

The African Ingenuity

*Columbia University's Wendy Lee looks ahead to the ninth annual African Economic Forum to be held at the university on 13 and 14 April. The theme of this year's forum will be **Africa Reclaiming Africa: Changing the Rules of Engagement**. Among the speakers will be Mallam Sanusi Lamido Sanusi, Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria.*

I am not an African, but in the two years of **my Peace Corps service** in Cameroon, I had fallen in love with the African people. Like most naive twentysomethings who set out to go “change the world”, I was humbled by my time in Cameroon. The country changed me in more ways than one. I barely made a dent in changing my village, much less the world.



I discovered Africa beyond the mainstream portrait of the continent. Africa is a massive place, and while civil wars, famines, and the like do still exist in parts of the continent, the Western media somehow rarely highlights the incredible growth that is taking place in this part of the world. In working with the Cameroonian people, they taught me the realities of African life. Western solutions to problems often do not align with these African realities. Western perceptions of Africans often belittle the incredible motivation, pride, and ingenuity that many Africans possess.

I taught business classes to my villagers. Sure, a little accounting and marketing skills are helpful, but my villagers know the landscape of operating business in Cameroon far beyond my knowledge. At the end of the day, they know what works. Africans know what they need to fix their problems. That's not to say that problems are easy to fix and foreigners should back off completely. But it is time for the world to give Africans a lot more credit and recognise their own power to develop their own countries.

Articles like **The Hopeful Continent: Africa Rising** in The Economist gives me hope that the international community are finally recognising the many positive aspects of African growth. But what will it take for Africa to reclaim its on power? And what is the role of the international community in this process?

Columbia University's 2012 African Economic Forum will address exactly these questions. The theme this year is Africa Reclaiming Africa: Changing the Rules of Engagement. I hope you will join us in this discussion and network with the Continent's finest at our formal gala on April 13-14th, 2012. For more information and to register, visit <http://www.aef2012.com>.

Wendy Lee is a graduate student at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs. She was born and raised in Taiwan and obtained secondary education in the US. Wendy served as a Small Enterprise Development Peace Corps Volunteer in Cameroon from 2008 to 2010. She plans to continue her work in Africa and international development after Columbia SIPA.

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