BORDERLESS TALENT

How do the global economy and local change-makers connect?

REPORT

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Innovation Village, Kigali Public Library, Rwanda
WORLD EXPO AND GLOBAL CONVERSATIONS

Since the first Great Exhibition held in London in 1851, World Expos have connected people and provided special spaces to spark dialogue amongst those who are curious about the future. With its mix of art and science, imagination and analysis, machines and ideas, nations and people, the Expo is a special place for convening inquisitive minds interested to ask questions about the future and, in so doing, learn more about each other. Expos have always been a mirror of their times.

Inspired by the format and values of the traditional majlis, the World Majlis is an original format for open, informed and measured conversations between diverse thought leaders and change-makers with the objective of helping us to explore and better understand areas of great significance for society from multiple points of view. The goal of these conversations is to generate new perspectives and incubate meaningful connections between people and new ideas.

The World Majlis takes place in the UAE and internationally in the lead-up to and during Expo 2020, with the goal of opening new horizons around Expo 2020’s theme and subthemes.

Hosted in culturally significant locations, these conversations are committed to an inclusive and constructive dialogue of the highest quality in an environment that reflects the UAE’s tradition of welcome and respect… the Majlis.
INTRODUCTION

The mobility of talent across borders and organisations is proving to be transformational in helping to shape ideas in a world that is more connected yet facing increasing divides. Africa is already proving that cross-border mobility and collaboration can provide enormous opportunities for local communities in a global economy where large, multinational corporations often wield greater influence but in which entrepreneurs and change-makers have the potential to create huge value for society.

Expo 2020 Dubai’s World Majlis in Kigali, Rwanda discussed synergies between large global companies and smaller enterprises. The session brought together current and aspiring thought leaders from across Africa and the UAE to answer the following question:

How do the global economy and the local change-makers connect?

KEY FINDINGS:

- Africa is a land full of opportunities, talents and big ideas that are unrecognised.
- Rwanda has grown to become an incubator country and a startup nation.
- The focus should be on building local capacity and at the same time apply international best practices. The secret is in localising the process.
TOWARDS A MORE INCLUSIVE & DIVERSE GLOBAL ECONOMY

The global economy is dominated by large corporations that enjoy significant capital, broad networks and infrastructure, while small enterprises often lack access to financial, technological and logistical tools, which hinders their ability to thrive. How can we create a more inclusive and diverse global economy that offers equal opportunities to businesses and encourages a culture of collaboration?

LATENT TALENT

The Majlis participants emphasised the importance of building capacity, nurturing talent and using resources locally, while still adopting best practices and learning from people and processes around the world. Participants agreed that an African approach is necessary in order to maintain the integrity of the process.

For big companies, diversity does not necessarily mean westernisation. It rather means adopting concepts like indigenisation and holocracy that will guarantee bringing different perspectives into the fold.

Building local capacity happens by empowering the youth and – at the same time – using the best foreign expertise while localising the process. Participants all agreed that greater diversity within the workplace leads to greater innovation.
“Diversity is good; it gives you a different context, it brings a different culture. But overall, I think it’s important to build capacity locally. We can learn from expats but in the long run we need to Africanise.”

Mohammed Dewji, CEO, Mohammed Enterprises Tanzania Limited (MeTL)

“To make an organisation run better, you need to get the views of the younger generation because they’re the consumers of the future and if you don’t hear from them, it’s a mistake.”

Rakesh Wahi, Chairman, CMA Investment Holding (ABN Group), Rwanda

“The more nationalities involved in a company, the more ways of profiting. The most important thing we say to companies who’d like to go across borders is ‘build a relationship with the people you’d like to work with even before you discuss business’.”

Mohammed Al Kamali, Deputy CEO, Dubai Exports, UAE

Large companies and startups both need to work towards widening the net of opportunity and providing opportunities to the brightest minds across the continent. Companies can do this by offering training and tools that will enhance their skills and the professional setting for them to implement what they have learned.

The Majlis participants identified the digital sector as one of the most effective ways to integrate people and companies in the global economy because of the increasing digitisation and accessibility globally.

Some participants suggested that one of the best ways to bring youth and otherwise atypical or ‘unheard’ perspectives into the fold is to operate businesses as a holocracy. This gives a voice to a broader spectrum of participants and ensures that the entire team feels they have a stake in operations and building the company. It also ensures that opportunity is more evenly spread, even among the lower ‘ranks’ of an organisation.

“Greatness is evenly distributed but opportunity is not. So let us identify the most brilliant people and give them the tools to learn.”

Clement Uwajeneza, Country Director, Andela, Rwanda
Participants all described the incredible wealth of ideas, innovations and the robust entrepreneurial spirit alive in the continent, and agreed that often goes under utilised and unrecognised. Even Expo 2020 Dubai’s social innovation programme, Expo Live received 23.6% of its applications from African entrepreneurs, pointing to the vibrant community of entrepreneurs coming out of Africa.

“We have witnessed a tangible demonstration of the level of entrepreneurship and innovation happening across Africa, reflected by the number of Global Innovators from the continent who have received grants from Expo Live so far – a total of 12 out of 70.”

Fatma Ibrahim, Assistant Manager, Expo Live, Expo 2020 Dubai

THE ROLE OF THE STATE

The Majlis participants highlighted the importance of government support of small businesses, and providing them with the opportunity to thrive. Governments must ensure policies that make a favourable business environment for small and young entrepreneurs are in place.

Governments have a role to play in ensuring that policies and incentives are in place to foster a favourable environment for small enterprises and young entrepreneurs to thrive. Furthermore, governments can start evaluating their own procurement processes, and bringing SMEs and startups into consideration for contracts.

“We need to ask, how can governments start employing small businesses? Public procurement processes do not cater to SMEs. They are giving incentives and opportunities to those who already have muscle.”

Claudette Irere, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of ICT & Innovation, Rwanda
THE POWER OF COLLABORATION

For the entrepreneurs in the Majlis, collaboration between big and small players is the best way forward. Small startups can be more agile than large corporates and aren’t saddled with bureaucratic or procedural challenges that larger companies face. Meanwhile, large companies have incredible resources and influence. To combine the benefits of both is an ideal arrangement for a diverse, robust and collaborative future.

“As an organisation that operates in the tech sector, particularly the financial sector across Sub-Saharan Africa, we see that there’s small, nimble organisations that can act far more swiftly than we ever could but we can bring to them potential scale, network capabilities and stakeholder discussions that then means they can grow very rapidly. Then it becomes about how can you foster that dialogue to be able to take it as a repeatable, scalable function around the world.”

Adam Jones, Vice President & Area Business Head, East Africa, Mastercard

“For corporates, governments, private sector or SMEs to survive we all need to work in the same environment and we all need to work in a way that’s collaborative.”

Henry Umunnakwe, Co-Founder, Compound55, Rwanda

In the case of Rwanda, the market is relatively small, but it has the perfect environment for entrepreneurs – especially in the tech sector – to test their ideas and then move to other regional markets. The country is moving forward to become a knowledge-based economy with the ICT sector being one of the key enablers to achieve this.

“Rwanda has positioned itself as a ‘proof of concept’ country. If you have an idea, let’s work together, let’s learn together, let’s make mistakes together and learn from it.”

Dr Shivon Byamukama, Deputy CEO Babyl, Rwanda
QUESTIONS FOR FUTURE MAJLIS CONVERSATIONS:

• How do we start creating standards (voluntary codes or government policy) that encourage and enable large and small companies to benefit from one another?

• How do we make collaborative/mutually beneficial relationships between corporaates and small enterprises scalable?

• How do you most effectively localise ('Africanise) international best practices when building a local industry that already exists abroad?

• Beyond widening the net of opportunity, how do you decrease brain drain within the continent and outside it?
THE WAY FORWARD

Expo 2020 Dubai will integrate the knowledge and outcomes of this World Majlis to inform further conversations and during the next World Expo.
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