

VERA SONGWE

UN. Executive Secretary of the
Economic Commission for Africa



Vera Songwe is the Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and the 9th Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the leading thought leadership institution in Africa whose goal is to generate knowledge and conduct research in policies in support of accelerated economic diversification and structural transformation. Following her appointment, she became the first woman to lead the organization in the organization's 60 years and the United Nations's senior regional official.

As a leading figure on macroeconomic and debt issues, Songwe, focuses on "ideas for a prosperous Africa"; its organizational reforms have revealed crucial problems of macroeconomic stability; financing for development, growth and the private sector; poverty and inequality; digital and data transformation; and trade and competitiveness. With determined leadership on trade, she is pushing for a new approach to trade deliberation, developing macroeconomic frameworks for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and refocusing the discourse on debt and fiscal sustainability. As Executive Secretary, Songwe first created a private sector platform at ECA with a strong focus on climate change, energy, the business environment and improving sustainable financing for the SDGs.

Songwe re-energized the ECA to produce significant results that led to groundbreaking policies for Africa's development agenda. She defended Africa's ratification of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) as well as the idea of having better competitiveness in Africa. She launched the Digital Center of Excellence, an on-demand source of technical advice for countries on their digital identity and digital economy, **and established the African Women's Leadership Support Fund (AWLF), a Developed impact fund that aims to accelerate the growth of funds managed by women in Africa.** Songwe focused on strengthening old partnerships and building new ones. It has established strong relationships with the African Union Commission and strengthened alliances with international financial institutions, including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

She is recognized for her long experience in providing development policy advice and her vast experience in delivering development results for Africa. In March 2020 she was named one of the "50 most powerful women in Africa" by Forbes, was named one of the "100 most influential Africans" by Jeune Afrique in 2019. In 2017, she was also ranked among the "100 Most Influential Africans" by New African Magazine and one of the "20 Powerful Young Women in Africa". In 2018, she was chosen by the Institut Choiseul for International Policy and Geo-economics (France) as one of its "African leaders of tomorrow" and was ranked in the "Top 10 of women entrepreneurs in Africa" by the African Business Review in 2014. In 2015, she was ranked among the "25 Africans to watch" by the Financial Times.

Prior to joining ECA, Songwe was Regional Director of the International Finance Corporation, covering West and Central Africa. Previously, she held several positions at the World Bank, including as Country Director for Cape Verde, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania and Senegal, and Advisor to the Managing Director for Africa, the Europe and Central and South Asia. Prior to joining the World Bank, she was a Visiting Fellow at the Federal Reserve Bank of Minnesota and the University of Southern California.

Songwe is a Non-Resident Principal Investigator at the Brookings Institution. She is also a Member of the African Union Institutional Reform Team under the leadership of the President of Rwanda, Paul Kagame, and a Board Member of the African Leadership Network and the Mo Ibrahim Foundation. As an official observer for the Pathways for Prosperity Commission on Technology and Inclusive

Development, co-chaired by Melinda Gates, Strive Masiyiwa and Sri Mulyani Indrawati, she works to highlight how new waves of technology can work to benefit the most poor in the world. She has written extensively on development and economic issues, including on debt, infrastructure development, fiscal and governance issues. She has published extensively and contributes to the development debate on a wide range of platforms, including the Financial Times.

She holds a Doctorate in Mathematical Economics from the Center for Operational Research and Econometrics, a Masters in Law and Economics and a Diploma in Advanced Studies in Economic and Political Sciences from the Catholic University of Louvain in Belgium. She also holds a BA in Economics and Political Science from the University of Michigan. She was also a student at Notre Dame de Lourdes School in Bamenda, Cameroon.