

EMPLOYER OF CHOICE TOP 100

The 100 best companies to work for in Africa

Every year *African Business* partners with the Global Career Company to create its Employer of Choice ranking. This year's results emphasised the importance attributed to making an impact when deciding which organisation to work for. In the biggest study to date, this year's ranking collated the views of thousands

of African professionals to discover which brands lead the way on the continent in their appeal to prospective employees. The survey, methodology and outreach was spearheaded by leading recruitment specialists the Global Career Company in association with Willis Towers Watson.



Alex Mugan, executive director at Careers in Africa, guides us through this year's ranking.

Making an impact is key for employees in Africa

The Careers in Africa Employer of Choice Study has a dual focus, combining insight into career motivations generally among the talent pool with a brand-by-brand review. The two aspects of the survey converge in this year's leading employer and key attraction drivers.

The ranking is interesting in many ways. The key drivers and methodology have been devised by recruitment and careers specialists Careers in Africa in association with global HR consultants Willis Towers Watson (WTW). Bringing in an international partner such as WTW enabled us to look at motivations from an African perspective and pit them against those from WTW's Global Workforce Study. While factors such as salary retain an important position, the opportunity to make an impact on an organisation, in addition to learning new skills, are significantly more important than average within the African talent pool.

This message is reinforced after first emerging in last year's study, where the connection between development of the individual's career, development of the employer's business and of the markets in which they operate are closely linked.

Against this, organisations that are in the development space, such as the African Development Bank, Afreximbank, the Aga Khan Foundation and IFC performed strongly in our ranking and significantly improving their ranking compared to last year. This year the World Bank Group moved up 12 places largely because, across the board, contributing in a meaningful way to the development of Africa was seen as the key element of an employer value proposition (EVP) on the continent today.

The evolution of choice

In this, the second year of the study, work has gone into evolving the definition of "Employer of Choice". Organisations speak in aspirational terms about becoming a great employer, yet a broad understanding of how this



is quantified remains elusive. Indeed, it is more often treated in qualitative terms, as a sense of overall excellence against organisational objectives. This is unsatisfactory, as choice ultimately rests with the talent pool itself. It was with this in mind that we adjusted the methodology.

In year one we provided an average score based on a number of criteria (what we call "attraction drivers"). This gave a general picture of who is the strongest employer in terms of elements of an EVP. When we analysed last year's results we came up with an interesting paradox. Candidates wanted to work for certain institutions, but when asked to rate those institutions across a number of criteria, these institutions no longer scored so highly. We ranked companies per their score (as opposed to their popularity).

This year, we wanted to rate companies not only by how they were perceived across these

"drivers" but also how attractive they were to prospective employees. As a result we introduced new areas into the methodology. Firstly, we developed a way to bring pure popularity of employer brands into the methodology.

Secondly, we introduced a deciding factor by asking candidates to rank in order of preference the companies they had selected (a forced ranking). In sum, we had three dimensions to work with in producing the ranking: individual company scores across 15 drivers; a company's general attractiveness as perceived by prospective employees; and a "forced ranking" of companies selected by the candidates.

The introduction of a forced ranking "shoot out" created immediately interesting results. Brands that were frequently selected did not always fare well in a direct ranking versus their peers. Nor did brands with strong individual scores from the 15 drivers. It should be noted that companies were being compared across sectors (as opposed to companies within their own sector), making the process much more competitive.

In the end, of course, when we review employers of choice, we are looking for the one organisation that appeals most to the individual candidate making their career decision. In Employer of Choice, first is everything.

The return of the big brands

With overall popularity playing a role in the final standings, this year's ranking sees the return of the "big brands" and a shift towards brands with a continental presence. Where regional and local brands figure, they are the behemoths of a region or market, sufficiently well followed to stack up against pan-African organisations.

While this means that international brands feature heavily, the presence in the top 20 of the likes of African Development Bank, Nigeria LNG, Central Bank of Nigeria, SAB Miller, East African Breweries Ltd and Safaricom shows that African organisations are competing effectively in employment branding with the Coca-Colas, GE's and Microsofts.

Key attraction drivers

Does Africa have an engagement gap to accompany the talent gap?

Engagement levels in African organisations show a mixed picture compared to global averages. People's willingness to help the organisation succeed surpass global levels (nine out of 10 people report putting in extra effort to help their organisation). However, recommending the organisation to others for work trails significantly below global norms and whilst effort levels are high, people do not feel enabled to do their best work, facing substantial obstacles and lacking the tools and resources to do their job well.

To engage and retain talent in African organisations, there must be strong and consistent leadership and manager capability and a strong focus on the training elements of the employee deal. Less than half of respondents felt that managers focus enough time on people aspects of their role, and coaching and mentoring trail our global averages significantly. Less than four out of 10 people feel that they have good opportunities for advancement in their organisation.

To attract, engage and retain top talent, top organisations are now devoting considerable efforts to creating an employee experience that lives up to expectations and delivers an unbeatable deal to employees. This research suggests organisations in Africa should be devoting efforts to remove obstacles to performance, provide better tools and resources, inspire people through great leadership, support them through great line management and provide clear development opportunities.

Matthew McDonnell, Senior Consultant, Willis Towers Watson

Employer of Choice ranking methodology

The Employer of Choice ranking is the only employer attractiveness awards based entirely on the votes of the global African talent pool. The ranking (and awards) cannot be entered by brands, so there are no entry fees, no entry packs and no lobbying for nominations. Brands are simply voted among the most attractive by their prospective talent, or they are not included.

The votes that make up the Ranking are drawn from the Careers in Africa Employer of Choice Study. This is the continent's first employer attractiveness study completed at scale (by more than 20,000 professionals) from an external talent pool. That is, a survey of talent not currently working for the organisations they are reviewing. Therefore, the ranking is reflective of the impact of employer brands and value propositions on the talent market.

The survey provides a vast amount of data, with almost 100 questions completed per respondent. To draw out the results from this data requires a rigorous methodology that gets to the heart of what it means to be an Employer of Choice.

The make-up of an Employer of Choice is multi-dimensional. Popularity and brand awareness matter, as this drives the volume of applications and the ability to source. Equally important though, is the likelihood of an employer being selected over its rivals by talent with multiple offers. Finally, in a competitive talent market, the granularity of the value proposition by attraction drivers also plays a role, with the perception of the employer's ability to deliver the right employment deal a critical factor in the decision making process that talent goes through.

To reflect the multi-dimensional nature of Employer of Choice status, an Index is created from the survey results. Employers are ranked by a combination of popularity, choosability and perception across key attraction drivers, all of which are provided in the data from the survey. Only by scoring well in all aspects will a company feature in the Top 100 ranking.

ABILITY TO HAVE A REAL IMPACT ON THE ORGANISATION'S PERFORMANCE

BASE PAY/SALARY

CHALLENGING WORK

RETIREMENT BENEFITS

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

HEALTH CARE AND WELLNESS BENEFITS

JOB SECURITY

OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN NEW SKILLS

ORGANISATION'S COMMITMENT TO SOCIAL/ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

ORGANISATION'S FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

ORGANISATION'S MISSION, VISION, AND VALUES

ORGANISATION'S REPUTATION FOR INNOVATION

REPUTATION OF THE ORGANISATION AS A GREAT PLACE TO WORK

REPUTATION OF ORGANISATION TO HELP ADVANCE YOUR FUTURE CAREER

TRUST/CONFIDENCE IN SENIOR LEADERSHIP

ORGANISATION'S COMMERCIAL BRAND, PRODUCTS OR SERVICES

Away from the top 20, an impressive number of new entrants have emerged, with Econet Wireless (with its Liquid Telecom brand), Angola LNG, Sonangol, Vinci Construction, SAP, De Beers, Maersk Oil, Wart-sila, Philips, Ghana National Petroleum Corporation, Bosch, Siemens, Boston Consulting Group, Danone and Air Liquide figuring in the Careers in Africa Employer of Choice Top 100 for the first time. Here too, regional and local brands mix it with the international ones, highlighting the fact that the playing field to attract top talent is (if not level, then) competitive, and that regionalising an EVP pays dividends.

The phoney war for talent

Stepping into the "war for talent" narrative to take a view of performance across sectors, we see one or two unexpected developments. In a market where certain skills and profiles remain at a premium, the continuingly strong performance of oil and gas brands is somewhat surprising. In a slight improvement on last year, these brands make up five of the top 10. Few of these brands are hiring in anything like their typical volumes due to market pressures, but they continue to be backed by the talent pool. This may be for the opportunities they provide in terms of career progression, their international footprint and also the salaries they are known to attract.

While the number of African professionals committed to a career in oil and gas has remained high despite the downturn, it was anticipated that other sectors would target engineers who were surplus to the oil and gas companies' requirements. This has not manifested in the rankings, with few heavy industrial sectors making significant strides, either in terms of volume of companies in the ranking or exceptional individual performances. We are left with something of a phoney war for talent, where everyone is desperate for the skills they need, but not necessarily desperate enough to build employer brand appeal to knock out established players.

Meanwhile, there is a new battleground for us to keep an eye on, the one for digital talent. Along with the established technology providers (IT and Telecoms), companies from across all the sectors are in one way or another digitising their businesses. As a result we are seeing a massive demand (and as a result a gap) for digital skills. As companies fight for this talent pool, companies will have to position themselves as top digital employers, competing with the Facebooks, Googles and the African internet brands such as the Jumias of this world. This will be an interesting space to follow and we expect next year's ranking to have many more tech companies up the ranking. ■

Sarah Roe (below) of the Global Career Company talks to *African Business* about recent trends in African recruitment.

Prospective employees want socially impactful careers

African Business: You've been specialising in African recruitment for over 15 years. How have you seen the trends changing in Africa in terms of the HR space, in terms of what employees are looking for and in terms of what makes a great employer?

Sarah Roe: Over the last 15 years, we've noticed a number of trends. The first was the reverse of the brain drain. We saw massive numbers of diaspora Africans wanting to go back [to work] in Africa, and this has become much more pronounced in recent years, certainly post-2008/2009, when the markets constricted here. But also, with the improvement in tertiary education in Africa, employers are looking within the region a lot more for home-grown talent, people that perhaps have some interesting pan-African experience rather than international exposure. That's definitely been a big change over the past three or four years.

Over the past 15 years we have seen how the markets and demand have changed. When we started, South Africa was an important market with specific needs. Post-apartheid the focus was on getting skilled Africans back into the region. That's plateaued out a bit. And then we saw the rise and fall of Angola. Again, post-civil war there were massive recruitment needs across all sectors and with so much investment taking place in the country. However, with the fall in oil prices there's been a massive contraction.

From the employees' point of view, talking to people who are going back into Africa now, whereas previously the Nigerian would be looking to go back to Nigeria, a Kenyan to Kenya, people are now way more open to a regional experience.

Have the demands of prospective employees changed in any significant way?

There's been a change, a bit of a global change really, in terms of people wanting a lot more flexibility in the workplace. Work-life balance comes up in conversation a lot more now than it would have done 15 years ago. The Em-



SARAH ROE is the co-founder of the Global Career Company, which launched the Careers in Africa initiative in 2002 and the Employer of Choice Survey last year. *African Business* met up with her in London, following the Careers in Africa Summit that took place in Johannesburg in November.

ployer of Choice Survey has been interesting there in terms of some of the results. I think what is specific to the African audience is they want to be part of something that's socially impactful as well as being a commercially viable career. They want to really buy into the business and see themselves as part of it rather than just being an employee as a means to an end. That kind of social motivation or sense of worthiness in terms of what people do is definitely more pronounced within the African audience.

You mentioned that companies are increasingly looking for candidates with African experience. Can you elaborate?

Certainly for the more senior roles the expats are being replaced [with locals] in part because expats are a huge cost to the business.

Also African businesses, especially the local African national businesses, are having to be a lot more competitive in the way they operate.

They're having to be more agile in terms of how they retain their human capital but still remain competitive within the business. And so they're looking perhaps regionally for that more senior talent.

We're still seeing a lot of continuity with big multinationals in terms of their graduate intake, that's one thing that hasn't really taken a hit. The multinationals are invested in Africa and have kept their graduate programmes in place. They realised that it's a long game and you can't dip in and out of graduate recruitment without it being really impactful to the business five or seven years down the line, so that's remained pretty consistent, which is good.

In terms of the Employer of Choice survey is there anything that in particular caught your eye?

I think the one thing that is striking is that salary doesn't come out as the number one retention driver for African talent. It's obviously up there as something that is important and they need to feel valued but the overwhelming consensus is that it's much more about buying into really good leadership, belief in the business and really feeling that they're part of something worthwhile.

And so when you work with companies in terms of talent retention, what exactly are you working on?

I think a lot of it's about training and developing what those individuals feel that they can learn within the organisations. People are looking for regional if not international experience, so once they've studied overseas, yes, they want to go back to Africa, yes they want to do something impactful for the region, but they also want to see some real development within that organisation, whether that be opportunity to study within the role or move roles within the organisation and have more of a pan-African experience. That seems to be something that's very, very important. ■

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Rank	Change on last year	Company Name	Sector	Score
1	12 ↑	World Bank Group	Education, Government, IGO & NGO	16
2	39 ↑	Exxon Mobil	Oil & Gas	21
3	16 ↑	Chevron	Oil & Gas	24
4	5 ↑	GE	Energy & Utilities	26
5	77 ↑	African Development Bank	Education, Government, IGO & NGO	38
6	-3 ↓	Microsoft	IT	39
7	13 ↑	Nigeria LNG	Oil & Gas	40
8	38 ↑	Schlumberger	Oil & Gas	54
9	-3 ↓	Shell	Oil & Gas	54
10	27 ↑	Coca-Cola	FMCG and Retail	55
11	44 ↑	Central Bank of Nigeria	Banking and Financial Services	67
12	5 ↑	McKinsey & Company	Professional Services	70
13	18 ↑	IFC	Education, Government, IGO & NGO	73
14	-2 ↓	Tullow Oil	Oil & Gas	74
15	20 ↑	SAB Miller	FMCG and Retail	87
16	-14 ↓	East African Breweries Ltd	FMCG and Retail	90
17	7 ↑	Safaricom	Media and Telecoms	91
18	16 ↑	Deloitte	Professional Services	91
19	62 ↑	ENI	Oil & Gas	92
20	3 ↑	British American Tobacco	FMCG and Retail	93
21	30 ↑	IBM	IT	95
22	66 ↑	Anadarko	Oil & Gas	97
23	60 ↑	AngloGold Ashanti	Mining	97
24	28 ↑	BP	Oil & Gas	97
25	20 ↑	PwC	Professional Services	99
26	-4 ↓	Heineken International	FMCG and Retail	102
27	NEW	Econet (Liquid Telecom)	Media and Telecoms	106
28	-27 ↓	P&G	FMCG and Retail	116
29	7 ↑	Oracle	IT	122
30	-19 ↓	Unilever	FMCG and Retail	125
31	9 ↑	Anglo American	Mining	126
32	1 ↑	Halliburton	Oil & Gas	129
33	24 ↑	Rio Tinto	Mining	130
34	63 ↑	Sasol	Oil & Gas	131
35	-8 ↓	Citi	Banking and Financial Services	135
36	18 ↑	GSK	Pharma	136
37	1 ↑	Nestlé	FMCG and Retail	140
38	55 ↑	ABB	Energy & Utilities	141
39	NEW	Angola LNG	Oil & Gas	142
40	45 ↑	Diageo	FMCG and Retail	142
41	-23 ↓	BG Group	Oil & Gas	144
42	24 ↑	Old Mutual	Banking and Financial Services	145
43	56 ↑	Standard Bank	Banking and Financial Services	146
44	-19 ↓	Mastercard	Payments Technology	146
45	46 ↑	Addax Petroleum	Oil & Gas	147
46	-16 ↓	KPMG	Professional Services	149
47	48 ↑	MTN	Media and Telecoms	153
48	-1 ↓	Ericsson	Media and Telecoms	153
49	7 ↑	L'Oreal	FMCG and Retail	158
50	NEW	Sonangol	Oil & Gas	158

Employer of choice top 100

Rank	Change on last year	Company Name	Sector	Score
51	-46 ↓	Total	Oil & Gas	158
52	19 ↑	Engen Oil	Oil & Gas	167
53	-24 ↓	Accenture	Professional Services	167
54	23 ↑	Afreximbank	Banking and Financial Services	169
55	18 ↑	Puma Energy International	Oil & Gas	173
56	7 ↑	Dangote Group	Construction, Heavy Goods Manufacturing & Aggregates	176
57	NEW	Vinci Construction	Construction, Heavy Goods Manufacturing & Aggregates	176
58	-51 ↓	JP Morgan	Banking and Financial Services	177
59	39 ↑	Aga Khan	Education, Government, IGO & NGO	177
60	NEW	SAP	IT	178
61	-53 ↓	Visa	Payments Technology	178
62	NEW	De Beers	Mining, FMCG, Retail & Pharma	178
63	NEW	Maersk Oil	Oil & Gas	179
64	28 ↑	Samsung	FMCG and Retail	181
65	NEW	Wartsila	Cons., Heavy Goods Man. & Agg., Energy & Utilities	181
66	10 ↑	DHL	Logistics, Travel & Aviation	182
67	-9 ↓	Roche	Pharma	183
68	-54 ↓	Nigerian Breweries	FMCG and Retail	183
69	27 ↑	Novartis	Pharma	185
70	NEW	Philips	Cons., Heavy Goods Manufacturing & Aggregates	187
71	-67 ↓	DSTV Digital Media	Media and Telecoms	189
72	-11 ↓	Dev. Bank of Southern Africa	Education, Government, IGO & NGO	190
73	-25 ↓	Africa Oil Corporation	Oil & Gas	190
74	NEW	Ghana National Petroleum Corp.	Oil & Gas	190
75	-60 ↓	Sahara Group	Oil & Gas	192
76	14 ↑	Barloworld	Cons., Heavy Goods Man. & Agg., Mining, ICT & Tel.	193
77	23 ↑	Bolloré	Logistics, Travel & Aviation	194
78	-50 ↓	Cisco	IT	195
79	NEW	Bosch	Cons., Heavy Goods Manufacturing & Aggregates	196
80	-54 ↓	BHP Billiton	Mining	196
81	13 ↑	Ecobank	Banking and Financial Services	200
82	-33 ↓	Lafarge Holcim	Cons., Heavy Goods Manufacturing & Aggregates	200
83	-3 ↓	Airtel	Media and Telecoms	200
84	-25 ↓	Barclays	Banking and Financial Services	202
85	NEW	Siemens	Media and Telecoms	205
86	NEW	Boston Consulting Group	Professional Services	208
87	2 ↑	Saipem	Oil & Gas	208
88	-67 ↓	Statoil	Oil & Gas	210
89	NEW	Danone	FMCG and Retail	213
90	-58 ↓	Standard Chartered Bank	Banking and Financial Services	216
91	-24 ↓	Aggreko International Projects	Energy & Utilities	218
92	-18 ↓	Schneider Electric	Con., Heavy Goods Man. & Aggregates; Energy & Utilities	219
93	-25 ↓	Orange	Media and Telecoms	219
94	-16 ↓	Vivo Energy	Oil & Gas	222
95	-56 ↓	APM Terminals	Logistics, Travel & Aviation	228
96	-34 ↓	Sanofi Aventis	Pharma	228
97	-11 ↓	Etisalat	Media and Telecoms	237
98	NEW	Air Liquide	Oil & Gas	244
99	-83 ↓	Vodafone	Media and Telecoms	247
100	-90 ↓	Petrobras	Oil & Gas	263

Ecobank, the most multinational African company, a bank with 20,000 staff and the largest African footprint, makes an interesting case study for anyone in the recruitment or HR space. We spoke to Julie Essiam, Group Head of HR and Corporate Affairs at the bank, to find out her thoughts on managing such a large talent pool, recruitment challenges and Ecobank's employer value proposition.

Putting HR at the centre of strategy

When we meet Julie in London on her way back to Accra where she is based, she has just come from a board meeting in Geneva with the Global Fund. Interestingly, Julie is not only head of HR at Ecobank but also heads the bank's Foundation as well as its corporate affairs division. To an outsider, she admits, it may look a little strange but from her perspective it actually puts her in a unique position to take part in helping shape reform and play an active role in developing the skills that the African private sector needs. It is essential, she says, for government and the private sector to work together on developing the right skills and the fact that she has an intimate insight into the HR needs of the group, as well as overseeing the work of the foundation and corporate affairs, affords her a useful overarching perspective on the congregation of business, education and government.

So what is it that she sees as the biggest gap in terms of skillsets? Undoubtedly for her, it's leadership skills, and not just leadership skills at the CEO or management level, but right through all levels of an organisation. And this is something that her own organisation is addressing. They have an academy at their group headquarters in Lomé, Togo, and they have dedicated \$45m in the last two years alone to train staff and develop leadership capability throughout the organisation.

"We're building leadership capability right from the beginning of the talent pipeline all the way to the end. We feel this is a key enabler to transformation as well," she says.

Transforming Africa

Transformation is a word that comes up frequently in our discussion and Essiam feels that this is at the centre of the Bank's Employer Value Proposition. Ecobank, she says,

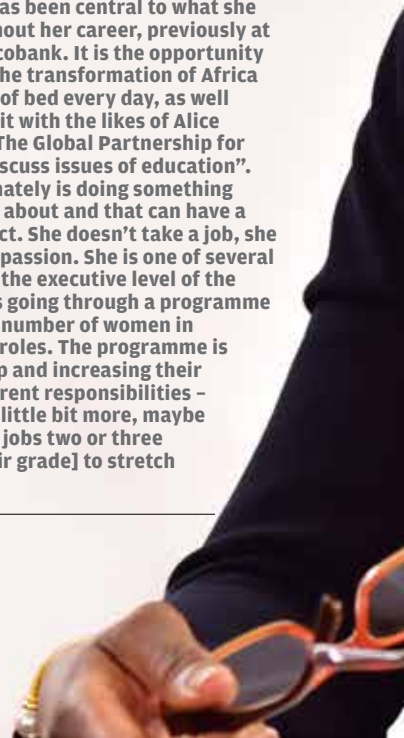
was formed to lead the transformation of Africa and the vision from the top down, she stresses, is to impact economic and social development. Ensuring that potential recruits share this value, she says, is a central aspect of the recruitment process and she is confident that this culture permeates the whole organisation. It is usually, she believes, one of the key reasons that candidates choose to work for the bank.

Another is the international dimension of the bank. It has a presence in 36 African countries and moving between the bank's operations across them is both a staff benefit and an obligation. It is stipulated in their contract that they could be moved anytime, anywhere to another of the group's locations, depending of course on the needs of the bank. Essiam feels that this mobility grants a development opportunity and a perspective offering the triple benefit of operational effectiveness, leadership readiness and global competitiveness for her people. Providing international mobility for African talent is, in Essiam's view, as much a blow struck for the continent as for her organisation.

In the Employer of Choice Top 100, one key attraction driver was trust in senior leadership at an organisation. Essiam definitely agrees with this. People, she confirms, want to be associated with leaders. In the markets where they are the number one bank – that is, many countries in West Africa – they are spoilt for choice and talent effectively comes to them. In East Africa, where they are less established they are having to adopt a different strategy, bringing some of the best leadership skills from the bank to develop local talent wherever it may be. Getting the balance right, between local and "international" African talent is also delicate, but that all fits into the greater strategy of developing a pipeline of

Julie Essiam - The resumé

Essiam started her career on the graduate programme at Chase Manhattan Bank, which we know today as JP Morgan Chase. She says she has been lucky at being at the right place at the right time but when you speak to her, you soon realise that her drive and her inability to take no for an answer made her stand out from the crowd. She was the only black person of an intake of 22 on the graduate programme. And before she knew it, she was sitting on the diversity committee alongside some very senior people at the bank, working on the transformation agenda. She saw that she could have a massive impact on people's lives and the direction of the bank, and it has something that has been central to what she has done throughout her career, previously at Citi and now at Ecobank. It is the opportunity to contribute to the transformation of Africa that gets her out of bed every day, as well as being able to sit with the likes of Alice Albright (CEO of The Global Partnership for Education) "to discuss issues of education". Her success ultimately is doing something she is passionate about and that can have a meaningful impact. She doesn't take a job, she says, she takes a passion. She is one of several women sitting at the executive level of the bank. The bank is going through a programme to accelerate the number of women in decision-making roles. The programme is about mentorship and increasing their exposure to different responsibilities – "we push them a little bit more, maybe even giving them jobs two or three levels above [their grade] to stretch them".





leaders in a way that is aligned with the overall group strategy. Having the right leadership is necessary to attract future leaders and to also enhance the employer value proposition.

A key strategic function

To the outside world the HR function can be seen as administrative, looking at pay, ratios in terms of gender or company make-up, but Essiam says she wouldn't be in a job if it wasn't central to strategy. As a matter of fact, when the new CEO (Ade Ayeyemi) joined last year, she was one of the first people he called to think through the strategy.

"People implications are huge on any strategy. Our own HR strategy, we've broken it up into two key roles: aligning the people strategy to the business strategy and enabling the success of the strategy – that is, ensuring its successful execution."

Essiam's team went to the extent of preparing speaker notes for the executives to ensure the strategic roll-out to all employees proceeded smoothly. She is adamant on HR's strategic role: "If HR doesn't sit at the core of the strategy, then sorry, you don't need to be an HR head. You can't, there's no role for you."

Talking strategy now, one area where Essiam says the bank wants to gain an advantage over its peers is in the digital space. She agreed that there is going to be a talent war over candidates with digital skills, but it's not only about mobilising the best talent in digital. Across the organisation, departments are being asked what their digital strategy is, from front, to middle to back office, even in HR. The bank is focusing on a digital transformation over the next five years, and it is not only about hiring but gearing the whole organisation to adopt that mindset and think and act differently.

Ecobank, Essiam notes, knows that it needs to be nimble in order to compete with others. "We are only 28 years old, not 200 years like some of our competition. To compete and be stronger than our rivals, we need to be entrepreneurial and innovative in the way we think".

Connecting this to people again, Essiam points out that an entrepreneurial spirit is a quality Ecobank is seeking, particularly for front office positions.

So what is Ecobank's EVP? It all comes down to that one central theme, passion for African transformation: "You'll be surprised if I say it, but I'd say 90% of 'Ecobankers' have the same drive and ambition as myself in terms of a passion for driving transformation and I think that is our unique proposition."

Not too surprised though, if the palpable enthusiasm Essiam exhibits is permeating the business via its people approach. ■

SM Law: operating in the heart of Dubai.

An interview by Neil Ford

Dubai and Abu Dhabi continue to grow incredibly quickly, becoming global investment centres and creating a great deal of legal work in the process. As a law firm with operations in both emirates, as well as in Egypt, SM Law is ideally placed to analyse the situation. Our associate editor, Dr Neil Ford, interviewed the head of legal at SM Law, Mr Abbas El Bahrawy, to find out more.

NF: How has the legal sector in the United Arab Emirates changed since you began operating in the country?

AEB: We have been working in the legal industry for more than 17 years and some of our experts have more than 30 years' experience in the sector. This experience allows us to say that the rules and laws in the United Arab Emirates in general – and in Dubai specifically – are being developed in conjunction with a wide range of technological developments in various fields. Overall, a stable situation is being maintained in such a way so as to aid investment, investors, residents and citizens in the country.

NF: Has the incredibly rapid growth of Abu Dhabi and Dubai changed the nature of the cases you deal with?

AEB: Of course, growth on all levels, including economic and political – as in any country in the world – determines the type of cases that you secure. In Dubai and Abu Dhabi, as they are the most developed emirates in the country, there is continuous growth in all aspects and areas.

NF: How can SM Law Firm help in establishing and starting up new businesses in the UAE?

AEB: We help and support all companies and investors working in different fields and industries, whether they are commercial, industrial or managerial, in investing in the United Arab Emirates, and Dubai specifically, by providing all means of legal security, from feasibility studies to providing the legal advice and consul-

The advantages we have at SM Law Firm that the international law firms don't have are firstly that we are licensed to work as lawyers and legal advocates in Dubai

tation that is needed to help make the best decisions on starting work or investing in the United Arab Emirates.

Moreover, we work on the procedures of establishing businesses, the issuing of licenses and all related activities. SM Law Firm assists in finding convenient places for business to take place and undertakes all the work needed during the process of establishing these businesses. As part of setting up a firm, we make sure we provide them with the services necessary to acquire residency. After establishment, we are available for all the legal needs that company may have, including advice and legal support, to help the company run their activities smoothly in the United Arab Emirates without future mistakes.

NF: Why did you decide to offer very affordable legal advice?

AEB: We offer this as a motivation for all our clients to quickly take the right decisions in all aspects of their life. We find it a duty for us to offer a helpful environment and give our clients the feeling that their case or situation is our top priority and more important than anything. Thus, our motto is "We are for a secure life".

NF: What advantages do you offer over the big international law firms that may not have as much local knowledge?

AEB: The advantages we have at SM Law Firm that the international law firms don't have are firstly that we are licensed to work as lawyers and legal advocates in Dubai specifically and the United Arab Emirates in general – an advantage that international law firms do not have. Secondly, at SM Law Firm, we speak more than ten languages.

Thirdly, our experience enables us to have enough knowledge in all aspects and fields of the law and prosecution in the United Arab Emirates. In addition to that, we have a diverse team of legal advisors and administrators, which allows us to deal with all nationalities while understanding the cultures that they come from, when they are in the United Arab Emirates in general and in Dubai in particular.

