

# Geneva's Bordier Hiring to Double African Client Assets

By Giles Broom | Feb 14, 2014 12:01 AM GMT+0100 | [- Comments](#) [✉ Email](#) [🖨 Print](#)

Khalil Marcos, head of Geneva-based **Bordier & Cie.**'s Africa desk, says he is using the contacts he made during 20 years as a commodity trader to attract millionaire private-banking clients in Africa.

Since joining Bordier from **Credit Suisse Group AG (CSGN)** in 2011, Marcos has used a network developed while trading wheat, corn, rice and sugar at Glencore International AG and Cargill Inc. to build the bank's managed assets for Africa to about 300 million Swiss francs (\$336 million). Marcos says he doesn't join rivals touting for clients at events in hotels or cherry-picking the Swiss ambassador's contact list. He is more discreet.

"I use my network," Marcos, 52, said in an interview at Bordier's office in Geneva's old banking quarter. "Word of mouth is a banker's best friend in Africa. If you do well for a community or a person, then he will recommend you."

Gregoire Bordier, from the fifth generation of a family who provide three out the firm's four managing partners, is hiring client advisers as his bank bids to more than double assets in Africa over the next two years. Inflows from faster-growing **emerging markets** helped the 170-year-old wealth manager counter withdrawals in western Europe last year as a crackdown on **tax evasion** pushes American and European customers to pull money from offshore Swiss accounts.



Photographer: Christophe Leu/Bordier & Cie. via Bloomberg

Khalil Marcos, head of Bordier & Cie.'s Africa desk, said, "Word of mouth is a banker's... [Read More](#)

“We’re focusing on the sub-Saharan African market as that’s where the growth is,” said Bordier, whose bank had more than 10 billion francs under management at the end of December. “We’re looking to build this team.”

## African Potential

The number of African millionaires surged 9.9 percent to 140,000 in 2012, according to a June report by Capgemini SA and Royal Bank of **Canada**. That was the fastest rate of increase outside North America as the economies of countries such as Nigeria and Ghana grew at more than 5 percent in 2012. Millionaires in Nigeria, Kenya and Angola will more than double by 2030, boosting the prospects for private banking on the continent, New World Wealth, a U.K.-based research firm, said on Dec. 3.

While Africa’s richest man **Aliko Dangote** is ranked 24th in the Bloomberg Billionaires Index with \$25.1 billion, Bordier is targeting individuals with \$1 million to \$6 million to invest.

“We’re focusing on small entrepreneurs,” said Marcos, whose family came from Lebanon, before settling in West Africa. “We’re not after Africa’s billionaires.”

The bank is tapping wealth made in industries from commodities to telecommunications, while avoiding rich politicians who bring due diligence risks, according to Marcos, who worked at Glencore from 1994 to 1997 in **South Africa**. Bordier’s clients include affluent individuals among the Lebanese, Pakistani and Indian diaspora living in African cities, he said.



Photographer: Magali Girardin/Bordier & Cie. via Bloomberg

*Bordier & Cie. private bank managing partner Gregoire Bordier said, “We’re focusing on...*

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## Client Clusters

Bordier has clients in Ivory Coast, where Marcos grew up, and across West Africa in Nigeria, Ghana, **Burkina Faso** and **Senegal**. Other customers come from the **Democratic Republic** of Congo, **Uganda**, Kenya, Tanzania, and **Mozambique**, said Marcos, who is the firm's first banker dedicated to Africa and worked at Cargill in Geneva from 1997 to 2004.

The firm, which opened an office in Uruguay in 2007 and another in Singapore in 2011, is avoiding "over-banked" North Africa where competition is more intense, said Bordier. The bank won't send advisers to countries with tight foreign-exchange controls and restrictions on nationals remitting funds abroad, such as **Ethiopia**.

**UBS AG (UBSN)**, **HSBC Holdings Plc (HSBA)** and **Barclays Plc (BARC)** are among the wealth managers competing for African entrepreneurs and individuals enriched by the sale of stakes in family-owned businesses.

## Swiss Transfer

African clients usually transfer money to Geneva where investment managers allocate funds in different currencies to equities, bonds and other asset classes, Bordier said. Funds may also be entrusted to partner banks in London, especially if customers need money in the U.K. to buy property or pay school fees.

Bordier, which has a presence in Paris and London, doesn't have a branch network in **Africa** and won't establish representative offices on the continent, Marcos said. While the continent is a "land of opportunity," there are challenges, he said.

"Marketing is difficult in Africa," said Marcos. "It's a difficult place to travel in. It's not like going to London or Paris and the relationship managers going to Africa must like the continent."

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