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## Meet Contec Global, A Family Business That Is Committed to Investing in Africa

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*I chronicle Africa's success stories and track its richest people*

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**Contec Global Group** is a leading U.K.-based security technology company that operates across several developing countries. Contec Global Group, which is a family business, has an established presence across the globe including in Asia and Europe, and for decades, the conglomerate has started spreading its tentacles into many African countries. Today the group is engaged in providing integrated systems-based solutions in the fields of **Secure Technologies**, **Infrastructure** and **Hospitality** to leading companies in many African countries. From pioneering identification technology and immunizing whole harvests from viral threats in sustainable and organic fashion, to spearheading mobile technology in markets rife for dynamic upswings, Contec Global Group has led by example. Its founders, the acclaimed Berry family, steward the interlinked portfolio of the conglomerate so as to ensure that emerging market sustainable development is measured and diversified, while the squalls in its respective paths are efficiently maneuvered.

I recently caught up with Contec Global Group's founder Dr. Benoy Berry (BB), his son Roheen Berry (RB), Sahir Berry (SB) and Financial Team representatives Tor Langoy and the company's Chief Financial Officer Srinivasa Reddy (SR) in Lagos. We talked about Contec Global's international reach and its ambitions for Africa.

### **Tell me about Contec Global's portfolio and the rich history behind the organization.**

**BB:** My academic career took flight at the University of Delhi in India, where I earned a Bachelor of Arts with first class honors in Economics. I then obtained a Masters of Arts in Finance from the University's Delhi School of Economics, where I achieved a place on their Roll of Honors merit list. I understood during this formative time that effective articulation would play a guiding hand in my brokerage of agreements and fostering of innovation in strategically challenging climates and later invested in my education once more, receiving my Doctorate from World Open University, where I studied communications and arts.

Accordingly and following my formal education, I worked in the investment banking and marketing industries before venturing out on my own. I founded Continental Transfer Technique Limited and became its Chairman (Contec Global Group) in 1984, with offices on four different continents around the world.

With the right management and a personally diverse academic background complimentary to navigating the challenges of potential public and private sector bureaucracy, I focused on establishing Contec Global as a worldwide leader in securities technology at the onset, through, in large part, identification software.

Over time, we indeed diversified this portfolio, with Contec Global expanding its operations into the energy, financial technology, agro, telecommunication and hospitality fields.

It has been a unique honor to garner accolades for our endeavors, such as earning the Nation Builder Award and the African Order of Merit Award on e-Governance and Biometrics Technology, as bestowed on to us by the Institute for Governance Research and Leadership Technology. We believe we have earned such acclaim; throughout our efforts, we maintain that developing state-of-the-art, technology-driven solutions that utilize accountable systems is a methodology applicable across a wide range of sectors – It authenticates objects and people; it immunizes crops from airborne or fauna-driven diseases. It connects the farmer to the manufacturer to the consumer. These advanced features can improve a country's infrastructure and that is just what we intend to do with our partners in governance across Pan-African emerging markets.

### **What are the present-day challenges and conversely, opportunities in emerging market African integration?**

**RB:** We often integrate our portfolio, be it in information technology or agro, in parts of the world where infrastructure is still deemed a luxury. With that, no doubt, comes the challenge of how to do so efficiently and responsibly; can we employ and thusly empower a localized workforce? How can we circumvent, resolve or enhance issues with connectivity?

No regulatory environment is assuredly the same and so our approach, as has always been, is tailor-made to meet the challenges inherent in operating in the climates in which we proudly serve as entrepreneurial stewards. It's what drove me back to Africa following the conclusion of my academic career at Harvard University in Massachusetts, rather than residing in the United States. This region has fed my family for generations.

**BB:** Take 'agro', for example; surely, the emerging marketplace in Nigeria, where we hold headquarters, and beyond, has taken notice amidst the commodity crises of late the need for proper diversification to deter outright oil dependency and develop sustainably. Conversely, we saw this reliance as an opportunity and through diligent R&D and subsequently, the deployment of 'smart'-bio-herbicides and pesticides, wholly organic in nature, we have played a lead role in, for example, checking the Tuta Absoluta outbreak (tomato leafminer) which threatened to deplete the tomato crops across the country, a Nigerian staple. The enriched Nigerian soil we developed and utilize has garnered bountiful harvests. Our vocational training programs that, in socially responsible fashion, compliment our portfolio are educating and integrating the next generation of Nigeria's workforce. We are ultimately providing an interwoven offering making our chances of eradicating hunger in the times ahead that much greater.

**SB:** Connectivity is also challenging. In Nigeria, like so many parts of Africa, many students study by streetlight. Boons to public works are in short supply and yet the technology-driven, social media population is unwavering; it grows by leaps and bounds daily, in a contemporary desire to connect and from such engagement, enhance quality of life.

The opportunity to play a role in this evolutionary process was far too attractive to ignore.

**RB:** Connectivity issues also dictate the format of our integration – Should there be no electricity, for example, our software would operate via candlelight or sunlight. And it has before. I would argue our greatest ‘value-add’ is within our innate ability to manage and operate projects in many fields and in starkly different conditions, including ICT projects where there existed no ICT infrastructure. And we integrate, look to change those conditions, with integrity and responsibility.

**TL:** Then of course with regard to your question of challenges and opportunities, for many sovereign states, banks and corporates is the issue of liquidity. It’s high on the agenda of challenges. This is also an opportunity that we in Nationwide Finance, BD Globe Capital together with Contec Global seek to capitalize upon. Companies and investors who have been considering investing in Africa have a great window of opportunity today, as asset pricing is low across the boards while yields are good.

Further, it is critical to adhere to best western practices to create a conducive environment for foreign investment and ‘think outside of the box’. Contec Global surely thinks and acts outside of convention and has been a great investment partner for us at Nationwide Finance and my own company, BD Globe Capital.

**SR:** Agreed. With the advent of identification technology comes the question of population management. Census. Budgeting for our companies to facilitate supply to meet demand is just day on day operating in Africa. We take pride in our wherewithal in ensuring profits are adequately divided for growth.

**Roheen, you’ve stated that identification services are at the forefront of emerging market development. How so?**

**RB:** Identification is not just a human right; it is, in definition, ever-evolving. We are proudly stewards of identification biometric technology. Whether we champion optical character recognition (OCR), facial recognition software or the advent of the e-identity card in Nigeria, hosting Africa’s largest population and perhaps most vibrant environment, Contec Global has pioneered the measurement of physical and/or behavioral characteristics that are unique to each individual and from such findings, formulated solutions (such as e-visas, personnel management, control systems and smart cards) to inhibit fraud (as it is estimated that counterfeiting, tampering and theft affect 7% of world trade, equivalent to \$960 billion USD of losses), while allowing for effective taxation and at the same time, empowering through the provision of financial autonomy. Our identification software will allow for creditworthiness and provide inclusion for the next great contributors to the global marketplace.

**Contec Global also owns and oversees Wiesmann Sports Cars GmbH, a German luxury automobile manufacturer. What were the motivations to acquiring Wiesmann and how does development and expansion of the Wiesmann brand compliment Contec Global’s strategic growth?**

**RB:** Wiesmann was founded in 1988, with our cars since that time being manufactured by hand in Dülmen. Our logo, which by way of aerial view serves as a German business icon as the foundation of our factory, portrays a gecko, as we claim our cars "stick to the road like geckos to a wall". In 2014, ours was one of the top five most recognizable brands in Germany.

Contec Global Group has vast experience in Africa, which continues to be our primary market. However, in the year 2008, we decided to aggressively build our presence in Europe through our operations in the United Kingdom and across the E.U., as well as in the Middle East via a trusted network of partnerships and strategic alliances.

Our technological expertise is fundamentally complimentary to the automotive industry, a market Germany stewards, much like that of its economic leadership of present-day Europe.

Accordingly, the German market offered a uniquely attractive environment for entrepreneurial achievement.

It was a strategic business decision for our Group to acquire the Wiesmann brand, as we view great synergy in their malleable methodology set out by design to appeal to evolving customer tastes with that of our corporate mantra of predicting the next great evolution in 'supply' as a forecast to advancing market 'demand'.

**On the 21<sup>st</sup> April, AfriOne (subsidiary enterprise to Contec Global) will launch Nigeria's first smartphone, produced by Nigerians, for Nigerians. What are your thoughts on the tremendous precedent this sets and where does AfriOne go from here?**

**SB:** A reliance on foreign-produced smartphones at high costs was deemed an opportunity by our Team; a prospect to provide, not just Nigeria's first in-country produced and distributed smart tech, but the provision of an e-ecosystem in which coupons can be garnered from mobile wallets, money can be sent in real-time and even loans can be facilitated, all from the touch of one, proudly Nigerian product.

AfriOne thusly serves Africa's largest socioeconomic power player with reliability, while hosting cutting-edge technology, sleek design, an affordable price point, and particularly, an inherent dedication to financial integration for all through automatically installed mobile banking and financial technology (FinTech). We like to say; "AfriOne is consistently and accountably offering mobile products for everyone"

It's safe to suggest that we are excited at the potential for empowerment and from it, prosperity that AfriOne will bring to our market in Nigeria and accordingly, well beyond.

**TL:** AfriOne is a phenomenal example of how Contec Global and Sahir Berry are changing Nigeria and Africa for the better.

**Where does Executive Leadership envision Contec Global as an overarching enterprise in five years' time? What 'leave-behind' would you wish to provide to this international readership?**

**RB:** Our Pan-African footprint is a source of great pride and I view our portfolio further expanding across the continent and geo-commercially, well beyond. We have an extensive network of partners from the Asian 'Tiger Markets' and across Europe, for example, with whom we have the pleasure of collaborating and view such alliances as paramount to mutually beneficial, emerging market development in a fashion that continues to be both sustainable and responsible.

**TL:** We all benefit from autonomous development in Africa. BD Globe Capital implement smart, wholly-innovative capital solutions in tandem with the forward-thinking Contec Global Group to capitalize on new ventures, sharing their passion about emerging market opportunity and what they as a Team can do for citizenries on the continent; I predict further expansion in to strategically exciting sectors under their mantra of unprecedented accountability in public-private sector collaboration.

**SB:** Our portfolio has been profitable from execution because we have established relationships of trust with our partners in both the public and private sector and with our clients and customers. Maintaining this commitment without compromise while providing inclusion to what we truly envision our 'home continent' (I previously studied in both the United States and Switzerland) through next generation technology, leveraged by our powerful research and development management team will only enhance this model for years to come.

**SR:** In reflection and from competitive intelligence, it would seem the odds were overwhelming such a multifaceted portfolio would achieve the success that it has in the international business arena. While many may attempt same, I believe our unique model will stand alone and stand the test of time for generations to come.

**BB:** In five years' time, wiser. We had the foresight to acknowledge that malleability will allow our enterprise to evolve with the times. Our predictive nature as an organization, coupled with the seamless communication we foster within our corporate climate gives us a significant competitive advantage.

As we grow, we must never lose sight of the commitment we originally gave our clients and customers in providing tactical, technology-driven solutions to the challenges inherent to emerging world globalization, while supporting programs throughout that ensure the next generation will be a brighter one, well prepared for said next generation challenges as they arise.

It's in our hands to create such lasting change.