

International Association of Youth and Students for Peace (IAYSP) Africa Day

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May 25, 2020



Accra, Ghana in pre-pandemic times (Photograph by Muntaka Chasant, via Wikimedia)

In celebration of Africa Day 2020, the International Association of Youth and Students for Peace (IAYSP) organized the Africa Day Youth Virtual Conference on Monday, May 25 on the theme, "A Leap into the First World: Africa can do it."

The event was organized in collaboration with several partners, in particular, the Ghana National Scout Association (GA), Water for Rural Africa, The Pan African Leadership and Entrepreneurship Development Center (PALEDEC) of Nigeria, Vodec Africa and Clifvof International.

More than a thousand participants from all across the world were engaged during this maiden webinar of YSP on both Zoom and Facebook Live. The event was moderated by Rev. Tegha King, president of the International Association of Youth and Students for Peace-Ghana, and co-moderated by Bisola Babalola, a university educationist and journalists from Kwara State in Nigeria.

The event preparation took several face-to-face meetings of YSP executives (while respecting social distancing). We achieved major headways during these meetings, in particular focusing on social media engagement and management of the Zoom platform. YSP Ghana executives thought it wise for the association to undertake a one-month subscription on Zoom in order to have its own platform and ensure fluid coordination of the event. We also issued a press release and the presenters disseminated it on social media platforms and YSP networks to ensure wider reach.

We covered four UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) during the event, focusing specifically on the contribution and the potential impact youth can bring to bear on SDGs. These were Goal 4: Quality Education; Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth; Goal 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure; and Goal 17: Partnerships to achieve the goal.

Africa Day 2020 presenters

Great speakers from various backgrounds and fields of knowledge graced the event including a renowned child artist who wowed the audience with an amazing poem performance.

With a gender balanced, international, intercultural and interracial panel of almost all age ranges, the presenters engaged the virtual audience with professional and life experiences. We initially selected eight speakers for the event. Among these, only one, Samia Nkrumah, due to last minute challenges beyond her control, could not participate in the event. We selected presenters from five countries within Africa and beyond. Ambassador Wallace W. Williams, who is the honorary consular general of Antigua and Barbuda to Nigeria came as the special guest. Daniel Asomani, president and CEO of Vodec Africa, an NGO with headquarters in Ghana; Alan Saunders, president and CEO of Saunders Consultancy LLC from the United States; Dr. Donald Agumenu, founder and CEO of Water for Rural Africa, from Ghana; Karima Rhanem, a Moroccan multiple award winner and president of the International Center for Diplomacy; Nakeeyat Dramani Sam, a Ghanaian child poet and winner of multiple talented kids awards; Stacey Fru, of South Africa, Africa's youngest international award winning author; and Daniel Matalon from the United States, founder of isthereenough.org

The speakers addressed the skepticisms of some young people regarding Africa's political and socio-economic paradigms. They identified existential leadership limitations in the continent as the main causes

of the web of consternation, doubts, fears and the myopic mindset of some African Youths; resulting in entrenched mediocrity in the life options of many.

They also deliberated on topics with intentions to identify some of Africa's chronic problems and made suggestions on how young people could take advantage of the numerous natural resources and human capital on the continent to change the socioeconomic, trajectory and leap into the industrialization level of the "First World."

Building Africa's future

The special guest, Ambassador Williams, spoke on the topic, "Preparing African youth for the Future of Africa." He expressed joy to be on a platform with young people. He stressed the need for African solutions for African problems. Instead of only focusing on achieving goals from the United Nations, African leaders should set yearly goals for Africa as a continent, for instance, on education, health, etc. He urged youths to challenge their leaders to display the appropriate leadership. He also addressed the issue of environmental degradation by other nationals who come to grab the continent's wealth. He decried the fact that most projects being implemented on the continent were "white elephant" projects, which seem huge but do not address the continent's main challenges. Instead, he called for investment into free education from primary to secondary school to get a literate society and empower youth with the tools required to move our continent forward.

Ambassador Williams also highlighted the need to boost E-learning on the continent, for which he and other key figures had established the *Africacy* Project to promote E-learning and education as the basic first step for Africa and the African youth. He also spoke about entrepreneurship, ownership of resources, agriculture and food security, the transition of youth to leadership on the continent, and the transparency of youth representation.

Be industrious

During the deliberations, Daniel Asomani spoke about entrepreneurship and the numerous opportunities around the globe. He said young Africans should change the economic trajectory from a consuming to a manufacturing one. While identifying that lack of funding and of business partnerships were Africa's biggest business weaknesses for those who aimed at venturing into capital intensive businesses, he acknowledged that the Africa Continental Free Trade Area was a great business opportunity that Africans must exploit. He suggested that a United States of Africa Trade be put in place for Africa's sustainable development.

Reconnect with African roots

Dr. Donald Agumenu, a Ghanaian politician, a philanthropist and one of Africa's finest gems, underscored the underpinning reasons for Africa's stagnation in the political and economic sectors. He said it was high time Africa rediscover herself, by readapting to our values, cultural heritage and ethics of probity, equity, justice, morality and sane politics that had in the past given the continent a unique identity and made us a people of great integrity just after colonialism. He stressed that today's democracy was full of corruption and of emphasis on "the money factor" and that this has provoked much disorder on the continent. He encouraged African young people to embrace democracy as the guide for the rule of law and order.

Dr. Agumenu underscored the media's role and condemned the use of social media for the dissemination of fake news and other ills. He urged people who engage in such acts to consider the negative impact of such deeds on the continent.

Recognize your good qualities

Professor Saunders spoke on "the centrality of virtues in leadership and relationships," emphasizing and highlighting three character traits and virtues in leadership. He noted that based on his experience of engaging with young people on the African continent, there are three characteristics of successful leadership that African youths have that American youth lack. Without character, he said, we cannot develop integrity and it's important in leadership.

The first characteristic of African youth is their capacity for public speaking. He gave the example of Nakeeyat who gave an excellent presentation of a touching poem on our environment. He said the continent has something that the rest of the world does not have -- the courage to speak eloquently.

The second characteristic, he explained, is the connection of spirituality and the physical realm in Africa, where both are seen as a whole. The third is the importance of family, community and tribes in Africa. He noted that we need to preserve all the beautiful traditions and skills we have as a continent.

The precious value of literacy

Africa's youngest international award-winning author, Stacey Fru, thanked all participants on behalf of

African youth for their taking part in the webinar. She spoke on the power of literacy among African youth. She began her presentation by noting that the youth in Africa are in a position to set the future for the rest of their lives, however, this cannot be achieved without literacy. Literacy, she explained, has been defined as the ability to understand, identify, interpret, create, communicate and compute, the basics of which should be learned in primary school.

African youth need to learn how to read and write. She observed that in many schools where she had the opportunity to engage the youth, there is a lack of infrastructure to promote literacy. The poverty cycle, illiteracy and an ignorance cycle continues, she added.

Africans, she lamented, do not seem to own or control the needed foundation for education and literacy. She ended her presentation by identifying two ways through which Africa can empower its youth: education and community engagement. Education is the first way, because with education, we can move to community engagement through activities aimed at empowering and inspiring others. She added, "We need to change the mindset of the community and address the root causes of the growth of the continent. We do not have to lose the value that literacy creates."



Accra, Ghana, during the Coronavirus lockdown. (Photograph by Kwaku Berko, via Wikimedia)

Let's look again, reconsider our concepts

A Moroccan multiple award winner and president of the International Center for Diplomacy, Karima Rhanem, spoke on the topic of how young people were and are leading the fight against Covid-19 and what we need to focus on. She began her presentation by remarking that we are becoming global citizens and globalization issues affect us, which implies that we need to interact across the world with issues that are affecting us and contextualize these issues.

Many chief security officers and especially young people, she revealed, have been at the frontline of tackling the Covid-19 pandemic as volunteers and health workers. There has been a great deal of solidarity all over the world, and also in Africa. Young African entrepreneurs are innovating and creating, using artificial intelligence (AI) to contribute to the fight against Covid-19, such as AI masks for protection and drones for raising awareness to help manage the virus.

Although Africa has been in the process of being digitalized, this transformation has been accelerated through Covid-19, particularly digitalization of all services. Many services have gone digital because of the lockdown and there have been strategies to have e-governance and digitalization of services. She mentioned the creation of free education platforms to enable students to continue studying despite the pandemic. She however noted the need to think of strategies to raise the capacity of teachers and students to have a digital culture. It was time, she emphasized, to adapt different strategies to change the mindset of the African population. In a transition to a post Covid-19 era, we need to question if our current policies are still valid. We need new business models. She also spoke about the generational gap and the need to develop policies that include a generational dialogue because this could be a problem for youth to access services etc. We ought to unlock young people's potential and take the opportunity presented by the pandemic to rethink current needs, future trends and how we can harness the potential of our youth.

Conceptualizing the world we live in

Daniel Matalon, founder of isthereenough.org from the USA spoke on the topic of "Leadership is not a lottery," focusing on seeing Africa as an emerging continent with huge human resources. From the outset, he asked the audience to respond mentally to two questions: what they perceive to be the major weakness of Africa, and what they perceive to be their own major weakness. These questions, he noted, stem from the concept that weaknesses are the seeds of our strength, so long as we know how to turn weakness into

opportunity.

His goal, he explained, is to make the world work for 100 percent of humanity, which is mathematically possible. The campaign he is leading, the #is there enough campaign, is a conversation on ways of looking at how to expand the available investment dollars for the sake of human survival. He said that globally, the world is facing a three-and-a-half trillion-dollar deficit on what it needs to invest in human survival by the way it has defined its 2030 goals, and that to have a global community setting those goals is an amazing evolution of language and culture.

He asked young leaders, especially those under ten years old, to consider the fact that the global community that we refer to is primitive in terms of leadership. The conversation around "Is there enough?" suggests that wealth is not produced by resources, although our economic systems appear to be based on this concept. If wealth were based on resources, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), for instance, would be the richest country on earth.

According to him, the reason the DRC is not able to maximize its resources is that wealth is based on agreement. In view of this, the answer to "Is there enough?" is conditional, and whether there is enough or not, the answer is agreement, not war. The Impact Launchpad campaign, which is currently being developed, therefore focuses on launching a peace treaty to say that we do not have to wait for leadership but welcome the idea that humanity can make its own peace among one another.

A few moments of bliss

"Our Environment our Home," a poem recited by an eight-year-old Ghanaian poet, Nakeeyat Dramani Sam, refreshed the audience. She thrilled the virtual audience in the most mesmerizing audiovisual format asking Africans to stand up for Mother Earth because, as she said, "Mother Earth is all we have."

Outcomes

It should be noted that this event was made a reality thanks to the sterling leadership and devotion of Tegha King, president of YSP, who went to great lengths to ensure that the team understood exactly the objective of the event and its significance. The executives of the association also collaborated fully and supported the vision of holding this amazing webinar.

In the preparation for the event, the executive team had put in place three key performance indicators (KPIs) that were going to determine the success or otherwise of the event. This virtual get-together being the first of its kind for YSP Ghana, the executive team focused on measuring the success of the webinar through the actual participation of the selected presenters, feedback from participants and presenters, and management and coordination of the Zoom platform.

The presenters' participation rate was high, as mentioned earlier, and demonstrated the high level of consideration given by the speakers to YSP as well as the fluid collaboration and excellent coordination by YSP President King. The team received positive feedback from participants of the webinar. Participants appreciated the depth of the presentations, the caliber of presenters and the harmony and seamless flow of event. They also praised the presenters for highlighting key points from one another's presentation.

Using the Zoom platform for the hosting of this event was an eye opener in many respects. The team was able to successfully display the event live on Facebook, and the entire event took place without major difficulties, despite heavy rain in Accra during the entire event. YSP Ghana was able to weather the storm and offered participants a well-organized event.

However, including non-presenters in the Zoom platform was not ideal since it led to some level of distraction. In the future, when we use Facebook Live as the main webinar medium, only presenters shall be allowed to access the Zoom platform. When Zoom is the main platform, we must take care to switch off audience videos and mute all inactive microphones.

In terms of results, we believe that YSP Ghana has been able to forge strong ties with key personalities having an impact on African youth and our innovation landscape. We generated interest in the activities, vision and mission of the association and inspired YSP's current and potential members on the latent strengths of the organization to be a pacesetter on youth issues in Ghana and beyond. We have asserted our online presence through its social media pages (Twitter and Facebook).