

OKERE SUMMIT

For SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

SDGs Talk: Reimagining Rural Futures

Background

The rural represents a key sphere in any discussion on sustainable development. Much is known about major trends that have impacted and that continue to impact rurality such as migration, and significant research exists on the nature of such impacts. However, whilst we have considerable knowledge about the past and present dynamics of such impacts, we still struggle to deal with uncertainty about the future for the rural, and to anticipate and plan for the possible, probable, and desired shape of that future. Disruptions, including climate change, and migration pose significant uncertainty to sustainable development for rural areas. Moreover, the profile of rural areas is evolving. While agriculture remains a vital component of the rural economy, other sectors such as industry, wholesale and retail, health and social work administrative and other services, accommodation, and food. In light of this, fundamental questions thus ensue: should the rural of the future mirror urban realities? What connections should the rural of the future have with urban cities?

Similarly, the concept of 'Sustainable Villages' or 'Resilient Communities' like Okere City is attempting is just one example of emulating the sustainable villages movement. The sustainable village movement employs information technology, participation, smart agriculture, and other forms of economic and social innovation to manage local assets and resources, and enhance place-based sustainability. Could sustainable villages provide a good response to challenges such as climate change, rural-urban migration, unemployment, illiteracy, and financial exclusion?

Therefore, Okere Summit for Sustainable Development responds to some of the questions above by arguing that rural people's participation, agency, power, innovation, and entrepreneurship must contribute to reimagining the rural of the future.

The uniqueness of the summit is its rural locality. The business as usual approach is such that a handful from the rural is invited to urban areas to 'participate' in development discourse often dominated by 'experts' from the cities. This summit will instead transport the 'experts', some of whom have never lived in rural areas, to the rural; away from the 'comfortable boardrooms or hotel conference rooms. Expert perspectives will build on community expertise (lived experiences), based on respect for each other's perspectives. The summit envisages knowledge sharing that can meaningfully inform policies that work for the rural. How, for example, do the rural and urban inter-depend? What can policymakers, policy influencers, and policymakers learn from listening to, and living with the poor? What can the poor take away from listening to the 'experts'? Okere Summit also considers how innovation

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in a development sense is broadly linked to improvements—in methods, processes, products, services, or technologies—and how it can be about promoting a culture of innovation that supports and nurtures new ideas in the rural setting. Again, how does the effectiveness of rural innovation relates to how we frame the innovation challenges facing rural areas?

Aims and Objectives of the #OkereSummit on Re-imagining Rural Futures

The summit aims to generate and increase more interest in rural futurism through critical, innovative, and alternative practical approaches, policy narratives, and theoretical perspectives as one of the ways to drive the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Moreover, the conference shall enable participants to become more aware of the complexities of rural issues, the associated innovation and planning processes, and the implications for sustainable development.

At the end of the conference, participants shall be able to:

- Critically analyze opportunities and challenges for sustainable rural futures/communities in Africa.
- Propose innovative and alternative practical strategies and policy narratives for reimagining a thriving rural future.
- Have confidence in taking practical innovative steps to develop rural communities.
- Evaluate the vital importance of the rural to future sustainable development.

Methodology of the discussion

The discussions will take an adventurous approach. To set the stage, the morning session of the first day shall feature an experience-sharing episode with the grassroots community members of Okere village. In the afternoon, an intellectual exchange keynoted by a rural futurism expert and followed by a panel discussion session with experts from various disciplines – including agriculture, financial inclusion, education, and entrepreneurship, among others shall be held. Day 2 will feature stimulating discussions hosted via the #360Mentor platform. Over 100 participants from the Okere sub-county, Otuke district, will interact with at least 70 participants from Kampala city. Additionally, the event shall also be streamed live on Zoom, broadcasted on Twitter Spaces, and segments of it shall be broadcasted on SEE TV as well.