

Young African Leaders Call for Change

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- Africa's young leaders call for change in closing of World Economic Forum on Africa in Addis Ababa
- World Economic Forum participants want integrity in leadership and narrow country interests set aside
- For more information about the meeting, please visit: <http://wef.ch/africa2012>

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 11 May 2012 – Young African leaders called for greater optimism and transformative change to bring about a more positive image of their continent at the closing plenary session of the World Economic Forum on Africa. A call was made for current government leaders to think beyond single country interests and to collaborate on a regional basis to unlock entrepreneurship.

One project that is imminently achievable with regional cooperation is the proposed Inge Dam on the Congo River, which could significantly expand the African power grid and change the infamous satellite photograph of Africa at night as a dark expanse, said Euvín Naidoo, Co-President, South African Chamber of Commerce in America (SACCA), South Africa.

Another panellist, Yawa Hansen-Quao, Founding Director, Leading Ladies' Network, Ghana, said her biggest wish for Africa is to bring integrity back to the continent's leadership. She said there is a sense of "brokenness" about the leadership in Africa and it has to be restored to good health.

The young global leader panellists and audience participants in the closing session, entitled "Shaping Transformation: Africa's Rising Leaders", were asked a series of questions about their visions for the continent and their sources of inspiration.

The question of what "big, bold, audacious, hairy idea" might bring about major transformation in Africa elicited responses that ranged from deeply-felt wishes for inspired and selfless leadership to a desire for fewer potholes in the streets.

Tewodros Ashenafi, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, SouthWest Energy (HK), Ethiopia; Young Global Leader said the world's future is predicted on rapid advances in the areas of brain research, nanotechnology and biotechnology and he dreams of Africa becoming a source of innovation in these three things. "How cool would it be for Africa to manufacture parts of the human body with biotechnology?" he asked.

Other "big ideas" included blanketing Africa with broadband to bring down connectivity prices, forging aviation agreement to allow easy travel around Africa and obviate diversions to other continents, granting people in all countries property rights that they can leverage for capital. Other answers included teaching peace in schools and getting rid of military-style school uniforms, repatriating all money stolen from Africa by corrupt individuals and salted away in developed countries, and young Africans being portrayed a great deal more in media and literature.

Asked what myths about Africa need dispelling, participants mentioned the ubiquitous “basket case” stereotype, the so-called lack of talent, that young people as misguided and irresponsible and that North Africans are not really Africans.

In response to the young leaders’ views, Pravin Gordhan, Minister of Finance of South Africa, said the session had been one of the most inspiring things he had heard in a long time. They showed commendable idealism, which is “what the world needs right now”. Gordhan said no transformation can happen without clear ideas of what society wants to achieve. “Africa is in very safe hands if these are the leaders of the future,” he added.

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