

## Unlocking People Power

### Why investing in local leadership will accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals

In this People First Talk on the margins of the UN General Assembly Summit of the Future, we discussed why investing in leadership development will accelerate progress toward the SDGs. Watch the talk [here](#).



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Moses Ruharo



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Denis Mizne



Jackie Chimhanzi



Jackie Jones



Jaime Saavedra

#### Key ideas

- Despite billions of dollars invested in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), progress is slow. One challenge is that we've focused mostly on investing in technical solutions, but not enough on leadership development.
- It is important that we **invest in developing the leadership of locally-rooted leaders**, those who possess the lived experience, local knowledge and networks, and a deep sense of urgency to create change. This also includes ensuring more young people have a voice at the decision-making tables.
- We were urged to **be deeply disturbed by what we're seeing** in our systems and then to **cultivate the agency within us all** to do something about it. We explored the power of investing intentionally in leadership development, and how such efforts have supported leaders to *connect with purpose*, *grow awareness of their strengths & blindspots*, *unpack past trauma*, build confidence in *disrupting injustices* in their system, and access new *networks*.
- We heard how **networks can be transformative in accelerating leadership**, though noted that not enough resources are being allocated to them. Networks provide leaders with the safe spaces they need to cultivate resilience, given how lonely and hard it can be to take on the work of challenging injustice and broken systems. Networks also enable leaders to work collectively to take on these messy challenges, since no one person will solve them alone.
- We explored the **need to tackle institutional and systemic barriers**. We heard how donors fund million-dollar projects, but often are not flexible enough to offer a small grant to a young person when that's what's most needed. At a macro level, we explored how institutions such as the World Bank and Brazil's government are taking on systemic barriers, through policies that enable under-represented groups to gain more equitable access to senior leadership positions.
- We also discussed the **need to rethink how we capture impact**, acknowledging that while investing in people has a high return on investment, it may not be evident in two years. Making our progress more visible, even through qualitative measures, can remind us that change is

possible. Building a robust evidence base is also necessary if we wish to bring more people alongside us around the idea that investing in leadership is critical to sustainable development.



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Omikunle**  
Board Member, Global  
School Leaders  
(moderator)



**Denis  
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CEO, Lemann  
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**Jackie  
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**Jackie Jones**  
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**Jaime  
Saavedra**  
Human Development,  
Regional Director,  
Latin America &  
Caribbean, World Bank

**“The most important resource we have by far is our people. Every year, 3 million Brazilians are turning 18... and we are not supporting those people to fulfill their potential. A country's potential is the collective potential of its people.”**

— **Denis Mizne**, Lemann Foundation

**“We believe that effective leaders self introspect. The key question is how do you show up as a leader? How do your followers experience you?”**

— **Jackie Chimhanzi**, Africa Leadership Institute

**“Women represent half of the population, but when you look at leadership, 70% of the health workforce are women. Of that, 90% are nurses, 93% are midwives, and yet only 25% of leaders are women and that just does not match how decisions should be made.”**

— **Jackie Jones**, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

**“We need a sense of urgency... even if things are complex, there is one child, one student, one girl *now* who is waiting for a better chance.”**

— **Jamie Saavedra**, World Bank



**Joyce Wanderi**

Chief Programme  
Officer, Girl Effect;  
WomenLift  
Health alumna



**Moses Ruharo**

Associate Board  
Member, Amref Health  
Africa and Teach For  
Uganda alumnus



**Richard Dzikunu**

Action Learning  
Groups Lead,  
YIELD Hub and Global  
Health Corps alumnus

**“We underestimate the power of networks. Imagine if every trained leader took time to pay it forward to just three people per year. Imagine the ripple effect.”**

— **Joyce Wanderi**, Girl Effect (Women Lift Health alumna)

**“If you invest in the right people who are locally rooted and globally informed, then you can have the right team that can drive change in the communities.”**

— **Moses Ruhara**, United Nations Foundation (Teach for Uganda alumnus)

**“Your systems can change. Your systems can be flexible. Your systems must work for the people who matter. ”**

— **Richard Dzikunu**, Global Health Council (Global Health Corps alumnus)

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This event was co-organized by [Global Health Corps](#), [Teach For All](#) and [WomenLift Health](#) and graciously sponsored by the [Leman Foundation](#) and the [Rockefeller Foundation](#).

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