

Dr. Hesham Gaafar's closing keynote at the conference emphasized the rapidly changing global landscape and the vital role of Africa-Canada collaboration in addressing emerging challenges. He began by acknowledging the commitment of participants, particularly those from Africa, and recognized the significance of the Africa Institute at Western University in fostering these partnerships.

Dr. Gaafar highlighted key global shifts, including advances in artificial intelligence, shifts in financial structures, geopolitical instability, and the pressing climate crisis. He argued that these challenges should not be viewed solely as obstacles but as opportunities to rethink and improve existing structures, especially those that have historically disadvantaged the Global South. He emphasized the importance of collaboration across institutions, countries, and continents to navigate these complexities effectively and equitably.

A major theme of his speech was the role of academia in real-world impact. He echoed discussions from earlier in the conference regarding the divide between academic research and activism, stressing that knowledge creation should ultimately lead to tangible change rather than just publications. He warned against retreating into academic isolation and called on Canada and Africa to engage more actively with each other, strengthening relationships based on mutual respect and shared growth.

Dr. Gaafar introduced the concept of human-centered design as a key takeaway from the conference, noting that successful collaborations combined both passion for academic inquiry and compassion for the communities impacted. He highlighted how knowledge exchange should be bidirectional—Africa is not merely a recipient of knowledge but a knowledge generator, influencing Canada in critical ways. He provided examples of blended learning, mentorship models, and experiential education, showing how African scholars and institutions contribute to shaping global perspectives.

He discussed specific case studies, such as the role of Canadian-trained Somalis in rebuilding Somalia and Canada's historical identity as a peacebuilder. He pointed to policy advancements, such as the Nurses Association of Ontario expanding its work into Africa, illustrating a shift from theoretical research to real-world implementation. He also emphasized environmental concerns, climate-smart agriculture, and AI applications in air quality monitoring, positioning Africa as an active participant in technological advancements rather than a passive beneficiary.

The conference also addressed gender disparities, particularly in agriculture, and the importance of integrating gender considerations into policy frameworks. Additionally, the shared experiences of Indigenous communities in Canada and Africa provided opportunities for cross-learning on land ownership, cultural preservation, and economic development through indigenous sports and cultural exports.

Dr. Gaafar underscored the importance of reframing narratives—moving from "aid" to "investment"—and identifying efficient, sustainable solutions, such as reducing food waste and supporting smallholder farms for greater resilience. He stressed Africa's role as a global knowledge hub, particularly through intergenerational mentorship, where African elders could share wisdom with the world. The discussion of health issues, including communicable diseases, non-communicable diseases, and the globalization of health challenges, further demonstrated the value of Africa-Canada knowledge exchange.

He concluded by urging participants to not only share insights but to commit to collective action. The conference, he emphasized, should serve as a springboard for impactful, sustained collaboration that leverages the strengths of both Africa and Canada. By fostering deep connections and prioritizing equity, Dr. Gaafar called on attendees to navigate the evolving world together and create meaningful change through research, policy, and education.