



frotellers
Conference 2026
Mombasa, Kenya

CONFERENCE CONCEPT NOTE





BACKGROUND: OUR JOURNEY SINCE 2024

Three years ago, a gathering of storytellers, activists, academics, and cultural workers in Johannesburg came together around a simple but profound question: Who gets to tell Afrika's story?

That question sparked what has since grown into a continental movement. The inaugural Afrotellers Conference in 2024, held under the theme *Beyond Borders: Mapping New Frontiers of Afrikan Narratives*, brought together more than 130 participants from across the continent and diaspora. More than a conference, it served as a collective affirmation that Afrikans must reclaim the power to define, document, and share their own realities. At a time when narratives about the continent continue to be shaped by external actors and institutions, Afrotellers emerged as a space for advancing authentic, diverse, and self-determined Afrikan storytelling.



Images: Afrotellers Conference 2024

In 2025, under the theme *Our Stories, Our Voices, Our Power*, Afrotellers deepened its identity as a continental platform for narrative power, critical reflection, and movement building. The conference expanded its intellectual scope while strengthening connections between storytellers, activists, researchers, artists, journalists, and development practitioners. Beyond the annual gathering, Afrotellers continued to evolve into a year-round ecosystem through the establishment of Community Hubs across eleven countries: Malawi, South Africa, Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Lesotho, Togo, Madagascar, Mali, and Zimbabwe. These hubs serve as locally rooted spaces for storytelling, dialogue, learning, creative expression, and collective action, helping to nurture narratives that emerge from communities themselves.



Images: Afrotellers Conference 2025

Afrotellers 2026 marks an important milestone in the movement's evolution. As Afrotellers launches its 2026–2030 Strategy and transitions into a standalone institution, the conference represents the beginning of a new chapter—one in which the movement increasingly positions itself as a leading continental platform for narrative agenda-setting, knowledge exchange, and thought leadership. This next phase builds on a strong foundation: eleven active community hubs across the continent, a growing community of more than 300 members spanning Afrika and the diaspora, two successful continental conferences, and a network of institutional partnerships that have helped shape and strengthen the movement. Through these foundations, Afrotellers is increasingly contributing to critical conversations about narrative power, representation, identity, culture, technology, and the future of Afrika.

It is against this backdrop that Afrotellers 2026 convenes, bringing together diverse voices from across the continent and beyond to engage with some of the most urgent questions shaping the future of Afrikan storytelling and narrative sovereignty. Over the years, Afrotellers has been privileged to work alongside a range of institutional partners who share this commitment, including:



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POLICY AND
MANAGEMENT



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AFRICA
TRUST



CITY LODGE
HOTEL



African
Youth
Philanthropy
Network

Unleashing Young People To Lift Up Philanthropy



WHY MOMBASA?



Image: Mombasa Town, used with permission from Canva

Mombasa: A City That Carries Its Stories

Mombasa is not a neutral backdrop. It is a city whose geography is itself a story of contested power, layered identity, and Afrikan resilience.

From the ancient walls of Fort Jesus - a UNESCO World Heritage Site built by the Portuguese in 1593 and among the most significant physical testimonies to the centuries-long struggle for control of the East African coast - to the vibrant streets of Old Town, where Swahili, Arab, Persian, Indian, and Afrikan cultures have coexisted and contested for centuries, Mombasa carries history within its walls. It is a physical argument for the complexity of Afrikan identity and the persistence of Afrikan agency.

As Kenya's second city and a major Indian Ocean port, Mombasa also sits at a living crossroads of trade, culture, and geopolitical influence. It is a fitting stage for a conference asking: in a world where artificial intelligence, shifting global power, and information wars are reshaping who gets heard, what does narrative sovereignty mean for Afrika?



THE MOMENT WE ARE IN

2026: A Pivotal Moment

The global order is in motion. Traditional aid architectures are fracturing while new alliances between Afrikan governments and diverse global partners are forming and straining simultaneously. China, Russia, and Western powers are actively competing for narrative influence across the continent. International institutions are increasingly under strain.

At the same time, artificial intelligence is rewriting the rules of content creation, distribution, and consumption at a scale and speed that demands an Afrikan response. The training data, ownership structures, and governance frameworks of the dominant AI systems and to a large extent concerning shaping of the Afrikan narrative are overwhelmingly located outside Afrika. The risk of an algorithmic colonialism that reinforces existing narrative inequalities at industrial scale is real and present.

Alongside these pressures, a new Afrikan self-confidence is growing. From Nollywood to Afrobeats, from investigative journalism networks to grassroots media platforms, Afrikan storytellers are asserting themselves with increasing force and reach. The Majority World is finding its collective voice in international institutions. The question now is not whether Afrika has stories to tell but whether Afrikan storytellers have the resources, the sovereignty, the infrastructure, and the power to tell them on their own terms.

Afrotellers 2026 is where that question is confronted directly and collectively.



Image: Afrotellers Conference 2025



THE 2026 THEME: NARRATIVE SOVEREIGNTY IN THE AGE OF AI AND SHIFTING GLOBAL POWER

Narrative sovereignty is not a new idea for Afrikan people. The struggle to tell our own stories; on our own terms, in our own languages, and through our own platforms, has been central to every liberation movement, every cultural renaissance, and every act of resistance across this continent.

But the terrain is shifting beneath our feet.

Artificial intelligence is now capable of generating text, images, audio, and video at scale. The training data, ownership structures, and governance frameworks of these systems are overwhelmingly located outside Afrika. At the same time, global power dynamics are in profound flux: aid architectures are collapsing, information warfare is intensifying, and the contest for Afrika's narrative is more active and more consequential than it has been in a generation.

In this environment, the question of who controls the narrative is no longer simply a cultural question but a political, economic, and existential one.

Afrotellers 2026 confronts this moment head-on. The theme asks: What does it mean to own our stories when the systems and platforms that carry those stories are increasingly owned by others?

How do we maintain narrative sovereignty in the face of rapidly collapsing multilateralism, fragile world peace, algorithmic colonialism and the raging battle for narrative control? And what do Afrikan storytellers, practitioners, researchers, and advocates intend to do about it?

This is not a conversation about technology for its own sake. It is a conversation about power; about who has it, who is building it, and how Afrikan voices can actively shape the systems, institutions, and structures that will define the next decade.

The Conference Sub-themes

01

**AI, ALGORITHMIC
COLONIALISM &
NARRATIVE
FUTURES**

02

**FROM PRACTICE
TO POLICY AND
POLICY TO
PRACTICE**

03

**CULTURAL
ECONOMY &
SUSTAINABILITY
OF AFRIKAN
NARRATIVES**

Subtheme 1: AI, Algorithmic Colonialism & Narrative Futures

Who writes the code that writes and platforms that own our stories?

This subtheme examines the intersection of artificial intelligence and Afrikan narratives. It will tackle themes such as algorithmic colonialism in content generation and recommendation systems, Afrikan language representation in AI training data, the risks of deepfakes and synthetic media in information warfare, and the tools that Afrikan storytellers are building and reclaiming. This track invites a rigorous, grounded interrogation of AI not as a distant threat but as a present reality with which Afrikan storytelling must actively engage.

Key questions include: Who owns the data that trains the systems that shape how Afrika is seen? How are Afrikan storytellers using or resisting AI tools? What governance frameworks are needed to protect Afrikan narrative rights in the digital age? What does data sovereignty mean in practice?

Subtheme 2: From Practice to Policy and Policy to Practice: Policy Architecture & Advocacy

Narratives shape policy and policy shapes what narratives are possible.

This subtheme explores the deep and often under-examined relationship between storytelling and governance. It asks how stories drive advocacy and legal reform, how they are used to hold power to account, how they influence public policy and electoral dynamics, and how they can be protected as a public good and a human right through institutional and legislative frameworks.

This track opens Afrotellers 2026 to direct dialogue with government representatives, regional bodies including the East African Community and the African Union, civil society advocates, and development practitioners working at the intersection of narrative and systemic change. It asks: what would a continental policy framework for narrative sovereignty look like? And who needs to be in the room to build it?

Subtheme 3: Cultural Economy & Sustainability of Afrikan Narratives

Narrative sovereignty cannot be built on borrowed money and borrowed platforms.

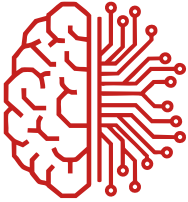
This subtheme addresses the practical, economic, and institutional architecture that determines whether Afrikan storytelling can sustain itself. It asks the hard questions about funding; who funds Afrikan stories, on what terms, and what conditions are attached. It examines the creative industries, cultural policy environments, and institutional ecosystems that make or break an Afrikan storyteller's ability to do their work over the long term. And it explores what an autonomous, Afrikan-owned cultural economy might look like, not as a distant aspiration but as a design challenge.

This track is for practitioners who know that the narrative battle is also a resources battle and are determined to win both.



CONFERENCE OBJECTIVES

Afrotellers 2026 seeks to:



Confront the question of Afrikan narrative sovereignty in the age of AI and shifting global power — generating a substantive, continent-led analysis of how artificial intelligence, information warfare, and fracturing multilateralism are reshaping who gets to tell Afrika's story, and what Afrikan storytellers must do about it.



Deepen understanding of how algorithmic colonialism is reshaping power, knowledge production, and representation, while creating space for critical dialogue on its consequences for Afrikan sovereignty and decolonial futures.



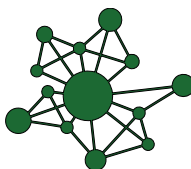
Produce concrete outputs from the convening — including declarations, frameworks, and commitments — that participants carry back into their advocacy, research, and practice, and that contribute to an Afrikan position in global conversations on AI governance and narrative rights.



Open direct dialogue with government and policy actors at the Kenya national government, East African Community, and African Union levels, positioning narrative sovereignty as a governance and policy priority in the age of AI.



Establish Afrotellers as Afrika's leading continental thought leadership platform on narrative power — cementing its identity as the institution that convenes, documents, and sets the narrative agenda for the continent.



Grow and deepen the Afrotellers movement by strengthening connections across eleven country hubs, welcoming new hubs, and expanding the network of partners, contributors, and collaborators working across the storytelling ecosystem.



Showcase the breadth and depth of Afrikan storytelling through a curated exhibition and screening programme that gives works, voices, and visions from across the continent a stage, a serious audience, and an extended conversation.



WHO SHOULD ATTEND

Afrotellers 2026 is for the people who are already doing the work and who want to do it better, together. The conference is designed to be genuinely cross-sector: the quality of the conversation depends on the diversity of the people in the room.

Storytellers & Creatives	Writers, filmmakers, tour guides, oral storytellers, photographers, podcasters, journalists, visual artists, performers, and content creators across all media
Activists & Movement Leaders	Social movement organizers, community advocates, human rights defenders, and civic leaders who use narrative as a tool for change
NGOs & Development Actors	Development organizations, foundations, philanthropic institutions, and civil society organizations working on social impact across Afrika
Academics & Researchers	Scholars and researchers working on media, technology, governance, cultural studies, communication, and related disciplines
Policymakers & Institutional Actors	Government representatives, Afrikan traditional leaders, policymakers, diplomats, and institutional leaders at national, EAC, AU, and international levels
Funders & Philanthropists	Foundations and donors investing in Afrikan storytelling, media, civic space, and cultural infrastructure

Target attendance: 200+ delegates from across Afrika and the diaspora.



Image: Afrotellers Conference 2025



PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

**27
OCT**

**Arrival and
Welcome Reception**

**28
OCT**

**Academic & Practitioner Pre-
Conference** (Paper
Presentations & Exhibitions /
Works Showcases)

**29-30
OCT**

Main Conference with Plenary
& Breakaway Sessions.
Mombasa sightseeing tour

**31
OCT**

**Afrotellers Festival &
Market**



PAPER PRESENTATION TRACK & STORYTELLING WORKS SHOWCASE

Paper Presentations

For the first time in its history, Afrotellers 2026 will feature a dedicated paper presentations track, marking a significant step in the conference's evolution as a serious thought leadership platform.

This track reflects a core conviction: that the distance between academic research and community practice in the Afrikan storytelling space has cost us too much already. The most powerful thinking about narrative sovereignty is happening in both worlds; in university departments and in grassroots media collectives, in policy institutes and in community radio stations. The paper presentations track is designed to bring those worlds into genuine, sustained dialogue.

Submissions are welcome from organisations, movements, academics, researchers, practitioners, journalists, policymakers, and community leaders working within any of the three conference subthemes. Papers may be theoretical, empirical, practice-based, or policy-focused.

Submission types: full academic papers, practitioner reflections and case studies, panel proposals, and presentation abstracts.

Storytelling Works Showcase

The Storytelling Works Showcase is a central feature of Afrotellers 2026; a curated exhibition and screening programme that gives Afrikan storytelling works a stage, a serious audience, and an extended conversation.

In keeping with Afrotellers tradition, the showcase is not simply a display. It is a provocation. Selected works will be chosen for their power to challenge, illuminate, connect, and move. They will be in active dialogue with the conference theme and the conversations happening across the three days.

The showcase is open to a wide range of forms including documentary film, photography, audio and podcast work, visual art, digital storytelling, written and spoken word, performance, and multimedia installation. Works produced by Afrikan storytellers and rooted in Afrikan community realities are especially encouraged.

Selected works will be featured across the three conference days and highlighted during the PreConference sessions on the 27th October.

See Appendices A and B for more details on both calls.



EXPERIENCE MOMBASA: THE COASTAL HERITAGE & OCEAN JOURNEY

Afrotellers has always held that the city where we gather is part of the story. We do not arrive in a place but we enter into a conversation with it. Mombasa will be no exception.

On the afternoon of Day 3 (Friday 30 October), following the closing ceremony, delegates will be taken on a curated Mombasa coastal heritage and ocean experience. This is not a tourist excursion. It is a deliberate act of engaging with place as story – of letting a city speak, and of listening.

Movement 1: Mombasa Old Town Walking Tour

The experience begins with a guided walking tour of Mombasa Old Town – one of East Africa's most layered and significant heritage landscapes. Delegates will walk through streets and courtyards where Swahili, Arab, Indian, Persian, and colonial histories intersect, through mosques, temples, and carved wooden doorways that tell a story of a deeply cosmopolitan Afrikan city that has always been more than the world gave it credit for. Local storytellers and cultural practitioners will serve as guides.

Movement 2: Fort Jesus

The walking tour will bring delegates to Fort Jesus – a UNESCO World Heritage Site built by the Portuguese in 1593, and one of the most powerful physical testimonies to the centuries-long contest for control of the East African coast. The fort has changed hands nine times. Its walls hold stories of resistance, capture, liberation, and loss that feel urgently relevant to a conference about who controls the narrative. Delegates will be guided through the fort and its museum with dedicated reflection time.

Movement 3: Dhow Sunset Cruise on the Indian Ocean

The experience concludes with a traditional dhow sunset cruise on the Indian Ocean – a moment of collective rest, celebration, and reflection on one of the world's most storied bodies of water. The Indian Ocean has carried traders, enslaved people, colonizers, liberators, and storytellers across its waters for thousands of years. Floating on it together, as the sun sets on three days of powerful conversation, is a fitting and intentional close to the Afrotellers 2026 journey.



Image: Mombasa Old Town



Image: Fort Jesus, Mombasa



Image: Dhow Sunset Cruise



CALL FOR PARTNERS



Image: Afrotellers Conference 2025

Why Partner with Afrotellers 2026?

Afrotellers is not a corporate conference. It is a continental movement and, like all movements, it is built through solidarity, collective investment, and a shared commitment to a vision.

Together with our Conference Co-Convener, the **Cultural Policy and Management Department at the University of the Witwatersrand**, we are inviting foundations, NGOs, development organizations, research institutions, cultural bodies, and corporate actors to partner with Afrotellers 2026; not as sponsors of an event, but as co-investors in a growing ecosystem of Afrikan narrative power. Partnership with Afrotellers is a statement of where your organization stands on the question of whose stories matter and who should have the power to tell them.

Partnering with Afrotellers 2026 means standing alongside one of Afrika's most dynamic thought leadership platforms at a pivotal moment in its history. It means building meaningful relationships with more than 200 of the continent's most committed storytellers, activists, researchers, artists, philanthropists, and development practitioners. It also means contributing directly, in a visible and impactful way, to strengthening the infrastructure of Afrikan narrative sovereignty while helping shape critical conversations on AI, power, policy, and the future of storytelling on the continent. We invite partners who recognize the importance of these conversations and want to help lead them.

Different partnership tiers are available, each designed to reflect the nature and level of a partner's contribution and engagement. Beyond financial support, partners have opportunities to help shape the intellectual agenda, contribute to the programme, and stand visibly alongside a growing movement committed to amplifying Afrikan voices and perspectives.

Organizations interested in partnering with Afrotellers 2026 are invited to contact the Afrotellers team to request a detailed Partnership Prospectus outlining available partnership opportunities, benefits, and contribution structures.

To discuss partnership opportunities, please contact willson@thriveafrika.net | +265 997 699 166 or themba@thriveafrika.net | +27 710 894 889.



APPENDIX A: CALL FOR PAPERS

Invitation

The Afrotellers Conference 2026 invites submissions of academic papers, practitioner reflections, and research presentations from researchers, academics, practitioners, journalists, community leaders, and storytellers working at the intersection of narrative, power, technology, and social change in Afrika.

This is the first time Afrotellers has opened a formal paper presentations track, reflecting the conference's evolution as a thought leadership platform that takes both rigorous scholarship and lived practice seriously. We are looking for work that is intellectually grounded and practically relevant that speaks across the divide between the university and the community, the policy room and the street.

Focus Areas

Submissions may engage with any of the three conference subthemes:

Subtheme 1:

AI, Algorithmic Colonialism & Narrative Futures

Algorithmic bias in content generation and recommendation; Afrikan language representation in AI training data; generative AI and authorship in Afrikan contexts; deepfakes and synthetic media in information warfare; data sovereignty and community data rights; AI governance and narrative rights; tools for Afrikan storytellers in the digital age.

Subtheme 2:

Policy From Practice to Policy and Policy to Practice: Architecture & Advocacy

Narrative sovereignty as a policy and legal framework; storytelling and public policy advocacy; narrative rights as human rights; media law and policy in Afrika; storytelling and electoral integrity; the role of the EAC and AU in narrative governance; case studies in narrative-led policy change.

Subtheme 3:

Cultural Economy & Sustainability of Afrikan Narratives

Funding models for independent Afrikan storytelling; the political economy of creative industries in Afrika; cultural policy and institutional ecosystems; community media sustainability; diaspora investment in Afrikan narrative infrastructure; the ethics and economics of narrative philanthropy; building autonomous cultural economies.

Submission Types

Full Academic Paper	4,000 – 8,000 words. Original research with abstract, methodology, findings, and references.
Practitioner Reflection / Case Study	1,500 – 3,000 words. A grounded reflection on practice, a documented case, or a lessons-learned account rooted in real work.
Panel Proposal	A group of 3–4 presenters with a unified theme. Submit a 500-word panel rationale plus 200-word abstracts per presenter.
Presentation Abstract	500 words plus a speaker biography. Accepted presenters will present without submitting a full written paper.

Review Process

All submissions will be reviewed by the Afrotellers 2026 Programme Committee, comprising academics, practitioners, and movement leaders from across the continent. The committee will assess submissions on the basis of relevance to the conference theme, intellectual or practical contribution, and representation of diverse perspectives and geographies. Accepted presenters will receive full guidance on presentation format, logistics, and scheduling.

Key Dates

Call Opens	Jun 12, 2026
Submission Deadline	Jul 12, 2026
Notification of Acceptance	Jul 31, 2026
Final Papers Due	Sep 13, 2026

How to Submit

Submit your paper, abstract, or panel proposal to: [**afrotellers@gmail.com**](mailto:afrotellers@gmail.com) with the subject line "Afrotellers 2026 – Paper Submission."

We especially welcome submissions from women and youth, Afrikan scholars, practitioners, community leaders, and from early-career researchers. Submissions in English and French are welcome.



APPENDIX B: CALL FOR STORYTELLING WORKS

Invitation

Afrotellers 2026 invites storytellers, artists, filmmakers, photographers, audio producers, writers, and multimedia creators from across Afrika and the diaspora to submit works for the Afrotellers 2026 Storytelling Works Showcase.

The showcase is one of the most distinctive and powerful features of the Afrotellers Conference – a curated exhibition and screening programme that gives Afrikan storytelling works a stage, a serious audience, and an extended conversation. Selected works are presented not as decoration but as argument. They are in active dialogue with the conference theme and the intellectual work happening across the three days.

We are asking for work that takes narrative sovereignty seriously – that asserts the right of Afrikan storytellers to tell Afrikan stories, on Afrikan terms, with Afrikan values at the centre.

What We Are Looking For

We welcome submissions across a wide range of storytelling forms, including but not limited to:

- Documentary film (short and long form)
- Photography series and photographic essays
- Audio and podcast work
- Visual art and mixed media installations
- Digital storytelling and interactive media
- Written and spoken word – including poetry, creative non-fiction, and personal essay
- Performance work (video documentation of live work accepted)
- Multimedia and augmented reality installations

We are especially interested in works that:

- Are produced by Afrikan storytellers and rooted in Afrikan community realities
- Push back against dominant, externally imposed narratives about Afrika
- Explore the intersection of technology, including AI, and storytelling

- Document social movements, community resistance, or cultural practice
- Engage questions of power, voice, silence, and representation
- Are works in progress as well as completed works – the process of storytelling is also a story

Submission Requirements

Please submit the following:

- A brief description of the work (300 – 500 words), including title, format, duration or dimensions, and production context
- A statement (200 words) on how the work engages with the conference theme or one of the three subthemes
- A biography of the creator(s) (100 – 150 words per creator)
- A link, file, or excerpt of the work. For longer works, a 3–5 minute excerpt is acceptable for initial review
- Technical specifications and any space or equipment requirements for exhibition or screening

Selection Process

Works will be reviewed by the Afrotellers 2026 Curation Committee, comprising curators, practitioners, and cultural workers from across the continent. Selections will be made on the basis of creative quality, thematic relevance, representation of diverse geographies and voices, and the work's potential to generate conversation and reflection among conference delegates.

Key Dates

Call Opens	Jul 12, 2026
Submission Deadline	Jul 12, 2026
Notification of Acceptance	Jul 31, 2026
Final Papers Due	Sep 13, 2026

How to Submit

Submit your work and accompanying documentation to: [**afrotellers@gmail.com**](mailto:afrotellers@gmail.com) with the subject line "Afrotellers 2026 – Storytelling Work Submission."

Afrotellers especially welcomes works by women storytellers, young and emerging creators, and storytellers from communities whose voices are underrepresented in mainstream African media.