

GLOBAL DOMINATION: \$100 laptop computer inspires students around the world

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A Harvard University professor and noted authority on the role science and technology plays in economic development encouraged UCSB students Friday to see themselves as global entrepreneurs.

"We live in a global community and universities have become the locus of new ideas with unparalleled commercial value," asserted an exuberant Calestous Juma, professor of the Practice of International Development and director of the Science, Technology and Globalization project at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard.

Dr. Juma was in town to address several hundred UCSB students during the School of Engineering's "Innovation Day." He was also the keynote speaker at a program sponsored by its technology management program.

Dr. Juma discussed the value of harnessing student knowledge and expertise, resulting mostly from research, for transforming economies both highly evolved and developing. He believes the greatest synergies for commercialization are in the areas of life science and health care; information technology and telecommunications; and energy, infrastructure and sustainability. One of the ideas that has come to the marketplace with his support is the fabled \$100 laptop developed by Massachusetts Institute of Technology students. Dr. Juma is on the board of the nonprofit organization developing the software.

He goes everywhere with the white and green device that looks like a toy. Manufactured in Taiwan, a half-million of the Xo laptop computers are in use around the world. The idea is to get them to the poorest children for educational purposes. Purchasers can buy them online for themselves as well donating one for a deserving youngster. The most recent iteration of the Wi-Fi-connected unit will have a Windows operating system option. "Many of them are being used in lieu of textbooks, since these are often the most expensive part of an education in countries like Kenya and Paraguay," said Dr. Juma, who added that the laptops are also being considered for schools in Alabama and New York City. "Digital access to education will be a transformative" step for these students, he predicted of the global project.

Dr. Juma, who is originally from Kenya, is the former executive secretary of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity and founding director of the African Centre for Technology Studies in Nairobi. He has won several international awards for his work on sustainable development.

Today, governments and international organizations consult with him on a variety of issues, including Washington. "We have a very fruitful working relationship. Technology and development is a small sector of the State Department, but they have maintained a focus despite the issues happening globally," he said, referring to the aftermath of 9/11 and the military actions in Iraq and Afghanistan.

He also recently addressed 70 world finance ministers at an international conference in Kyoto, Japan. His specialty -- science and technology for development -- was one of the themes of the meeting. He said the conference, which is called the Science, Technology and Society Forum, "is fast becoming the Davos of

science," referring to the Swiss economics summit that attracts the world's top minds in finance and business.

"Five years ago, I wouldn't have expected it to be the topic of a summit," Dr. Juma added.

In addition to the finance ministers, the conference attracted company CEOs, research organizations and universities developing new products and services. Approximately 800 people attended the event, said Dr. Juma, which was equal parts forum and networking for potential customers.

As he travels around the world touting economic renewal and revival through technology, how all these good ideas will fly in the current global economic climate is another matter.

While Dr. Juma didn't have an immediate answer or solution, he said the subject of harnessing technology for energy development will not dissipate. He hinted that many such efforts are continuing, such as a solar-power project in the Sahara Desert funded by a consortium of European energy companies and other investors.

While the presidential candidates have said little about their positions on science and technology in their debates, Dr. Juma noticed that a discussion of renewable energy elicited high response from potential voters whose reactions were being monitored on the screen.

"There will be jobs and customers as we find alternative ways to produce more environmentally clean energy," said Dr. Juma. "The grand challenge in engineering is to be engaged, take ownership and help find solutions."

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