

Economic Outlook

**African CEOs pursue
resilient growth amid
economic uncertainty**

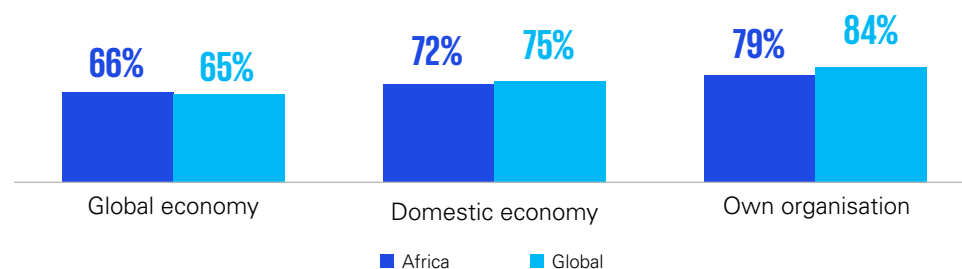


Economic outlook

Confidence holds, but execution will shape the next phase of growth

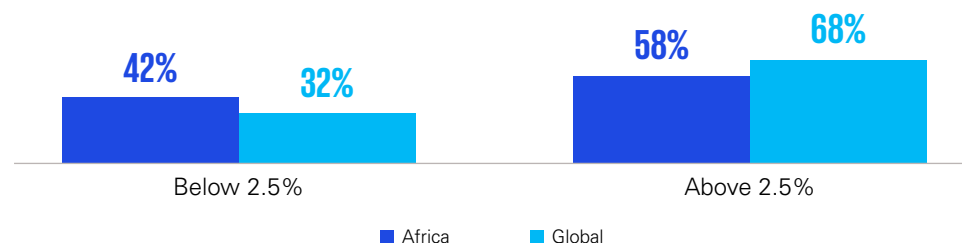
African CEOs remain confident in their growth prospects, even as a complex operating environment places greater demands on resilience, productivity and capital discipline. Confidence in the global economy stands at 66 percent among African CEOs, broadly in line with the global benchmark of 65 percent. Confidence in domestic economies is 72 percent, while 79 percent are confident in their own organisations. Both measures trail global peers, highlighting the gap between corporate ambition and the wider conditions for growth.

CEO confidence in growth prospects over the next three years



Recent performance provides grounds for optimism: 86 percent of African CEOs reported revenue growth in their latest financial year. Yet expectations are more restrained. Only 58 percent anticipate annual earnings growth of at least 2.5 percent over the next three years, against 68 percent globally. The challenge is to convert revenue momentum into stronger earnings through productivity, cost discipline and selective investment.

Expected annual earnings growth over the next three years



The contrast between recent revenue performance and future earnings expectations is a defining feature of the 2026 outlook. While African CEOs remain optimistic about growth, their more measured earnings expectations point to the importance of operational efficiency, effective cost management and investments that deliver measurable returns. These priorities will be critical to sustaining business performance amid economic uncertainty.

Resilience is now central to the growth agenda

Cybersecurity and data security are a leading growth threat for African and global CEOs alike, cited by 31 percent in each group. African leaders also highlight supply-chain resilience (31 percent) and the integration of AI into operating models (27 percent). Global peers place greater emphasis on economic uncertainty and geopolitical instability. These differences point to a common need for resilience, shaped by operating pressures.

Top 3 threats to organisational growth over the next three years

Africa



Global



Investment priorities broadly reflect the key risks identified by CEOs, with investment levels exceeding reported threat perceptions. While 31 percent identify cybersecurity and data security as a threat to growth, 45 percent are increasing investment in cybersecurity and digital-risk resilience. Similarly, 27 percent cite AI integration as a growth threat, while 31 percent are increasing investment in integrating AI into operations. These are different survey measures, but together they illustrate how leaders are seeking to move from exposure to operational preparedness.

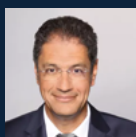
Growth from the core

Organic growth is the leading operational priority for 18 percent of African CEOs, compared with 8 percent globally. Customer experience (14 percent) and digitisation and connectivity (13 percent) follow. Rather than relying solely on expansion, African businesses are prioritising stronger core operations, closer customer relationships and technology-enabled efficiency.

These choices point towards a practical model of growth: protect the operating base, strengthen customer economics and invest selectively in the capabilities that can improve margins. Cybersecurity, regulatory preparedness and reliable supply chains are not merely defensive expenditures; they help protect service continuity, access to markets and the confidence of customers and counterparties.

For boards, the challenge is to connect investment to measurable commercial outcomes. Capital allocation will need to distinguish initiatives that improve the resilience of existing operations from those that create incremental growth, while recognising that both may be essential to sustained performance.

The next phase of growth in Africa will not be defined by how fast organisations expand, but by how effectively they build resilience, deploy capital and translate growth opportunities into sustainable earnings.”

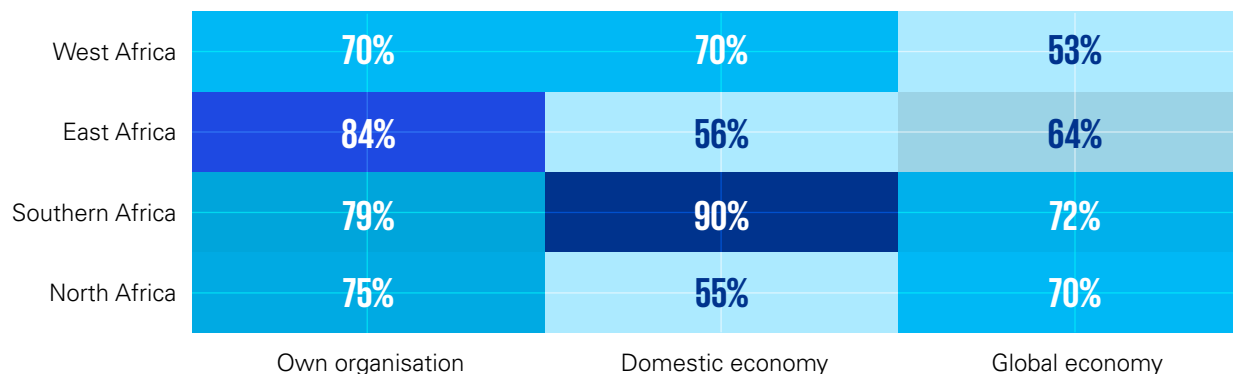


Mustapha Oussedrat

Partner and Head of
Francophone Africa Region

Regional view: Confidence in growth prospects reveals different routes to growth

Confidence remains positive across the four regions, but its drivers vary. Southern African CEOs are most optimistic about domestic economic prospects; East African CEOs report the strongest confidence in their businesses. West Africa is more cautious about the global economy, while North Africa combines business confidence with more restrained earnings expectations.



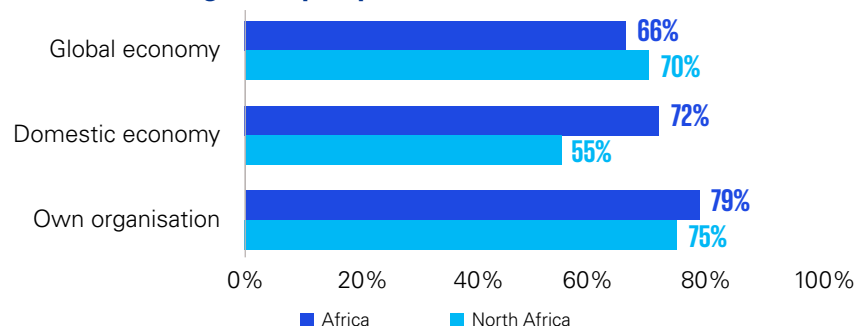
Note: Regional base sizes differ and results should be interpreted directionally

North Africa

North African CEOs remain confident in their businesses, while securing the fundamentals before accelerating growth

75 percent of North African CEOs are confident in their company's growth prospects, compared with 55 percent for the domestic economy. Yet only 40 percent expect annual earnings growth of at least 2.5 percent, compared with 58 percent across Africa. These results point to an uneven growth environment: public investment and sector specific opportunities support business prospects, while structural bottlenecks and exposure to external shocks temper expectations for earnings growth.

Confidence in growth prospects



CEOs show greater confidence in the outlook they can shape at company level than in the broader domestic environment.

Leadership agility and workforce skills underpin productivity gains

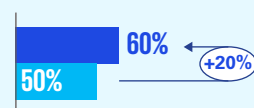
Sixty percent of North African CEOs cite agility and faster decision-making among essential leadership capabilities, compared with 50 percent across Africa. Workforce upskilling and AI readiness also receive greater investment emphasis, at 30 percent in North Africa (vs 18 percent Africa).

As digital transformation reshapes business requirements, addressing skills gaps become critical to improving productivity.

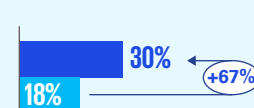
Translating technology investments into results requires organisations to strengthen both decision-making and the capabilities of their teams.

The North African findings reflect a more cautious earnings outlook despite confidence at the company level. The unusually strong emphasis on regulatory compliance and reporting suggests that institutional readiness is being treated as a prerequisite for investment and growth. Alongside stronger leadership agility and workforce capability, this may help organisations convert opportunities into more durable performance.

Agility and faster decision-making



Workforce upskilling and AI-readiness



■ North Africa ■ Africa

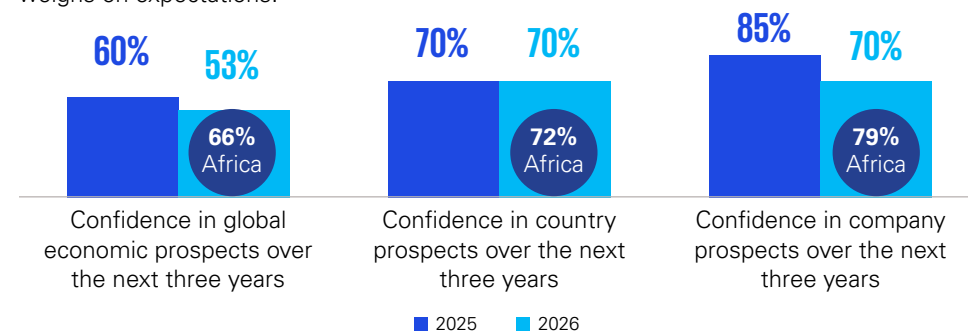
However, supply-chain resilience is a leading growth threat, prompting 43 percent to prioritise end-to-end visibility through data, AI and digital tools. With 84 percent reporting greater pressure to secure long-term prosperity, CEOs are placing a premium on risk management, strategic foresight and faster decisions.

On growth expectations, the majority (57 percent) of Southern African CEOs estimate positive earnings growth over the next three years, with 39 percent estimating that growth to be between 2.5 percent and 4.99 percent, 38 percent estimating growth of between 0.01 percent and 2.49 percent. Only 2 percent predict growth of less than 0 percent, while 18 percent of Southern African CEOs expect earnings growth of more than 5 percent.

West Africa

Measured confidence, stronger appetite for transformation

West African CEOs continue to express confidence in growth, but sentiment has softened materially since 2025 as an increasingly fragmented and uncertain global landscape weighs on expectations.



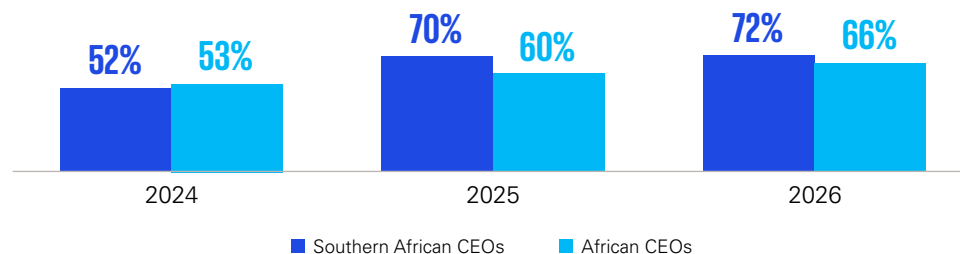
Confidence in West African companies declined from 85 percent in 2025 to 70 percent in 2026, while confidence in the global economy fell from 60 percent to 53 percent. Yet confidence in domestic economic prospects held at 70 percent.

Southern Africa

Domestic optimism meets operational discipline

The confidence of Southern African CEOs in their country's growth prospects has reached a new high level with 90 percent of CEOs endorsing this view. Confidence in their own businesses remains high at 79 percent, just below the global average of 84 percent. Southern African CEOs are also confident in the growth prospects for their industry (77 percent), while confidence in the global economy stands at 72 percent. That being said, the level of confidence Southern African CEOs have in the global economy is higher this year than in any of the previous two years at 72 percent compared to an average of 60 percent.

Southern African CEO confidence in global economy is rising



90% of Southern African CEOs show confidence in their country's growth prospects

Growth priorities centre on customer experience, organic expansion, skills and digitisation.

Here are the top operational priorities of the next three years identified by respondents:

Operational priorities	West Africa	Africa
Improving the customer experience	20%	14%
Organic growth	17%	18%
AI education and upskilling of workforce and streamlining processes	13%	9%
Advancing digitisation and connectivity across the business	13%	13%
Enterprise risk transformation in light of AI	10%	9%
Others (Generative/Agentic AI, inflation-proofing, sustainability initiatives and supply chain reconfiguration)	27%	37%

The region combines greater caution about company and global conditions with continuing confidence in local opportunities. On Mergers and Acquisitions (M&A), the proportion reporting a high appetite rose from 5 percent in 2025 to 37 percent this year, while 47 percent report a moderate appetite. At the same time, 53 percent intend to maintain their current approach to risk, indicating that acquisition ambition coexists with restraint.

West Africa's picture is particularly instructive: softer confidence has not extinguished strategic appetite. Rather than relying on a stronger global cycle, CEOs are considering changes to customer propositions, digital capability and their business portfolios.

East Africa

Corporate confidence outpaces the domestic outlook

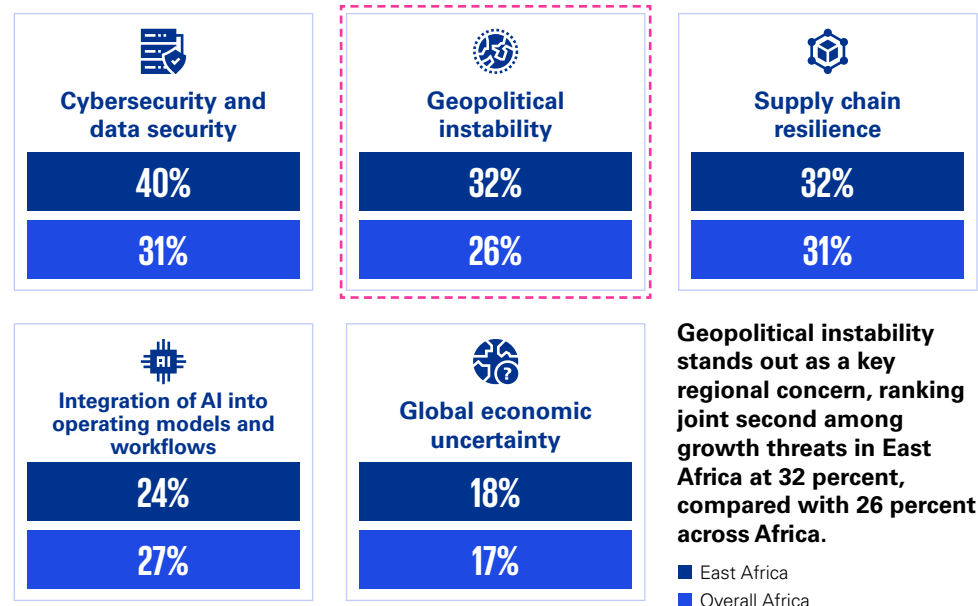
East African CEOs are particularly confident in their own organisations (84 percent), above the Africa average of 79 percent, despite lower confidence in domestic growth (56 percent). Two-thirds expect annual earnings growth of at least 2.5 percent, against 58 percent across Africa. Cybersecurity and data security lead the risk agenda (40 percent), followed by geopolitical instability and supply-chain resilience (32 percent each). CEOs are responding with a focus on organic growth, customer experience, cost resilience and digital capabilities.

The change from 2025 also reveals where sentiment has strengthened and weakened. Company confidence rose eight percentage points, from 76 percent to 84 percent, while confidence in the domestic economy fell six points, from 62 percent to 56 percent. Confidence in the global economy increased from 50 percent to 64 percent. On expected

earnings, half of respondents anticipate annual growth of 2.5–4.99 percent, with a further 12 percent expecting 5–9.99 percent and 4 percent expecting 10–19.99 percent. These results point to continued growth ambition despite the less favourable domestic assessment.

The divergence between confidence in companies and confidence in the domestic economy suggests that East African leaders see scope for company-specific outperformance. Yet geopolitical and cyber risks remain relevant to the earnings outlook, reinforcing the need for disciplined execution and investment in business continuity.

Top growth threats over the next three years



What this means for CEOs

Across Africa, the next phase of growth will depend on combining commercial ambition with financial and operational discipline. Leaders will need to protect their core businesses, direct capital towards measurable productivity gains, improve risk sensing and build organisations capable of adapting quickly as conditions change. The opportunity is not simply to grow faster, but to create earnings that are more resilient to disruption.

Note

- Percentages may not sum up to 100 percent due to rounding.
- Figures represent CEO survey responses, not economic forecasts.