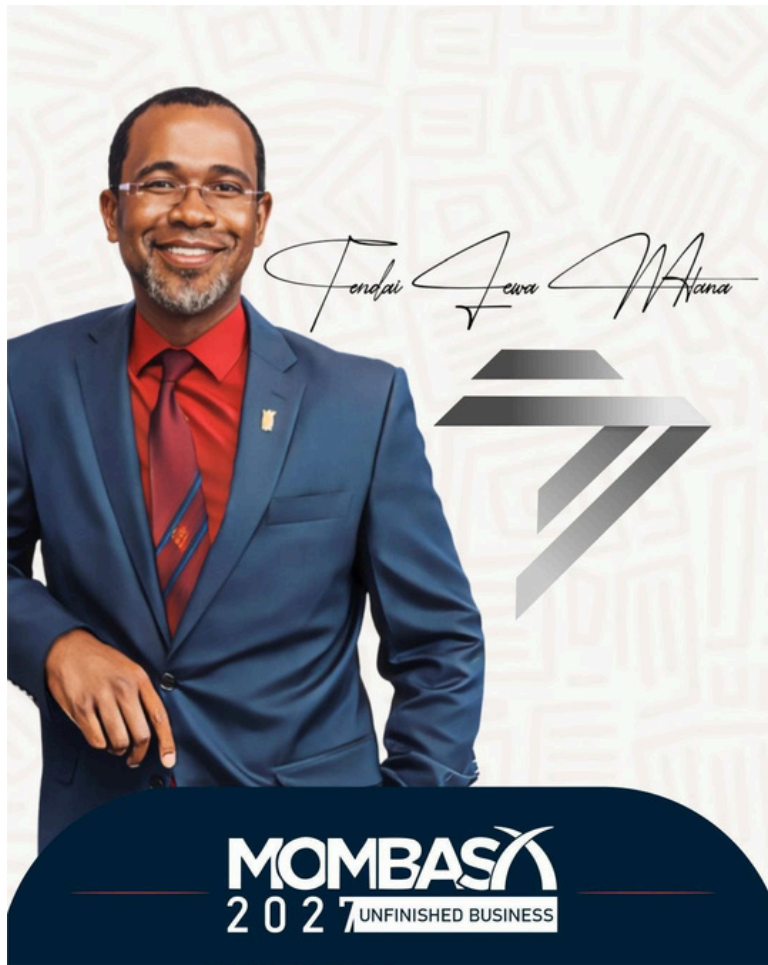




Like many nations across Africa, Kenya faces challenges that cannot be solved by government and politicians alone. They require people who can bring together public policy, political leadership, private enterprise, communities and development partners around a shared purpose.

I have spent more than two decades working at that intersection, facilitating policy, negotiating outcomes, advising governments and convening people and institutions to turn shared ambition into practical action.

I believe Kenya's greatest opportunity lies in devolution. Beyond the constitutional transfer of functions and resources, devolution gives Kenya the opportunity to

demonstrate a distinctly African model of diligent, accountable and collaborative governance — one in which national and county governments work together, communities shape priorities, and public institutions have the capability to deliver.

My work has increasingly focused on building and facilitating such models.

A career built around convening

Over the past 20 years, I have worked as a government and international relations practitioner, strategic adviser, negotiator and team leader across the public, private and development sectors. My experience has taken me into policy design, programme development, resource mobilisation and international partnerships across the blue economy, education, peace and security, talent and workforce development, regional trade and city diplomacy.



I have had the privilege of working with political and administrative leaders at many levels of government — including former Presidents, Governors, Mayors, Cabinet Secretaries, Principal Secretaries, Commissioners and senior executives.

These experiences have taught me that successful public policy is rarely the product of one institution or one individual. It emerges when people with different responsibilities, knowledge and interests are given the opportunity to work together toward a common outcome.

That is the role I have chosen to play: to convene, facilitate, negotiate and help build the conditions in which others can deliver.

Mombasa and the practice of collaborative diplomacy

My experience in government gave me an opportunity to put this philosophy into practice.

As a member of the Mombasa County Cabinet, I served in advisory and liaison capacities with the National Government and international development partners, working across areas including city diplomacy, regional trade, talent and workforce development, and the blue economy.

This brought me into engagement with institutions including the U.S. State Department, World Bank, Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, USAID and the Food and Agriculture Organization.

Working alongside former Governor Hassan Joho, former President Olusegun Obasanjo, former Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn and the Brenthurst Foundation, I contributed to the development of Future Cities of Africa — a political, policy and development coordination framework connecting Mombasa with other strategically important African cities, including Lagos, Hargeisa, Cape Town, Buffalo City and Rabat.

The experience reinforced something I have come to understand deeply: cities and counties can be powerful instruments of diplomacy and development.

They are where citizens experience government most directly, where economic opportunity is created, and where relationships between communities, markets and institutions can be transformed.

Peace, security and the Horn of Africa

My work has also taken me into complex environments across the Horn of Africa, including conflict-affected and post-conflict contexts.

Through engagements with organisations and initiatives including the United Nations Development Programme, Strong Cities Initiative, African Union, IGAD and Kenya's National Counter Terrorism Centre, I have worked alongside practitioners addressing questions of peace, security, resilience and sub-national governance.





These experiences have shaped my approach to leadership.

They have taught me to listen before acting, to understand the interests behind competing positions, and to design solutions that can work within the realities of institutions and communities.

For me, diplomacy is not simply about negotiation between governments. It is the practice of creating sufficient trust between different interests for people to act together.

Diversity as an asset

Throughout my career, I have led and mentored teams comprising people of different generations, professional backgrounds, cultures, abilities, genders, faiths, ethnicities and experiences.

I have learned that diversity is not something an effective leader manages around. It is something a leader learns to work through and draw strength from.

The strongest teams I have been part of have not been those in which everyone thought alike. They were teams in which people were given the space to bring their knowledge and experience to the table, while remaining united around a shared objective.

That principle informs how I approach public leadership today.

From student politics to public leadership

My political journey began as a student leader at the University of Reading in the United Kingdom in the 1990s.

It was a formative period. I watched the political transition in Britain and observed how leadership operates within established political cultures and institutions. Those experiences prompted questions that have stayed with me throughout my career:

How does political leadership translate into effective government? How do institutions become capable of delivering? And how can politics create the conditions for people, communities and markets to prosper?

My time as Secretary, Mvita CDF in 2003 - 2008, Nominated Councillor Mariakani Town Council 2003 - 2007, and decision to run for Governor of Mombasa County in 2013 brought those questions much closer to home.

It was then that I became convinced that Kenya needs a more deliberate relationship between politics, government and state capability – one in which political vision is matched by the institutional capacity, partnerships and discipline required to deliver.





A continental vision

I believe Kenya has an opportunity to demonstrate something much bigger than successful devolution.

We can help develop an African model of collaborative diplomacy — one that respects local knowledge, connects national and county governments, welcomes responsible investment, strengthens local institutions and enables communities to participate meaningfully in the creation of value.

Africa possesses extraordinary natural, human and cultural wealth. The challenge before us is to build the systems, relationships and institutions capable of unlocking that wealth and positioning it within the common wealth of nations.

This is particularly important as Africa becomes increasingly connected through trade corridors, cities, ports, digital infrastructure, blue economy opportunities and regional markets.

My ambition is therefore not simply to participate in African development, but to contribute to the systems of collaboration that make African development possible.

What I am rising to do

I remain deeply passionate about Africa and committed to Kenya's role in shaping the continent's future.

My professional life has taught me that leadership is ultimately measured not by the positions we hold, but by what becomes possible because we were there.

I want to continue bringing together people who do not ordinarily sit at the same table, political leaders, public servants, communities, businesses, investors, development partners and international institutions, and help create the relationships through which shared ambitions become deliverable outcomes.

I believe Kenya can become a model of diligent public service, collaborative diplomacy and inclusive economic growth.

And I believe our future will be built by people who are prepared not simply to speak about what Africa can become, but to rise, organise, collaborate and serve until it becomes possible.

Tendai Lewa Mtana

Public Policy & International Relations Practitioner | Strategic Adviser | Diplomatic Convenor

