

## Africa: Chicago Teachers Invested in Africa and You Should Too



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Chief Investment Officer for the Chicago Teachers' Pension Fund Angela Miller-May.  
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GUEST COLUMN *By Angela Miller-May*

My family drilled the value of education into me. I'm a first-generation college graduate because my family emphasized that education was a priority. For us, it was the path to success.

The work that I do now is my way of giving back to those who make that success possible for others. There are 88,000 active and retired Chicago teachers who rely on the [Chicago Teachers' Pension Fund](#). But like many public pension funds, we are underfunded, at about 54 percent.

From 2017 to 2019, I was invited to participate in investor delegations sponsored by the U.S. Government to various countries in Africa. These delegations helped educate U.S. investors about market opportunities across the continent. Now [Prosper Africa](#), a U.S. Government initiative to increase two-way trade and investment between the United States and Africa, is continuing this work.

On these trips, we had the chance to explore investment opportunities firsthand and meet with members of multiple investment communities in Africa.

Before my first delegation to Durban and Johannesburg, my understanding of Africa was based on what I had seen on TV or read in the news, and I perceived Africa as a place of risk. But all of those perceptions quickly went out the door: I saw that Africa was filled with opportunities.

Africa's story is a story of growth. [Last year, the continent was home to half the world's fastest growing economies](#) . Its urban populations [are set to triple by 2050](#) , and over the next 20 years, its workforce will become [the largest in the world](#) . I knew that Chicago Teachers' needed to be a part of that long-term growth story. For a long-term investor like us, it just made sense. How can you not invest in a continent that is about growth?



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Chief Investment Officer for the Chicago Teachers' Pension Fund Angela Miller-May and other asset owners during an investor delegation visit to Dakar, Senegal.

Of course, Africa's story is also a story of need — the need for investment. In sub-Saharan Africa, small and medium-sized businesses—the primary drivers of job creation and innovation — [are facing a huge financing gap](#) . Growing these businesses (especially those operating in key sectors such as healthcare, telecommunications, and agribusiness) is essential for economic development and a better quality of life. These companies need growth capital so that they can meet increasing demand and continue to supply people across Africa with goods and services as the continent's population grows.

On that first trip, I immediately realized that there were growth opportunities that could meet the investment needs of Chicago Teachers' and bring much needed private capital into Africa.

So we researched those opportunities, and on the following delegations, I focused on due diligence and met with bank representatives, general partners, and my African peers. In Africa, the largest pension funds are led by African women. It was really a special experience to sit and talk with my peers, women who manage large African pension plans like Linda Mateza of GEPF and Mantuka Maisela of EPPF.

The discussions brought us closer together and shortened the distance between the U.S. and Africa for me. When investing in private equity in Africa, they considered the same risks, the same investment criteria, and the same structures as we do when investing in private equity in the U.S.

Ultimately, these delegations contributed to Chicago Teachers' making our first investments in Africa. We have committed \$20 million to two Africa-focused private equity funds. In many ways, it's a perfect fit. An underfunded U.S. pension fund seeking yield and returns and qualified African-based investment managers seeking access to capital. When those two come together, we find a lot of solutions in each other.



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Chief Investment Officer for the Chicago Teachers' Pension Fund Angela Miller-May at the Johannesburg Stock Exchange during an investor visit to South Africa.

Those visits to Africa were an experience. I can't tell you the impact that standing on [Gorée Island](#) had on me. As I looked at where the ships docked and boarded slaves, I connected the pieces of history in my mind, coming full circle to understand the opportunities that I have as an African American. The cost that was paid for me to be in the position where I am able to reach out and help a continent that was originally our home.

Institutional investors should explore investment opportunities in Africa. We have the opportunity to boost investment and job creation in Africa while earning the returns that we need. Together, we control trillions of dollars. We can use that capital not only to benefit our stakeholders, but also to spur social and economic impact in emerging markets. We can do both. We can make money and do great things.

We can do well, and we can do good.

*Angela Miller-May is the Chief Investment Officer for the Chicago Teachers' Pension Fund, a \$12.5 billion pension fund that services a membership of over 88,000 active and retired Chicago Public School teachers. She was recently honored as the Distinguished Woman Investment Professional of the Year, receiving the WIP (Women Investment Professionals) 2020 Trailblazer Award. She was one of Institutional Investor's 2020 Industry Voice Innovators and its 2019 Change Maker of the Year. In 2019, she was named one of Crain's Notable Women in Finance and one of Trusted Insight's Top 30 Chief Investment Officers. She has also testified at a 2019 congressional hearing on the topic of diversity and inclusion.*

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