

Taking the youthful approach

Young global leaders are pushing their elders to think differently about world challenges, writes Yazeed Kamaldien

WHILE global players were tied up in the formal proceedings of this week's World Economic Forum (WEF), emerging leaders were out and about beyond the hotels and meeting rooms to find examples of innovative solutions to Africa's challenges.

WEF runs a project called Forum of Young Global Leaders (YGL) and its participants visited a number of grassroots initiatives across Cape Town to find out more about the development hurdles on the continent.

YGL is an "independent international organisation committed to improving the state of the world by engaging leaders from across society".

Its members, also known as YGLs, are recruited from businesses, civil society structures and governments.

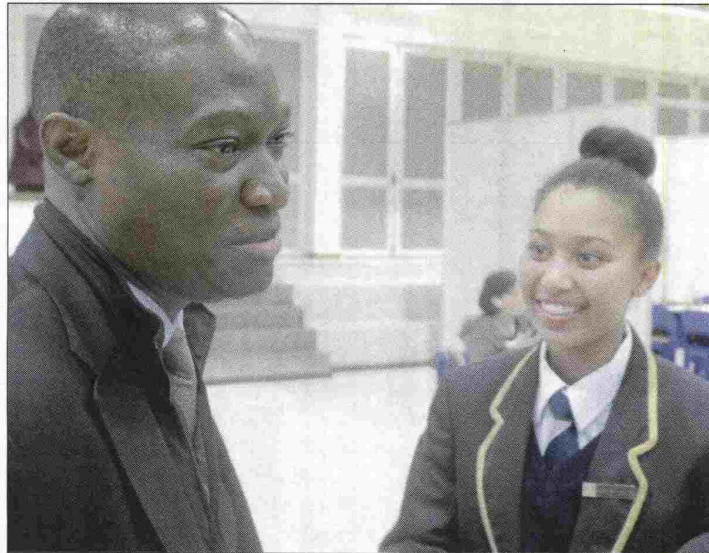
They are "influential next-generation leaders who have demonstrated outstanding commitment to making a positive impact on the world".

Some YGLs visited Christel House school in Ottery, where pupils from the poorest parts of the city are not only schooled, but given nutritional, medical and psychological support.

YGL head John Dutton, who is based in Switzerland, said YGLs visited Christel House to examine its model of eradicating poverty. The school is run by an international organisation and depends on donations.

Dutton said YGLs regularly met at parallel events during WEF meetings to brain-storm solutions to societal challenges.

Those who visited Christel House aimed to "assess how public-private partnerships can be



Cameroonian businessman Cyrille Nkontchou with Monique Kock of Christel House school in Ottery. Nkontchou and other members of the World Economic Forum's Young Global Leaders project met pupils from the school this week as part of their drive to find fresh solutions to social challenges.
Picture: Yazeed Kamaldien

replicated to educate children from poor, violent and drug-infested communities and develop highly employable (persons)".

YGLs also shared their real-world know-how with Christel House pupils during workshop sessions at the school.

Dutton said YGLs "have a 15- to 20-year track record of success" and for them these meetings were also a "learning moment".

"They're learning about a new generation while exchanging knowledge," said Dutton.

"The ethos of our YGL community is about creating a better future. This is a really important complement to the business and public leaders the

forum has. These are younger leaders who have innovative ideas that are pushing the other (older) leaders to think in a different way and respond to new challenges.

"YGLs are reaching positions where they have influence enough to change the minds of policymakers and CEOs. But they are still in contact with a younger generation. They are willing to give back, roll up their sleeves and open their doors to make things happen."

Cyrille Nkontchou, a businessman from Cameroon based in Joburg, said his asset management business runs a subsidiary called Enko Capital, investing in private education.

Nkontchou said he was impressed with Christel House's recruitment process.

"The more impoverished you are the more chance you have of getting into this institution. They give poor students an opportunity. "You need more institutions that help students from poor backgrounds to become successful."

Nkontchou said YGLs wanted to "look at innovation in education".

"We came to this school to see what they have been able to do with their resources. It has been a great inspiration for me."

He also said YGLs were focused on a "desire to make an impact".

"We come from diverse backgrounds but we have a leadership ability in common. As a result there have been a lot of initiatives that have been taken forward through

our network. There is also mentorship in our community."

Irene Tinagli, an Italian parliamentarian focused on youth employment and social mobility, said education was "one of the biggest tools we have to improve young people's lives".

"It was amazing to see the degree of their maturity," she said of Christel House pupils.

"I think this is related to what they have endured to get to where they are. It has been difficult for them to part with a culture that was dominant in their neighbourhoods.

"They are aware they made a choice to depart from that."

Tinagli added: "I was struck by

how much they want to give back to their community. They are here to improve themselves and their community."

She said YGLs gained from these experiences as they made people who worked in businesses or institutions "aware of what the real purpose of their work must be".

"YGL is not structured like a company to produce services or products. It is to change the way you view the world and interpret your own job; seeking in your daily job ways to make a better world.

"It is about building a new culture and awareness. It reminds successful people that success must

be shared and made useful to others. We also see other realities.

"We see what the potential could be. We get an international perspective. We see problems and

solutions. Some of us go back to our countries and fund NGOs or create solutions."

Christel House chief executive Nicky Sheridan said the model used by the school had ensured a 100 percent matric pass rate, and that "95 percent of Christel House graduates are either gainfully employed or studying at university".

He said: "People need to be well educated to fuel economic growth and maximise Africa's competitiveness.

"Our goal is a sustained fight against poverty; not just in helping learners pass matric, but, critically, to find quality employment after school."

'Leaders are willing to roll up their sleeves and make things happen'