Call for new thinking about Africa

Nurturing and encouraging a different way of thinking by Africa's thought leaders - and about Africa by the rest of the world - was emphasised by speakers at the Africa Day celebrations, 25 May, at the University of Stellenbosch Business School (USB) in Bellville.

“What is needed is an extensive examination of how thinking, strategy and decision-making in Africa may be distinct from the West,” said futurist and systems thinker Dr Morne Mostert. The Institute for Futures Research, headed by Mostert, will start a new initiative to support his call.

“We will consider the role of ancestors, elders, communalism, land-lockedness, conceptions of corruption, the role of the family and other dynamics in decision-making in and about Africa,” he undertook.

Dean of Stellenbosch University’s Economic and Management Sciences faculty, Professor Stan du Plessis, added: “The hockey stick of history for many societies in Africa is bending upwards – more dramatically than it did for the currently rich world in past decades.”

This is illustrated by the fact that the majority of the world’s fast-growing economies are now found on the African continent.

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“Such unprecedented change brings both unprecedented risk and disruption, but also unprecedented opportunities. We need to think through the possible futures for societies on our continent as it integrates with the global economy.

“The purpose of such long-term grappling with the possible future is to understand how the path of decisions that start with each of us leads to different possible outcomes for ourselves, our companies and our societies,” concluded Du Plessis.

Development finance expert Prof Charles Adjasi pointed to the Ivory Coast, Ethiopia, Kenya, Morocco and Rwanda as economic “growth drivers”; while the “top performers” were Rwanda, Botswana, Mauritius and South Africa. It was noteworthy that none of these economies were commodities driven, he said.

Adjasi’s wish list for Africa’s future included diversified and competitive economies, green urban cities, Africa centered education and active committed citizenry, as well as good leadership. Specialised knowledge and a critical inquiry and understanding of the science of development finance were equally important in ensuring the kind of future for the continent - as foreseen by the founders of the Organisation for Africa Unity (now African Union), said Adjasi.

Frik Landman, director of the USB’s executive development arm, cautioned that Africa’s future should not be solely viewed through an economic lens.

“The focus should be transdisciplinary - that is thinking and designing that addresses current issues that cannot be dissolved by a singular view,” he explained. “We should bring together academics, practitioners, researchers, scientists, political and community leaders, as well as business people, in a serious effort to dissolve the pressing problems facing Africa.”

The event, co-hosted by the IFR, USB and USB-ED on the university’s Bellville Park Campus and in Johannesburg, was aimed at business people, scholars and people generally interested in the future of the continent.