

**MOBILISING YOUTH:** Africa's population is set to double to two billion by 2050, and channelling this tremendous reservoir of human capital to productive sectors will not only offer unrivalled economic and social opportunities but also mobilise youth to the urgent task of national and regional development.



**N**ATIONS that have excelled in innovation have benefited from substantial government investment in building a higher quality higher education system and training young minds in science, technology, IT and maths (STEM) and related fields said Ameenah Gurib-Fakim, President of the Republic of Mauritius.

Speaking at the British Council's Going Global conference recently, she said the challenge is to implement policies that foster growth but are inclusive and sustainable.

Gurib-Fakim said sub-Saharan Africa was undergoing profound economic, social and cultural transformation and there was a need to look at how the science, technology and ICT revolution can play a role in tackling its development deficits.

"As a scientist, I believe science and technology has a major role to play in advancing knowledge for improving the human condition.

"Equally important is the need to marshal innovation, mobilise investment and strengthen institutions."

She referred to the United Nations' adoption of sustainable development goals to improve human conditions by 2030, and said working out how to translate these goals into meaningful actions improving lives the lives of the poorest "must remain our guiding mantra".

The Africa population is set to double to two billion by 2050, and "channelling this tremendous reservoir of human capital to productive sectors will not only offer unrivalled economic and social opportunities but also mobilise youth to the urgent

task of national and regional development".

Basic investment in education, especially STEM and vocational skills to build human capital, will serve as the engine of the economic transformation of this continent, she said.

But tapping this potential will require vision, sound policies, innovation and investment backed by keen implementation capacity.

If we want to sustain the "Africa rising" narrative, closing the infrastructure gap is an imperative.

Only one in three Africans has access to electricity and only 6% of roads are paved.

Shortfalls like these come at a huge cost to business and people and stop movement of ideas and curtail creativity, Gurib-Fakim said.

"High-quality infrastructure can be a magnet for investment, can accelerate employment creation and support regional integration."

Technological innovation can help support global integration and foster inclusion, and sub-Saharan Africa needed to develop resources to conduct research that is innovative, creative and adapted to local circumstances.

Africa may be resource-rich but its greatest potential is its people and there is a need for good jobs to be created with and in the private sector.

Today only one in five Africans find work in the formal sector, and this must change,

she said. She also made a plea for better access for women, saying most women in Africa cannot afford not to work and they are mostly employed in informal activities that offer low productivity, low income and low prospects.

The gender divide is particularly evident in STEM degrees. Development of African research and development requires investment, and the few that have been trained have left the continent.

"Africa's brain drain has to be reversed for Africa to take its place in the fully integrated global economy", she said.

She said universities that

in engagement and multinationalism, and said Africans need to become producers and not just consumers of knowledge.

Naledi Pandor, Minister of Science and Technology, said challenges included lack of collaboration between Africans in higher education, lack of funding and the insufficient number, size and variety of higher education institutions.

She said there needed to be a diversity of provision of institutions, and in this regard we need to look at changing technical and vocational institutions to offer high level programmes.

She said we need to

There should be a focus on the development of appropriate skills and teacher training.

The promotion of distance learning, open learning and e-learning was one of the strategies we need to develop, he said. Video conferencing would enable students of one institution to help others.

He said a better focus on vocational programmes could ease the pressure on universities.

He also suggested that universities should foster their relationships with alumni to address management and funding issues.

Professor David Some, CEO of the Commission for University Education in Kenya, said the introduction of free primary and secondary education in 2003 and 2008 respectively had led to a huge increase in demand for higher education.

His comment that Kenya has, since 1990, not increased tuition fees caused some reaction.

Asked to explain, he said Kenyan education works on differentiated unit costs, for example, the cost it takes to train a doctor versus teacher, and then gets sponsors for higher cost degrees.

There is also discipline-differentiated remuneration of staff.

Pandor said she could not imagine how fees cannot rise for 10 years, saying academics would be paid poorly and infrastructure and facilities would not be renewed.

"There is a cost if we want to build a strong functioning and capable higher education system."

*This is a summary of selected perspectives at the Going Global's session on development in Africa*

# AFRICA RISING

## Perspectives on the continent's development



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have been most successful are those that provide support and expertise for entrepreneurs to move product to market.

There is a need to establish a strong link with industry and the private sector. Technology was growing at warp-speed and there is always a risk that technological advancement is accompanied by job losses.

This has led to the rise of the freelance economy and companies like Uber, and these changes have profound implications.

"In designing policies we must factor in the disrupting nature of new technologies.

We need to change what people learn, how people learn, when people learn and even why people learn."

She called for African countries to build a new enduring platform anchored

attend to curriculums and the skills that are taught as we are not producing problem-solving young people who can become independent entrepreneurs.

She said far too few young people are joining academia.

Professor Olusola Oyewole, President of the Association of African Universities in Ghana, said there have been efforts in the past few years to address the issue of access to education, but this had led to increased enrolment without an increase in staff, facilities and learning infrastructures.

Challenges included funding, quality of education, deteriorating research facilities and poor English skills.

He suggested that each country should have national quality assurance agencies setting standards and benchmarks.