

Report on the Panel Discussion

Life After COVID-19 | How the Younger Generation Can Secure Our Future
Perspectives from Rwanda on the Collective Role of Millennials in Safeguarding the Future

On the occasion of the Africa Shared Value Leadership eSummit 2020

02 – 05 June 2020

Discussants

Fred Swaniker, *Founder & CEO - African Leadership Group (Moderator)*

Honourable Prof. Anastase Shyaka, *Rwanda Minister – Local Government (Panelist)*

Rosine Ndayishimiye, *Senior Associate: Agriculture - Bridge2Rwanda Services (Panelist)*

Christelle Kwizera, *Managing Director – Water Access Rwanda (Panelist)*

Liban Mugabo, *Managing Director – Safe Gas Rwanda (Panelist)*

Regis Umugiraneza, *CEO – Carl Group Rwanda (Panelist)*

Report By

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Introduction and Context

Africa is home to the fastest-growing human population in the world, from an estimated 140 million in 1900 to a billion in 2010. According to UN predictions, this figure is expected to have risen to 2.5 billion in 2050 (constituting a third of the world's workforce) and more than 4 billion in 2100. Currently, Africa has the fastest-growing youth population in the world having 70% of its population under the age of 30 with the average age of an African being 19 compared to Europe (42 years) and North America (37 years) (worldometers.info).

By 2055, the continent's youth population (aged 15-24), is expected to be [more than double](#) the 2015 total of 226 million. Such projections present great opportunities, with a vibrant workforce and large market, primordial to increase the wealth of the continent. In sharp contrast with such optimism, a combination of these projections when associated with the daily challenges currently faced by the continent such as poor health care and sanitary conditions, malnutrition, hunger and high unemployment rates among others, Africa faces the risk of increased hardship for its people.

With the outbreak of the COVID-19 global pandemic, the African continent has not been an exception to its devastating effect on livelihoods and national economies despite their already strained status, pre-pandemic. It will probably take Africa longer than any other continent to recover from the socio-economic downturn resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Now, more than ever before, it has become obvious that any chance of defying the odds and securing the future we want is to leverage Africa's most available existing and projected resource: our youth. Africa direly needs to unlock the potential of our youthful population.

In this discussion, on the core principles of shared value, participants set out to dissect from their varying experiences and backgrounds, what actions young Africans should take today that not only have an immediate impact but will also secure a desirable future of the continent. Actions that empower the continent for posterity. The discussion also aimed at drawing insight from existing challenges (faced by businesses and societies) amplified by the pandemic and how they could be addressed to bring about fundamental systemic changes with regards to

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greater access to finance, business networks, routes to market and cross-border collaboration for young millennials.

Discussion and Proceedings

It was apparent from the panel discussion that **the role of the youth in building societies and forging the future of nations** cannot be undermined. Drawing evidence from one of Africa's success stories - Rwanda, Prof. Anastase Shyaka highlighted the role young people played in ending the genocide and maintaining solidarity in building what is called the "New Rwanda". Following up to the event that led to the outbreak of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, the armed militia that put an end to this melancholic moment of history was formed by predominantly young vibrant people with the oldest being in their early 30s.

Scanning through Rwanda's economic and entrepreneurial landscape, Prof. Shyaka remarked that all the businesses and innovations around the country whether in Information Technology, Water/Sanitation amongst other sectors are for the most part being led by young people. Young people in Rwanda have been vigilant in capturing opportunities and forging the way towards innovation. They have portrayed a sense of ownership and self-confidence in this journey.

The role of leadership has also been very vital in driving youth engagement in the national strive towards transformation. Still referencing the case of Rwanda, Prof. Shyaka called attention to the fact that through various initiatives driven by government leadership, a number of homegrown solutions have been adopted for resolving domestic problems. These homegrown solutions responsible for the U-turn post-genocide can be traced to the social sector, community health and Umuganda amongst others. All this has been built on the wheels and wishes of young people. While the government plays a pivotal role in stirring a nation towards a positively transformative future, Prof. Shyaka made it clear that all these efforts will yield no results if the younger generation does not take ownership of the future.

The imperative of ownership can be looked upon in terms of (i) ownership of the problems, (ii) ownership of the future, (iii) ownership of a transformational mindset, and (iv) ownership in playing a role in leadership. While a committed leadership strives to create numerous opportunities in business, capacity development and social transformation, they need to be

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captured by the future holders - the youth. This has been the case of Rwanda according to Prof. Shyaka as the youth is eager and willing to be part of the transformation.

Entrepreneurship comes in as a factor of life, seeking nourishable institutional policies that give entrepreneurs the allowance to craft sustainable solutions to existing and future challenges in society. Unlike other European and American countries, African countries do not have the luxury of ample financial resources, stable markets, established supply/value chains and accommodative policies. Young entrepreneurs are therefore up against a lot of odds in order to forge the future they want. So what does it take to succeed as an African entrepreneur especially in such unprecedented times?

According to Christelle Kwizera, young African entrepreneurs need to be committed to the change they are after. This means a commitment not only to leading a profitable venture, but commitment to their personnel and staying true to the vision. With regards to the rapidly changing African socio-economic landscape, agility is a must-have. Also, entrepreneurs need to be able to lead their personnel through changing times and this requires investing in them.

While the COVID-19 pandemic was accompanied by devastating effects on businesses across the world, any entity's ability to continue operations and remain in business depends greatly on its ability to pivot and adapt to new realities. This is even truer for African businesses. While some businesses had to shut down as preemptive measures against the spread of the pandemic, some businesses considered to be essential services, needed to come up with new business strategies to serve their clientele amidst the peak of the pandemic.

According to Liban Mugabo, while the COVID-19 pandemic came with undisputable challenges, it also did present some opportunities. For Africa to successfully emerge from the pandemic, Africans need to reimagine how things are done and think about new possibilities, not just focusing on the present challenge(s). This can be achieved through agility and resilience – skills young people are endowed with and could very much be learned where lacking.

The agricultural sector remains Africa's most important economic sector. Despite it being the number one employer on the continent, Africa remains a net importer of food, spending

over \$35 billion to import food annually. Africa's food import expenditure could rise to \$110 billion by 2050, thereby weakening African economies, decimating its agriculture and export jobs from the continent ([africanews, 2017](#)). There is, therefore, the need for more young Africans to get into this sector as it presents a great opportunity to create wealth for Africa and become more self-reliant.

Among the numerous industries affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, the agricultural sector has been no exception. According to Rosine Ndayishimiye, the pandemic has simply shed more light on the great dependence and importance of the agricultural sector to the African continent. With the increasing risk of looming food shortages resulting from the pandemic, measures need to be taken to protect vulnerable communities and make supply chains more efficient. It is therefore imperative that there is a rethink to agricultural knowledge and technology so as to boost agricultural productivity.

As per Rosine Ndayishimiye's remarks, the COVID-19 pandemic and uncertainty of what the new normal will be post-pandemic, reliance on agricultural inputs such as seeds and technology need to be brought closer to where they are used. In other words, the agricultural sector needs to be hyperlocal if it is to meet the needs of the continent. The young generation stands a greater chance of meeting this objective than the older generation because the pandemic has challenged traditional labour-intensive methods of agriculture.

With agriculture facing more intense competition due to the forfeiture of land to sectors such as for residential purposes (given the increasing population), mining, conservation amongst others, the need to produce more for a population growing at a geometric progression has become momentous. According to Rosine Ndayishimiye, this need has been amplified by increasing constraints to human contact caused by COVID-19.

With **technology and innovation** being on an all-time high, a transformation has never been more certain. However, the gap between technology and people's livelihood needs to be bridged to achieve transformation. The power of technology cannot be undermined but can only manifest itself when properly harnessed. How can Africa begin to harness the power of

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technology in sectors such as agriculture that present greater potential in leapfrogging Africa's economic situation?

The global food crisis has been exacerbated by COVID-19 pandemic and the uncertainty of what lies ahead. According to Regis Umugiraneza, for Africa to get ahead of this, Africans need to be fast in adopting new technologies in the agricultural sector. While the food crisis seems to be worsening, farmers, on the other hand, are faced with challenges around farm-to-market channels. This gap presents a unique opportunity for young people to tap into and apply technology.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In concluding, Prof. Shyaka referenced the President Paul Kagame (of the Republic of Rwanda) in saying that values, principles and hard work which are prerequisites to a wealthier future for Africa can't be outsourced. An innovative younger generation is imperative for securing Africa's future needs to take ownership and keep contact with people they are out to improve their livelihoods.

Recommendations from the discussion included the following:

1. According to the Honorable Minister of Local Government, Prof. Shyaka, there are key strategic values that as a continent we need to possess that will be imperative to spark the transformation we want and secure the future.
 - a. Shaping the character of youths to reflect unity and dignity (agaciro).
 - b. The imperative of self-reliance and resilience. This is rudimentary in driving the hunger for improvement of livelihood and achieving higher levels of wealth and prosperity.
 - c. Ownership
 - d. Innovation guided by foresight. Innovation and foresight are essential for creating a result-oriented and problem-solving mindset
2. According to Rosine Ndayishimiye, the concept shared value stands true as such insights to the agricultural sector need to be shared and applied by several communities and complementary sectors so as to guarantee food security in the future and/or prepare for future pandemics (or similar situations).

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3. Africa youths need to start. There is no better time to start working for the future than now. Young people need to invest their time and resources in educating themselves on how economies operate so as to yield maximum returns on economic activities.
4. The public and private sector need to view each other as partners and not competitors on the journey to a more sustainable and prosperous Africa. This could be achieved by deliberately leveraging on each other's strengths and resources as has been and continues to be the case in Rwanda.

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