

Keynote Panel with Guest of Honour Mr. Tharman Shanmugaratnam

Moderator

Viswanathan Shankar, Chief Executive Officer & Partner, Gateway Partners

Panellists

Tharman Shanmugaratnam, Deputy Prime Minister & Coordinating Minister for Economic and Social Policies, Singapore

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Key Learning 1: Globalised world of today is an uncertain one, but the prognosis for globalisation is still good

1. There is a lot more uncertainty in the world economy today or its constituent parts than there used to be. There are a wide range of scenarios that are possible in the world economy, from the positive to the calamitous.
2. We must prepare ourselves for this uncertainty, tapping into our capabilities, our preparedness, and our resilience.
3. Globalisation is getting a bad rap because of policy failures in the advanced world.
4. There are tremendous opportunities before us; for integration within our own continent, and opportunities for integration between Asia and Africa.

Key Learning 2: Asia and Africa share communalities in the challenges they face,

1. Urbanisation: Introduces modernity and allows for agglomeration – provides for economies of scale, better clusters, better knowledge transfer. It can also be a disaster: congestion, pollution, and social problems.
2. Demographic dividend. In most of emerging Africa and Asia, with the exception of China, the populations are young, and people think of it as a big plus. But it can also end up as a disaster, leading to social and geo-political problems. People must be trained to take part in the new economy that the global market requires.
3. Agriculture and commodities. We must convert these and prevent them from turning into the Dutch disease. The easy revenues from commodities, and from over-investment in China, has led to complacency in both Asia and Africa.

Key Learning 3: What can be done to make Africa a manufacturing powerhouse?

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Panel Main Points

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1. African must use their resources as a source of sustainable competitive advantage.
2. Africa must debate topics such as cyber security, tapping into the level of mobile phone penetration, and the high quality of its financial services-based economies.
3. Africa must debate on what they do with freedoms in terms of education, culture, and language as they try to define themselves as a people with great national impact.
4. Africa must tap into its great harbours, and up its food production again.
5. Africa must also look at how they can move into the services industries.
6. In spite of its solar potential, Africa is not investing time, energy and money on how they can harness nature to generate electricity.

Key Learning 4: Regional integration can be good for Africa

1. Africa cannot afford the infrastructure required to catapult them into the 21st century.
2. Pooling of resources: East African countries are building 5 separate pipelines to take oil to the ocean, when they could have pooled their resources.
3. Famine: Instead of exporting our food, we could be addressing hunger by moving food around in Africa.

Key Learning 5: Singapore can play a supportive role in the development of Africa

1. Africa can learn from Singapore: they converted disadvantage into advantage, because they started off with nothing.
2. Africa must emulate Singapore by focusing on skills and capabilities, integrated housing neighbourhoods, and successful urbanisation.
3. Singapore can also be useful in integrating Africa with Asia. Singapore is a useful base for African companies in Asian markets in the field of logistics and orientation of Singapore's businesses and people.
4. Africa can learn from Singapore's inclusive economic growth.
5. Like Singapore, Africa must embrace business as a national asset and a force for good, focus on nation building and protecting its institutions, and Africa must learn from Singapore's success with PPP's.

Key Learning 6: Singapore can play a role with China to support initiatives in Africa

1. Singapore can provide a variety of sources of funding for companies in both directions.
2. Singapore can concentrate expertise – on both Asia and Africa and emerging markets.

3. Singapore can provide a predictable environment for businesses to base their operations for the long term, and foster business and deals.
4. Infrastructure, origination, project management, execution, are Singaporean strengths.
5. Africa can learn from Singapore's leadership experience, choosing leaders that are selfless, and act in the best interest of their citizens.

Key Learning 7: Lessons for Singapore and Africa on improving education

1. Avoid over-academising education. This must be key priority in both Africa and Asia.
2. Focus on skills and technical skills especially.

Key Learning 8: Specific opportunities Singapore should look at in the African context

1. Pragmatic education. Business people on university councils must provide insights into business needs.
2. Information exchange – crosspollination on what works. Jobs must be meaningful; employees must feel they make a contribution.
3. Diversity and inclusiveness: Africa must embrace this as an amazing strength. If you can manage in Africa, you can manage anywhere in the world.
4. Look at businesses from SA that have gone into Africa – Shoprite, etc. Have done well and understand diversity.
5. We must develop the skills of Africa so that they do not migrate.
6. Africa has 1.2 billion people, of which 50% are 55years and younger. They are still buying cars and homes. Africa is therefore a good market to turn to, including the informal sector.

Key Learning 9: Singapore must diversify the targets of its investments

1. Singapore has no strong links with Africa. It must develop resilience in its economy by having a diversification strategy
2. Africa is a huge continent with a huge potential, a huge sense of enterprise, and a sense now that something can be done to empower people and enterprises.