

## COVER INTERVIEW

# light work

Benjamin Kabeya is delivering Schneider Electric power solutions that will help enhance Africa's energy requirements. **BY KERRY DIMMER**

**By 2030, the world's current electrical** energy demand will double. Some 1.3 billion people – mostly in Africa and India – will still not have access to power; and of the world's projected 8 billion inhabitants, 60% will be residing in cities, 2 billion of whom will be classified as middle class.

What these figures represent is a demand for smarter grids and solutions, especially for Africa where electrification problems are one of the most discussed topics on the continent, along with poverty, food security, health, education and development as well as urbanisation.

In all instances, power is the common denominator that will help ease a plethora of problems, which is why Schneider Electric, a world leader in energy efficiency, will play a significant role in providing Africa with solutions to sustainable development.

Benjamin Kabeya is Schneider Electric's newly appointed zone strategic customer and segment leader for Africa and the Caribbean. His task is a mammoth one – to engage and expand four key sectors that have strategic value: mining, metals and minerals; water and waste water; oil and gas; and food and beverages. Combined, these sectors influence the GDP of most African nations and, as such,

require electrification solutions that will not only be sustainable but life-changing.

'You have to look at Africa as a whole to understand where development is most needed,' says Kabeya. 'Certain countries have reasonable power capacity, such as Egypt, Morocco, Algeria and South Africa, but others lag behind significantly, requiring enormous investment.'

'Another issue is that electrified assets are not managed efficiently and are unable to cope with the demand, especially given the requirements of smart technology.'

A further challenge is how to take power to remote communities and ensure that it is efficient, productive and green, especially the latter, as this is one of Schneider Electric's most important tenets globally.

The Schneider Electric Services solution looks to a life-cycle support system. Central to this concept is examining how energy is used, as well as transforming the electricity grid into one that is 'smart'. The implication is that businesses and consumers alike need to shoulder the responsibility of managing power usage and consumption in real time, adapting usage for peak and non-tariff power brackets.

'The five-step life cycle Schneider Electric has adopted comprehensively provides an

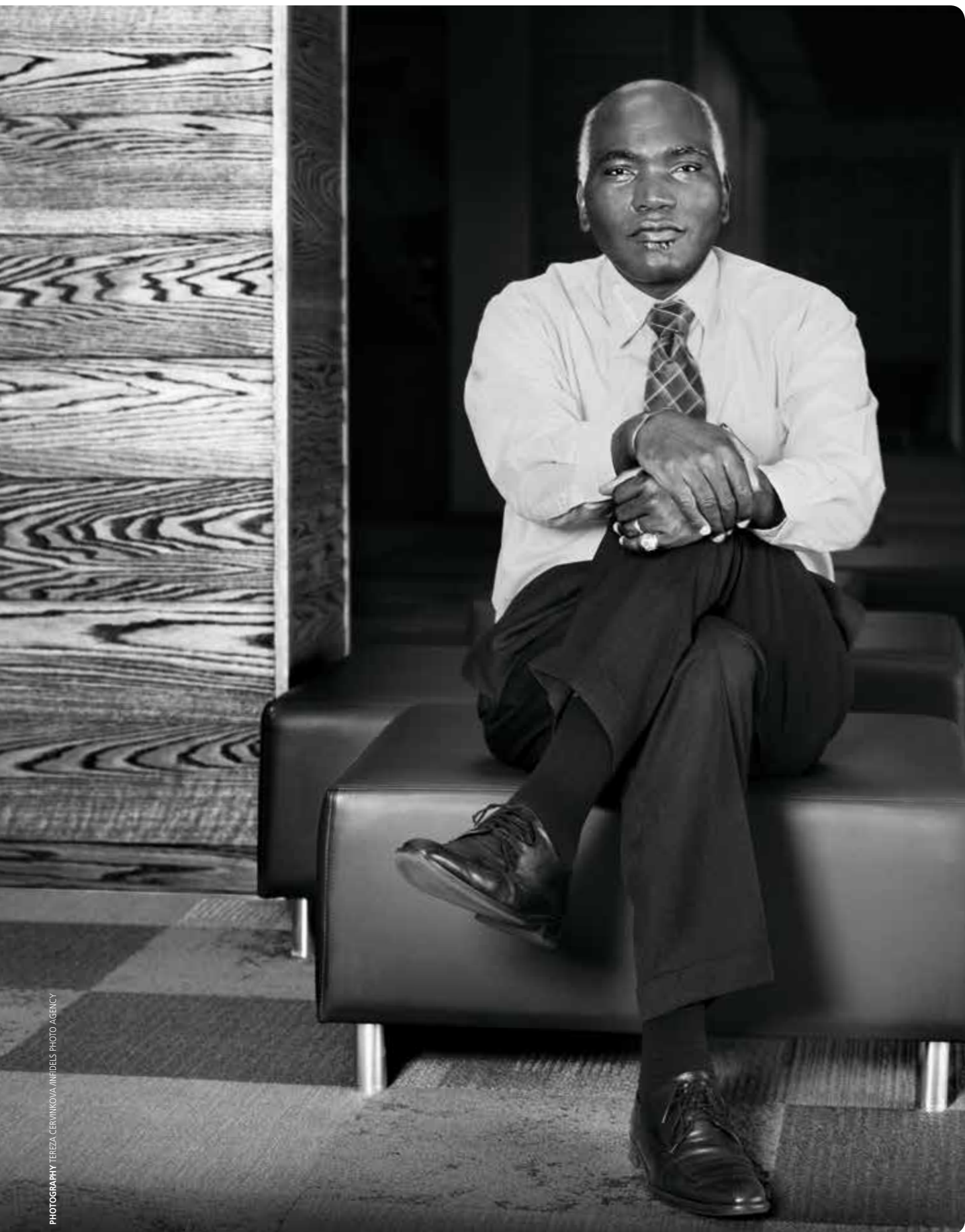
entire range of services,' says Kabeya. 'From design, build, operational, improvement and renewable services, backed by a full range of individually tailored solutions, we are able to strategically partner with a wealth of diverse industries and consumers.'

'Understanding diversification is important as sooner or later, all people and businesses are going to need to use technology in their environment. Our contribution is to anticipate the future of that use, to ensure we improve the process of energy management, and in combination, provide an on- or off-grid solution. This applies equally to public and private enterprises, not forgetting SMMEs.'

Kabeya's point is well made, especially in the mining sector where Schneider Electric excels at servicing the cross-over needs of the public utility to the private or state-owned mine and, by obligation, extending electrification to the communities surrounding the mining activity.

'The Schneider Electric Africa penetration is very weighted in this sector,' says Kabeya. 'Minerals are everywhere on the continent, similarly water demands. Oil and gas is also a burgeoning growth market. For example, just a decade ago Ghana wasn't talking oil and gas, neither was Uganda or Mozambique – not to the extent they are now.'

'This is never a solo journey. You may be able to run fast by yourself, but to walk with others means you achieve more'



PHOTOGRAPHY TEREZA CERVINKOVA/INFIDELS PHOTO AGENCY

'You have to look at Africa as a whole. Certain countries have reasonable power capacity but others lag behind significantly, requiring enormous investment'

'New resource taps are usually in rural environments and therefore present a challenge for developing nations that desperately need to grow their economies. Compounding this is that any existing power infrastructure is either old, in disrepair or just inadequate.'

For socio-economic development to be successful, it needs to revolve around suitable and sustainable power supply. Developing markets – and the resulting new businesses and investment explorers – are no longer in a position to tolerate fluctuations in power, and in some cases it is critical to ensure an uninterrupted supply.

Schneider Electric's answer is EcoStruxure, a trade-marked concept that presents systems that are simple, cost-effective and reduce waste. It's an architecture that aligns power-management, white space, process and machines with building control, and security through open-platform software.

The benefits of EcoStruxure are in five key areas of business management: power; building; process and machine; IT/server room; and security. This essentially means that energy is monitored everywhere, which Schneider Electric guarantees translates into at least an average of 30% energy efficiency.

Kabeya explains that the key is to make sure the right technologies are all connected. 'Being close to the client is crucial,' he says.

'The best way to do that is to ensure the provision of the best service and, once that is established, to be consistent. This is one of Schneider Electric's strongest assets – discovering, understanding and aiding the entire value chain.'

Value beyond the products and solutions that Schneider Electric provides can also be found in its BipBop programme.

Three complementary initiatives – Business, Innovation and People – help fund entrepreneurs with a contribution to small-business development and those companies participating in electricity supply and access. They also aid in setting up business models, distribution channels and dedicated innovative offerings, as well as developing training modules for those seeking careers in the energy trade environment.

BipBop also steps outside its immediate power ambit into healthcare, agriculture and rural depopulation, with a mandate to eradicate fuel poverty and contribute to the social upliftment of communities.

Meanwhile, the Schneider Academy offers a range of electrical efficiency training solutions and a voluntary teachers association, providing coaching to young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Kabeya understands the desperate need for such services. The son of a blue-collar worker from the rural lands of the DRC, his

qualification as an electrical engineer would not have been possible without support from his father's employers in terms of his primary education, followed by a comprehensive government bursary for his studies at university.

Kabeya has extensive African experience as a result of career positions that have seen him based in Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi. He has devoted himself to the sub-Saharan region and, more importantly, customer satisfaction, which he says is the reason for his personal career success.

'For me, value comes from being able to see results. I am the first to jump in, plan and motivate for change. In many respects I think of myself as one of the pioneers of Africa's development in terms of access to electricity. But this is never a solo journey. You may be able to run fast by yourself, but to walk with others means you achieve more.'

'What I see is a full value chain of effects,' he says. 'When you provide access to power in a remote village, children can deepen their study because they have light. Higher education follows, television brings further knowledge, water is portable, nourishing food can be cooked.'

'I have experienced this but it is no good just repeating what I know – others need to feel it and that is when they buy into your vision for the future.' **AD**