is not the problem. The question is what we are building for. Short-term visibility can meet immediate targets while weakening tomorrow's institutions.

02 / THE MARATHON

Marathon performance depends on preparation, pacing, disciplined energy and recovery. Esther Mwaniki pointed to Iten, where athletes train together and learn from one another.

03 / INSTITUTIONAL ENDURANCE

Leaders need to develop people, use resources wisely and build systems that continue without constant personal intervention.

What am I building—and what will help it last beyond me?



CHAPTER ONE

Build Self

What must change when our responsibility becomes larger than our individual contribution?

BUILD SELF

From personal delivery to collective capability



Moments of reflection and learning at the Summit

RESPONSIBILITY BEYOND DELIVERY

Sarah Nderitu's experience showed that results alone are not sufficient. Greater responsibility called for influencing decisions, supporting teams and bringing others along. Michelle Wanjiku considered how her coaching and psychology experience could serve institutions more broadly.

COURAGE AND FRESH MEASURES

Mary Kiguru's journey illustrated the courage of acting before every step is clear. Dr. Vongai Nyahunzvi challenged inherited measures of success and authority: what we admire in leaders can become the habits and cultures we reproduce.

RETHINKING THE MIRRORS WE LEAD

Dr. Vongai Nyahunzvi invited participants to examine the standards and inherited habits through which they judge themselves and others. Her image was the mirror: where mirrors are borrowed, they distort what people believe is possible and which opportunities they think are open to them. The session left with one question: **What are you going to make sure you do not reproduce?**

She also asked the room to write their name with their other hand, a simple way to show how we resist what is unfamiliar, even when the change has value.

RECOGNISING CONTRIBUTION

Carolyne Kendi's invitation to name what we are proud of encouraged participants to recognise the experience they can share. Build Self ultimately asks how we use authority, recognise capability and enable others.

A LEADERSHIP TRANSITION

Four shifts in how leaders work

FROM		TO
Working harder to meet each new demand	→	Communicating direction and sharing responsibility
Being valued for what I deliver	→	Taking responsibility for what others become able to deliver
Protecting others from mistakes	→	Developing judgement in others
Carrying key decisions personally	→	Distinguishing what requires my involvement from where others should grow

Build Self asks more than whether we understand ourselves better. It asks whether that understanding changes how we use authority, recognise capability and enable others to act.



CHAPTER TWO

Build Institutions

What systems and structures enable sustained impact at scale?

When purpose becomes institutional





Conversations about how institutions develop people and deliver

01 DIRECTION / PURPOSE INTO PRACTICE

Elizabeth Gathai showed how purpose becomes operational through roles, branch responsibility and performance conversations. The tests are concrete: do budgets, measures and everyday choices reflect what the institution says matters?

02 PEOPLE / CAPABILITY WITH AUTHORITY

Dr. Sheila Macharia described how high standards can unintentionally discourage colleagues from asking for guidance. People develop through opportunities to exercise judgement, backed by feedback and accountability.

03 LEARNING / EVIDENCE INTO DECISIONS

Nancy Matimu's experience highlighted the need to revisit assumptions, listen to customers and adapt teams and offerings. An institution learns when evidence can change what happens next.

A SIMPLE FRAMEWORK FROM THE ROOM

Three dimensions of institutional capability

01

Direction

Purpose translated into practice

What we ask people to account for tells them what matters.

02

People

Capability supported by authority

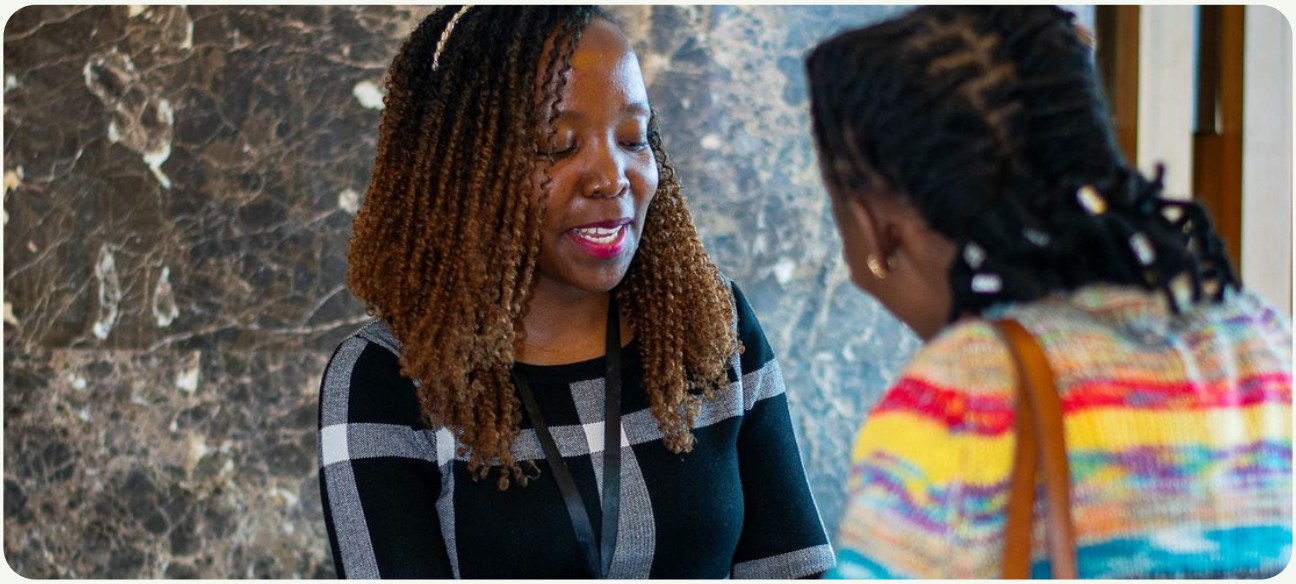
Developing people while retaining every consequential decision leaves capability unused.

03

Learning

Evidence connected to decisions and delivery

An institution improves when evidence can alter decisions and delivery.



Conversations between sessions at the Summit



CHAPTER THREE

Build Futures

What must we create for those coming after us?

What does our influence make possible?



Carolyne Kendi and Nancy Matimu in conversation at the Summit

Influence becomes meaningful when it changes what is possible for others. The speakers in this chapter came from technology, education, people development and business. They returned to one test: does what we build serve the people it is for, and will it still do so after us?

Listen before you build

Nancy Matimu described the launch of Safaricom's Big Box. She said about 1,500 units sold on the first day, which looked like success, yet customers were running out of data before 3 p.m. The team's first response was to triple the bundle size. Leadership challenged this because the problem was not yet understood, and watching customers show the problem on their own phones changed the team's thinking. Her lesson: sales are not the same as value, and a launch can hide a failing product.

Cherrelle Druppers described building Cheza Cheza, which uses dance to create safe spaces for young people. She said the organisation grew to about 40–50 employees, all drawn from the communities where it began. At the Jackfruit Foundation she supports schools founded by women who saw that public provision was not meeting local demand, and she asks how to help them grow stronger rather than treat their founders as passive recipients. She also asked leaders to go beyond doing less harm and to ask whether their work leaves people, communities and the environment better than it found them.

Technology, work and the next generation



The Build Futures panel in conversation

Technology that serves people

Catherine Muraga described using data to find gaps between what universities taught and what employers needed. She said the work engaged 16 universities and contributed to changes in technology curricula, aiming to strengthen the wider talent ecosystem rather than only recruit for one company. Looking ahead, she pointed to AI in healthcare, agriculture and water, but argued that these depend on basics such as reliable electricity and well-managed data. She urged that ethics and safeguards be built into design from the start, drawing on faith institutions and legal and governance expertise, and recalled how mobile money showed that Africa can leapfrog conventional systems.

Protect the pathways into work

Evelyne Munyoki warned that AI could automate the entry-level and junior roles through which people learn judgement, even as employers still want experienced hires. She argued for preserving practical early-career learning, recognising skills beyond degrees (including those of freelancers and entrepreneurs), and treating a young colleague's challenge to a process as a possible improvement rather than disrespect.

THE TENSION

Technology can expand human capability, or it can remove the ways people learn to build it. A product can sell well and still fail the people who bought it.

The question for Build Futures: What opportunities must we create today so that the next generation can develop the judgement, skills and confidence to build a future we cannot yet fully imagine?

A future-building pathway

01

Build capability

Practical work, supervision and feedback help people develop judgement and experience.

02

Create opportunity

Education, employers and institutions must open meaningful ways to contribute.

03

Strengthen communities

Build upon existing initiative through the right resources, capabilities and relationships.

We must develop talent and open opportunities to use it. Readiness without opportunity leaves potential waiting at the door.

ACROSS GENERATIONS

Passing the responsibility forward



Sasha Chepkoech Ng'eny and Mama Wahu Kaara · The intergenerational handover

The baton passing to Sasha Chepkoech Ng'eny made continuity visible. Introduced as a Green Ambassador, her environmental work and ambition around tree planting showed how a young person can carry a purpose into the future. The next generation is already contributing. Our responsibility is to create room for its members to lead now—and improve what they inherit.

What will become possible for others because we led?

What remains to be built?

The Working Labs brought the day's themes together and asked what was still missing, which assumptions needed challenging, and what people could build together. One participant described the shift needed as a move from the power of one to an ecosystem that develops a wider community, not just one person.



The room at the Women of Purpose Summit

What the Labs returned to

UNLEARNING

Experience is valuable, but it can become a reason to defend practices that no longer serve their purpose. The question of borrowed mirrors came back: what have we inherited that we must not reproduce?

WHAT IS ALREADY IN OUR HANDS

The room held knowledge, capital, technology, talent, networks, data, institutional authority and lived experience, much of it disconnected. The shift was from asking what is missing to asking what could be mobilised.

Tensions held open, not resolved quickly

Participants were encouraged to examine these tensions rather than resolve them quickly.

Standards versus unnecessary barriers

Individual excellence versus institutional capability

Developing people versus entrusting them with real responsibility

Institutional ownership versus collaboration across institutions

Representation versus what leadership builds

Preparing the next generation to inherit institutions versus enabling them to reshape them

From “someone should” to “we could”

An idea becomes buildable when it can answer five questions.

1. What could be built?
2. What problem would it address?
3. Who or what would need to come together?
4. What existing assets could support it?
5. What would need to be tested or understood first?

QUESTIONS THAT REMAIN OPEN

- How will we know whether the change has worked?
- Who will be accountable for learning from the results?
- Who holds the missing capability?
- What are we preparing the next generation for?

These are recurring questions from the Summit, not formally adopted resolutions.

FROM IDEAS TO ACTION

The Next Gen Commitment Studio

The final session moved from reflection to small-group work. Participants chose between two groups, facilitated by Michelle Wanjiku and Dr. Ann Rita Njageh. They were asked what the day's insights required them to do next.

GROUP

Future of Work

GROUP

Women Building in Public Service



Mama Wahu Kaara, Sasha Chepkoech Ng'eny and Esther Mwaniki

What a commitment needs

A strong commitment names four things. No one needed a perfect plan, only enough clarity to begin, learn and improve.

01

A specific issue

02

A practical first step

03

The people who must be involved

04

The evidence that will show progress

Where things stand



Mama Wahu Kaara and Esther Mwaniki on stage

WHERE THINGS STAND

The Summit did not capture formal, named commitments with owners and deadlines. In the closing moments, Esther Mwaniki asked participants to write down one takeaway they would act on, so that the day would not blur into the many other conferences people attend. Those takeaways belong to the participants, and this report does not record them.

What continues

The programmes and dialogues that carry this work forward are set out on the Continue the work page (p. 29).

THE AMBITION

Through Under the Baobab, Lapid Leaders Africa is working towards one million meaningful opportunities for Africa's next generation by 2036. The Summit's contribution is a way of judging progress: the quality, accessibility and sustainability of the opportunities created matter more than the number of activities completed.

The question to leave with: What will you build, what must you stop repeating, and who will have greater opportunities because you chose to act?

Three possibilities raised

No commitments, owners or timelines were agreed at the Summit. These are directions the conversations pointed to.

FINANCE

Rethinking banking around people's realities

A gap between access to financial services and the capital people need to build livelihoods and enterprises.

RAISED, NOT YET COMMITTED

INSTITUTIONS

Reinvention with AI and technology

Leaders and technology practitioners working on a defined institutional challenge to test a better approach.

RAISED, NOT YET COMMITTED

EMPLOYMENT

Apprenticeships for meaningful work

An employer-linked, funded pathway with supervision and measurable progression into work.

RAISED, NOT YET COMMITTED



Dialogue across the room at the Summit

CONTINUE THE WORK

Different needs. Different pathways. A shared responsibility.

01 FOR INDIVIDUAL LEADERS

Crossroads supports experienced professionals and founders seeking clearer direction, better strategic judgement and a practical plan. STEWARD: Leading What's Next is an executive retreat planned for March 2027. Participation is by invitation, and expressions of interest are welcome.

02 FOR INSTITUTIONS

Begin with a defined priority: strategic direction, leadership and delivery capability, or a consequential institutional change. Reinvention Labs are a possible engagement format.

03 FOR COLLABORATORS

Bring a specific opportunity no single institution can deliver alone. Clarify the need, complementary capabilities, partners and resources necessary for implementation.

NEXT STEPS

Explore Crossroads at lapidleaders.africa/crossroads. The Unbuilt Future Dialogues explored the questions that led to the Summit; read them at lapidleaders.africa/unbuilt-future-dialogues. For institutions or collaborators, contact Lapid Leaders Africa to discuss a defined opportunity.

THE WORK BEYOND THE ROOM

1 million meaningful opportunities for Africa’s next generation by 2036

The measure is what becomes possible beyond the gathering: stronger institutions, people entrusted to lead, and opportunities others can build upon.



WITH APPRECIATION

The people who held the room



Applause at the Summit

SPEAKERS, DELEGATES AND ORGANISERS

Thank you to the speakers, Crossroads alumni and participants for their experience, questions and willingness to learn. We recognise Esther Mwaniki, Caroline Ndirangu and Mama Wahu Kaara, alongside the organising team and volunteers.

FACILITATORS AND SUPPORTERS

With appreciation to Dr. Ann Rita Njageh, Ivy Wainaina, Michelle Wanjiku, Julia Sishia and Dr. Anne Muendi Musuva, plus our moderators and working-room facilitators. We thank Ashitiva Advocates and Amos Gachuiri for supporting the Summit and acknowledge contributors to the preceding Unbuilt Future Dialogues.

WOMEN OF PURPOSE SUMMIT 2026

Built for the Marathon

A report from a room of women builders asking not simply how to lead, but what their leadership will build.



Summit environment and design details

www.lapidleaders.africa • @LapidLeadersAfrica

Women of Purpose contributes to Under the Baobab's wider ambition: mobilising leaders and institutions to create one million meaningful opportunities for Africa's next generation by 2036.

Leadership that builds institutions.
Institutions that shape Africa's future.