



Mandela Washington Fellowship Summit

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Leadership for the Future: Resilience and Inclusion

Nyarko Dennis Ignite Talk Transcript

Speakers

- Nyarko Dennis, 2021 Mandela Washington Fellow, Ghana

Session Transcript

“The world is just unfair.” I'd like us to take a minute to reflect on that phrase. But what if the world could be made fair? Now, imagine a world with equal access to healthy food, a fundamental human right. Let me share a story: When I was little, I attended a funeral with my dad. The deceased, while alive, could barely afford one healthy meal in a day. Rumors were he died of a hunger-related disease. Poor Mr. Nti, may his soul rest in peace.

Now, one thing that never seemed to make sense to me was how there was a buffet at the funeral of a man who died literally of hunger. So I remember asking my dad, “why is this so?” And his words were, “the world is just unfair,” he continued, “you will understand better when you grow up.”

The trying thing about growing up in Ghana is not having the room to think freely. It's a presentation. To make sense of this, you're expected to take on society's beliefs, opinions, and mannerisms without questioning. I learned to speak the right way, appear in the right way, and even stare in the right way. Every day was a test, and there were a thousand ways to fail, a thousand ways to betray yourself, to not live up to the standard of “always acceptable”. What this meant was a life that was limited to its purpose, even growth.

Fast forward, I was enrolled into an undergraduate engineering program, which I didn't care for. I guess I was just there to prove myself worthy of recognition, acceptance, and approval from my community. What I failed to realize was this was someone else's calling. I didn't belong there and I definitely wasn't grown. So I made a very tough decision: I left. Now, I'm at the African Leadership University. A change has come true. Here, I am challenged to grow more into my passion: leadership and activism. I couldn't be happier.

It has been a privilege to work with and participate in dialogues organized by the Bites of Transfoodmation, FAO, The Future Food Institute, SG2 Advocacy Hub, and the Waste Academy amongst others. My work and commitment over the past few months has been strictly towards creating a regenerative food system through advocacy, capacity development, generating new solutions and revamping existing ones, and analyzing policies in order to reduce climate change and sculpt, a just world where no one is left behind.



So reflecting back on what my dad said to me fifteen years ago, I think the world is just unfair because we have accepted that narrative, and by doing so, we did not put in the required effort to challenge it. We only have barely ten years before the world food crisis kicks in. And scientists may be right, we may have only 60 harvests left, yet we do not have a one solution to change this narrative. But what we do know is that hunger can be cured if we continue to cast a spotlight on Sustainable Development Goals two, twelve, and thirteen.

During and after the Mandela Washington Fellowship, I hope to continue with my mission to educate the youth, create a community of bright minds to develop holistic practices and sustainable food systems to counter food planet challenges, and empower a culture that leads to renewed traditions to shape a regenerative planet. I believe the most crucial spindle to reshape the food system is education, capacity development, and transferring competencies and fortes allowing the creation of a desk network of interconnected realities. So if you asked me why I chose to care for the planet amongst many other careers, I'd say it's because someone has to care. Choosing to protect biodiversity shouldn't be an option because we are faced with a fierce urgency of now that requires action. And as Thomas Barry says, "Our greatest work for our generation is to learn to live on the planet at least benignly."

So here is my wish: I wish for everyone to care, rethink their actions, and help fight against the cruelty imposed on Mother Earth, and empower people everywhere to do the same. Thank you!