

Framing a Better Future for All Is a Collective Enterprise That Will Depend on Long-Lasting Partnerships

In a lively conversation, leaders from Brazil, Kenya, Greece, Malaysia, Sierra Leone, and the United States addressed future strategies and initiatives to drive resilient and inclusive societies in the years ahead

Societies are going through a period of accelerated change propelled by new technologies and increased connectivity. At the same time, communities and businesses worldwide face the effects of the COVID-19 crisis and other global challenges, such as climate change, rising inequality and the systemic lack of opportunities, the depletion of natural resources, and cyber threats. This critical juncture in history calls leadership and citizens to re-evaluate today's strategies, make sense of an increasingly complex world and take action to design and build the future. During the first Frame the Future session, on June 16, leaders from Brazil, Kenya, Greece, Malaysia, Sierra Leone, and the United States shared insights on actionable steps to drive change, future economic growth and improvement of living standards.

A central question guided the discussion: How can countries and organizations weave innovation, partnership, resilience, inclusiveness, and sustainability into future competitiveness strategies? These five future-defining attributes are the pillars of the Frame the Future series and will be applied to all ten competitiveness strategy areas considered in the GFCC Global Competitiveness Principles: Innovation Policy, Talent, Intellectual Property Systems, Infrastructure,

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Gianna Sagazio
Innovation Director, Brazilian National Confederation of Industries

Public-Private Partnerships, Regulation, Local Development, Natural Assets, Trade and Global Partnerships, and Competitiveness Benchmarking. GFCC President Deborah L. Wince-Smith, who hosted the conversation with GFCC Executive Director Roberto Alvarez, noted that the Frame the Future series aims to accelerate the sharing of best practices to understand what measures countries and businesses can take to build a more prosperous and competitive environment in the years to come.

The session gathered insights from Charles O. Holliday, Jr., GFCC Chairman and former Chairman of Shell, Dupont, and Bank of America; Socrates Lazaridis, CEO of Athens Exchange Group; Alfred Ongere, Managing Director of Mind Intelligence and Founder of AI Kenya; Gianna Sagazio, Innovation Director of the Brazilian National Confederation of Industries; Mohd Yusoff Sulaiman, President and CEO of the Malaysian Industry-Government Group for High Technology (MIGHT); and Kandeh Yumkella, member of the Parliament of Sierra Leone and former United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) Secretary-General.

Five Future-Defining Concepts

The proposal is to use innovation, partnership, resilience, inclusiveness, and sustainability as a "toolbox" to develop competitiveness strategies for periods of rapid change. Mr. Holliday advised that these five topics are crucial to decision-making beyond only numbers, when uncertainty permeates organizational and managerial processes. Mr. Holliday remembered his experience during the Global Financial Crisis in 2008, when he led Dupont, one of the largest chemical companies in the world, and had to put in place a strategic

Participants

Charles O. Holliday, Jr.

Chairman, Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils (GFCC)

Former Chairman, DuPont, Bank of America and Royal Dutch Shell

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CEO, Athens Exchange Group

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Managing Director, Mind Intelligence Ltd

Founder, AI Kenya

Gianna Sagazio

Innovation Director, National Industry Confederation (CNI)

Mohd Yusoff Sulaiman

President & CEO, Malaysian Industry-Government Group For High Technology (MIGHT)

Hosts

Roberto Alvarez

Executive Director, Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils (GFCC)

Deborah L. Wince-Smith

President, Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils (GFCC)

President & CEO, Council on Competitiveness



WATCH THE CONVERSATION

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Mohd Yusoff Sulaiman

President and CEO, Malaysian Industry-Government Group for High Technology (MIGHT)

scheme for economic recovery. By then, the plan already included the five future-defining concepts. With the COVID-19 pandemic, a new disruptive crisis scenario emerged, again challenging leadership and citizens worldwide. “These times of rapid change will not stop. It is very difficult to predict what the next crisis will be. We couldn’t predict the last two,” pointed out Mr. Holliday. “But there will be a next one.”

Both Mr. Sulaiman and Ms. Sagazio commented that including these concepts in industrial strategies will help to drive robustness, competitiveness, capabilities, and connectedness. Ms. Wince-Smith highlighted the importance of understanding the concept of sustainability linked to human development. “We need to apply sustainability writ large,” she noted. “In a strict way, it is related to the climate and using resources more effectively. But sustainability goes beyond that – it is really about human development, potential, and capacity.”

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President, GFCC

President & CEO, Council on Competitiveness

Examples of Actionable Steps

In practice, there are multiple ways to drive long-lasting change applying the five future-defining concepts considered in the Frame the Future series. The foresight tools used for strategic thinking at MIGHT serve as an instrument in coordinating programs. “These tools include – but are not limited to – horizon scanning, wind tunneling, and foresight framework scenarios that allow us to explore the future, develop prescriptions, and understand the consequences of strategies,” explained Mr. Sulaiman. For him, foresight methodologies provide a structured framework to include innovation, partnership, resilience, inclusiveness, and sustainability as design criteria in future strategies.

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Socrates Lazaridis
CEO, Athens Exchange Group

In Brazil, industrial activities represent more than 20 percent of the country’s GDP. For Ms. Sagazio, engaging the public and the private sector in an open dialogue to build consensus around strategy towards a common goal is crucial to effectively use the five future-defining attributes. “Entrepreneurs, government, and society must work together to foster innovation and competitiveness, and promote inclusiveness.” She explained that this type of cross-sector commitment is crucial to build resilient systems and drive a sustainable future.

Another key point touched on financial inclusion and sustainable initiatives in the financial sector. The Athens Stock Exchange developed a model to accelerate SMEs and startups called the Roots program. The project relies on partnerships with the GFCC, the Athens University of Economics, Arizona State University, and other organizations in Greece.

The Roots program combines education for entrepreneurs, focusing on ESG (Environmental, Social, and Corporate governance) products and pathways to capital allocation, capacity building, and stock market investments. Mr. Lazaridis highlighted the importance of combining

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multi-sector international partnerships with concrete projects to change reality on the ground. “There is an opportunity to connect financial systems in different areas through partnerships, giving accessibility to capital markets to all investors around the globe,” Mr. Lazaridis said.

Outcomes

Three pivotal learnings stemmed from the Frame the Future opening session. First, partnerships are necessary to build new models and increase today’s capabilities to tackle global challenges. Second, knowledge sharing and information exchange pave the way for the democratization of knowledge, disseminate best practices, and accelerate innovation. Third, communication and storytelling are much-needed tools to empower people and share ideas.

AI Kenya, an ecosystem for artificial intelligence (AI) founded by Mr. Ongere, illustrates the entrepreneurial mindset that drives future growth and strategies. Back in 2017, Mr. Ongere started a small community with 30 members in a WhatsApp group to talk about challenges and trends in AI and how to solve AI programming problems. Throughout the

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Managing Director, Mind Intelligence Ltd
Founder, AI Kenya

years, the project grew by harnessing the power of partnerships and communication, using WhatsApp groups, social media, and podcasts. Today, it involves around 6,000 people in Kenya. “This initiative significantly improved the ecosystem. It helped people to access different jobs, and inspired new startups to come up,” stated Mr. Ongere.

One of the key strategies was creating and distributing video content to boost the tech community in places outside the capital of Nairobi, where the company was initially based. Mr. Yumkella commented that initiatives like AI Kenya, which introduces best practices to low- and middle-income countries, can help to enhance competitiveness when there are not available budgets for significant research and development activities.

For Mr. Ongere, the key to success is to start small and be resilient. Persistence plays a part in the equation. “We knew what we were trying to achieve, and we understood it would take time for more people to participate in the community,” he noted. Other relevant actions included incentivizing participation in business challenges and rewards, and sharing stories to inspire people through business interviews and podcasts.