



Short Bio

Dr. Wanjiru Kamau-Rutenberg is a visionary leader and cultural polyglot with a track record of turning bold ideas into lasting institutions. She currently serves as Managing Director for Africa at the Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT, part of CGIAR. In her role, she leads a team of 600+ scientists across 19 countries, shaping climate-smart, inclusive agricultural innovation.

A dynamic speaker and experienced board member, Wanjiru brings insight and rigor across sectors. She is the founder of Akili Dada and Black Women in Executive Leadership (B-WEL), and previously led initiatives at the Ford Foundation, Schmidt Futures, and AWARD.

Named a White House Champion of Change and one of the 100 Most Influential Africans, Wanjiru is sought after for her strategic clarity, global perspective, and commitment to stopping the waste of human potential. In addition to speaking five languages, Wanjiru is fluent in research, activism, and impact—always bridging worlds in service of creating a more equitable future.

Long Bio

Dr. Wanjiru Kamau-Rutenberg is a connector, builder, and cultural polyglot working across agriculture, climate, gender equity, and leadership. As Managing Director for Africa at the Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT. In her role, she oversees more than 600 scientists across 19 countries, managing a \$70M+ research portfolio that advances sustainable and inclusive food systems across the continent.

A seasoned executive with deep board experience and global visibility, Wanjiru has spent over two decades leading across academia, civil society, and philanthropy. She is the founder of Black Women in Executive Leadership (B-WEL), an initiative incubated at the Ford Foundation, where she served as a Senior Fellow. Prior to that, she was Executive Director of the Rise program at Schmidt Futures and led AWARD (African Women in Agricultural Research and Development), where she designed pioneering programs focused on gender, science, and climate resilience.

She began her career as an assistant professor of politics and later founded Akili Dada, an award-winning leadership incubator investing in young African women. Today, she is a frequent keynote speaker, advisor, and moderator—sought after for her bold ideas, sharp wit, and rare ability to speak with fluency across sectors.

Wanjiru serves on the boards of the Autodesk Foundation, Syngenta Foundation, and the Global FoodBanking Network, among others, and advises multiple global initiatives, including the Africa Food Prize, Malabo Montpellier Panel, and Co-Impact's Gender Fund. Her strategic experience spans both nonprofit and private sector spaces, and she brings unique value to boards looking for trusted guidance on ESG, global development, and inclusive innovation. Recognized by the Obama White House, United Nations, and the Ford Foundation for her leadership, Wanjiru has been named one of the 100 Most Influential Africans and a Ford Foundation Champion of Democracy.

Born in Kenya and raised between Nairobi and the U.S., Wanjiru is deeply Pan-African in vision and global in experience. Fluent in five languages, she brings that same multilingual ease to the cultural, political, and strategic spaces she navigates. She holds a PhD and MA in Political Science from the University of Minnesota, a BA from Whitman College, and an honorary doctorate from the same institution.

Speaking Topics

Dr. Kamau-Rutenberg regularly speaks at global convenings, executive leadership retreats, academic institutions, and corporate forums. Her most requested speaking topics include: Leadership & Legacy: Navigating power, bias, and purpose as a global Black woman executive

- Climate & Equity: What inclusive climate solutions look like from the African continent outward
- Agriculture & Innovation: Gender, food systems, and the future of global development
- Pan-African Possibility: How Africa can stop looking East and West—and start looking forward
- Activating Human Potential: Building systems that work better for the people who need them most
- Cross-Sector Fluency: Lessons from bridging research, activism, philanthropy, and boardrooms
- Personal Power: Mothering sons, mentoring women, and holding values in high-stakes space

