



6TH ANNUAL

AFRICA SUMMIT REPORT

REPORT ON RESILIENT AFRICA: LESSONS THE
CONTINENT CAN OFFER TOWARDS BOUNCING BACK
AND THRIVING IN THE FACE OF ADVERSITY



Mission

To foster understanding and engagement with Africa and African society in a fair and unbiased way.

Vision

Africa Agenda envisions a world in which the vibrant contributions of Africa and African society make a better life for everyone.

Our Goals

Africa Agenda sees to:

- 1.(Media) Identify, track, and disseminate unreported African news.
- 2.(Education) Create programs that provide the opportunity for educational exchange between Africa and the global community in an effort to facilitate valuable discourse on the media, democracy, culture, business, and economics.

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While the Africa Agenda Summit is an annual affair, it was on hold in 2020 due to the COVID pandemic. As businesses, schools and nonprofit organizations all adapted to the new rules and normal with life in a pandemic, many of us began to wonder, how we all can be resilient, able to bounce back and thrive even as we fight against a global virus?

With this in mind, the 2021 Summit was held on November 5, 2021 to spread a “pandemic of hope” by sharing lessons about resilience from Africa in small table dialogues and with a keynote address from Zaneta Varnado Johns. About 100 participants enjoyed Ethiopian food provided by Konjo Ethiopian and Zimbabwean music from Greg Tanner Harris and Adjei Abankwah, and Chihera at Denver’s Field House. The Summit was co-sponsored by the Africa Center at the University Denver. It built on a six-month series of webinars that created an international dialogue on resilience and Africa in the face of global challenges.

The Summit represented a culmination of these discussions, weaving together the various threads and offering an opportunity to go behind the news to understand the complexity and richness that Africa brings to the world. There is no better way to learn than diving into conversations together and getting to know each other. As George Bamu, founder and executive director of Africa Agenda said in his opening remarks:

“We want to change the narrative about the African Continent., We’re not dismissing the issues the African continent faces or the challenges which often lead to increased poverty or coup d’états. Those are real, they actually happen. But the thing that’s missing is the other side. In journalism, they say there are two sides to every story. But where is the other side of the story about the African continent? That is when we as an organization come in.”



Keynote speaker
Zaneta Varnado Johns.

6th Annual AFRICA SUMMIT

Tribute to the Africa Agenda

Inspired by George Ramu, Founder

By Zaneta Varnado Johns

November 2021

*I salute Africa Agenda's noteworthy cause.
Your demand for truth gives journalists pause.
It is no simple task—your honorable quest
Your tireless effort gives the world your best.
I searched the definition of truth online
What I discovered truly boggled my mind.
Is fact considered truth, or is truth a fact?
The more I searched, the more clarity I lacked!
Reality and perception are rival constructs.
Your pursuit of truth, these rivals disrupt.
One man's truth is another man's lie.
But Africa's resilience cannot be denied.
Disproportionate focus on the continent's ills
ignores decades of progress and Africa's goodwill.
You confront unfair words or tones unbecoming.
Reporters should take note that you are never quitting.
They should recycle plastic and not Africa's news.
Profit motivated coverage is a shameful abuse!
Your agenda upholds Africa's bold reputation.
Integrity is expected from all reporting nations.
What's sincere is your noble purpose and spirit.
What matters is Africa's truth—the world must hear it!*



Zaneta Varnado Johns, an award-winning poet, and keynote speaker at the event stressed the importance of listening to each other. She presented a poem written in honor of the Africa Agenda. As she said, "What matters is Africa's truth, the world must hear it."



The Dinner DISCUSSIONS

Dinner discussions were broken into nine tables each with five-to-ten people and a distinguished table leader. Table leaders brought decades of experience working in development across the African continent in a variety of disciplines - energy, health, human rights, climate change and food security, community development, education, and housing.

“We started out by talking about the problems of development in Africa, but we ended up going into all the things that Africa can teach us,” summit attendee Steve Brooks, architecture and planning director at Urban Planning Constellation, Denver, said. “The leapfrogging of technology is one of the things that I reported. They are able to leapfrog technology in Africa beyond what western nations have done. So, that’s affecting everything like energy, banking, transportation.”

It is not possible to give a full report on each of these rich but informal discussions. What we can give is a “flavor” of the discussions in areas where tables touched on potential overarching themes and similarities among best practices and lessons learned from the continent. This report is based on feedback received from each of the table leaders.

AFRICANS ARE UNITING ACROSS BORDERS TO LEARN WHAT WORKS AND TO CREATE A COMMON FRONT FOR SOLVING PROBLEMS.



Many of the tables explored how Africans are reaching out, learning and sharing resources at an increasing pace. For example, M-Pesa, coined from the pesa, the Swahili term for money, is providing an innovative system for people to exchange money wirelessly without needing a bank account. The company was launched in Kenya in 2007 but has now spread across Africa.

Various tables felt that despite being depicted in western media as a conglomeration of disconnected and hopeless countries, there are positive signs that people in Africa are feeling a sense of being united as Africans.

Increasingly open and porous borders are allowing groups to feel more united and aligned than they do being apart. African communities have not just been adopting "Western Technologies" but adapting them and "leap-frogging" to make them accessible and useful across the continent. Cell phones, for example, became ubiquitous across the continent long before the land-line transition had got into full steam in the US.

This feeling of belonging and uniting under similar goals is happening at all levels of society including regionally, nationally, and even locally. The African Continental Free Trade Area (ACFTA) is seeking to promote trade and business among countries. This landmark agreement attempts to address long standing challenges of Africans trying to do business with other Africans by supporting regulation, resources, human capital, funding, and more through at least a regional united approach.

COMMUNITIES ACROSS THE CONTINENT ARE RESOLVING PROBLEMS AND PROVIDING CARE FOR THEIR MEMBERS.

Across all the topics discussed, it became clear that community involvement is a key to sustaining solutions to problems in every country. Communities are increasingly building partnerships based on trust to bring resources and know how. For example, a number of tables considered slum-upgrading programs spearheaded by communities in South Africa, Nigeria and Kenya. Others discussed how solar is being adopted innovatively by communities in Uganda and Rwanda and other countries to charge batteries and replace wood-burning stoves.



The focus on inclusion is helping to break down barriers. They are involving youth by providing education in both mother tongues and the inherited languages from the colonial period. Both education and action are increasing awareness of human rights and helping evolve rights-based approaches into a reality that fits with local contexts.

As has been happening in most countries, women are increasingly recognized for the essential roles they play in their communities and as a powerful force for sustainable and just innovation. Many of the discussions stressed that it remains critical to give women the tools and recognition for their contributions.

In regards to energy development, electricity is critical for Africa and a continuing challenge in many places. New experiments with solar and alternative energy sources are promising. In order to serve communities energy needs to be accessible and affordable for all. This can build on the extraordinary ability of African communities to leap-frog and adapt technologies to existing problems.

Land ownership remains an area where communities need to come up with sustainable solutions. The colonial legacies have led to unfair distributions and illogical patterns of land ownership. An example of a land redistribution program in an urban slum in Kenya shows that solutions are possible where the government regulates land development and ensures greater access for people that need housing.



THERE IS MUCH TO LEARN FROM GOOD PRACTICES IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE.



While national governance and democratic systems are still a challenge in many countries, there are many examples of excellent local governments in countries across the continent. Citizens in many countries can count on significant access (in many cases better access than in the US) to their local governments. Also a greater emphasis on collective responsibility in many cultures results in strong commitment to working together to strengthen and improve local initiatives. For example, in Zimbabwe even while the country has been in decline over the last twenty years, local governments have been working with community groups to ensure that some access to education, health and basic services is maintained.

This local awareness and action is promising for improving governments across the continent and here in the United States as well. For example, youth groups have been taking the lead to hold their governments accountable to promises made and exposing bias and corruption. Community groups are building real inclusion and learning about how to build less fragile partnerships. They are fighting for rights--the only way to achieve them--and building the bridges to understand rights along with traditional values.

Africa Agenda is a community-based organization that advocates for individuals and groups to engage with Africa in a meaningful way. We are working to build a truly trans-continental community that includes Africans, African diaspora and increasing our understanding of the critical and innovative role that we must play together to move towards a better future.

As such, much of the dialogue of the African Summit will continue within networks. Networks such as organizations based in the Posner Center for International Development are critical for building understanding and contact between Americans and Africans. Education partners at the University of Denver, Regis University and the University of Colorado are helping to open up opportunities for new engagement with students. Finally, Africa Agenda's network of contributors from across the US and Africa to Africa News Matters needs to be expanded and is providing critical input to the challenge of changing the narrative on the continent.

Moments like the Summit are key to building partnerships based on mutual understanding, respect, a two-way dialogue to learn from best practices and resilient and productive relationships.

We would like to thank the participants and our co-sponsor, the Africa Center at the Josef Korbel School of International Studies, University of Denver, for making this possible.

TABLE DISCUSSIONS

Peace and Justice- Ken Scott

International Human Rights Lawyer

Development- Steve Brooks

Architect

Human Rights- Peter Van Arsdale

University of Denver, Retired Professor

Security- Abigail Kabandula,

University of Denver, Africa Center

Education- Malcolm Newton

Denver Institute of Urban Studies, Executive Director

Environmental/ Institutional Change- Robert Uttaro

University of Denver, Lecturer

Agriculture- Monica LaBiche Brown

African Development Promise, Executive Director

Partnerships- Miarri Phillips

Watson Institute Scholar

Housing- Singumbe Muyeba

University of Denver, Professor of African Studies

Energy- Luka Powanga

Regis University, Professor of Economics and Finance

People's Power- Scott DuPree

International Non Profit Consultant



Continuing the
DIALOGUE