

A celebration of resilience

On this Africa Day 2020, we celebrate our resilience in the face of the disruptive Covid-19 pandemic. Our resilience stems largely from our youthful population and the continuing embrace of values of *ubuntu* that enable interdependence, interconnectedness and mutual support that is critical to mitigating the devastation of this virus.

By [Dr Mamphela Ramphele](#) 25 May 2020



Dr Mamphela Ramphele, co-founder of ReimagineSA and co-president of the Club of Rome

Covid-19 has enabled us to demonstrate our ability to shift from our tendency to be pre-occupied with the pursuit of personal success to rally together with empathy and compassion to collaborate in response to this existential crisis. This change in behaviour towards what really matters for humanity and ecosystem survival is a critical success factor in our response to Covid-19.

What do we need to do differently

The key question we need to put to ourselves as the people of Africa is what do we need to do differently at a fundamental level to enable us to emerge from this emergency wiser, stronger, and more resilient? What we do know is that this virus has changed the world as we know it, for good. There is no going back to “normal”. Successful regions, countries and communities will be those that seize this moment as an opportunity for fundamental transformation towards more resilient socio-economic and political systems.

Resilience is essential to the future that lies ahead of us, given the multi-layered crises we are likely to continue to face. The high human footprint on our planetary system has led to the fragility of most ecosystems and threats to biodiversity that sustains our lives.

Prosperity and wellbeing of all

Africa needs to take this crisis as an opportunity to reimagine itself as a place that birthed humanity, those many aeons ago, into one that now needs to birth a new human civilisation characterised by prosperity and wellbeing of all people and our planet. This reimagined Africa needs to set itself new goals and measures

reflecting what would matter most in such a new civilisation.

David Korten of Stanford Business School and member of the Club of Rome, in a [recently published article](#) as part of the Re-articulation of Human Development Project of the UNDP, challenged the notion that humanity's progress can adequately be measured by the economic goal of growing GDP. He concludes that: "The human future depends on making cultural and institutional choices that align with our needs as living beings, make life, not money, the defining value, and actualise the potential of our human nature and democratic aspirations. These choices frame an emerging vision of a new and truly civilised civilisation of peace, justice, material sufficiency, and spiritual and creative abundance for all."



INFRASTRUCTURE, INNOVATION & TECHNOLOGY

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Ubuntu values

The vision of this new "truly civilised civilisation" resonates with the social framework guided by *ubuntu* values that most of my generation were brought up to embrace. We grew up in communities in which material sufficiency, spiritual and creative abundance for all was ensured through seamless collaborative approaches to common challenges and inter-dependence enacted in both good and bad times.

Poor households did not suffer the indignity of humiliating deprivation of basic needs. Abundance for all was secured through the *Letsema/Lima* processes that ensured that poor people's fields were ploughed in return for working alongside their neighbours. Milk was available to their children in return for helping out in the milking of cows in well-off households. Education and training opportunities were accessible to all children in community-owned local primary schools, and the better off members contributed to the establishment of bursaries for secondary and higher education, to secure a better future for all.

Inclusive new economy

President Ramaphosa needs to look no further than to leverage our rich heritage of *ubuntu* to create an inclusive new economy characterised by peace, justice, material sufficiency and spiritual and creative abundance for all. We need to have inter-generational conversations to enable my generation to share the richness of our heritage of cultural values with the younger people. We need to discharge our responsibilities to the next generation - "re se ke raya le ditaola badimong" (we dare not go to join our ancestors before we impart this knowledge). We need to leverage this heritage that has been undervalued and marginalised to create a new economy that promotes wellbeing for all people and protects and promotes our environment – the source of all life.

Africa is well placed to ['build back' better](#) by leapfrogging the high human footprint-low human development outcomes that most industrialised countries are struggling to emerge from. We have an abundance of land, sun, wind, and rivers to power up an ecologically sound development process for the 21st century. We also have a huge contingent (estimated at close to 200 million) of highly trained Africans in the diaspora to team up with the large youthful population to help with a historic reconstruction and development of Africa into a place of wellbeing for all people and the ecosystem.

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